

*Full Length Research Paper*

# State regulation of religion in Uganda: Fears and dilemmas of born-again churches

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Received 14 August, 2019; Accepted 7 October, 2019

Since 2016 when the government of Uganda announced its intention to enact a policy about regulating religions and faith-based organizations, there have been contrasting responses from those this policy intends to regulate. The mainstream religious groups especially; the Moslem community, Anglican Church of Uganda, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Roman Catholic Church, Greek Orthodox church and generally all those that subscribe to the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda have welcomed the State's proposal. On the other hand, the proposal has met both stiff and liberal minded resistance from both the born-again churches and relatively newly founded religious faiths and groups. This is partly so due to the historical relationship between the State and Religious institutions which has been characterized by uncertainty at one time, and flowering at another. The contemptuous attitude of the born-again church towards the State's proposed religious and faith based organisations policy (RFBOS) calls for renewed interest in analysing church-state relations in Uganda. Using the institutional approach, this paper analyses the historical relationship that has subsisted between the state and religious institutions in Uganda, over the years, showing how this influences reaction of religious institutions to a State's attempt to provide a regulatory framework over them.

**Key words:** Born again, registration, regulation, religious policy, faith based organisations.

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the state and religious institutions has over the years been that of unpredictability. The state wishes to have its power felt over its citizens by having a regulatory system that monitors their activities. On the other hand, religions and religious institutions wish to enjoy absolute right to freedom of worship by rejecting state control. The claim is that any state control through regulation hinders their freedom of worship and choice inherently given by God and guaranteed by International Human Rights regimes (Kyazze, 2017). However, Parsitau (2017), argues that religious clergy, including rogue ones have exploited

prevailing legal and policy framework to avoid being held accountable for even issues that surround management of religious institutions. It is however, the responsibility of a state to fill up such policy and legal vacuum, whenever discovered. Regulation of religions and religious institutions manifest in states' enactment of laws and policies for guiding and monitoring of these entities. Religious regulation has always been a contested arena, pitting the state against religions. This uneasy relationship between the state and religious institutions vary between states and over time. With the proliferation of religions in Uganda, especially, born again churches,

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the state has raised a need to have a specific and separate policy framework for religions and faith based organisations (RFBOs). However, there has emerged two born-again churches' blocks, opposed to each other with regard to the new policy. One group led by Dr Joseph Serwadda of the Victory Church-Ndeeba, under the Born-Again faith (BAF) and another group under the auspices of the National Fellowship of Born Again and Pentecostal churches (NFBPC), led by Pastor Joshua Lwere. This division is defined by one's stand towards the policy. Pastors belonging to BAF not only support but have also vigorously been promoting the idea of a regulatory framework over the born-again churches. Contrariwise NFBPC are against state regulation. This has arisen over a long-standing disagreement among born again church pastors belonging to either rival groups over the vision and leadership of the born-again church in the country. Because of these differences, a meaningful engagement with the state on the other hand has been elusive. In the wake of conflict among born again churches over the proposed policy, the article attempts to provide a historical context of state regulation of religion in Uganda, analysing whether or not state regulation of religions is a new phenomenon, that should be a surprise to religious entrepreneurs and consumers in the country. The article also analyses the points of contention between the different religious groups with regard to the proposed policy. Above all, the article analyses the skepticism with which born-again churches have resented the policy, characterising it a scheme intended to stifle the growth of the born-again church. To systematically address the above issues, the article is presented in sections. The first section deals with the methodological approach of institutional theory, which has been used as the basis of analysis of religious organisations. The second section presents the phenomenon of 'born again' church in Uganda's context. This is followed by a historical analysis of state regulation of religions and faiths in Uganda, indicating the challenge of resistance to regulation but also employment of state legislation as a tool to suffocate religious entities. Whereas the article is specific on Uganda, comparison of state regulation in other African countries is made over the years. Finally, the article analyses the salient issues in the proposed policy, along with the contentious issues in it that make born gain churches to discuss it contemptuously.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is embedded in religion-state studies. In this approach, the relationship of religions and religious institutions on one hand and the state on the other hand is explored, leading to understanding of the interplay of religion and politics at the institutional level. The best way to study church-state interactions are when both the church and government are analysed as separate institutions, but whose activities affect each other (Odiemo, 2016, p. 29). This approach translates into what is called institutional analysis. Institutional analysis is concerned with the organisational expression of religion. Institutional analysis helps in

establishing the challenge of religion-state relationship (Niringiye, 2016, p. 4). Lammers et al. (2014, p. 195) argue for the church and state as the dominant institutions with an enduring social phenomenon, necessitating a self-reproducing social order. Institutional theory is perhaps the dominant approach to understanding organisations (Greenwood et al., 2008, p. 2; Tracey et al., 2014). This theory prescribes that organisations are influenced by their institutional context, that is, by widespread social understandings that define what it means to be rational. The institutional context means the rules, norms and ideologies of the wider society (Greenwood et al., 2008, p. 3). In this case, religions and religious institutions are concerned because laws and policies made by the state may affect their religious freedoms and activities. At the same time, religious ideologies, beliefs and doctrines either imposed or taught and expected of religious adherents largely impact on the attitudes of the citizens towards the government. This makes governments to have interest in the management of such religious ideologies and activities to have the citizens governable. Organisations like religions and faith-based organisations become isomorphic with their institutional context (in this case, laws and policies made by governments) in order to secure societal approval (legitimacy) which provides survival benefits (Greenwood et al., 2008, p. 6). The long-standing agitation by born again churches in Uganda to secure legal recognition as 'faiths' and not non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is in effect an attempt to secure perpetual existence as it is with the traditional religions. It therefore becomes important and necessary for religious and faith-based organisations to interest themselves in such laws and policies made by the state lest bad laws and policies may be passed that make it difficult for them to operate.

Institutional theory is concerned with a wide range of phenomena; including investigation of specific policies of both government and organisations (Tolbert and Zucker, 1996, p. 169). Institutional theory therefore seeks to explain the elaboration of rules and requirements to which organisations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy. The contestations over the proposed religious and faith-based organisations (RFBOs) policy by the born-again churches in Uganda, is an attempt to ensure that they operate in a favourable institutional context. In their attempt to seek for state recognition, McGinnis (2011, p. 5) has analysed how religious organizations face challenges of collective action and as a consequence they experience a similarly mixed record of positive and negative results. Attempts by born again churches in Uganda, to collectively seek for state recognition is testimony of the challenges highlighted above. But at the same time, the apparent disagreements among born again churches over the proposed policy explains the difficulties available in a situation when born-again Christians need a collective voice. McGinnis, therefore, proposes a critical analysis of religion's implications for public policy. This becomes a basis upon which policymakers act to shape the choices made by religious entrepreneurs. This is the essence of religion policy: the use of policy instruments or tools to encourage religious leaders or followers to engage in activities that contribute to the goals of the relevant policymakers, either directly or indirectly. In order to attain grasp of the issues under contention about the policy, the author of this study held interviews with the key players in the development of the policy. These included state officials from the Directorate of Ethics and Integrity (DEI), with the mandate to oversee religious institutions in the country. The Religious and Faith based organisations (RFBOs) policy has also been drafted by this directorate. The author also interviewed born again church leaders in favour and against the proposed policy. These belong to the Born-again faith (BAF), and the National fellowship of born again and Pentecostal churches (NFBPC) respectively. Key personalities from the traditional religions belonging to the inter-religious council of Uganda were also interviewed. Moreover, the study also relied on newspaper reports about this policy because vigorous debate about the proposed policy has been dominant in the newspapers

with several articles published in local newspapers. The author's interest was to establish the reasons for the divergent attitudes towards the proposed policy. Consequently, the discussions presented in this paper draws from an empirical analysis of Ugandan born-again churches that play particular attention on their institutional and public behavior.

## THE BORN-AGAIN CHURCH (BAC) IN UGANDA

The concept of 'born-again' is commonly used in Uganda. In other countries the terms 'evangelical' and 'pentecostal' are used. In Uganda, the terms 'born again' and 'pentecostal' are used synonymously to refer to those Christians who emphasise the experience of 'rebirth' in their spiritual life, having previously been members of other mainstream churches or religions. Born again Christians usually have a story to tell about an unfulfilling life they had in the mainstream churches or religions before they converted to the new churches-called the born-again churches. Whereas there exist numerous Pentecostal churches in Uganda, the author uses the term 'Born Again churches' to refer to those Pentecostal churches that have been established beginning in the 1980s to the present. These are built around cult like pastors, usually with their married partners as the bearers of the church. The organisation structure of these churches is embedded in the founder, who is the senior pastor. A selected group of other church leaders will depend on the whims of the senior pastor and for which objectives he wants fulfilled. Such leaders however, hold no much power and authority to take decisions, however minor they may be. Therefore, just like in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, born again churches are private properties co-owned by spouses, making them personal property (Parsitau, 2017, p. 244). This usually breeds conflicts of ownership between followers and relatives of the church owners upon the demise of the church founders. The proposed demand in the policy to register these churches will turn them into community churches, with their properties and resources simply held in trusteeship.

Born again churches in Uganda's context are to be distinguished from other Pentecostal churches established earlier than 1980, and those that had taken root in Uganda's religious field. These include, Deliverance church, Makerere Full gospel church, Baptist church, Salvation Army, Redeemed church, Assemblies of God, and Elim church. Different from the more established Pentecostal churches before 1980, contemporary born-again churches lack hierarchical and administrative structures (Bremner, 2013, p. 13; Downie, 2015, p. 54). The major difference between earlier Pentecostal churches and those emerging during the 1980s to present is that the former adopted some level of 'formalities' typical in the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches; which were to be reformed. For example, they have functional 'councils of elders' that manage the

churches rather than individual pastors. This category of Pentecostal churches has a liberal minded attitude towards the proposed religious and faith-based organisations' policy. It is not surprising that contemporary born again churches in question have voiced strong objection to the proposed policy because it would compel them to have streamlined structural organisations, differently from their philosophy of church organisation.

Born Again churches have strong emphasis on speaking in tongues, experience of the Holy Spirit, performance of miracles and divine inspired socio-economic deliverance. On the other hand, the classical Pentecostal churches like those mentioned previously, are more ascetic and less charismatic in their worship; with less excitement and little regard to the prosperity gospel, which encourages accumulation of material wealth (Bremner, 2013, pp. 12-13). Essentially, the title 'charismatic' is used in reference to born again churches, to distinguish them from the churches of established Pentecostal denominations like the Assemblies of God (Gifford, 1994, p. 241). Contemporary born again churches promote a prosperity gospel, with emphasis on 'sowing a seed' into the church if one is to experience socio-economic transformation (Bompani, 2018, p. 304). The 'sowing of seed' syndrome has turned pastors of these churches into wealthy and financial moguls, at the expense of their congregations. Therefore, such pastors would be the last group to accommodate a policy that seeks to take away their individual power and authority over church finances, to be vested in committees, with modern accounting systems, tenable to financial audits. The sermons are full of hope for the believers and less condemnation of their personal transgressions. Born Again churches in Uganda, share one more common factor, that all misfortunes, societal and personal failures in all areas of life are a result of witchcraft and demons, which require to be exorcised, to restore harmony. To them, cancer as well as poverty need to be dealt with through exorcism of the demons that cause them. This is what Bompani (2018) describes as 'spiritual warfare'.

Born Again Christians are locally called *Balokole*. This is a general term applied to all categories of Pentecostal-charismatic Christians in Uganda. The various Pentecostal umbrella groups like BAF and NFBPC interchangeably use the terms 'born again' and *Balokole* (Valois, 2014, p. 65). However, in the strictest sense, the term *Balokole* refers to Christian communities that emerged out of the East African Revival Movement of the 1930s, and these continue to align themselves to the Anglican Church of Uganda. The *Balokole* of the East African Revival Movement, distance themselves from the connotation of Pentecostal (Bompani, 2018, p. 304). But because Pentecostal Christians have dominated public religious space while the original *Balokole* have subtle activities, as they continue to align and operate under the structures and institutions of Anglican Church of Uganda, the terminology is now more popularly associated with

Pentecostal Christians than the Church of Uganda revivalists. In current, everyday usage, for the original *Balokole*, to be identified as such, have to labour explain their identity as the 'Balokole of Church of Uganda' or more specifically identify themselves as 'Bazukufu'. The term *Bazukufu* refers to the remnants of the *Balokole* from the East African Revival Movement. They continue to worship in the Anglican church of Uganda, and they are very committed to all activities of this church, but also meet privately at a place called Kawempe, north of Kampala city.

Born Again Christians in Uganda rarely use the term 'Pentecostal', in preference to 'born again' or 'Balokole'. They claim that 'Pentecostalism' portray the 'religiosity', common in traditional churches. Pastors and Christians belonging to these churches hold a feeling that being tagged 'Pentecostal' portray a semblance of the 'life and traditions' of the mainstream churches of Anglican church and Roman catholic church, which they seek to reform.

#### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO REGULATING RELIGIONS AND FAITHS IN UGANDA**

Uganda is a pluralistic religious country, and this is inbuilt in the 1995 constitution (Knighton, 2015, p. 426). Before Islam and Christianity were introduced in Buganda in 1844 and 1877, respectively, there was belief in a multiplicity of gods, with a supreme god called *Lubaale*. Traditional religious beliefs controlled the socio-cultural, economic and political life of the people. Religious beliefs determined and controlled politics. Traditional religious leaders like diviners and priests were such a powerful force to reckon with, that kings had to ensure that they were in good terms with them, lest they lose their political offices. Diviners were the kingmakers and without their authority, elected or appointed kings would not assume office. Consecration to the political throne was the reserve of the diviners and priests. Rules in form of norms and cultural values emerged from traditional religious beliefs, which controlled society and politics. Traditional religious practices and symbols were part of well-established states like the Buganda kingdom. The king had no powers to dictate in what forms should the people express their religiosity to the gods, neither could they determine to the diviners or priests the amount of sacrifices that were acceptable from the people. The political leaders of the kingdom occupied a relatively high hierarchy in the religious setting of society. The Kings and their subordinates accepted the voices of the gods without disputation (Niringiye, 2016). This was the norm even among stateless societies of old Africa, where village chiefs or councils of elders were responsible for the routine administration of government. Real public authority actually lay with ritual experts who mediated between the visible and invisible worlds (Ellis and Haar, 1998, p. 188; Isiko, 2019, pp.83-84).

Therefore, State interference in religious expression was unheard of. There was no uneasiness between the political institutions with African religions. Islam being the first foreign religion to be introduced in Buganda, it enjoyed a harmonious relationship with the Buganda kingdom until the 1870s when Muslims questioned the leadership of King Mutesa 1. The king thereafter imposed restrictions on Islam including execution of some Muslim converts (Twaddle, 1972, p. 59). State control and regulation over traditional religious beliefs and practices in Buganda began with the British colonial period. In 1912, the colonial government passed a witchcraft ordinance, which was revised in 1957 as the witchcraft law (Isiko, 2018, p. 148). This law was an attack on the basic beliefs and practices of the traditional religions of Ugandan societies. The Colonial government's rationale was to outlaw witchcraft, but the details of the law indicated a total ban of people's traditional religious beliefs. Legislation against traditional religious beliefs by the British was instigated by the Christian missionaries, who could not stand competition with religious beliefs they called satanic. Colonial policy to legislate against societies' traditional religions classifying them as mere witchcraft was intended to 'vulgarize' people's religious beliefs as the 'other', in the presence of Christianity-the colonial religion. However, the failure to enforce the witchcraft laws in Uganda at the time points to the irrationality with which the legislation was introduced. The dilemma was that since the British government used indirect form of government in Uganda, they had to rely on local chiefs and kings to enforce this regulation. Yet these local leaders were the chief custodians of the traditional religions of their societies (Pels, 1998, p. 200; Isiko, 2018, p. 149). However, the intention of colonial state regulation on formal religious issues, was intended to check on religious development (Fox and Tabory, 2008, p. 246).

To underscore the importance of state regulation of religions, there is need to look at perspectives brought forward by Carter (1993) and McGinnis (2011). These two authors agree that religions are in effect independent centers of power, with bona fide claims on the allegiance of their members, claims that exist alongside, are not identical to, and will sometimes trump the claims to obedience that the state makes. A religion speaks to its members in a voice different from that of the state, and when the voice moves the faithful to action, a religion may act as a counterweight to the authority of the state. A religion, in this picture, is not simply a means for understanding one's self, or even of contemplating the nature of the universe, or existence, or of anything else. A religion is, at its heart, a way of denying the authority of the rest of the world. The struggle for citizens' allegiance between the state and religious organisations has been well articulated by Nsereko (1986):

*The state no longer enjoys monopoly of citizens'*

*allegiance; it shares citizens' allegiance with organized religion or the church. The state, at times, resents this fact, particularly when it views the church as being inspired or led by foreign influences and as hostile to its ideology or socio politico-economic order. The state may also resent the fact that once implanted, religious beliefs are hard to uproot (p. 269).*

Governments' fear is that such foreign influenced and organised religions can lead to religious activism, violence and militancy, bringing about religious anarchy in the country. The above statements further attest to the strong social and political force that religion holds in Kenya, as it demonstrated utmost ability and capacity to mobilise the citizens during the 2010 constitutional review process. This was so because of the support that came from the United States evangelicals towards the Kenyan Pentecostal churches towards opposition of the new constitution (Parsitau, 2017, p. 253). The Ethiopian government is another example that came up with laws to tame evangelicals and Muslims influenced by foreign entities, for fear of religious extremism (Abbink, 2014a, p. 350). Further, Sperber and Hern (2018, p. 831), in their analysis of the born-again churches' involvement in the political participation in Zambia, reveal the relevance of the born-again Christians in influencing political change wherever they are. They are thought to hold religious views that have a strong bearing on the society's political direction, including influencing policy preferences. In Uganda, born again pastors hold great sway over their congregations, occasionally determining to their followers, who they should vote or not for political offices (Downie, 2015, 54). Organised religion can take on a political role, as it has capacity to rally believers around itself and voice legitimate demands to the state. It can become the fulcrum around which community power can be built to threaten the authority of the state. With specific reference to several African countries, Christianity has become a public and political voice, for the voiceless citizens, influencing their demands towards governments (Bompani, 2018, p. 304). And in Uganda, religious leaders have had greater leverage than other groups in voicing criticism against those in power (Downie, 2015, p. 49). This demonstrates how organised religion can transform itself in a competing force, necessitating governments to come up with regulations to constrain it (Barro and McCleary, 2005, p. 1344). This indicates how religion shapes itself into a competitor to state actors by becoming an alternative to politics (Abbink, 2014a, p. 357). Therefore, the ideology that state regulation of religions and faith-based institutions is one way of taming the unlimited locus that religions have on the people holds for the now popular policies about FBOs across the world. Religion through doctrines, beliefs and practices has the capacity to control its followers into blind acceptance. When this happens, the state then loses its absolute ability to have everyone under its authority. The

state then resorts to legislate religions so as to bring them under its absolute control and authority. Waller (2003, p. 244) and Isiko (2018, p. 150) have argued that the British colonials' legislation, which indeed vulgarized African traditional religions as witchcraft was premised on the fact that African traditional religions were a powerful force and controlled by native customary hands like the Kings and Diviners, who were feared to utilize their influence over the natives through religion to challenge colonial rule. Therefore, state legislation serves to remind and signal to such powerful non-state actors like religions and faith-based organizations of the repressive nature of the state should they attempt to challenge its authority.

Colonial state control of Islam and Christianity was not any different. The colonial government kept a close eye on the activities of these foreign religions. Special interest is taken in Christianity as a case study. Colonial government interaction with the church in the 1890s reveals that state regulation of religions in Uganda is not a new phenomenon (Hansen, 1986, p. 57; Hackett, 2011, p. 863). Although the Christian missions had arrived in Uganda much earlier than the British colonialists, and were well established, this did not deter the colonial state from having controls over the church. By 1894, the Christian church had to seek permission from the state to begin work in any new area. The church was under full state superintendence (Hansen, 1986, p. 58). The colonial state came up with policies that regulated church's acquisition and utilization of land (Hansen, 1986, p. 60). The state regulated taxes that were paid to the church in form of land rent. It has all the years been the state's attempt to protect her citizens from exploitation by religious institutions and the church in particular. For example, by 1917 the government refused to grant the church sovereignty over the land with tenants as this would bring alienation of the tenants in future. The intention of the colonial state to regulate church ownership of land was to curtail it from transforming itself into an economic force in society, which would rival the authority of the state. Fast forward, the current State proposal to coerce FBOs to declare their sources of wealth and demand for accountability and transparency, in one way portrays the fears of government of the churches' increasing financial capacity through donations and followers' contributions which might undermine authority of the state as the big brother. The intention of the state has been at all times to ensure that all institutions within its jurisdiction do not solicit or engage in activities that might undermine its power over them.

The born-again churches' demand for recognition as a faith in the current political dispensation is different from what happened in the colonial period. Although the Church was fighting for independence from the colonial state, there is a difference from the contemporary Evangelical search for legal and public recognition in the present case. The colonial church was legitimate and recognized by the state but wished to be free from

colonial political domination. The church unsuccessfully demanded to be an equal legitimate actor with the colonial state, spelling out which rights and privileges the church had to enjoy within the state (Hansen, 1986, p. 64). It is a contradiction that whereas in 1925 the church was challenging the state to grant it independence through an ordinance; defining its powers over its own members and its relations with the government; the church today is challenging the state to grant it basic freedoms of worship. The born-again churches today are neither legally recognized as churches nor does the state has control over them, in their right as spiritual entities but NGOs and private limited companies (Hansen, 1986, p. 66; Kyazze, 2017; Kabuleta, 2017; Kirunda, 2017). The colonial church was therefore not only recognized but also regulated by the state.

In the early 1950s and 60s, registration was not a condition precedent for the operation of religious and faith-based organizations in Uganda. The primary focus at the time centered upon the level of organization of such religious groups. State recognition was accorded to what are referred to as the traditional religions. These included the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican church (Church of Uganda), the Greek Orthodox Church, the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) and Islam. These religions were characterized by clear and well-established hierarchical structures with a central management and branches bound by a set of rules and regulations. In the 1960s through early 1970s, new religious organizations known as Born-again Churches (BAC) consisting of among others Pentecostals and Evangelicals witnessed increasing growth in terms of numbers and societal influence. These developments influenced state's attitude towards RFBOs (Wamimbi, 2010, p. 2). This could be the basis upon which the proposed policy acknowledges the multiplicity of RFBOs and the attendant disharmony that exists amongst them. It has been articulated by Fox and Tabory (2008, p. 246) that in such circumstances of religious pluralism and disharmony, state regulation is used as an indirect check to such religious competition.

### **LEGISLATING RELIGIONS UNDER PRESIDENT IDI AMIN ERA**

In 1971, Uganda witnessed the takeover of Idi Amin as President in a military coup against Milton Obote. In 1973 and 1977 Amin outlawed all churches except the Anglican Church of Uganda, the Catholic Church, and the Orthodox Church (Knighton, 2015, p. 429). The SDA church and all Pentecostal churches were banned by presidential decree (Ward, 1991; Bompani, 2016). Some of the Pentecostal churches that were outlawed included Salvation army, Wandegeya; the Uganda Baptist Mission, Jinja; The Uganda Gospel Mission, Makerere; Deliverance church; The Uganda Association of

Evangelicals; The Redeemed Church of Christ; The Full Gospel Church of Kenya which operated in Kampala at that time, among others. Pentecostal churches were in limbo until the overthrow of the Amin government in 1979. There were no protests against the presidential decree, especially from the affected churches, with the exception of pleas against the decree coming from both the Anglican and Roman Catholic Church (Pirouet, 1980, p. 24). Barbara Bompani argues that President Amin's action was influenced by the fear that he held against churches as centers of opposition to his rule (2016, p. 3). Indeed, religions are described as the best instrument through which mobilisation of people can be made under the guise of its spiritual and divine authority. States have to devise mechanisms of how such mobilisation instruments can be controlled because if left unattended to, they can bring about dire consequences for public order, making society ungovernable (Abbink, 2014b, p. 92). Born again churches were put in limbo, without disputation because they were a minority without a political voice. They did not have any influence in the politics at the time. Therefore, the suspicion held by today's religious institutions towards state regulation over them is justified because over the years, such regulation has intended to fulfill purposes of the politicians rather than making them better entities. Whereas born-again churches experienced revival after Amin, they did not gain visibility and state recognition until the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and President Museveni came to power in 1986.

### **NATIONAL RESISTANCE MOVEMENT AND THE RESURGENCE OF BORN-AGAIN FAITH**

At the onset of the NRM government in 1986, President Yoweri Museveni practiced religious neutrality but at the same time condemning those who held religious segregative ideologies as parochial. The President's attitude led to notable changes in Uganda's religious field. Dismantling of multiparty politics weakened the old church-affiliated parties, while increased religious freedom led to a proliferation of Pentecostal-charismatic churches (Alava and Ssentongo, 2016, p. 681). Scholars like Bompani (2016) and Gifford (1998) have portrayed the rise of the born-again churches in Uganda as synonymous with the rise and consolidation of the Museveni regime. Some of the born-again churches were indigenous while others have American influences (Ward, 1991). For the latter, you may be convinced that through them there is a re-evangelization of Uganda by Americans.

The secularity of the 1995 constitution and the absence of a particular religious commitment by Museveni have been factors in the proliferation of new churches including cultic groups (Knighton, 2015, p. 426). The president's wife, Janet Museveni has personal friendship with some

of the big names in the Pentecostal circles and seems to have been the link of the born-again churches' love with the president and his NRM government. She is credited for cultivating the country's growing neo-Pentecostalist constituency (Ward, 1991). The country has therefore, witnessed the upsurge of new churches along with charitable faith-based organisations. Both local and foreign faith-based NGOs are littered all over the country. These have taken advantage of the financial support for NGOs from both the US government and Uganda, in the areas of HIV/Aids prevention (Hofer, 2003, p. 394). Museveni seems to be happy and comfortable with the born-again churches, as they have helped the state to police the minds of Ugandans. Indeed, Alava and Ssentongo (2016) acknowledge that the religious and political landscape has become largely pentecostalist, as born-again pastors have helped the government to keep citizens away from being critical of the Museveni government. This attitude of the born-again Christian pastors has been evident in other countries like Brazil, Liberia, and Zambia where they have turned themselves into political clientele of the reigning governments (Bremner, 2013, p. 196; Sperber and Hern, 2018).

*Born-again churches had kept a low profile in Ugandan politics (Bompani, 2016, p. 3). These, however, have become very prominent in the recent past, especially from 2006 when Uganda had the first multiparty general elections in 26 years. They have become a big force in influencing the outcome of presidential elections in the country. They have kept a political leaning towards President Museveni and the NRM political party. The president himself has found born-again church leaders and their churches as suitable avenues to communicate to the nation on religious holidays (Hofer, 2003, p. 393). Born-again pastors with large followings have caught the attention of the president and also attracted state funding and presidential visits (Alava and Ssentongo, 2016, p. 681).*

Sperber and Hern (2018) have elaborated on the outright support given to the politicians of the day by the born-again pastors. Their argument is that born-again pastors along with their followers do not subscribe to the liberal political ideology which distinguishes the 'personal' from the 'political'. Their unequivocal support for the regime of the day is part of their survival strategy in an uncertain political environment. This has sometimes become a source of contention among born-again church pastors as they struggle to win presidential favours. To Downie (2015, p. 57), religious groups trade their cooperation with the state for access, influence, as well as material resources. They trade their support for privileges and business. In this regard, some pastors have prophesied about Museveni as being 'God sent', while others have on the eve of every presidential election prophesied his

victory (Nakagwa, 2006; Kirunda, 2018; Ruteikara, 2006). The pastors have admonished their followers to vote the candidate that restored the born-again faith in the country. The born-again vocal support for President Museveni is premised on the belief that the president can advance their religious faith in the prevailing political space by espousing transformative religious changes (Sperber and Hern, 2018, p. 835). However, Kofi Quashigah argues against this kind of close relationship between governments of the day and religious organisations as this might set the stage for the abuse of rights of sections of citizens including those who belong to specific religions. Religions therefore, are urged not to allow to be used for political gain and neither should they seek to usurp political power to advance their goals (Quashigah, 2014, p. 78). It could be for these very reasons that the government of Uganda, now finds it convenient to enact a policy that will curtail religious freedoms of those they have been hobnobbing.

The born-again church leaders' support to government when enacting the anti-homosexuality act and anti-pornography act in 2014, is testimony to the political influence that the born-again churches have had in the country (Bompani, 2016, p. 1). Parsitau (2017) has documented the growing political influence of born-again pastors in other African countries, to the extent of having much power to influence public debates and driving policy. And because in less democratic and authoritarian regimes, presidents matter more than the state's political structures and institutions, aligning themselves to the regimes of the day would come with presidential veto benefits to born again pastors who are supportive of the regime (Bremner, 2013). When religious people ride on the political authority inherent in the state there arise challenges of excessiveness, making it difficult for any of them check the other. The examples of church's participation in the Rwanda genocide and the overt influence of religion on the civil war in Sudan, attests to these. In these circumstances religious institutions may legitimise oppressive actions of the state (Quashigah, 2014, p. 90). Yet, the numerical significance of the born-again Christians in Uganda cannot be ignored in influencing political decisions. The 2014 census report recorded Pentecostals as being 3.7 million adherents, representing 11.1% of Uganda's total population (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016). However, with all their numerical strength and the political romance between the NRM government and the born-again churches, there had not been a deliberate move to have the new Christian churches enjoy the status accorded to the traditional religious faiths in the country. Yet still with such political and public participation influence in the country, the born-again Christians are bound to fight to have a policy which reflect their wishes and promote their faith. Therefore, any proposals that are deemed to infringe on their religious expression are to be resisted with all their might.

## STRUGGLE FOR LEGAL STATUS AND RECOGNITION

Here, the author does two key things: Analyzing the efforts the Born-again Churches (BACs) have expended to have them obtain state recognition, and discussing the reasons for their failure to achieve this. The efforts are characterised by; forming umbrella organisations and lobbying through the President, His Excellency Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. The challenges comprise; disunity and power struggles among pastors, stringent registration requirements, and political patronage among others.

Through the 1990 NGO statute, the NRM government made it obligatory that all Born-again Churches (BACs) be registered as NGOs thus metamorphosing from being companies limited by guarantee as stipulated in the 1961 Companies Act. It is from the demanding requirements of this process that impelled BACs to seek state recognition as a 'faith'. For example, certificates of registration were only issued yearly, and the registration renewal was in first three, and then five years respectively. Uncertainty about renewal acceptance was also a deterrent to BACs who wish to express their views on contentious political issues (Tiwana, 2008; Knighton, 2015, p. 427). Attitudinal challenges, too, were common. For instance, BACs' registration as NGOs placed them under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA), a ministry handling security and criminal matters. This would imply that BACs (spiritual/religious institutions) are linked to criminality. Bureaucracy was also rife. For a church to be fully registered and operational, it had to secure clearance from Local Council administrators and at least three government ministries depending on their stated intended activity (Barr et al., 2003, p. 13).

By the 2006 election campaigns, BACs through Dr. Joseph Serwadda seized the opportunity to lobby the President for their recognition as a 'Faith' and a permanent stop of annual registrations. In return, the president and his government would amass votes from them. Having agreed to their demands, the President instructed MoIA to establish a framework that would make BACs recognised as a 'faith'. According to Downie (2015, p. 49), the President consented to the BACs demands realizing their growing influence in the country. In the hope of getting this promise realised, the efforts of the three umbrella organisations are crucial to mention: National Fellowship of Born-again and Pentecostal Churches (NFBPC) under Ap. Alex Mitala's chairmanship by then, Born-again Faith Federation (BAFFE) and Born-again Faith (BAF) under Dr. Serwadda's superintendence. Such organisations according to Sperber and Hern (2018, p. 835) have successfully influenced governance in other African countries. The aforesaid organisation encountered various challenges. NFBPC was accused of two things; equating BACs 'faith' to a religion and its leaders' wanting to further their personal interests of making a personal 'religious empire' through their sole control over all other pastors. Thus, divisions amongst

NFBPC pastors were inevitable. Boasting over large numbers, close affiliations with the State House plus 'political money' channeled through election campaigns were among the causes of these divisions among BACs leaders is evidence, that whereas they counter-argue the proposed RFBO policy, they too have always been utilizing the same mechanism in running their churches. Having allowed their congregants to become political tools for amassing votes for the incumbent government, it thus becomes expedient for BACs to accept the policy so as to institutionalize state hegemony over them in favour of the prevailing political ideologies (Nsereko, 1986, p. 280). Some born again pastors express the fear of being brought together for selfish interests of politicians. For example, in an interview with Pastor Michael Kyazze, he said:

*Being organised, we become vulnerable to the state, and this has been happening during every presidential election, when we are mobilized as born-again pastors and taken to Rwakitura, President Museveni's country home, and we are given five hundred thousand Uganda shillings each. We are told to mobilise believers in our churches to vote for the president (Kyazze, M, Personal interview, Omega Healing Church, Namasuba, February 13, 2019).*

Therefore, some members of NFBPC, contested the intentions of NFBPC leaders that aimed at making BACs hunting grounds for votes. They feared increasing state hegemony over BACs through NFBPC leadership. NFBPC members thought that their leaders, including Dr Joseph Serwadda, were exploiting them as a viable political constituency to win favours from the president. In 2009, Dr. Serwadda got BAFFE registered and gazetted, having experienced troubles with NFBPC. Amidst oppositions and infighting, BAFFE intensified the 'gospel' of unity across the country. It also lobbied government to let the BACs have their own "self-regulation" without the former's interference. Due to mistrust and non-commitment by members of BAFFE, the organisation evolved into Born Again Faith (BAF), equivocally dropping the idea of a "federation". Just like NFBPC, BAFFE faced similar challenges of disunity and mistrust in their leadership. Hofer (2003, p. 376) observes that the splitting and rejoining in loose associations of BACs is typical of Pentecostal and evangelical churches. Registered and gazetted, BAF became a harbinger for joining the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) in the future. Through the IRCU, born again churches became more visible in participating in political dispensation, socio-economic transformation through the fight against HIV/Aids. They were recognised as they became bona fide partners with government in the socio-economic transformation of Ugandans. Through IRCU and the fight against HIV/Aids, BAC became recognised and institutionalised in the public and political realms



(Bompani, 2018, p.308). Through the IRCU, government has opportunity to relate with several religious denominations, with a semblance of a monopoly of organised religion. Certainly, it would be convenient for government to work with an organized entity rather than individual pastors and their churches. Some authors have argued that governments promote religious unity in diversity (as with the IRCU) because they want to use such organised religion as a cooperative force for controlling the masses (Barro and McCleary, 2005, p.1344).

In summary, the struggle for legal status and recognition of the BACs has been by unceasing efforts among the church pastors. This has been affected by 'palace politics' in which individual pastors struggle to secure a personal relationship with State House. The President has also played a key role in this struggle. He has praised all 'enemy pastors' and castigated none. Visiting pastor Robert Kayanja's Lubaga Miracle Centre, largely seen as legitimate, as well as pastor Samuel Kakande's Synagogue Church of all Nations, which has been described as a cult by NFBPC (Ochwo, 2017), shows the President's impartiality. This has helped the president to promote his divide and rule principle among born again pastors, to protect his popularity among all (Abbink, 2014b, p. 93). Divisions among born again churches have been exploited to the advantage of government (Downie, 2015, p. 56).

## **REGULATING BORN AGAIN CHURCHES IN OTHER COUNTRIES**

Here, the author surveys and analyses the legal status of born-again churches in other countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is intended to provide a comparative analysis with Uganda, which has expressed its intentions to provide a policy over the religious industry in the country. This analysis is premised on the opinion that born-again churches have the same kind of operational characteristics and have taken root in sub-Saharan Africa. The argument here is that if Uganda has established born again churches to be a challenge upon which a regulation is the only option, then this should be witnessed in several other sub-Saharan countries, with a similar challenge. The findings here will help in establishing whether the direction taken by Uganda to regulate born again churches is out of the norm or in conformity with other states, whereupon a regulatory system becomes legitimate.

The situation in Kenya is not any different from what is happening in Uganda. Just like Uganda, churches in Kenya were being registered as charities under the 'Societies' Act', and this was pretty easy for anyone to register an institution and make it a church (Odiemo, 2016, pp. 6-7; Parsitau, 2017, p. 253). Due to widespread public outrage against the numerous scandals by rogue

pastors, the Kenyan state made a proposal to review the registration of churches, putting in place a special unit to manage religious institutions in their right as spiritual entities, different from charities. Under the framework code-named the 'Religious Societies Compliance Rules', the special unit was expected to bring sanity, transparency and accountability to the religious industry and also reign on rogue clergy (Parsitau, 2017, p. 253). In Cameroon, whereas the right to religious freedom is embedded in the constitution, the same constitution provides for the enactment by the state of laws that should determine the circumstances for the lawful establishment of religious organisations. The 1990 Law of Association regulates the activities of religious organisations, and they undergo mandatory registration to be allowed to operate (Fombad, 2013, p. 13).

For Ghana, by 1989, it had a law called the 'Registration of Religious Bodies' number 221 which required all religious bodies to register. A regulatory body was created, known as the Religious Affairs Committee. It was a mechanism of controlling the activities of Christian sects that were multiplying very rapidly. The law also empowered the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) to ban any church "whose activities it deemed incompatible with normal Ghanaian life." It was argued that the law was not aimed at regulating religious freedom, per se, but addressed the "threat" of religious movements to national culture (Shipley, 2009, p. 528). Contrary to Uganda's situation, whereas the mainstream churches in Ghana contested the registration of churches, charismatic churches took it as an opportunity to secure legal status and recognition from government. The legislation failed to work until the 1992 Constitution entered into force, guaranteeing the "freedom to practise any religion and to manifest such practice" and rendering the law unconstitutional (Hackett, 2011, p. 862; Quashigah, 2010, p. 332). Just like the Ugandan scenario, churches in Ghana are simply required to register with the Ministry of Justice, as Non-Governmental Organisations (Quashigah, 2010, p. 335). However, since 2014, umbrella organisations of Pentecostal churches in Ghana called on the state to enact a law that would check on activities of independent pastors and churches. They acknowledged that the religious industry was rife with charlatans, exploiting gullible Christians (Awal, 2019; Myjoyonline.com, 2014). Currently, there is a proposal before the Parliament of Ghana to enact a law regulating churches.

Whereas the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa provides for religious freedom, there is currently a proposal by the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Commission) to amend the constitution to provide for regulation and control of religious bodies. The desire to regulate religious bodies is based on the 'commercialisation' of religion and increasing malevolent practices of pastors and ministers

of God's word (Henrico, 2019, pp. 2-11). In 2018, Rwanda was in media spotlight for closing several churches under a new legislation that aimed to regulate religious freedom (Xinhua, 2018). The law requires all pastors to have degrees in theology. The law also aimed to tighten rules on registration and the functions of churches thus reducing the numerous fraud cases against religious leaders who take advantage of their impoverished followers (Kiunguyu, 2018).

From the experiences of several countries cited above, the impression envisioned by born again churches of limitless expression of religion does not suffice, not only in Uganda but the world over. There are circumstances when governments may legitimately limit religious freedoms and expression. Hackett (2011, p. 854) has articulated the circumstances under which states may impose such limitations under international law, including protection of public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; and finally, the limitations must be necessary in a democratic society. Hackett also warns religious organisations against putting much trust in constitutional regimes as these provide cold comfort to religious groups disapproved of by the political authorities. Frequent constitutional amendments along with the limitations to religious freedoms in the constitutions, down play the confidence that religious groups espouse in them. Attempts to enforce state regulation of religion in the countries surveyed are premised on the religious commercialisation and attendant competition that has rocked the religious industry. There is therefore need to regulate the supposedly religious industry. The regulation of trades, professions and certain occupations is necessary in any democratic society. The state has to ensure that there is adherence to basic standards of service delivery and professionalism, upholding the prescribed code of conduct (Henrico, 2019, p. 15).

### **THE CONCEPTION OF THE RELIGIOUS AND FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS POLICY**

The idea to have a RFBOs policy was conceived by the government's Ministry of Ethics and Integrity on two grounds. First, the agitation by the born-again Christians themselves to be recognized as a 'faith' by the state. Secondly, were the subsequent amendments of the NGO policy in 2010 which divorced RFBOs from the ambit of the NGOs framework. It is significant to note that the intention for religious regulation in Kenya was different from that of Uganda. For Kenya, the intention was to tame the influence of the born-again church, which was described as 'rogue' (Parsitau, 2017, p. 241). In state governance, this meant that the state had to come up with a framework spelling out the nature of relationship that it would have with the RFBOs. In the author's view this was government's attempt to actualize the promise it

had made to let the born-again churches away from NGO framework and therefore be recognized as spiritually edifying entities. If RFBOs were being divorced from the NGO framework, then it meant that it needed a better arrangement under which its relationship with religious bodies would be managed. This is clearly stated in the National NGO policy as follows:

*Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) which until now have been obliged to register as NGOs, shall not fall under the ambit of NGO Policy. However, where an FBO is engaged in NGO – type activities as defined herein, the FBO shall be required to comply with the provisions governing the activities of NGOs in Uganda. Until Government takes measures to provide an appropriate separate framework for promoting coordination of the spiritual activities of Faith Based Organizations in the country, the existing arrangements shall obtain (Republic of Uganda, 2010, p. 11).*

It therefore, meant that, born again churches were separated from the arrangement which managed NGOs. Secondly, by enacting the NGO policy, the state took a decision to separate activities of NGOs from the spiritual activities of RFBOs. Thirdly, the churches ought to have been aware that by this policy shift, the state in the near future would come up with a separate framework to regulate them away from the NGOs. The questions are; would it be possible for born-again churches to continue operating as NGOs when the state had stopped them to do so? Secondly, why would born-again churches that had for the last couple of years complained of being treated as second-class citizens resent government's efforts to actualize their requests? Alternatively, why would born-again churches prefer to be classified as NGOs contrary to their complaints over the years? Why wouldn't the born-again churches embrace this as an opportunity to be at the same dining table with the mainstream religions? It is ironical that born-again churches are now arguing that whereas the previous arrangement was questionable and agitated for change, the proposed policy on RFBOs affects their freedom of worship and expression enshrined in the constitution (NFBPC Taskforce, 2019). However, whereas there are constitutional guarantees, there is need to observe the non-absoluteness of church autonomy under any country's constitution. For example, constitutional guarantee to freedom of religion does not include church ministers' immunity from prosecution when they commit crimes (Odiemo, 2017, p. 25).

### **RATIONALE OF THE RFBOS POLICY**

Now that the born-again churches were no longer controlled by the NGO board, government took a decision to transfer their activities to the Ministry of Ethics and Integrity, with a directorate of religious affairs. This has

been the institution charged with the responsibility of designing the RFBOs policy. The ministry engaged a consultant to do baseline survey and engage the various stakeholders in preparation for the policy. The Government recognized the centrality of RFBOs in the development of the country in the areas of education, healthcare, community development and other social services. However, the government was uncomfortable about the different arrangements under which RFBOs operated, including being registered as NGOs under the NGO Act; companies limited by guarantee under the Companies Act; and others under the Trustees Incorporation Act. Moreover, majority of these new churches had registered under the NGO Act yet the 2010 NGO policy made it impossible to do so. The challenges of according churches a status of 'non-governmental organisations' have been debated over the years. But most fundamental is that this arrangement opens the door to sometimes irresistible potential for abuse with a small probability of external interference (Robbins, 1985, p. 247). The NGO policy proposed a separate framework to cater for RFBOs (Byakagaba, 2018). Therefore, the policy was premised on the fact that there is no law harmonizing the activities of RFBOs. There is also lack of coordination and monitoring of RFBOs. The policy would enable constituting and operationalising an RFBOs framework which would facilitate the registration of all RFBOs in the country. The policy would clarify the roles and functions of RFBOs vis-à-vis the state; as well bring about the needed unity which was rare among the RFBOs. It is, however, important to note that the intention of the policy was to legislate the conduct of RFBOs and not on matters of faith, doctrine and theology. Authors like Odiemo (2016) have argued that government regulation over religion is warranted because, churches are now engaged in activities beyond preaching, and above all, churches are not above laws and constitutions of the land. But she warns that such regulation should never interfere with doctrines of the church.

## **CONTENTIOUS ISSUES ABOUT THE POLICY**

The author asserts clearly (here) that the debate is about the draft policy and not the policy itself. The process which began around 2016, five years after the NGO policy had declared the faith-based organizations legally redundant, has raised a lot of disagreements. The first being lack of consultation of the stakeholders concerned. Several born again churches claim that they were not consulted. More so, the drivers of the proposal were a Roman Catholic Priest and an Anglican priest, whose churches are institutionalised and structured. Born again pastors have been suspicious of the likely prejudices that the two priests carried into the proposed policy. Yet consultations would promote acceptability and legitimacy of not only the process but the policy too. One pastor

interviewed said thus:

*We were not consulted on a policy which is supposed to affect us. How can we believe that these people have good intentions for us? (Mukasa, P, Personal interview, March 10, 2019, Kampala).*

In another interview with Pastor Richard Ganya of Namasuba Altar, he admitted that as a pastor, he only knew of the proposed policy through newspapers. Odiemo (2016) has argued that having religious organisations be part of religious policy formulation, through open consultations with them would provide an opportunity for them to propose standards which they agree to be bound by. She further argues that state regulation would work much better if stakeholders are involved in its formulation. It would further promote commitment and compliance to the policy made. For the case of Ghana, where the same scenario is prevailing, the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council suggested the theological society to lead the process to come up with proposals on regulating activities of pastors and churches, for Parliament's consideration. The council argues that this is what will make the regulations hold the required authority to ensure compliance (Awal, 2019). Government attempts to impose regulations over religious organisations in South Africa were criticised for not involving religious bodies themselves, that were to be affected by the regulations. Religious bodies in South Africa argued against imposing any form of regulation on religious freedom, without their involvement. They lobbied to be availed an opportunity to participate in the process, where they can adopt a code of ethics, agreeable to all of them and for which themselves would fight to enforce and uphold (Henrico, 2019, p. 11).

The second contention regards to the disagreements between the umbrella organisations of born-again churches. The disagreements between NFBPC and BAF provide a peculiar phenomenon in church-state studies. Ordinarily, the expectation would be the different umbrella organisations to unite against government over what born again Christians have termed a bad policy. On the contrary, members of NFBPC are particularly angered by the romanticism with which another born again church faction, called BAF and its leadership under Dr. Joseph Serwadda glorified government's proposals to have RFBOs regulated. The longtime accusation against Dr Joseph Serwadda and his BAF to conspire with government to 'sell off' the 'born-again faith' to the 'traditional religions' was now a reality. The idea is that the traditional religions have an institutionalised hierarchical structure, which the policy seemed to propose. Apparently, the difference in opinion between the religious organisations relates to the level of structural organisation of the churches belonging to either umbrella organisations. BAF churches seem to have already appreciated and embraced an organizational structure,

contrary to the philosophy of the small and individual churches that look at the pastor as sole church manager (Odiemo, 2016, p. 23). On the other hand, institutionalising churches through state regulation would deprive these smaller and individual churches the opportunity to operate unhindered, without the requisite standards as they actually are (Hackett, 2011, p. 861). State regulation would bring them under firmer law, which they may not be in position to meet.

The third contention relates to the unequivocal attitude of IRCU members towards the proposed policy. Apparently, IRCU members already have what was being proposed in the policy. For example, the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church of Uganda, Seventh-Day Adventists Church (SDA) and Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC) own theological training institutes, and they require their clerics to obtain such theological qualifications. Mainstream religious groups have committees which ensure transparency and accountability. Some have functional and modern financial accounting systems. Main stream religious groups have had clear and well-established structures under one management with branches that are bound by set rules and regulations (Byakagaba, 2018). These seem to be missing and difficult to attain in several born-again churches. This is perhaps what made Born-again churches to believe that much as the policy seemed to cover all RFBOs, it was simply veiled to curtail their activities. Other issues of contention include the following among others: The requirement to have all religious clerics obtain formal theological training and obtain a certificate from a recognized institution; enforcement of transparency and financial accountability in RFBOs; and the rigorous 'registration'. A detailed explanation of these challenges is provided in the following sections.

### **THEOLOGICAL TRAINING FOR ALL CLERICS**

The policy proposal demands religious clerics from across the religious divide to obtain some bit of formal training, to be well equipped for ministry work. The flexibility in the proposal is that it would be up to the specific religious organization to ensure that all its clerics acquire formal training. Also, those faith-based institutions would have the liberty to train their clerics at recognized institutions. This would call for investment by RFBOs that do not have theological schools. The SDA church welcomed the proposal arguing that divine calling demands one to be taught how to serve as God's minister. Contemporary challenges of ministry work demand a literate cleric, who ministers to majority of literate people (Mubiru, 2019; Orwenyo, 2014, p. 46). Orwenyo (2014, p. 24) argued for churches to have personnel of high intellectual and professional caliber, with the inevitable implication of a non-stipendiary ministry. Orwenyo further stated that current pastoral

work is not just evangelism, but entails critical thinking on issues of inter-religious dialogue, African religion and culture, social concern as well as counselling services. Interview with one pastor in favour of theological training commented thus:

*Almost all born again pastors claim to offer counselling services to their flock. And such counselling sessions have become popular, believers wishing to lighten their burdens laden with socio and economic concerns. They visit us in all categories; some are young and others old. Women are the biggest group seeking counselling from us the pastors. But this is a profession for which one claiming to be a counsellor must be trained to get at least some basic skills on how to handle peoples' problems. But I also know some pastors who have on their own opted to take courses in professional counselling (Tumwine, C, Personal interview, March 20, 2019, Kampala).*

The concern raised by the pastor above indicates to the reality that ministry work is no longer just preaching the word. It is now laden with several other activities which require a pastor to be well versed with socio-economic, marital, educational and political challenges faced by the believers. For example, counselling is becoming a well-protected profession, with ethical codes of conduct expected of those who practice it. For pastors to give professional and useful counselling, they need to be educated in counselling principles which are central in the curriculum of many theological colleges. In the United States, already, Pastors who practice religio-therapy were accused of practicing without certification and were recorded to be inflicting harm on clients because of their lack or inadequate professional knowledge (Robbins, 1985, p. 241).

The proposal for theological training was premised on the fact that some clerics out of insufficient knowledge were dissuading their followers away from government programmes. For example, some preached against immunization, Universal Primary Education, national identity card registration, and taking of anti-retroviral therapy for HIV/Aids patients. Theological training would be a tool to help such clerics to interpret God's message without contradiction. However, some other interviewed born again pastors resented this requirement, saying:

*Pastoral work is by calling not training. Jesus did not attend any school neither did he have any academic qualifications but he was an excellent teacher of the word. Another is the Apostle Peter, he never went to school, he was just a fisherman but called to ministry by Jesus. The work we do is spiritual. What I say is the word of God. God keeps talking to us and that is what we tell our believers (Kisseka, J, Personal interview, February 3, 2019, Kampala).*

Views expressed by the above pastor indicate how formal theological training continues to be a challenge to born-again churches. It also demonstrates the narrow perspective that some pastors have on ministry work, restricting it to evangelism and spiritual leadership (Orwenyo, 2014, p. 13). Some Pentecostal Christians view theological education as unspiritual (White, 2015, p. 7). Further argument is that whereas motivation for ministry is having a call to do God's work, theological education provides a chance and a conducive environment to grow spiritually (Orwenyo, 2014, p. 36). Whereas some born again church pastors in Uganda are resisting theological training, research undertaken by Orwenyo (2014) indicate that pastors in Kenya who had undertaken theological education argued that it had positively changed their thinking and behaviour. The Kenyan pastors argued that it is important for pastors to view themselves as professionals in their own right. Theological education makes the pastors critical in their approach and changes their attitudes towards dealing with diverse issues that are brought to their attention. In their view, theological education makes pastors more liberal and tolerant, less prone to hardline stances on matters that are not essential to faith and salvation. Theological education builds up the spirituality of pastors and grounds them in the truth. Pastors benefitted through intellectual and spiritual formation, and were equipped to share the gospel confidently. Through theological education, pastors learn social skills and management skills that are essential for leadership in various settings (Orwenyo, 2014, p. 67). Elsewhere in Ghana, the Pentecostal church has embraced theological training for the pastors, and the benefits are enormous.

Majority of the born-again pastors in Uganda have learnt the 'trade' by observation of what the senior pastors do. Many of them have been tutored by the senior pastors, who received little or no education at all and have mastered the art of reading and interpretation of the bible (White, 2015, p. 7). Demanding them to produce formal theological qualifications would be driving them away from the vocation. Some have studied other academic disciplines other than theology, and requiring them to go back to school at a time of consolidation of their ministries would undermine their efforts to push their ministries to greater heights. Yet others are school drop outs, making a living from pastoring. Re-integration in an academic system which one may have abandoned twenty or more years would be challenging. But having such a category of clergy, unregulated, would be the greatest threat to pentecostalism in Africa (Parsitau, 2017, p. 256). However, the significance of theological training as part of preparation for ministry work has been discussed by several authors over the years. For example, Orwenyo (2014) argues that ministers should be educated and examined before entering their work. Better ministerial work demands both study in school with personal spiritual growth. Pastors aspiring for ministerial

work need to undertake close study of both the sciences and the Bible, since Jesus studied the entire environment around him, enabling him to gather the spiritual teaching from the surroundings of His daily life. He argues that ministers who are intellectual giants achieve much more than those who are not (pp. 20-21).

Additionally, theological training is usually done at higher institutions of learning in the country which demand basic qualifications of Primary Leaving Examinations certificate (PLE), Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) and sometimes Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE). For pastors who may have dropped out of school or never had an opportunity to attend basic education at all, they would find it difficult to meet the basic requirements for entry in theological schools. Moreover, the language of instruction at institutions of higher learning in Uganda is English which would be a hindrance for several of pastors, who can only preach and express themselves in their mother languages. Requirements from the education ministry to establish a theological training institution may be way high the reach of emerging churches in the country. Even when the religious denominations are allowed to establish theological training schools of their own, these have to meet the requirements set by the body responsible for higher education. These are the real fears of born-again church pastors. The challenge, though, is that their arguments against being re-schooled casts doubt on their attitudes towards a civilized society where education and knowledge acquisition are key elements of societal transformation. A more serious challenge though has been raised by the Watchman Ministries where demands for an established curriculum regulated by a central body might run the risk of indoctrination of religion by the state, which offends the right to freedom of religion guaranteed by the Constitution and international human rights instruments to which Uganda is a signatory (Watchman ministries, 2018).

Beside these challenges, a well-trained pastor needs to be aware of the institutional framework in which he/she operates. Knowledge of the religious and theological environment in which one operates enhances one's spirituality (White, 2015, p. 7). In Jewish religion, from which Christianity springs, it was mandatory for the young to be taken to the temple and synagogue to listen to the word. Much as St. Paul had a physical encounter with the Lord, his educational background sets him apart from the rest of the Apostles such as Peter. St. Paul contributed almost three quarters of the New Testament. He had received his education from Gamaliel, one of the notable philosophers of the time. This requirement does not restrain born-again Christians in general but those who pastor them. Pastoring to a congregation is not just the sermons that are delivered. It also involves exercise of management and counselling skills, financial accountability and people-related skills that can be acquired through education. These skills, if gained, make

one a better spiritual leader. Arguments by the World Council of Churches, in support of theological education, are enshrined in the very basis of the church's existence. Theological education strengthens the mission of the church on earth through training and equipping church leaders with knowledge to teach God's word with faithfulness, relevance and clarity; as well as ability to communicate God's word in every cultural context (White, 2015, p. 7).

### Transparency and Financial Accountability in RFBOs

In the baseline report by Directorate of Ethics and Integrity (DEI) Consultant, it was observed that there was reported lack of transparency and accountability in some RFBOs. This had left many citizens exploited and manipulated by some religious clerics. Stories of exploitation of believers by some unscrupulous clerics in the country are common in national media (Mukombozi, 2018; Kiva, 2019). In 2009, Pastor Michael Kyazze, the Head of Discipline in the National Fellowship of Born-Again and Pentecostal Churches of Uganda (NFBPC) had intimated about this same kind of indiscipline among clerics in the city (The Observer, 2009). However, in an interview, he opposed government's intention to regulate born again churches, claiming that born-again churches umbrella organisations like NFBPC have the capacity to self-regulate members. He noted thus:

*When I was the head of discipline in NFBPC I used to discipline errant pastors here. Christians always brought their complaints against pastors fleecing them of money, like Pastor Kiwedde. I would put them to task to refund believers' money, and they would do so. So, there is no need for government to put in place a law or committee to monitor us because we can do it ourselves and weed out wrong elements (Kyazze, M, Personal interview March 7, 2019, Omega Healing Church-Namasuba).*

Pastor Michael Kyazze's assertions point to two fundamental issues. First is the existence of rogue pastors in churches, and these need to be tamed to keep the sanity of the Christian faith. Second is the dire need for a mechanism to deal with such pastors who manipulate Christians for their personal financial gains. The point of contention then is, who and how should this be done, government or churches themselves? The challenge with self-regulation under umbrella bodies is that they are varied, numerous and in most cases competing with each other for supremacy in the country. This is the case between NFBPC and BAF. It then becomes difficult to apply same standards for churches belonging to different umbrella organisations. More so, membership is not compulsory hence not all churches subscribe to these bodies. Some opt to regulate themselves as individual churches. Hence, the doctrines

and regulatory mechanisms by these umbrella bodies only apply to their members. The varied doctrines and teachings held by the different churches prove self-regulating not tenable (Odiemo, 2016, p. 9). Other scholars have argued that since churches are involved in collection of money from followers; there is obvious competition amongst themselves for this product. Competition between and among entities for certain goods, in this case, followers of churches, demands that government should regulate such competition (Odiemo, 2016, p. 35).

Churches are slowly being turned into commercial entities and are making headlines for all the wrong reasons due to lack of transparency and accountability by some religious leaders. The funds collected from members of congregation or received in form of donations go unaccounted for as these members rarely question how the funds are utilized. This leads to misappropriation of funds which results in wrangles within the Church. Some religious leaders are seen to lead such lavish lifestyles while their congregants struggle to make ends meet. Scholars in church-state relations are bogged with the question as to whether the right to religious freedom allow this blatant abuse of church autonomy by some religious leaders (Odiemo, 2016, pp. 3–4). This is the basis upon which Thomas Robbins has argued for the prerogative duty of government to defend religious freedoms, as long as churches engage in legitimate activities, but when the activities are negative, governments should have an absolute mandate to intervene in the area of religious organizations (1985, p. 238). RFBOs are corporate bodies whose membership ought to be protected against exploitation by individuals. RFBOs collect money in various forms including tithe, offertories, voluntary contributions and donations from both local and international donors. They also have several properties in their possession especially land because evangelical pastors are so much preoccupied with amassing of wealth than tending to the afflicted. In order to protect the public, the state must promote rationalisation, by instituting regulations that demand and enhance organizational structure of churches, to promote the survival of churches and the benefactors by firming institutionalization (Robbins, 1985, p. 247). The situation seems to be infecting much of Africa. In Kenya, for example, Parsitau (2017, p. 254) writes: Pentecostalism has become a thriving business and the shortest route to wealth and influence on a continent teeming with population, unemployment, poverty and disease, conflict, environmental degradation. Local pastors employ all sorts of tricks and techniques to exhort money from gullible folks. They use this money to build magnificent churches, buy luxurious cars, houses and aircrafts and live openly opulent lives, while their church members languish in poverty, misery and squalor. In most cases, pastors tell the faithful to give money to God, so that God will bless them in return. They dupe people by telling

them that divine favours come to those who pay their tithes and offerings regularly. Often, they use biblical injunctions such as “givers never lack” to squeeze money out of people.

It should be noted that some FBO’s showed resistance to registration under the 2006 NGO Registration amendment Act with the contention that as a faith, the financial disclosure requirement and the lengthy registration procedure hampered their constitutional right to freedom of worship. However, the rationale behind the registration requirement was based on Government responsibility to protect its populace against manipulation, money laundering, human trafficking and the possible financing of terrorism by some unscrupulous organizations (Wamimbi, 2010, p. 4). The nature of religious corporations is peculiar with directors not responsible to stockholders neither to their religious followers (Robbins, 1985, p. 247). This policy proposal just like the NGO registration arrangement would then protect Christians from money makers who work under the disguise of serving God (Mubiru, 2019). The challenge has been that churches and church land are owned by individual pastors, registered in their names. A church in this case ought to be owned by the believers and not the founder. Bank accounts of church finances are singularly managed by the pastor(s). No effort is made to provide accountability of church collections and donations to the congregations. These churches are therefore personal outfits, not belonging to any community (Matovu, 2019).

Biblical scriptures are used to manipulate believers and stifle financial accountability. For example, Malachi 3:10, it is written: Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

Another scripture is found in 2 Corinthians 9:6–8, for it is written; the point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

Attempts by some church members to ask for accountability is interpreted as lack of faith in God’s stewards. Again, biblical verses are used to suit their demands. For example, Romans 13:1-2 writes:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement.

Such manipulation is summed up with Psalms 105:15 and 1 Chronicles 16:22, which is written:

‘Do not touch my anointed ones.....’

Three issues arise out of the above quotations. The first being the manipulative techniques used by fraudulent pastors to siphon financial resources of the believers, through intimidation and promising rewards. Believers are assured that the more they pay to the church the more financial and spiritual benefits await them from God. Secondly, is the question of accountability. According to Matovu (2019), this is the very basis of analysing the question of church ownership. He argues that the owner of the ministry is the owner of the collections made in that church. Whereas other companies are overseen by the law, churches don’t want to account to anyone. And this comes with intimidation from church pastors over the flock, not to fall into sin by questioning the pastor’s authority, given to him only by the almighty (Parsitau, 2017, p. 257). The policy would require RFBOs to declare their sources of income; both locally and internationally raised (Kitubi, 2018). All these would ensure that RFBOs are accountable to the communities they serve. The policy is to ensure that all activities of RFBOs especially social services are monitored and regulated for the common good of society (Byakagaba, 2018). Arguments in favour of government’s enforcement of accountability and transparency upon churches and their leaders are based on the fact that governments are established to serve the needs of the governed and promote public good. As such, governments must ensure the protection of the population’s fundamental rights and freedoms. This aspect of regulation is in the public interests in order to prevent exploitation of unsuspecting members of the public. Religious leaders should ensure that there is transparency and accountability in the manner the Church is run. Transparency and accountability are key features of good governance (Odiemo, 2016, p. 5).

Pastors raised a number of objections including that there were existing laws and requirements under them with enough internal structures that cater for transparency and accountability. They cited the constitutions of their various NGOs at registration, memoranda and articles of association and the filing of returns which include audited reports, minutes and work plans (NFBPC Taskforce, 2019). Depending on the nature and type of registration of a church, there is indeed some measure of accountability expected of it to whichever body it had registered with. The question though is, do the prevailing accountability mechanisms address the concerns of the state vis-a-viz protection of its citizens? Churches registered as NGOs provide accountability to the NGO board but not to Christian members of their churches. Other churches registered as companies limited by guarantee, are required to make returns to the registrar of companies and also pay the necessary taxes. The believers have no mandate whatsoever, to demand and question bank accounts of their pastor registered as a private limited company yet they are used as the nursery beds to fatten those

accounts. One pastor argued that they have internal structures. He said thus:

*At my church, I as a pastor I am not involved in church collections. I have a group of elders in charge of finances and development of the church. I can however advise them on how best church money can be used. And some people think we the pastors live on those church collections, but I don't think it can fund my expenses. Some of us have other businesses we do (Batambuzze, P, Personal interview, February 26, 2019, Kampala).*

The pastor's views above relate to the claims of internal structures of churches. However, such existing internal structures are usually weak and are used to try portraying a semblance of a structure that hardly serves the interests of the believers but the pastor. Such structures are either under the superintendence of the pastor or are only known to a small group of people close to the pastors. For example, it has not always been the bother of common Christians to establish whether their church is registered or not. They have no knowledge about the status of its registration, neither are they provided with memoranda and articles of association. These continue to be personal to holder with the pastor. The nature of perceived financial accountability in born again churches are real and cause necessity for intervention. This is because relatively new institutionalized religious movements are particularly prone to financial irregularities because their charismatic mode of leadership inhibits the emergence of built-in mechanisms for assuring financial accountability (Robbins, 1985, p. 247). The policy would then demystify the tightly guarded internal structures that are thought about only when demanded by the registering and monitoring bodies. The born-again pastors have also argued that enforcement of accountability and transparency does not require a separate law because this is done through natural and behavioral laws of the land. The challenge here is that it is the flouting of such natural and behavioral laws by born-again pastors that has led to untold stories of exploitation of the flock. But this raises another question of honesty of those opposed to the proposal. For example, why would they want to remain under a policy framework which seems defective in bringing them to accountability? The real fear lies in the likely public scrutiny of church funds versus the real sources of wealth of pastors that have been a taboo to be questioned. The born-again pastors are likely to suffer loss of absolute control over church funds, as the policy suggests such funds to be managed in trustee of the church. It would no longer be possible for born-again pastors to misuse church resources, as government will demand for not only source declaration but also reveal the way it was spent. The traditional religious faiths could not complain about this requirement because they are recognized under the trustee's incorporation act and have well established systems through which their members

are appraised on the finances. Their systems do not allow the pastors/priests or sheikhs to collect and keep the money but through well-established committees selected from among believers.

## REGISTRATION OF RFBOs

The policy proposal demands all existing RFBOs to undergo fresh registration, under a body that will be defined in the policy. RFBOs that carry on the spiritual activities will no longer register as companies and NGOs. Mainstream religious organisations like the Anglican Church of Uganda, Roman Catholic Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Orthodox and Uganda Muslim supreme council will also be required to register afresh with the state. I have already stated that prior to the 2010 NGO policy guidelines, RFBOs were required to register either as companies limited by guarantee, NGOs or under the trustee's incorporation Act for the mainstream religions. However, the non-ceasing shifts in registration of new churches casts doubt on the intentions of the state towards born-again churches. One other pastor interviewed said:

*Before every presidential election the issue of registration of churches come up. May be government's intention is to scare us into submission to mobilise votes for them, so that they can secure us of our religious liberty to worship as born-again Christians (Wandera, S, Personal interview, February 13, 2019, Kampala).*

Views expressed by the above pastor indicate that demand for fresh registration of churches, under stringent conditions is an attempt to force born again churches to kneel before the state for leniency, in which case they will be liable to manipulation by the state. Even though the state fails to implement the proposed policy, it can be used to scare born again pastors, who hold influence over numerous followers into submission to the state. The proposed policy framework would provide an elaborate procedure for anybody who wants to start a church (Kitubi, 2018). Certainly, born again churches are increasingly becoming the primary identity of Ugandans and Africans in general (Abbink, 2014b, p. 92). It would therefore be in the interests of any government to take stock of such a growing religion so that it can have a better way people belonging to it can be governed. There are however, fears of 'hard to meet' conditions that may drive some pastors out of the vocation. This thinking has been built on born-again pastors' perceptions rather than reality. Some of the conditions include having at least an acre of land upon which the church could be established, a church building with approved architectural designs and having an occupation permit from the relevant body. Majority of the born-again churches today are started from makeshift environments, and can barely afford to



construct permanent church buildings, with the required standards in the cities. Most of the born-again churches begin as 'altars' (locally called 'ekyoto') and fellowships in one of the member's houses. Yet others operate from rented premises. Permanent church buildings are afforded by those churches with a large flock of believers, capable of raising much tithes, offertories and donations from which such church buildings can be erected. The usually semi-permanent church buildings constructed by several born-again pastors have no approved architectural plans; that would make it difficult to meet registration requirements.

Several of these churches are found in the urban areas, where cost of the land is well beyond the reach of an emerging ordinary pastor. The requirement for each church to provide proof of possession of at least one acre of land would amount to disenfranchisement to open up new churches. Even most of those that already exist would not meet this requirement. The sizes of the plots of land on which church buildings stand are usually too small to fulfill requirements that will enable them convince authorities to give them occupation permits. This is the very reason why pastors are in protest of the proposals not because they think that their rights to freedom of worship and expression will be curtailed but because they will be denied the leverage to have churches in lucrative but state forbidden places. More so, the likelihood to scrutinize the moral standing of those to register and pastor churches, make some 'pastors' uncomfortable as to whether government will not use such subjective parameters to deny them registration. Pastors who are involved in dubious activities under the guise of the church would not wish to be brought under a framework which specifically monitors their activities as pastors but not Chief Executive officers of NGOs or private limited companies.

## CONCLUSION

The ever-growing religious industry poses a great threat to state authority. With the kind of power and influence that RFBOs hold in Uganda, the state may feel threatened and come up with a repressive policy that may endanger the right to religious belief and expression. However, disunity among born-again Christians in the face of this policy increases state's hegemony over the church since it has no capacity to resist state interference due to internal division. Rather than disregarding the entire process and such policy initiatives, it is high time the RFBOs engaged in constructive engagements with the state to produce a framework which will promote religious freedom and expression. There is need to reflect on the past and determine whether or not it has been plausibly correct and edifying to the Christian church to be registered as NGOs, and private limited companies. This is an opportunity for RFBOs in Uganda to move to

the dining table and determine for themselves the amount of cake they need to have in this country. This is the first time in the history of this country that RFBOs are being consulted on how they wish to operate and engage with government. In the 1970's, by a mere decree, only four religions were left standing by President Idi Amin; Pentecostal churches were victims without disputation. In 1990, the government of the day, without consulting born-again churches, by legislation, transferred their allegiance from the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs to Ministry of Internal Affairs. The church of God was equated to any organization doing voluntary work. A proposal to regulate RFBOs is an opportunity to redeem the social and spiritual image of RFBOs in a society that categorizes RFBOs and their leaders as predatory to the innocent followers.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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