

Two Kingdoms, One Neighbour: Luther, Pentecostal Pneumatology, and the Church's Public Vocation

Michael Pamfiri Mkandawire^{ID}

Graduate Studies Centre, Malawi Assemblies of God University, P.O. Box 184, Lilongwe, Malawi.

Corresponding author: michaelsmkandawire@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62154/ajrts.2026.07.01016>

Abstract

Pentecostal Christianity in Africa combines a strong confession of the Holy Spirit's transforming power with uneven patterns of public engagement. In some contexts, prayer, prophecy and deliverance coexist with caution toward sustained engagement with institutions and political accountability; in others, Pentecostal leaders are highly visible in political life without a sufficiently articulated theology of that engagement. This article develops Spirit-empowered public vocation through a constructive dialogue between Martin Luther's distinction of spiritual and temporal rule, his theology of Christian freedom and vocation, and African Pentecostal pneumatology. Methodologically, it employs critical theological retrieval and contextual dialogue, bringing Luther into conversation with African scholarship from Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Zambia and Malawi. The argument is deliberately reciprocal with Luther locating neighbour-love in ordinary offices and differentiated political authority, while Pentecostal pneumatology keeps vocation open to the Spirit's discernment, disruption and transformation of unjust arrangements. Nigeria and Malawi provide contrasting tests of the proposal, exposing respectively the dangers of political visibility without adequate theological formation and spiritual vitality without sustained structural engagement. The article argues that Spirit-empowered public vocation joins vocational location, pneumatological agency and neighbour-oriented ethical judgment, enabling faithful institutional presence without accommodation and prophetic engagement without partisan capture.

Keywords: African Christianity, Christian Citizenship, Contextual Theology, Political Theology, Religion.

Introduction

A congregation may pray fervently for a nation and still remain silent about the forces deforming its common life. It may invoke the Holy Spirit against corruption yet regard public accountability as "politics." It may preach deliverance while saying little when institutions fail the poor. It may fill the night with intercession and leave the day largely untouched by Christian witness.

That contradiction deserves more careful treatment than the familiar accusation that Pentecostals are simply apolitical. African Pentecostalism is too diverse for such a verdict. Nigerian Pentecostals have occupied pulpits from which governments are criticised, participated in elections, cultivated relationships with political leaders and entered public

office. Ghanaian Pentecostalism has moved from relative political insulation toward democratic participation, socioeconomic initiatives and what Kudadjie (2024) calls prophetic politicking. Zimbabwean experience, however, also shows how an intense spirituality can coexist with political caution. Musoni (2021) describes a “spiritualised political theology” in which prayer may become the principal response to political disorder while direct criticism of power is avoided. The problem, therefore, is not simply absence from politics. Political visibility can itself be theologically thin.

This point is especially important for a Pentecostal public theology. A tradition formed around testimony, healing, mission, prophecy and confidence in the continuing work of the Holy Spirit should possess strong resources for public engagement. It often does. Pentecostal churches educate children, care for the sick, sustain households, create networks of solidarity and give people at society’s margins a language of dignity and hope. Yet the question remains whether the Spirit who transforms persons is also confessed as the Spirit who forms truthful citizens, ethical professionals, accountable institutions and communities capable of resisting public evil. The resulting theological gap animates the present study. Pentecostalism’s robust confession of the Spirit’s power to transform persons has not always been matched by an equally developed account of the Spirit’s work in forming, judging and transforming the institutions and civic relationships of common life. This article argues that a constructive conversation between Martin Luther and Pentecostal pneumatology can clarify that question because each tradition exposes a weakness in the other. Luther gives Pentecostal public theology a grammar for locating neighbour-love in ordinary offices and differentiated political authority. Pentecostal pneumatology, in turn, unsettles any account of vocation that only sanctifies inherited roles or unjust institutions. Luther helps answer where Spirit-empowered public responsibility is lived; Pentecostal pneumatology helps answer how vocation remains open to the Spirit’s judgment and transformation of the arrangements within which Christians serve.

The proposal developed here is Spirit-empowered public vocation, understood as the Spirit-enabled service of the neighbour through the ordinary offices, institutions and relationships of common life. Such service includes both the faithful performance of those roles and their prophetic reform when they become instruments of harm. Three features distinguish this category. First, its location is vocational, since public responsibility is exercised not only by pastors addressing rulers but also by Christians inhabiting ordinary institutions. Second, its agency is pneumatological, as Christians discern, resist, create, reform and witness in dependence upon the Spirit. Third, its ethical criterion is the neighbour’s good rather than ecclesial visibility or political influence. This is neither a fusion of Lutheranism and Pentecostalism nor an attempt to baptise a political ideology. It is a contextual theological construction tested against African experience, with particular attention to the contrasting pressures evident in Nigeria and Malawi.

Method: Critical Retrieval and African Contextual Dialogue

The article is a constructive theological study. It employs critical retrieval rather than simple transplantation. Luther's sixteenth-century categories are read historically and selectively, with attention to their limits, and then brought into dialogue with Pentecostal pneumatology and contemporary African public theology. The African context is not treated as a laboratory in which a European theory is applied. Nigerian, Ghanaian, Zimbabwean, Kenyan, Zambian and Malawian scholarship functions as a theological conversation partner capable of questioning both Luther and Pentecostal practice.

"Church and politics" is not one problem repeated unchanged across Africa. In Nigeria, the challenge includes highly visible Pentecostal activism and proximity to political power. In Zimbabwe, Musoni (2021) identifies a spiritualised political theology that can mute prophetic confrontation. In Ghana, Kudadjie (2024) traces participation in democratic processes, socioeconomic initiatives and prophetic politicking. In Kenya, Ingaboh (2024) argues more directly for the interdependence of Pentecostalism and political life within God's mission. Malawi presents another history, where pastoral letters from historic churches have repeatedly entered national life as instruments of public accountability (Jere & Magezi, 2018), while research on the Malawi Assemblies of God has identified a more cautious institutional posture toward political engagement (Mkandawire, 2023). These differences sharpen the theological question of what forms Christian public presence so that it serves the neighbour rather than merely increasing the church's political visibility.

When Two Kingdoms Become Two Separate Worlds

The expression "two kingdoms" can mislead before the discussion has properly begun. It easily suggests two sealed territories, with church set against world, sacred against secular, and faith against politics. Once imagined that way, the division of labour seems obvious. The church tends souls while government tends society. Pastors preach salvation while public officials deal with justice. But the historical picture is more complicated. "Two kingdoms" is a convenient label for distinctions scattered through Luther's writings rather than a single political system delivered in finished form (Wright, 2010).

In *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*, Luther distinguishes the government of the gospel from temporal government. Faith cannot be produced by coercion, and political authority has limits in matters of conscience (Luther, 1962). This distinction remains theologically important. The church becomes dangerous when it imagines that the kingdom of God can be manufactured through state power; the state becomes dangerous when it claims authority over faith or presents itself as the agent of final salvation.

Yet Luther did not construct a religiously empty public realm. Temporal government serves a necessary purpose in a world marked by sin. Law restrains wrongdoing and protects an external peace in which neighbours may live. Distinction is therefore not abandonment. The neighbour lives in the temporal world, where bodies are injured, wages are withheld,

contracts are awarded, schools teach, courts judge and public money disappears. A theology that protects the distinction between gospel and coercion cannot use that distinction to make such realities morally weightless.

This retrieval requires caution. Luther was not a modern constitutional democrat, and his response to the Peasants' War warns against turning him into one. His political judgments could be severe and troubling. The same historical caution, however, should prevent the opposite anachronism of recruiting Luther as a patron of modern Christian withdrawal. His account of authority limits rulers as well as subjects, and his wider theology of vocation places Christian life squarely inside ordinary relationships of responsibility.

What matters here is not a tidy division of territory but the freedom created by the distinction. The church need not seize the machinery of the state in order to witness faithfully, and the state need not become an arm of the church in order to pursue justice. A magistrate need not become a preacher to act justly; a civil servant need not turn a government office into a prayer meeting to refuse a fraudulent procurement. Christian service does not require the state to become church.

Free in Christ, Bound to the Neighbour

Luther's most fruitful contribution to this argument comes from a text that is not primarily a political treatise. In *The Freedom of a Christian*, he holds together the freedom of faith and the servanthood of love. His celebrated formulation captures the apparent paradox when he writes, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all" (Luther, 1957, p. 344). Grace frees the believer from anxious self-justification and therefore frees the believer for the neighbour. Faith receives; love gives. The neighbour is no longer a means by which the Christian earns divine acceptance. The public consequence is substantial. A hungry person is not simply an illustration in a sermon on compassion. A citizen whose rights are violated is not an interruption to the church's spiritual mission. A woman facing violence, a person with albinism living under threat, or a young graduate excluded from opportunity by patronage confronts the believer with the vocational question of what love requires in such circumstances.

Luther's catechetical treatment of "daily bread" widens the horizon. Bread names more than food. It includes the conditions that allow embodied life to be sustained: peace, health, honour, trustworthy relationships and "good government" (Luther, 2000, p. 357). That makes the petition unexpectedly public. To pray for bread is also to care about the arrangements through which bread is produced, distributed or withheld. Prayer becomes distorted when Christians ask God for provision yet refuse to notice the practices that deny provision to their neighbours.

Kolden (1983) is helpful at precisely this point because he resists reducing vocation to paid employment. Vocation names the ordinary relations in which a Christian is placed for the service of others. Recent work also helps retrieve Luther without freezing the idea in the sixteenth century. Kristanto et al. (2024) affirm the enduring value of calling while taking seriously Miroslav Volf's criticism that a static account of vocation can become inadequate

in changing labour conditions. Their retrieval is particularly useful because “Christian workers ... are enabled to see that their work is a participation in God’s redemptive work” (Kristanto et al., 2024, p. 6). Public vocation, then, cannot mean blessing every existing occupation or institutional arrangement. Some roles must be reformed; some practices must be refused; occasionally, faithfulness may require leaving a corrupt arrangement rather than serving it efficiently.

This understanding of vocation brings the discussion close to Pentecostal concerns. The accountant, teacher, police officer, nurse, journalist, entrepreneur and public administrator do not leave discipleship at the office door. Their work is one of the places where neighbours encounter either care or harm. This gives “neighbour” a more concrete public meaning than an appeal to the common good in the abstract. Institutions mediate neighbour-love. A procurement officer may never meet the patient whose medicine depends upon an honest tender; a teacher may alter a student’s future by refusing favouritism; a magistrate’s integrity may protect a citizen with no social access to the court. Vocation therefore moves public theology beyond an excessive focus on what bishops and pastors say to governments. Much of a nation’s moral life is shaped quietly by people who sign forms, allocate resources, teach children, investigate crimes, hire workers, administer medicine and tell the truth when a lie would be profitable.

Pentecost Beyond the Upper Room

Pentecostal theology enters the conversation with a different accent. It asks not only where Christians have been stationed but what the Spirit is doing. Yong (2010) has pressed Pentecostal political theology beyond private spirituality, while Wariboko (2012) treats Pentecostal existence as an openness to the Spirit’s creative interruption of settled life. Those emphases matter here. Pentecostals testify to a God who speaks, heals, gifts, empowers and sends. Acts is therefore read not simply as the record of a vanished apostolic age but as testimony to the continuing activity of the Spirit.

The temptation is to narrow empowerment to what happens at the altar, including tongues, prophecy, healing, deliverance, ecstatic worship and personal breakthrough. None of these practices needs to be rejected. The harder question is what kind of common life becomes possible when the Spirit poured out on all flesh creates witnesses. Acts 2 does not end in the upper room. Speech crosses boundaries; a public crowd gathers; Peter interprets events; a community takes material form. Possessions, meals, need, generosity, worship and social relationships enter the story.

Etukumana (2024), a Nigerian scholar, strengthens this reading by locating Luke–Acts within political, social and religious worlds rather than treating pneumatology as an escape from them. He argues that the Spirit-created community embodied an alternative social imagination whose practices challenged the imperial environment. As Etukumana (2024, p. 6) puts it, “The Spirit energised the believers so that they were able to transform the political, religious, economic, and social world of their time.” The force of the argument is

not that Acts supplies a modern party programme. It is that the Spirit's work becomes visible in a community whose life has social, economic and political consequences.

Luke 4:18–19 belongs in the same theological horizon. The Spirit rests upon Jesus for good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind and freedom for the oppressed. The text should not be flattened into a modern manifesto, but neither should its embodied and public force be spiritualised away. Pentecostal pneumatology becomes smaller than its own Scriptures when empowerment has much to say about victory over demons but little to say about truth, justice, material need and the abuse of power. The public practices proposed here are therefore not simply Christian ethics decorated with pneumatological language. Discernment belongs to a community that tests what claims spiritual authority; truthful speech belongs to a people empowered for witness; gifts are given for service rather than private possession; and the Spirit who forms a new community across inherited boundaries also unsettles practices that deny the dignity of neighbours. Pentecostal holiness must consequently reach the use of money, office, speech and public power.

The public work of the Spirit therefore requires practices of discernment. Pentecostal communities already know the language of testing spirits, weighing prophecy and seeking wisdom. Public discernment extends these habits: Who benefits from this policy? Who bears its hidden cost? Which voices are absent? What lie is being normalised? Which leader is using Christian vocabulary to purchase religious legitimacy? Discernment refuses the assumption that a political claim becomes righteous because it is spoken by a Christian politician or endorsed by a prophet.

A second practice is truthful speech. Pentecostal testimony assumes that speech can interrupt settled realities. In public life, however, prophetic speech requires discipline. Volume is not truth. A sermon that insults a ruler may be politically dramatic while theologically shallow. Orogun and Pillay's (2023) Nigerian study is instructive because neo-Pentecostal pulpit activism can mobilise public reaction and still lack a coherent theological foundation. Their analysis moves the discussion beyond the false choice between silence and confrontation.

A third practice is vocational formation. Spirit empowerment should reach the moments when an officer is asked to alter a file, a lecturer is pressured to favour a relative, a businessperson is invited into a corrupt tender, or a police officer is told to ignore abuse. If Pentecostal formation has nothing to say in those rooms, its pneumatology is too small. Congregations can pray for professionals, hear testimonies about ethical pressure at work, teach conflicts of interest and ask how occupations affect unseen neighbours.

A fourth practice is corporate advocacy. Some wrongs exceed individual virtue. Churches may need to issue pastoral statements, join coalitions, petition authorities, accompany threatened communities or support lawful civic action. Nanthambwe and Magezi (2024) rightly place churches alongside government and economic actors in the public sphere and argue for advocacy, service and collaboration directed toward social good. Such engagement requires prudence, competence and the freedom to criticise allies as well as opponents.

Finally, public witness requires ecclesial accountability. Pentecostal denunciations of corruption ring hollow when churches conceal financial abuse, denounce authoritarian government while protecting unaccountable ecclesial leaders, or preach human dignity while silencing victims. The church cannot credibly demand in the state what it refuses to practise in its own house.

Nigeria: Political Visibility and the Need for Theological Formation

Nigeria complicates any simple description of Pentecostalism as politically withdrawn. Oluwanifise (2023) shows that Pentecostalism has become a significant voice in Nigerian democratic life since 1999. Pentecostals have participated in political leadership, electoral mobilisation and civil society. At the same time, he concludes that the church has not fulfilled its public role adequately. The Nigerian case therefore reveals a distinction crucial to this article, since political presence is not the same as public faithfulness.

Orogun and Pillay (2023) sharpen the point by examining Nigerian neo-Pentecostal pulpit political activism. Their study identifies clergy who speak forcefully against corruption, inequality, poor governance, nepotism, tribalism and disregard for the rule of law. Such activism can catalyse civil action, but the authors argue that it can become counterproductive where it lacks a coherent theological basis. As they caution, “where a struggle for good governance ... lacks a solid theological foundation, its approach may be counterproductive” (Orogun & Pillay, 2023, p. 8). Their recommendation is not withdrawal but constructive theological grounding, especially through public theology.

The Nigerian evidence exposes a further danger. Activism itself can become a form of spiritual performance. A pastor may thunder against government without forming congregants to resist corruption in their own offices. A church may condemn one political party while excusing the same conduct in another. A prophet may become highly political through election predictions while saying little about institutions, budgets, procurement, violence or the everyday ethics of public service. The deeper question is therefore not whether Pentecostals engage politics, but what theology governs that engagement.

Danfulani (2022) approaches the problem through integrity and political participation. His Nigerian argument is deliberately activist, calling on the church to cease treating politics as dirt and to prepare Christians for public responsibility. His strongest contribution to the present argument lies less in the precise institutional model he recommends than in his insistence on formation. Christian education, he argues, should address national development, leadership, governance, integrity and transparency, while clergy should become more knowledgeable about public affairs. This emphasis comes close to what Spirit-empowered public vocation requires, which is not simply sending Christians into politics, but forming Christians who know why power is held and for whom it is exercised.

The Nigerian studies reveal a paradox within Pentecostal public presence. The problem is not simply absence from politics. Pentecostal actors may be highly visible and still lack the theological formation required for faithful public responsibility. A politician may speak

fluently about God and still govern without regard for the neighbour. A pastor may gain access to the presidency while losing the freedom to tell the truth. Nigeria therefore shifts the question from whether Pentecostals are politically involved to the theological quality of their involvement. Spirit-empowered public vocation values nonpartisanship without confusing it with nonengagement. A church that belongs to no party is better placed to commend what serves the neighbour and criticise what harms the neighbour.

Musa's (2021) Nigerian public-theological reflection widens the discussion from elections to poverty. He calls the African church to address economic, political and ecological dimensions of poverty and to present a holistic gospel attentive to people's spiritual and social existence. This is important because the public vocation of the church cannot be measured only by its statements during election seasons. Hunger, unemployment, land, education, health, violence and environmental degradation are also political in the broad sense that they concern how common life is ordered.

Opuni-Frimpong (2023), writing from Ghana but addressing African Christianity more broadly, similarly argues that biblical faith belongs in public questions of justice, corruption, human dignity and the common good. His work is useful precisely because it refuses the separation of evangelism and social responsibility. Pentecostal public theology need not borrow concern for society from a secular ideology; it can discover public responsibility within its own biblical confession.

From Zimbabwe and Ghana: Two Contrasting Pentecostal Lessons

Zimbabwe and Ghana press the argument from different directions. Musoni's (2021) study of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa identifies a "spiritualised political theology" in which political crisis is met primarily through prayer and leaders avoid direct confrontation with governing power. Prayer is not the problem. Indeed, Pentecostal public theology that loses prayer will soon lose its theological centre. The problem arises when prayer becomes an alibi for refusing responsibility or when political violence is interpreted only as spiritual warfare in ways that obscure identifiable human agency.

Ghana offers a different trajectory. Kudadjie (2024) describes Pentecostal engagement in the Fourth Republic through participation in democratic processes, socioeconomic initiatives and prophetic politicking. This demonstrates that Pentecostal spirituality can move into the public sphere in multiple ways. At the same time, "prophetic politicking" raises the question of discernment. Prophecy can contribute moral imagination, but election predictions and proximity to candidates can also reduce prophetic ministry to political spectacle.

These cases make a binary model of political or apolitical engagement analytically inadequate. Pentecostal churches can be silent, confrontational, developmental, partisan, prophetic, charitable or institutionally engaged, sometimes simultaneously. Spirit-empowered public vocation asks a different set of questions. Does the practice serve the neighbour? Does it tell the truth? Does it protect the vulnerable? Does it strengthen

accountable institutions? Does it preserve the church's freedom from partisan capture? Does it form believers for faithful conduct when nobody is watching?

The Malawian Test: Public Witness Close to Home

The argument becomes more demanding in Malawi because the issue is no longer observed at a distance. Malawian Christianity has a documented history of public intervention. Jere and Magezi (2018) trace the contribution of pastoral letters from colonial rule through the democratic transition and into multiparty government. Their account gives theological weight to a fact woven into Malawi's national memory. Ecclesial speech has sometimes opened political space when other voices were constrained.

The 1992 Catholic bishops' pastoral letter remains the best-known example, but its importance lies beyond denominational history. It demonstrates that a church can address political wrong without becoming a political party. Jere and Magezi (2018) understand pastoral letters as instruments through which the church has demanded reform and contributed checks and balances in democratic life. Public speech, at its best, is pastoral because the people affected by bad government are members of the flock and neighbours beyond it.

This history places a difficult question before Malawian Pentecostalism. Research into the Malawi Assemblies of God found an institutional tradition deeply committed to evangelism, prayer, mission and the power of the Holy Spirit, while often more comfortable with social service than sustained social action directed toward structures of public life (Mkandawire, 2023). The distinction should not be exaggerated. Feeding families, educating children and caring for the sick are genuine forms of public good. Charity is not morally inferior to advocacy. Still, a church may repeatedly serve people injured by unjust arrangements without asking why those arrangements continue to injure them.

In Malawi, that theological gap is not abstract. Questions of public integrity, economic hardship, electoral trust and the protection of vulnerable people are encountered in the ordinary life of congregations and communities (Mkandawire, 2023). A church need not issue a statement on every controversy. Constant commentary can become as shallow as constant silence. Nor should pastors convert pulpits into campaign platforms. The question is whether the church is forming believers whose prayer against corruption follows them into procurement offices, classrooms, businesses, police stations, courts and political parties.

The Malawian case also protects this argument from importing Nigerian forms of activism uncritically. The two contexts test the proposal from different directions. Nigeria raises the problem of political presence without sufficient theological formation, while Malawi raises the problem of strong Pentecostal spirituality and social ministry alongside caution toward sustained structural engagement. Spirit-empowered public vocation challenges both. Visibility is not enough, but neither is spiritual vitality that rarely reaches the institutional causes of public harm.

What works as pulpit confrontation in one political culture may fail in another. The task is not imitation but theological formation. Pastoral letters, professional networks, civic education, quiet mediation, public advocacy, ethical preaching and institutional partnerships may all become forms of public vocation. The criterion is service of the neighbour under the judgment of the gospel.

Toward Spirit-Empowered Public Vocation

At this point the constructive proposal comes into clearer view, but the two traditions should not be made to agree too easily. Luther's account of vocation emphasises the ordinary callings and relatively stable relations through which God serves the neighbour. Pentecostal pneumatology is more alert to interruption, as the Spirit gifts unexpectedly, sends beyond settled boundaries and creates possibilities not contained within inherited arrangements. Each emphasis becomes dangerous when isolated. Vocation without pneumatological disruption can sanctify the status quo; pneumatological disruption without vocational responsibility can collapse into episodic activism. Spirit-empowered public vocation holds stability and disruption together. The Christian is called to serve faithfully within institutions while remaining open to the Spirit's judgment upon them. Sometimes the answer to prayer is an honest accountant, a competent nurse, a teacher who refuses favouritism, a journalist who verifies a claim, a magistrate who will not sell a judgment, or a civil servant who remembers that public resources belong to the public. Pentecostal pneumatology, however, prevents vocation from becoming a theology of the status quo. Institutions are not innocent just because they exist. Volf's criticism of static vocation, echoed in Kristanto et al. (2024), is important here. A corrupt office cannot be sanctified simply by telling the Christian to remain obedient within it. The Spirit gives wisdom for service but also courage for refusal, speech and reform. Sometimes faithfulness means performing an office well; sometimes it means challenging how the office has been organised.

This account of vocation also has implications for Christian citizenship. African Pentecostal engagement with public life has often been framed through the moral transformation of persons and, through them, the nation. That instinct should not be dismissed. The broader African literature reinforces this connection by showing how Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity has increasingly shaped public life, political engagement, narratives of nationhood and understandings of citizenship (van Klinken & Obadare, 2018). Sperber and Hern (2018), however, demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between Pentecostal identity and citizen engagement in sub-Saharan Africa. Their study of Zambia, read alongside wider regional evidence, suggests that Pentecostal identity does not produce a single political disposition. Religious commitments can encourage political interest and aspirations for moral renewal while also generating forms of political preference that sit uneasily with pluralistic democratic citizenship. The theological question is therefore not simply whether Spirit-filled Christians become politically active, but what kind of citizens Pentecostal formation produces.

Spirit-empowered public vocation answers that question without making political participation the measure of Christian faithfulness. The Christian citizen is first a neighbour situated among other neighbours whose dignity does not depend upon their religious identity, political affiliation or usefulness to the church. This qualification matters in religiously plural societies. Pentecostal hopes for national transformation can easily move from the legitimate desire for morally serious leadership to the assumption that public righteousness depends upon placing the right Christians in positions of authority. Christian occupation of public office, however, does not itself Christianise the exercise of power. The more demanding test is whether authority is exercised truthfully, competently and justly for those who share the office-holder's faith and those who do not. In this respect, Luther's distinction between spiritual and temporal rule provides an important restraint upon Pentecostal political aspiration. The state does not become an instrument of the gospel simply because Christians govern it, while Pentecostal pneumatology prevents that restraint from becoming political indifference.

Citizenship consequently extends the argument from personal integrity toward participation in a shared institutional life. Van Klinken (2016), examining Pentecostal discourse in Zambia, shows how born-again identity can be imagined beyond personal and domestic transformation to encompass responsibilities in the sociopolitical sphere and aspirations for national renewal. This is significant because it demonstrates how Pentecostal formation can connect the transformation of persons with expectations about the transformation of society. At the same time, that connection requires theological scrutiny. Spirit-empowered public vocation shifts the centre of gravity from producing morally exemplary Christian subjects who will redeem the nation to Christian service within a public order shared with others. The question is not how much explicitly Christian influence can be accumulated, but whether Christians contribute to institutions and civic practices through which neighbours can flourish. Voting responsibly, refusing patronage, protecting public resources, reporting wrongdoing, treating political opponents truthfully and accepting legitimate institutional scrutiny can therefore belong to Christian discipleship without becoming techniques for establishing ecclesial control over the state. Such citizenship is publicly consequential precisely because it neither withdraws faith from common life nor requires common life to become an extension of the church. It seeks a public order in which Christian conviction generates service rather than entitlement and in which Spirit-empowered agency is judged by what it does for the neighbour.

Spirit-empowered public vocation takes concrete shape in discernment, truthful speech, vocational integrity, responsible advocacy and ecclesial accountability. These are not five steps in a programme. They belong together. Discernment tests public claims rather than baptising slogans. Truthful speech names wrongdoing without turning the pulpit into propaganda. Vocational integrity treats ordinary work as a site of neighbour-love. Advocacy addresses structural wrong with evidence, prudence and nonpartisan moral

clarity. Ecclesial accountability then turns the same scrutiny inward: the church must practise the transparency and human dignity it asks of public institutions.

For Pentecostal churches and theological institutions, these practices require intentional formation rather than occasional political commentary. Seminary and ministerial training curricula should connect pneumatology and Christian ethics more explicitly with public theology, professional integrity and responsible citizenship, while denominational formation programmes can equip pastors and lay professionals to discern the ethical demands of public office and institutional life. Clergy training should likewise develop competence in evidence-based public advocacy, nonpartisan engagement and ecclesial accountability so that prophetic witness is joined to theological depth and responsible practice.

This framework also clarifies the place of power. Pentecostal spirituality often speaks confidently of power, but public theology must ask what power is for and by what pattern it is judged. For Christian public vocation, authority stands under the cruciform pattern of Christ, who refuses domination and orders greatness toward service. Spirit-empowerment therefore cannot be measured by access, visibility or the frequency of religious language. A Spirit-filled politician is tested by the moral use of authority. A Spirit-filled civil servant does not simply pray at the desk; he or she administers the desk justly. A Spirit-filled pastor does not prove prophetic courage by volume alone but by truthfulness, independence from patronage and willingness to examine the church's own failures.

Such a theology can remain nonpartisan while being unmistakably public. Christians may disagree in good faith about taxation, welfare policy, constitutional design, electoral systems or the proper reach of the state. Public judgment is fallible. The church should therefore resist presenting prudential policy preferences as direct revelation. Even so, uncertainty about policy does not abolish moral responsibility. Bribery, theft of public resources, political violence, dehumanisation, deliberate falsehood and exploitation cannot be rendered morally neutral simply because Christians belong to different parties.

The neighbour becomes the practical test. Two kingdoms do not mean two separate worlds because there is one neighbour who inhabits both the worshipping community and the civic community. Intercession matters, but so does a functioning clinic. Deliverance matters, but so does protection from a violent official. Charity may meet an immediate need, while accountable institutions can prevent that need from being repeatedly produced by injustice. Public vocation refuses to choose between these forms of care.

Two limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. First, as a constructive theological study, it relies primarily on published scholarship and, in the Malawian case, the author's prior research rather than new empirical fieldwork. Second, its engagement with Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Zambia and Malawi is selective rather than exhaustive and does not encompass the considerable ecclesial, political and theological diversity of African Pentecostalism across the continent. These national contexts therefore function as conversation partners and contextual tests of the proposal rather than as a basis for continent-wide empirical generalisation. Further empirical research could examine how

Spirit-empowered public vocation is understood and practised within particular Pentecostal denominations, congregations and professional settings.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the familiar alternatives of Pentecostal political withdrawal and Pentecostal political activism are both insufficient. Spirit-empowered public vocation relocates the question from whether Christians enter politics to how Spirit-formed believers serve neighbours through the institutions of common life. Luther contributes a theology of ordinary vocation and differentiated political authority; Pentecostal pneumatology contributes empowerment, discernment and openness to institutional transformation. Read through African experience, particularly the contrasting pressures evident in Nigeria and Malawi, their encounter yields a public theology of faithful institutional presence without accommodation and prophetic engagement without partisan capture. Such a theology joins prayer and work, personal integrity and institutional responsibility, truthful speech and prudent advocacy, faithful presence and courageous reform.

No pastor is thereby required to become a politician, nor must every sermon become political commentary. The demand is more searching. Churches must form Christians to recognise that the Spirit who meets them at the altar accompanies them into the office, the classroom, the market, the newsroom, the court and the cabinet. A Spirit-filled church knows how to pray. Its public vocation is to ensure that prayer does not become the boundary of obedience but one of its beginnings.

Data Availability

No new empirical dataset was generated or analysed for this theological study. The study draws on published scholarly literature and the author's previously published research.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AI Usage Declaration

The author used Grammarly Version 1.2.230 for language editing and grammar correction of the manuscript draft. It was not used to create or conclude the argument of an article. All ideas presented therein are under my responsibility.

References

- Danfulani, U. H. D. (2022). Religion, politics and integrity: A discourse about fostering political participation by the Church in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Christian Studies*, 4(2), 299–329. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/njcs/article/view/220879>
- Etukumana, G. A. (2024). African Pentecostalism and politics: Reading Luke-Acts in its political, sociological and religious contexts. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 45(1), a2907. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.2907>

- Ingaboh, T. M. (2024). Pentecostal church and politics: Interdependent instruments of God's mission in Africa. In *die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi*, 58(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.3000>
- Jere, Q., & Magezi, V. (2018). Pastoral Letters and the Church in the public square: An assessment of the role of Pastoral Letters in influencing democratic processes in Malawi. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 39(1), a1844. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v39i1.1844>
- Kolden, M. (1983). Luther on vocation. *Word & World*, 3(4), 382–390. https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/3-4_Luther/Luther%20on%20Vocation.pdf
- Kristanto, D., Tompo, H. B., Silalahi, F. H. M., Ersada, L. A., Salurante, T., Wibowo, M., & Bilo, D. T. (2024). Hearing God's call one more time: Retrieving calling in theology of work. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 80(1), a9703. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9703>
- Kudadjie, P. T. (2024). Pentecostalism and political engagement in Ghana's Fourth Republic. *Pentecost Journal of Theology and Mission*, 5(1), 57–79. <https://doi.org/10.62868/pjtm.v5i1.181>
- Luther, M. (1957). The freedom of a Christian. In H. J. Grimm (Ed.), *Luther's Works* (Vol. 31, pp. 344–377). Muhlenberg.
- Luther, M. (2000). The Small Catechism. In R. Kolb & T. J. Wengert (Eds.), *The Book of Concord: The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (pp. 345–375). Fortress Press.
- Luther, M. (1962). Temporal authority: To what extent it should be obeyed. In W. I. Brandt (Ed.), *Luther's Works* (Vol. 45, pp. 81–129). Muhlenberg.
- Mkandawire, M. P. (2023). *Church and politics: An African Pentecostal contextual political perspective*. TMAC.
- Musa, H. (2021). The church, poverty and public theology in Africa: A reflection in African (Nigerian) context. *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, 2(2), 88–110. <https://atjcs.netact.org.za/index.php/netact/article/view/41>
- Musoni, P. (2021). Spiritualised political theology in a polarised political environment: A Pentecostal movement's response to party politics in Zimbabwe. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 77(4), a6312. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6312>
- Nanthambwe, P., & Magezi, V. (2024). Bringing faith to the public: Positioning church communities for social good in sub-Saharan Africa. *Theologia Viatorum*, 48(1), a272. <https://doi.org/10.4102/tv.v48i1.272>
- Oluwanifise, J. A. (2023). Pentecostalism and the dynamics of democratic governance in Nigeria since 1999. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 104(3). <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.321>
- Opuni-Frimpong, K. (2023). The Bible and public theology in African Christianity. *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology*, 5(5), 74–84. <https://doi.org/10.38159/motbit.2023552>
- Orogun, D. O., & Pillay, J. G. (2023). Neo-Pentecostal political activism vis-à-vis good governance in Nigeria: A theological analysis. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 44(1), a2670. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v44i1.2670>
- Sperber, E., & Hern, E. (2018). Pentecostal Identity and Citizen Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Evidence from Zambia. *Politics and Religion*, 11(4), 830–862. doi:10.1017/S1755048318000330
- van Klinken, AS. (2016) Pentecostalism, Political Masculinity and Citizenship: The Born-Again Male Subject as Key to Zambia's National Redemption. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 46 (2-3), 129-157. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700666-12340072>
- van Klinken, A., & Obadare, E. (2018) Christianity, Sexuality and Citizenship in Africa: Critical Intersections. *Citizenship Studies*, 22 (6), 557-568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2018.1494900>
- Wariboko, N. (2012). *The Pentecostal principle: Ethical methodology in new spirit*. Eerdmans.
- Wright, W. J. (2010). *Martin Luther's understanding of God's two kingdoms: A response to the challenge of skepticism*. Baker Academic.
- Yong, A. (2010). *In the days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and political theology*. Eerdmans.