

## Strengthening Christian Values Among the Great Lakes Region's Leaders for An Effective Political Transformation

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### Abstract

The Great Lakes Region has gone through repeated wars and conflicts between its countries. This has caused the loss of lives and it has brought a political crisis that needs to be addressed. However, even though there is such a political crisis, its leaders claim to be Christians. So, the question that we should ask ourselves: why the war in region that possesses Christian leaders? This paper demonstrates that there is a lack of inward change among its leaders that should allow them to practice a right politics in the region. Therefore, the Great Lakes region needs political leaders that are spiritually transformed and able to practice Christian values in their daily decisions and political duties. The article calls for strengthening Christian values among the leaders of the Great Lakes region. To fulfill this, the study traces the historical and current political crisis of the Great Lakes region, some trends that have been tried to resolve the situation, and it ends up with the analysis of Christian values as the foundation for a political change in the Great Lakes region. Generally, the articles encourage the leaders of the region the application of Christian values to overcome the political crisis that the region has faced for a long time. Therefore, the leaders of the Great Lakes region should accept to be transformed and turn to a new page.

**Keywords:** *Christian Values, Great Lakes Region, Leaders, Political Transformation*

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### Introduction

In Genesis, Adam and Eve were placed by God in the Garden of Eden, but they were not responsible for its creation. The world's origin is not attributed to human agency, but we bear responsibility for stewardship. Biblical teachings assert that God instituted laws, limitations, and purposes to promote humanity's well-being and progress. These limitations provide parameters for expanding and developing individuals or entities rather than serving as constraints.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Harti, Sri D. *Politics Identity in Christian Perspective and the Implication for Christian Politicians in Indonesia*, Pharos Journal of Theology ISSN 2414-3324 online Volume 104 Issue 4, p. 9, 2023.

Any given political power should be used for the well-being of the people under its leadership. Political leaders within a region are required to provide services that glorify God through their services to humanity. For this reason, as a steward any political leader should strive to take care of the people living in the entity under their political power. It is a political leadership's irresponsibility while people under their governance are mistreated, violated, and even die for the sake of their egoist interests. There is no excuse to say like Cain "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9). Political leaders within a given region are human keepers called to maintain a peaceful life of people living in their territory. The Great Lake Region needs such political leadership for its effective political transformation. Such political leadership can be reached once the leaders of the region are transformed and accept to incorporate Christian values in their daily political activities such as obedience, love and compassion, honesty and integrity, humility, righteousness, self-control, faithfulness, etc. However, these Christian values are not applied by the political leaders of the Great Lakes Region as they should be. The persistence of the political crisis is due to the unwillingness of political leaders to maintain Christian values throughout their leadership. The application of Christian values is imperative for an effective political transformation of the Great Lakes Region and should be strengthened among political leaders.

### **Great Lakes Region and its Current Political Crisis**

According to the U.S Department of State, the four countries that make up the Great Lakes region are: the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R.C.), Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda.<sup>2</sup> The African great Lakes region has experienced cyclical violence since countries began gaining independence in the 1960s. The repeated emergence of leaders formed in contexts of rebellion and violence has yielded continuing authoritarian rule rather than democratic societies aimed at the common good. Three key continuing problems today are a regional development deficit, a distrust of institutions and erosion of social capital, and the instrumentalization of religion by authoritarian political regimes.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the circumstances the political leaders come from, they hold the responsibility to work for the well-being of one another in the region. David was a rebel during King Saul's reign in Israel; however, he was passionate about unifying the kingdom and establishing peace in the whole kingdom despite the oppositions that he faced from the northern part. Such behavior should be the character of political leaders who are spiritually transformed and ready to live Christian values daily in their political businesses. In this way, Christian values should be strengthened among the Great Lake Region's leaders to work for an effective political change and to establish a lasting peace in this place which has become the field of wars.

Ntakarutimana Emmanuel points out that the civil wars followed one after another in the regional countries, and rebellions took hold in the majority of the countries of Central and Eastern Africa, basing their legitimacy on having fought bloodthirsty dictatorships. After the Burundian and Rwandan tragedies (in 1993 and 1994, respectively), as well as the collapse of the Mobutu regime in Zaïre in 1996, the entire region was embroiled in what became the first

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State. *About the Great Lakes Region*, Information released online from January 20, 2009 to January 20, 2017, [https://2009-2017.state.gov/s/greatlakes\\_drc/191417.htm](https://2009-2017.state.gov/s/greatlakes_drc/191417.htm) accessed in January 27, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Ntakarutimana, Emmanuel. *Peace Building in an Interfaith Context in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: The Challenges of Creating New Approaches*, Journal of Moral Theology, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 106, 2023.

African continental war.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, he explains that in the meantime, democratic emancipation movements of the late 1980s were eventually successful at stirring a general sentiment of disenchantment towards the elites who succeeded one another in power. The new leaders, having evolved in contexts of armed rebellions, did not construct political communities founded upon the common good, and instead developed so-called “democratic” regimes while remaining very authoritarian.<sup>5</sup> They are also so-called Christians and they cannot practice Christian values as people expect from them. They sow conflicts, wars, and division in the region instead of promoting love, peace, and unity. The political crisis in this region can only be resolved once the political leaders get transformed and live in accordance with the Word of God.

The Great Lake Region’s political leaders should stand for the well-being of its population, and they should be united through their cooperation. Unfortunately, some of them have been corrupted to the level that they look to enrich their country by troubling their neighboring countries with wars and insecurity. They develop their economy by stealing, violating and killing the citizens of a neighbor country. Many accusations testify to this reality. For instance, in 2015, Burundi accused Rwanda of troubling their security after the elections that were won by the Excellency Peter Nkurunziza. Even, after the death of Nkurunziza the reconciliation process has failed until today. Recently, the DRC president Felix Antoine Tshisekedi accused Rwanda president Paul Kagame of supporting the aggression that is made by the M23 movement in the eastern part of the country. This has been testified by the government of DRC for several times. It is observed that the Great Lakes leaders, who could work together to overcome the outside challenges, are themselves at the origin of the political crisis of their region. However, rebellions and aggressions should be stopped for the sake of political transformation in the Great Lakes Region since they destroy their heritage, and this is against the wonderful plan of God for the region (Jeremiah 29:11). We hope that the reason for the neighborhood of the Great Lake countries is not in vain, but it is for effective cooperation that provides benefit to both parts for God’s glory.

Political manipulations exploiting ethnic and tribal identity affiliations also contributed to the destabilization of society. There has also been great mistrust between states, in particular between Rwanda and Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda. The tragedies that occurred created a deplorable situation for the population, with the new phenomena of armies without borders, child soldiers, large-scale massacres, genocidal ethnic cleansing, and the displacement of populations, giving this region a great number of internally displaced people and refugees.<sup>6</sup> These conflicts are still in the Great Lake Region between the stated above countries. However, the only solution is to build political leadership centered on God’s Word and ready to promote Christian values. Consequently, political leaders of the region should strive to have love and compassion, justice, honesty, humility, service, obedience, self-control, integrity, faithfulness, and unity. Therefore, these Christian values create an obligation to serve the people through a leadership that renders

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<sup>4</sup> Ntakarutimana, Emmanuel. *Peace Building in an Interfaith Context in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: The Challenges of Creating New Approaches*, Journal of Moral Theology, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 107, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Idem.

<sup>6</sup> Ntakarutimana, Emmanuel. *Peace Building in an Interfaith Context in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: The Challenges of Creating New Approaches*, Journal of Moral Theology, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 107, 2023.

glory to God. Once this is applied by the political leaders, the Great Lake Region's political crisis can easily be resolved.

### **Trends to Effective Political Transformation in the Great Lakes Region**

Despite the political crisis in this region, several tendencies to overcome the political crisis in the region have been tried. However, it is observed that those tendencies are barren and ineffective in giving effective results that can bring political transformation that the Great Lakes countries intend to have. The situation continues to be tough and increases more conflicts instead of decreasing them. Imagine that in 1998, four million people were killed in DRC while it has been recently reported in 2023 by the Nobel Prize Denis Mukwege that more than twelve million were killed and until now the war is ongoing in the eastern part of DRC. Here are some of the tendencies that have been tried but in vain.

Since the mid-1980s, African mediators have been involved in efforts to resolve civil conflicts in the Great Lakes region: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and Uganda. Resource scarcities, ethnic tensions, elite mobilization of grievances, and weak postcolonial political structures have been the primary drivers of these conflicts. To meet the regional dimensions of the conflicts, diverse African mediators such as presidents, foreign ministers, elder statesmen, and special envoys have intervened to help combatants rebuild the institutions of political order, social cohesion, and economic stability.<sup>7</sup> The initiative failed even if it was good. For it to be successful, it was necessary to call all the political leaders to build their political leaders on Christian values.

The OAU sent unarmed military observers to Rwanda (1991–1992) and Burundi (1994). The organization also negotiated the Arusha agreement for Rwanda in 1993. The OAU has also been active in peacemaking efforts in Congo. At a meeting it hosted in Lusaka in July 1999, Angola, DRC, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe signed a peace accord. The Lusaka accord called for a cease-fire and the redeployment of troops to specified positions; the release of prisoners of war; the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the DRC; a national dialogue between the government in Kinshasa, armed opposition groups, and the unarmed civilian opposition; the disarming of all militias and "armed groups"; and the creation of a new national army. The UN was asked to deploy a peacekeeping force to Congo, in collaboration with the OAU. The Lusaka accord also called on the OAU to nominate a chair for a Joint Military Commission (JMC) and to designate a neutral facilitator for the inter-Congolese dialogue.<sup>8</sup>

After the 1994 Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi, Africa's Great Lakes Region became a theater of political conflict characterized by political turmoil. This situation is partly caused by the absence of good dedicated political leaders and supportive institutions in these states. Since 1996, Zaire, which later turned into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), has been scourged by insecurity, especially in the Eastern part of this country. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) survey shows that nearly four million people have been killed from

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<sup>7</sup> Khadiagala, Gilbert M. *Mediation Efforts in Africa's Great Lakes Region*. P. 47, [https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/112MediationeffortsinAfrica\\_sGreatLakesRegion-April-2007.pdf](https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/112MediationeffortsinAfrica_sGreatLakesRegion-April-2007.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Ewald, Jonas. *A Strategic Conflict Analysis for the Great Lakes Region*, Sida, p. 37, 2004, <https://cdn.sida.se/publications/files/sida3689en-a-strategic-conflict-analysis-for-the-great-lakes-region.pdf> accessed on December 19, 2024.

war-related causes in the DRC since 1998, the largest documented death toll in a conflict since World War.<sup>9</sup>

During 2019, workshops brought together representatives of religious denominations, who were able to analyze the situation in their countries, reviewing the main socio-political challenges, socio-economic situation, state of collaborative relations between religious groups, the coexistence of ethnic and tribal groups, relational quality of the region, hotbeds of tension in the countries and the most threatening potential conflicts, and prospects of upcoming election cycles. In the same vein, they were able to assess the quality of respect for human rights, discuss the main perpetrators of human rights violations, and assess the state of political dialogue between the various sociopolitical actors.<sup>10</sup>

The above trends have been attempted to transform the political crisis that faces the Great Lakes Region; however, they did not provide effective intended results. The dialogue is made today through the SADEC (Communauté de Développement d'Afrique Australe) and the East African Community (EAC), but the result is in vain. The effective strategy that we suggest in this paper to resolve the situation, should be through strengthening Christian values among political leaders of the region to overcome this political crisis.

### **Christian Values as Foundation for Political Transformation in the Great Lakes Region**

The lack of practicing Christian values in politics among the Great Lakes Region's leaders has contributed to a high political crisis in the region. Therefore, for its political transformation, the political leaders of the region must apply Christian values in their political leadership. Below are some key Christian values that should be considered for a political transformation in the Great Lakes Region.

#### ***Obedience***

Just as there are physical laws that govern our physical lives so there are spiritual laws that govern our spiritual lives. It is only as we are obedient to these laws that we are free. Jesus said that he had come to give us a more abundant life (John 10:10). Satan tempts us to violate the laws of the Spirit, which are confirmed by the Word of God and our hearts. Satan is the enemy of men's souls. Yet, though he wields great power, he cannot defeat us if we are completely yielded and obedient to Christ.<sup>11</sup>

There is no freedom in the Great Lakes Region because of the lack of obedience to the Word of God. Most leaders of the region do not care about the Scriptural truth and even the natural laws. It is essential to know that truth and obey it. Jesus said, "*You will know the truth and the truth shall set you free*" (John 8:34). However, most leaders in the region are sacrificial rather than obedient. They seem to be Christians outwardly, while inwardly they are wicked. The Great Lakes Region's leaders should be therefore more obedient to the Word of God instead of being more sacrificial by organizing Christian crusades and being talkative of the Word of

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<sup>9</sup> Gierszewska, Wioleta and Benjamin Mudaheeranwa. *African Great Lakes Region: Governance and Politics*, Polish Political Science Yearbook, p. 4, 21 June 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Ntakarutimana, Emmanuel. *Peace Building in an Interfaith Context in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: The Challenges of Creating New Approaches*, Journal of Moral Theology, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 111-112, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Bright, Bill. *Handbook for Christian Maturity: A Compilation of Ten Basic Steps toward Christian Maturity*, San Bernado: Here's Life Publishers, p. 222, 1982.



God. The Bible states that "...to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

### *Love and Compassion*

Good government does not dominate over the citizens. It serves them. We cannot expect a government to have the love of the Father, yet we should require the people in government to have faith in God's commandment, to appreciate their high position, to understand the importance of their responsibilities, and to rule with gladness, according to the principles of faith, aiming at the ends of peace and unity.<sup>12</sup>

We need political leaders characterized by love and compassion for an effective political transformation. Love and compassion should be expressed to all people, starting from the people of their states and to those around them. Good political leaders think seven times before they can make any decision. If they find that their decisions can affect negatively their citizens and the states around them, they decide to leave them. They also do not premeditate what is worse for others, rather they feel disturbed to see people suffering around them and they always engage to get solutions. That is what should be the preoccupation of the Great Lakes countries' leaders. They could be not only disturbed by the suffering of their citizens, but also by also the suffering that neighboring countries citizens go through. The political crisis of the Great Lakes Region can only be transformed once its political leaders hold love and compassion. In contradiction to this, there is no political transformation that can occur.

In connection with the above observation, Harti Sri D. mentions that everyone possesses intrinsic worth and importance regardless of circumstances or perceived societal contributions. In light of the current state of affairs, we must adopt an approach that upholds the principles of dignity, compassion, and empathy when interacting with individuals, duly acknowledging their unique experiences and valuable contributions to the fabric of society.<sup>13</sup> The construction of the Great Lakes community necessitates the compassion of political leaders toward others. When political leaders lack such traits, they can easily expose others to a catastrophic situation, and they cannot have a ready heart to secure neighboring countries from evil. Instead of manifesting love and compassion, they search for ways to implement troubles to the neighboring countries and their political stability. Love and compassion among political leaders are needed to build effective politics in the Great Lakes region. Especially for Africans, this should not be easy for us because it is also part of our African values.

The pagan wisdom does not put in its center the love commandment and thus it permits the creation of a social order susceptible to wars and conflicts. Pagans believe in self-assertion; their moral truths are partial. If the love commandment is not respected as the highest norm of behavior, then the entire order of values is confused. This leads to chaos and conflicting wills. On the contrary, the Christian vision of love is a "vision of peace."<sup>14</sup> The Christian vision of love and compassion is so important for political leaders of the Great Lakes Region. This must be at the center of their political vision because they are established by God to be

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<sup>12</sup> Tsonchev, Tsoncho. *The Christian Realist Perspective: The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr*, Quebec, Canada: Concordia University Montreal, p. 57-58, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Harti, Sri D. *Politics Identity in Christian Perspective and the Implication for Christian Politicians in Indonesia*, Pharos Journal of Theology ISSN 2414-3324 online Volume 104 Issue 4, p. 10, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Tsonchev, Tsoncho. *The Christian Realist Perspective: The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr*, Quebec, Canada: Concordia University Montreal, p. 9, 2015.

instruments of peace wherever they go and in what they do. Without love and compassion in political activities, there is no effective political transformation that can happen in the Great Lakes Region. The deserved political leaders are full of love and compassion for themselves and others. Paul says: “*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres*” (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

According to Harti, God allows someone to be part of politics so that they can care for the poor, defend the rights of the poor, and reduce poverty. The politicians must have charity. The Bible teaches that charity must come from the heart, and God’s compassion for the poor is expected from his followers.<sup>15</sup> Aquinas’ political theology suggests that the quality of a political regime should not be judged merely according to its formal constitution. A better means for judging a political power or authority is the analysis of its intentions and the practical effects of its actions. If the men in power act according to the principle “Good must be done, and evil avoided,” they certainly pursue the good of the community.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Honesty and Integrity***

Throughout the Bible we are called to the standard of truth-telling, but nowhere more graphically and less diplomatically than in the book of Proverbs, where a man “with a corrupt mouth” is called “a scoundrel and villain” (6:12) and where the suggest antidote to lying is that “a preserve tongue will be cut out” (10:31).<sup>17</sup> Daniel was not corrupt; instead, he was honest, ethical, and principled. Absolute honesty in speech and personal affairs has to be the hallmark of a faithful person.<sup>18</sup> Good political leaders always speak truth in their entire political projects and their mouths are opened in support of nothing more than truth. In addition to the above example, Joseph is also a good example during the time of his temptation by Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39:7-20). He agreed to be cast in jail for the sake of standing on truth since she was not his wife. He also stands for integrity by agreeing to flee though this could be fleshly observed as an opportunity for him. He was ready to please God and to obey his master instead of pleasing his flesh desire. He has stood for honesty and integrity in his business. Likewise, political leaders in the Great Lakes Region should stand for honesty and integrity for God’s glory through their services instead of pleasing their flesh desires.

Integrity is the qualification of honesty and trustworthiness. Leaders with integrity inspire confidence in others because they can be trusted to do what they say they are going to do. They are loyal, dependable, and not deceptive. Integrity makes a leader believable and worthy of our trust.<sup>19</sup> Sanders Oswald points out two qualities of leadership that were part of God’s law for the Israelites (Deuteronomy 18:13). God wants his people to show a transparent character, open

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<sup>15</sup> Harti, Sri D. *Politics Identity in Christian Perspective and the Implication for Christian Politicians in Indonesia*, Pharos Journal of Theology ISSN 2414-3324 online Volume 104 Issue 4, p. 11, 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Tsonchev, Tsoncho. *The Christian Realist Perspective: The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr*, Quebec, Canada: Concordia University Montreal, p. 10, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Hybels, Bill. *Making Life Work: Putting God’s Wisdom into Action*, Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity, p. 85-86, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Bridges, Jerry. *The Practice of Godliness*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, p. 147, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Northouse, Peter G. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, p. 20, 2007.

and innocent of guile. A prominent businessman once replied to a question: “If had to name the one most important quality of a top manager, I would say, personal integrity.” Surely the spiritual leader must be sincere in promise, faithful in discharge of duty, upright in finance, loyal in service, and honest in speech.<sup>20</sup>

This is also required for political leaders who want to build a peaceful environment in their region. They should demonstrate integrity in their daily life by searching to do what is right and contest any temptation that can push them to disobey God’s commandments. Here we have a biblical example of a guy who demonstrated integrity through his political and spiritual duties. Joshua is another leader who stood for integrity during the time his fellow Jews were turning their backs to God. He was not ready to disobey God’s prescriptions, instead, he called them to choose the God they should serve; however, he proclaimed clearly that he and his house shall serve the Lord (24:15). Political leaders in the Great Lakes Region should be an example for their society by standing for integrity and truth, instead of being a bad example for them. Without such values among the political leaders of the Great Lake region, peace cannot last as it should and political transformation can occur.

### *Humility*

Humility is the hallmark of the spiritual leader. Christ told his disciples to turn away from pompous attitudes of the oriental despots and instead take on the lowly bearing of the servant (Matthew 20:25-27). As in ancient days, so today humility is least admired in political and business circles.<sup>21</sup> Humility is a very expensive characteristic for political leaders in the world. It is tough for political leaders to humiliate themselves and live with the little ones as their servants. Consequently, it should be noted that without humility, a person holding power can be easily drunk-on it and forget to fulfill his duties effectively. To resolve any political issue in our society, humility is necessary for political leaders. Political leaders should avoid proud in their citizens and other states even when they hold power than them. This quality is essential for a political transformation in the Great Lake Region where some political leaders are still blinded by pride over their citizens and their neighboring states.

Jesus Christ exemplified humility in at utmost through his death for us. But he also exemplified humility throughout his life. He was born in the humblest of circumstances; he was obedient to his earthly parents; he called people to himself as one who was gentle and humble in heart; he said “I am among you as one who serves”; he washed the disciples’ feet on the very night of his betrayal; and he taught, “He who humbles himself will be exalted.” If we question whether humility is technically a Godlike trait, we certainly cannot question that it is a Christlike trait. And we are to be imitators of him as he lived out his human life on earth.<sup>22</sup> Political leaders who desire to succeed in their political leadership should always learn from Jesus’ leadership. Though he was not a political actor, he gave an example that political leaders should follow to succeed in their political affairs. Despite the power of any political leader, he should be humble toward others and offer deserved services as much as possible. This value has been lost among some political leaders of the Great Lakes Region where most political

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<sup>20</sup> Sanders, Oswald J. *Spiritual Leadership: Completely updated Text with Study Guide*, Chicago: Moody Press, p. 62, 1994.

<sup>21</sup> Sanders, Oswald J. *Spiritual Leadership: Completely updated Text with Study Guide*, Chicago: Moody Press, p. 61, 1994.

<sup>22</sup> Bridges, Jerry. *The Practice of Godliness*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, p. 73, 1996.



leaders are characterized with pride. However, this needs to be changed for an effective political transformation.

### ***Righteousness***

Christian Scripture, such as the Bible, is a primary source for Christian political thought. It contains narratives, teachings, and principles that inform Christians' understanding of political authority, justice, and social ethics. For example, passages like Romans 13:1-7 (The Holy Bible, NIV) teach about the submission to governing authorities and the responsibility of rulers to govern justly. Scripture also contains stories of prophets and leaders who challenged unjust rulers and advocated for the well-being of the oppressed, providing a precedent for Christians to engage in political activism and advocacy for justice.<sup>23</sup>

Personal accountability is a recurring theme in the Bible, underscoring the individual's responsibility for their choices and behaviors. The divine may engage in collective interactions with nations, yet ultimately, individuals will be subject to judgment based on their deeds. The individual's moral accountability to God underscores the importance of personal faith and righteousness in fostering a meaningful connection with the divine.<sup>24</sup> Righteousness is also very expensive for political leaders because most of them get corrupted and support injustice instead of justice. The lack of it is at the origin of the political crisis in the Great Lakes Region. However, political leaders of the region should be aware that God has established them to proclaim righteousness through their political activities and be an example for others. Any tendency to operate unjustly to a neighboring state is against God's willingness and the person applying such characteristic is accountable for his wrong acts. Political leaders should respect their borders and escape unrighteous fights with other countries in the region. Therefore, justice should reign among the Great Lakes politicians for an effective political transformation.

### ***Self-Control***

Self-control is control of oneself. It is probably best defined as the governing of one's desires.<sup>25</sup> Self-control is necessary because we are at war with our sinful desires. James describes those desires as drugging us away and enticing us into sin (1:14). Peter says they war against our souls (1 Peter 2:11). Paul speaks of them as deceitful (Ephesians 4:22). What makes these sinful desires so dangerous is that they dwell with our own heart.<sup>26</sup> Since we are created with desire, sometimes we can desire to disobey God's instructions. It is the same case even for political leaders. However, political leaders should not give place to the desires that do not please God. It is up to them to govern their desires and make decisions that please God. Conversely, political leaders who are unable to control themselves fall into idolatry to follow in flesh desires. The same is true for some political leaders in the Great Lakes Region, because they do not control their desires. They easily fall in lust for the neighboring country's wealth instead of taking care of their own countries. Political leaders of the Great Lakes countries should know how to

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<sup>23</sup> Salihu, Jacob T. *Christian Political Thought: Exploring the intersection of Faith and Governance*, Research Gate, p. 5, 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Harti, Sri D. *Politics Identity in Christian Perspective and the Implication for Christian Politicians in Indonesia*, Pharos Journal of Theology ISSN 2414-3324 online Volume 104 Issue 4, p. 10, 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Bridges, Jerry. *The Practice of Godliness*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, p. 131-132, 1996.

<sup>26</sup> Idem, p. 132.

control their thoughts, desires, speeches, and acts for an effective political transformation in the region.

### *Forgiveness*

The first Christians learned forgiveness from the example of Jesus himself. At the darkest moment of the Lord's life, he pleaded with the Father to forgive his executioners. Sometime later, the first Christian martyr Stephen prayed a nearly identical prayer as he was being stoned to death by his persecutors: "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*" (Acts 7:60). Authentic forgiveness not only says, "I hold nothing against you," but it also wants the guilty person to be forgiven by God as well.<sup>27</sup> It is not long before anyone who gets serious about serving others must come to terms with forgiving others as well. It is a required course in the servanthood curriculum.<sup>28</sup>

No matter the offense that has been caused by the neighboring countries through its worst leaders, qualified political leaders are ready to forgive and start a new journey. Political transformation in the Great Lakes Region necessitates such characteristics for its political leaders. The Great Lakes countries are in conflicts that need to be addressed through sincere reconciliation of their past and establish a true peaceful relation. The ability of political leaders to forgive their offenders determines their political maturity. They consider their mission as peacemakers where there is conflict and wars instead of being makers of conflict. Most of the time people think that only political leaders cannot forgive as the Bible stipulates. However, it is the responsibility of everyone to forgive so that he may be also forgiven. Establishing peace in the Great Lakes Region requires political leaders to address the existing issues instead of increasing them. It is through a sincere reconciliation among political leaders of the Great Lakes Region that a political transformation can be reached.

### *Faithfulness*

A faithful person is dependable, trustworthy, and loyal, who can be depended upon in all of his relationships, and who is honest and ethical in all of his affairs. It was said of Daniel that his rivals "tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was faithful and neither corrupt nor negligent" (Daniel 6:4).<sup>29</sup>

Most of the time people think that faithfulness is impossible for those involved in political affairs. However, the Bible is full of people who are involved faithfully in politics as God requires them to live. In the book of Daniel, we have four young Jews who were faithful to God and in their political tasks. These are Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who rejected to eat the food that could defile them (Daniel 1:7-8); they refused to worship the king's image of gold (3:16-18); and Daniel personally was accused of his faithfulness (6:5). Faithfulness is what God wait from political leaders that he has given political positions in this world. They have a responsibility to glorify him through their faithfulness in the different services they render to humanity. For this reason, they should stand faithful in all attacks that come from outside to mislead them into unfaithfulness.

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<sup>27</sup> Youssef, Michael. *The Leadership Style of Jesus*, Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, p. 87-88, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Swindoll, Charles R. *The Inspirational Writings: Improving your Serve, Strengthening your Grip, and Dropping your Guard*, New York: Inspirational Press, p. 41, 1994.

<sup>29</sup> Bridges, Jerry. *The Practice of Godliness*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, p. 147, 1996.

Paul taught and practiced this rite of passage: “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2).<sup>30</sup> The overall principle is that a person must establish that he is at least committed enough to carry out basic assignments and complete them as assigned and on time. Whatever a person demonstrates on a small level is the best predictor for the future. If a person does not prove faithful on this level, he does not proceed to the next level.<sup>31</sup>

To the level of the Great Lakes Region, faithfulness should be expressed among political leaders while resolving political challenges between the states. Most of the time it can happen that corruption can be given to mislead them to express the truth; however, transformed political leaders should stand faithfully for promoting effective political changes. Faithfulness should be proved through the political leaders’ daily lives to show their maturity. Therefore, faithful political leaders are needed to address the political issue in the Great Lakes Region. They should be faithful to God through the services they render to their states and in their region.

### *Work ethic*

The Christian steward recognizes God as his preeminent master, and lives for him. The whole of the Christian’s life, his personality, time, talent, influence, material substance, everything is dedicated to Christ. This is true Christian stewardship (Romans 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10).<sup>32</sup> The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All are free-ruled and rulers, as far as all are bound by the command of love. With this command, power and liberty enter into a “love” relation, in a harmonic unity. It makes all men simultaneously servants and masters. If this is the command that rules the soul of every member of society, notwithstanding his social status and political position, we would not have authorities that become tyrannies, nor would we have a liberty that transforms into abusive license.<sup>33</sup>

Political leaders are not different from other officials of the country. We are all stewards who have been called to glorify God through our service to human beings. This is a call for political leaders to serve as they are serving God since men represent God’s image on earth. Every political leader of the Great Lakes Region is responsible for taking care of the neighboring country and defending it against any attack if possible. We are all servants, serving in different services and levels including political leaders.

Stewardship is another key concept that informs Christian political thought. It stems from the biblical teaching that humans are called to be caretakers or stewards of God’s creation (Genesis 1:28-30, NRSV). Stewardship implies responsible and accountable management of resources, including political power and authority. Christian political thought emphasizes the intrinsic value of creation, a call to protect and preserve the environment, and the need to promote

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<sup>30</sup> Hull, Bill. *Building High Commitment in a Low-Commitment World*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, p. 140, 1995.

<sup>31</sup> Idem, p. 141.

<sup>32</sup> Bright, Bill. *Handbook for Christian Maturity: A Compilation of Ten Basic Steps toward Christian Maturity*, San Bernado: Here’s Life Publishers, p. 273, 1982.

<sup>33</sup> Tsonchev, Tsoncho. *The Christian Realist Perspective: The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr*, Quebec, Canada: Concordia University Montreal, p. 58, 2015.

sustainable and just use of resources for the benefit of all.<sup>34</sup> This is the kind of service that political leaders in the Great Lakes Region should provide in their countries as well as for their neighbor's countries.

### *Unity*

A basic Christian principle is the belief that we all depend on something else, ultimately on God's grace, men depend on other men, and society, whose primary function is to serve the interest of every single person in it, is a communion of men for men. There is no society without members as there is no sum without parts.<sup>35</sup> So, we may say that the pursuit of the common good by politicians and lawmakers, by rulers and ruled is the effort to achieve the good life for the whole and the parts.<sup>36</sup> The division among political leaders in the Great Lakes Region should be addressed and promote unity of the states. The lack of unity is the source of the political crisis of the Great Lakes states.

The concept of Ubuntu is common in the Bantu languages that stretch roughly from Uganda to South Africa, expressing a relational understanding of human nature. It describes a sense of the human being as a "human being," frequently understood with an affirmation of communal belonging: "I am because we are." It emphasizes values of integrity, solidarity, and compassion, along with respect for unity in diversity.<sup>37</sup> This philosophy expresses the dependence of one state on another in political cooperation. This is the reason unity should be carefully maintained between the states of the Great Lakes Region. No state can live for itself; however, cooperation is imperative between the states to complete mutually and support one another for an effective political transformation. This can only be practical once the states are united. The Great Lakes Region is like a body composed of diverse parts that should be united together for their liberation and reconstruction. There is a need for political cooperation among the leaders of the state.

Moreover, Muyonga Luvembe R. argues that unity should be well-kept rather than individuals acting independently, community-based initiatives prioritize working together, pooling resources, and sharing responsibilities. This approach generates constructive interaction, where the combined efforts of the group result in outcomes that exceed what could be achieved by individual elements alone. By embracing unity and sharing, communities harness their collective power to achieve common goals more effectively and efficiently.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Salihu, Jacob T. *Christian Political Thought: Exploring the intersection of Faith and Governance*, Research Gate, p. 4, 2024, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381521329\\_CHRISTIAN\\_POLITICAL\\_THOUGHT\\_Exploring\\_the\\_Intersection\\_of\\_Faith\\_and\\_Governance](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381521329_CHRISTIAN_POLITICAL_THOUGHT_Exploring_the_Intersection_of_Faith_and_Governance).

<sup>35</sup> Tsonchev, Tsoncho. *The Christian Realist Perspective: The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr*, Quebec, Canada: Concordia University Montreal, p. 65, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Idem, p. 65-66.

<sup>37</sup> Ntakarutimana, Emmanuel. *Peace Building in an Interfaith Context in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: The Challenges of Creating New Approaches*, Journal of Moral Theology, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 112, 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Muyonga Luvembe R. *Reimagining Theological Anthropology: Ubuntu Philosophy, Election Violence, and the Quest for Peace and Justice in Kenya*, Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Religious Studies, p. 53, 2024, <https://edinburgjournals.org/journals/index.php/journal-of-sociology/article/view/355>.

## Methodology

Through this study we have chosen to use a qualitative approach by using text books that deal with the topic from the previous authors' perspectives. All text books are carefully analyzed and criticized on the base of the Scripture. We have incorporated our critical views on the importance of strengthening Christian values among the leaders of the Great Lakes region that should be considered by political leaders to promote an effective political transformation in the region of the Great Lakes. This topic provides the answers to the misunderstanding that political leaders cannot live and apply Christian values. However, this research demonstrates through the ideas from various books and through our critical analysis that political leaders have been established by God for the good of God's people. Moreover, since they are created in the image of God, they do what is God. Therefore, a lasting peace is not possible in the Great Lakes Region once its leaders are not transformed and practicing Christian values.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, strengthening Christian values among the Great Lakes Region's leaders is imperative for an effective political transformation. It has been observed through this paper that the Great Lakes Region has undergone a political crisis for many years and different trends have been attempted to resolve its political challenges. However, the persistence of the situation increases instead of decreasing. The persistence of the situation is due to the lack of application of Christian values among the political leaders of the region who are so-called Christians but living a worse life than the unbelievers. Since there are laws that govern the universe, there are also policies that political leaders of the Great Lake Region should apply to overcome the crisis. Therefore, political leaders of the region should stand for the political transformation by promoting Christian values in their daily living such as obedience, love and compassion, honesty and integrity, humility, righteousness, self-control, faithfulness, service, unity, etc. The inability to live those Christian values implies the ineffective political transformation in the Great Lakes Region. We recommend through this study that Christian values should be strengthened among the Great Lakes Region's political leaders for an effective political transformation and for addressing the political crisis in the region. Political leaders of the region should be obedient, express love and compassion, have humility, live in righteousness, be able to control their desires, be faithful to God, be ready to serve God through serving humanity, and be united. In summary, they should always put into action this exhortation of Paul to Romans: "*Do not be overcome by evil, overcome evil by good*" (12:21).

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