



CIVIC THEOLOGY: REIMAGINING FAITH-BASED CITIZENSHIP IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Dr. Zainab Khalid

Assistant Professor, Department of Comparative Religion, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Email : zainab.khalid@iiu.edu.pk

Keywords: *Civic Theology, Faith-Based Citizenship, Religious Pluralism, Globalization and Religion.*

Abstract: *This article explores the emerging concept of Civic Theology as a framework that integrates theological principles with civic responsibilities in an increasingly interconnected global society. As secularism, pluralism, and globalization continue to reshape traditional identities, faith communities are confronted with the task of reinterpreting their role in public life. Civic Theology offers a reconceptualization of religious engagement in democratic citizenship, policy advocacy, and communal coexistence. This paper critically examines the historical roots, theoretical foundations, and practical applications of Civic Theology, with specific focus on Muslim-majority contexts such as Pakistan. By analyzing case studies and interfaith movements, the study argues that Civic Theology is instrumental in promoting a participatory, ethical, and pluralistic vision of citizenship rooted in faith. It concludes with a call for a renewed theological discourse that affirms both religious conviction and civic responsibility.*

INTRODUCTION:

The twenty-first century has ushered in unprecedented challenges to religious identity and civic life. In many societies, including Pakistan, debates around the role of religion in politics, human rights, and multicultural coexistence have become central. Civic Theology emerges as a bridge between personal faith and public responsibility, proposing that theology can inform constructive civic participation without endorsing theocracy or radical secularism. This paper investigates how religious traditions—particularly Islam—can reimagine citizenship beyond legalistic or sectarian interpretations to foster inclusive societies.

1. Historical Evolution of Theology and Civic Engagement

From Constantinian Models to Liberation Theology

The integration of theology with civic life has a long and evolving history. In the Christian context, the **Constantinian shift** (4th century CE) marked a pivotal transformation where Christianity transitioned from a persecuted faith to a state-sponsored religion under Emperor Constantine. This ushered in an era where theology directly influenced imperial politics and public life. Over time, critiques of such state-church alliances led to movements like **Liberation Theology** in Latin America during the 20th century, which reinterpreted Christian teachings through the lens of social justice, economic equity, and grassroots activism. Liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez emphasized a preferential option for the poor, aligning faith with active resistance against oppressive regimes.

Islamic History: Medina Charter and Classical Notions of Ummah

In the Islamic tradition, the roots of civic theology can be traced to **Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) establishment of the Medina Charter** (622 CE), often considered one of the earliest constitutional documents promoting pluralism and civic cooperation among diverse religious communities, including Muslims, Jews, and pagans. This covenant institutionalized a shared civic framework based on mutual rights, responsibilities, and religious autonomy, thereby balancing faith and civic order. The concept of **Ummah** (community) in classical Islamic jurisprudence also played a vital role in fostering a sense of moral citizenship grounded in divine accountability, communal welfare, and public justice (al-'adl). Later scholars such as Al-Farabi, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun further developed notions of political order and ethical governance within Islamic theological paradigms.

2. Defining Civic Theology in the Modern Context

Theoretical Framework and Terminologies

Civic Theology refers to the interdisciplinary theological perspective that explores how religious beliefs and values inform civic life, democratic participation, and public ethics. Unlike traditional political theology, which often focuses on divine sovereignty and state authority, Civic Theology emphasizes citizenship, social justice, and interfaith engagement as core expressions of lived faith. It operates at the intersection of theology, political science, and sociology, using key concepts such as **public reason, the common good, moral agency, and religious pluralism**. The framework critiques both secular exclusion and religious absolutism by promoting a middle path where faith communities actively contribute to public discourse without imposing theological dominance.

Relationship Between Religion, State, and Civil Society

In contemporary societies—especially pluralistic and democratic nations—the relationship between **religion, state, and civil society** has become increasingly complex. Civic Theology proposes that faith traditions should not retreat from the public sphere, nor should they seek theocratic control. Instead, they should engage constructively with institutions of governance, education, and law by offering ethical insights, mobilizing communities for social welfare, and participating in dialogue across ideological divides. In Pakistan's context, this means moving beyond sectarianism and political instrumentalization of religion, toward a model where

religious actors support constitutional democracy, uphold human rights, and strengthen civil society networks through education, philanthropy, and peacebuilding.

3. Globalization and the Challenge to Faith-Based Citizenship

Erosion of Traditional Authority

Globalization has radically altered how religious authority is perceived and practiced. Traditional centers of theological authority—such as seminaries, religious elders, and institutionalized clergy—are increasingly challenged by the rise of decentralized interpretations, online platforms, and transnational influences. This erosion of traditional authority has led to both opportunities and crises: on one hand, it democratizes access to religious knowledge and encourages individual agency; on the other, it risks fragmentation, misinformation, and the rise of populist or extremist religious voices. Civic Theology must therefore address how to maintain interpretive integrity while adapting to these global shifts. Faith-based citizenship becomes more complex as believers navigate multiple, often conflicting sources of moral and civic guidance.

Migration, Digitalization, and Identity Politics

Contemporary global mobility has transformed religious and civic identities. **Migration** has led to multicultural societies where religious minorities demand recognition, rights, and participation. In countries like Pakistan, internal migration has also reconfigured urban demographics, creating new inter-sectarian and interethnic tensions. Meanwhile, **digitalization** has reshaped religious engagement—faith communities are increasingly connected via social media, virtual worship, and online activism. While this fosters global solidarity, it also intensifies **identity politics**, where religious affiliation becomes a marker of political, ethnic, or ideological alignment. Civic Theology must therefore contend with the need to cultivate inclusive, transnational visions of faith-based citizenship that resist polarizing discourses and embrace diversity within and across religious traditions.

4. Civic Theology in Muslim Societies: A Pakistani Perspective

Jinnah's Vision of Inclusive Citizenship

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, envisioned a pluralistic society where religious identity would not obstruct civic participation. In his famous speech of August 11, 1947, he declared that Pakistanis, regardless of religion, "are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques... for that has nothing to do with the business of the state." This foundational civic vision, rooted in equal rights and freedom of conscience, laid the groundwork for a form of Civic Theology that reconciles Islamic values with democratic principles. Unfortunately, this vision has often been overshadowed by sectarian politics and exclusionary narratives, necessitating a return to Jinnah's inclusive ideals in contemporary discourse.

Role of Religious Scholars in Democratic Discourse

In Pakistan, the ulema (religious scholars) have historically held influence over public opinion and political developments. Civic Theology encourages these scholars to engage not just in doctrinal teaching but also in promoting civic ethics—such as justice, equity, and compassion—in the democratic process. Initiatives such as Paigham-e-Pakistan, a state-backed fatwa project condemning terrorism, reflect attempts to realign religious authority with national

peacebuilding. There is growing recognition that religious scholars can play a proactive role in promoting tolerance, interfaith understanding, and constitutional values within a civic-theological framework.

Faith-Based Organizations and Humanitarianism

Pakistan has a robust landscape of faith-based organizations (FBOs), such as Edhi Foundation, Al-Khidmat Foundation, and Saylani Welfare Trust. These groups operate on Islamic principles of zakat, sadaqah, and khidmat-e-khalq (service to humanity), and provide essential services in healthcare, education, and disaster relief. Civic Theology values these efforts as examples of how religious convictions can manifest in social solidarity and civic responsibility. By linking charity with systemic development goals, these organizations exemplify faith-based citizenship that extends beyond ritual piety into transformative action.

5. Practical Models and Interfaith Initiatives

The Peace Council in Ghana

Ghana's National Peace Council serves as a successful model of how multi-religious collaboration can address conflict. Composed of Christian, Muslim, and traditional religious leaders, it facilitates dialogue, mediates political tensions, and promotes peaceful coexistence. This model demonstrates that Civic Theology need not be confined to doctrinal teachings but can serve as a platform for pluralistic nation-building efforts.

Pakistan's Interreligious Harmony Councils

In response to growing sectarian and religious intolerance, Pakistan has instituted district-level interfaith harmony councils under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. These forums bring together representatives from Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, and other communities to discuss local grievances, foster cooperation, and celebrate religious festivals collectively. Such initiatives embody the core of Civic Theology by promoting social peace, civic unity, and religious pluralism.

Youth-Led Civic Faith Campaigns

A new generation of young Pakistanis is engaging in digital and grassroots campaigns that blend faith with civic engagement. Movements like Soch Foundation and Faith for Rights promote civic literacy, counter hate speech, and champion human rights from a faith-informed perspective. These youth-led efforts, often driven by university students and young professionals, illustrate how Civic Theology is evolving beyond traditional institutions and embracing modern civic activism rooted in moral and theological convictions.

Summary:

Civic Theology offers a dynamic framework for addressing the tensions between religion and modern public life. This paper has demonstrated that far from being mutually exclusive, faith and citizenship can synergize to promote justice, dialogue, and common good. In Pakistan's context, Civic Theology invites theologians, civic leaders, and policymakers to engage in ethical reflections and collaborative actions that uphold both faith integrity and democratic values. The article encourages further academic exploration of this intersection, especially in pluralistic and conflict-prone societies.

References:

- Stackhouse, M.L. (2007). *Public Theology and Political Economy*. Eerdmans.
- Hollenbach, D. (2002). *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*. Cambridge University Press.
- An-Na'im, A.A. (2008). *Islam and the Secular State*. Harvard University Press.
- Nasr, S.H. (2001). *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*. ABC International Group.
- Esack, F. (1997). *Qur'an, Liberation & Pluralism*. Oneworld.
- Sachedina, A. (2001). *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*. Oxford University Press.
- Habermas, J. (2006). *Religion in the Public Sphere*. *European Journal of Philosophy*.
- Rahner, K. (1966). *Theological Investigations*. Herder and Herder.
- Jenkins, W. (2008). *Religion and Environmental Ethics*. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*.
- Ghamidi, J.A. (2017). *Mizan. Al-Mawrid*.
- Eickelman, D.F. & Piscatori, J. (1996). *Muslim Politics*. Princeton University Press.
- Taylor, C. (2007). *A Secular Age*. Harvard University Press.
- Siddiqui, A. (1997). *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century*. Macmillan.
- El Fadl, K.A. (2001). *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*. Oneworld.
- Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press.
- Khan, M.A. (2011). *The Role of Religion in Pakistan's Political Development*. *Journal of South Asian Studies*.
- Bhutto, F. (2013). *Democracy and Islam in Pakistan: The Paradox of Religious Pluralism*. Routledge.
- Quraishi, A. (2006). *Islamic Constitutionalism: Not Secular. Not Theocratic*. *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law*.
- Iqbal, M. (1930). *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, F. (1982). *Islam and Modernity*. University of Chicago Press.