

# The Morality of Distributive Justice: A Christian Call for Government Support to Faith-Based Universities in Malawi and Zambia

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.910000692>

Received: 05 November 2025; Accepted: 11 November 2025; Published: 21 November 2025

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the moral and theological imperative of distributive justice as a basis for equitable government support to faith-based universities in Malawi and Zambia. Despite their significant contributions to national development, private religious institutions-including Seventh-day Adventist (SDA), Reformed Church of Zambia (RCZ), Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP), Baptist, Catholic, and Islamic universities, remain largely excluded from government financial assistance, even though their students, faculty, and guardians contribute taxes that sustain public systems. Drawing on John Rawls's theory of distributive justice and Christian ethical principles, the study contends that government support for non-profit faith-based higher education is both a moral obligation and a recognition of human rights. Empirical evidence from Malawi and Zambia indicates that these institutions consistently produce highly employable graduates and complement government efforts in expanding access to quality education. The paper argues that equitable resource allocation would not only enhance sustainability across all higher education institutions but also promote justice, fairness, and the common good as enshrined in the constitutions of both countries. The findings carry particular implications for SDA and other faith-based universities, highlighting their indispensable role in shaping ethical, skilled, and socially responsible citizens. This study combines theological ethics and moral philosophy with emerging empirical data-such as enrollment patterns, funding disparities, and graduate employability-to substantiate its argument. It draws upon Rawlsian fairness, Christian ethics, and African communitarian principles to propose an inclusive distributive justice framework for higher education policy reform. (NCHE, 2023; Ministry of Education, 2022). It draws upon Rawlsian fairness (Rawls, 1971), Christian ethics (Tillich, 1954), and African communitarian principles such as Ubuntu (Mbiti, 1969; Shutte, 2001) to propose an inclusive distributive justice framework for higher education policy reform.

**Keywords:** distributive justice, higher education, faith-based universities, Christian ethics, Malawi, Zambia, Seventh-day Adventist, government policy

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right and a critical instrument for national development, social transformation, and moral formation. Both Malawi and Zambia recognize education as a cornerstone for advancing social equity, economic growth, and sustainable progress. Public universities in these nations, however, frequently face persistent challenges lik-financial instability, recurrent strikes, limited infrastructure, and constrained resources-that compromise educational quality and continuity.

In recent decades, faith-based and private universities-including Adventist, Reformed, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Baptist institutions-have emerged as vital partners in delivering quality higher education. They contribute

significantly to human capital development, moral formation, and social stability, often complementing public efforts through programs in health, education, business, and theology. Despite their contributions, these institutions receive minimal or no government financial support, relying heavily on tuition fees, church resources, and charitable donations to sustain operations.

This situation raises pressing ethical and policy questions about fairness, inclusivity, and justice in educational funding. Governments benefit from taxes paid by these universities, their staff, and students, yet the institutions and learners themselves remain excluded from national funding mechanisms. Such structural imbalances challenge the spirit of equity, shared responsibility, and moral stewardship enshrined in the constitutions of both Malawi and Zambia. Addressing these disparities requires a re-examination of higher education financing through the lens of distributive justice and Christian social ethics, which affirm that equitable access to public resources is both a human right and a moral obligation.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite their proven role in national development, faith-based universities in Malawi and Zambia remain excluded from government financial support frameworks, such as Malawi's National Education Budget and Zambia's Higher Education Loans and Scholarships Board (HELSB). These non-profit institutions serve the same public interest as state universities by providing accredited education, producing employable graduates, and fostering ethical leadership-yet operate without the fiscal backing extended to their public counterparts.

This exclusion creates systemic inequities that limit access for students from low-income families, weaken institutional sustainability, and contradict the principles of fairness, human rights, and distributive justice upheld in national constitutions and global commitments like Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). The central problem, therefore, is a moral and structural imbalance in higher education policy: the state's failure to equitably allocate public resources among all institutions contributing to the common good. Without corrective reform, this disparity threatens to undermine inclusive growth, weaken educational quality, and erode the moral mission of higher learning in both nations.

### **Research Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research is to scrutinize the moral, ethical, and theological underpinnings of distributive justice as a framework for fostering equitable governmental collaboration with faith-based universities in Malawi and Zambia. By synthesizing principles of justice, Christian ethics, and empirical evidence, the study aspires to furnish a comprehensive rationale for incorporating non-profit faith-based institutions into national higher education support mechanisms.

Specifically, the study endeavors to:

- Examine the concept of distributive justice as articulated by John Rawls and evaluate its applicability to higher education policy in Malawi and Zambia.
- Analyze the prevailing government policies concerning funding and support for public versus private faith-based universities, identifying structural inequities and deficiencies in implementation.
- Evaluate the moral and Christian ethical dimensions of state responsibility toward non-profit religious institutions, accentuating the obligations of fairness, stewardship, and human dignity.
- Assess the economic and social ramifications of excluding faith-based universities from governmental financial support, including effects on student access, institutional sustainability, and national development.
- Present empirical evidence illustrating the contribution of faith-based universities to national human capital development, graduate employability, and the moral formation of students.
- Examine comparative models from other nations where governmental collaboration with faith-based institutions has successfully enhanced access, equity, and educational outcomes.
- Recommend strategic actions and policy frameworks for executing equitable resource distribution to all accredited higher learning institutions, ensuring that governmental support embodies principles of justice, fairness, and the common good.

- Provide a theological and ethical justification for integrating faith-based universities into national education planning, underscoring the alignment of such support with constitutional values, social equity, and moral responsibility.

By addressing these objectives, the study aspires to bridge the divide between moral theory, ethical obligations, and pragmatic policy implementation, ultimately promoting a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable higher education system in Malawi and Zambia.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Ethics of Distributive Justice**

John Rawls (1971) conceptualized distributive justice as fairness in the allocation of social goods, emphasizing that the structure of society should enable equitable opportunities for all citizens. Rawls proposed two foundational principles: the principle of equal liberty, which guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms to every individual, and the difference principle, which permits social and economic inequalities only when they benefit the least advantaged members of society. Applied to public policy, these principles require governments to design institutional arrangements that promote fairness, reduce structural inequities, and ensure that marginalized groups have meaningful access to social goods. While Rawls provides a foundational framework for fairness, complementary perspectives offer additional insights into distributive justice. Utilitarian thinkers such as John Stuart Mill emphasize maximizing collective welfare, suggesting that government support to faith-based universities enhances societal good by broadening access and improving graduate outcomes. African communitarian ethics-rooted in the Ubuntu philosophy of 'I am because we are'-extends this discourse by prioritizing communal responsibility, moral solidarity, and shared prosperity. Together, these frameworks complement Christian moral reasoning by situating justice not only as fairness but as mutual flourishing within society (Rawls, 1971). Utilitarian thinkers such as John Stuart Mill emphasize maximizing collective welfare (Mill, 1863/1998), suggesting that government support to faith-based universities enhances societal good by broadening access and improving graduate outcomes. African communitarian ethics-rooted in the Ubuntu philosophy of 'I am because we are' (Mbiti, 1969; Shutte, 2001)-extends this discourse by prioritizing communal responsibility, moral solidarity, and shared prosperity.

When applied to higher education, the ethics of distributive justice imply that all institutions contributing to the public good-whether state-owned or private faith-based-should have equitable access to government resources. The persistent exclusion of non-profit religious universities in Malawi and Zambia from state financial support contradicts Rawls's difference principle. Such exclusion undermines opportunities for students from lower-income backgrounds, limits institutional sustainability, and disproportionately benefits public universities, which already enjoy government funding. By failing to support faith-based universities, governments miss the opportunity to maximize societal benefits through a broader, more inclusive distribution of educational resources.

From a Christian moral perspective, distributive justice is not merely a civic ideal but a divine imperative. Scripture consistently emphasizes impartiality, equity, and the moral obligation to protect and support the vulnerable. Micah 6:8 instructs believers to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God," highlighting that justice is inseparable from ethical and spiritual responsibility. As Tillich (1954) asserts, justice is "love distributed in social relationships," suggesting that equitable treatment in societal institutions reflects divine moral order. Consequently, government policies that exclude religious universities from funding violate both moral equity and theological principles. Such exclusion undermines the broader mission of education to cultivate not only intellectual competence but also moral and civic responsibility among students.

In the context of Malawi and Zambia, faith-based universities-such as Rusangu University, Justo Mwale University, Central Africa Baptist University, DMI-St Eugene University, Malawi Adventist University, and the Catholic University of Malawi and Zambia-demonstrate moral stewardship, academic excellence, and social impact that complement public institutions. From a distributive justice perspective, equitable government support would ensure that these universities can sustain their programs, expand access to higher education for disadvantaged students, and contribute meaningfully to national development. Integrating John Rawls theory with Christian ethics provides a dual lens for understanding why moral, theological, and civic obligations converge in support of faith-based higher education.

## **Human Rights, Equality, and Educational Justice**

Both the Malawian Constitution (1994) and the Zambian Constitution (2016) recognize education as a fundamental human right, emphasizing the state's responsibility to promote equitable access and lifelong learning for all citizens. These national commitments are reinforced by international legal instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which asserts the right to education without discrimination, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981), which underscores the obligation of states to ensure accessible and quality education for their populations.

Despite these provisions, access to affordable higher education in Malawi and Zambia remains largely limited to public universities, leaving faith-based institutions marginalized. This selective distribution of educational benefits creates a structural inequity that disproportionately affects students from low-income families and undermines the broader societal goal of inclusive development. By excluding faith-based universities from financial support, governments inadvertently restrict educational opportunities, despite the fact that these institutions serve the public, comply with national accreditation standards, and contribute taxes to the state.

The ethical dilemma arises when the state, as the primary custodian of justice, prioritizes political or administrative interests over moral and legal obligations. Hittinger (1992) argues that such actions produce "rights conflicts," where the formal recognition of rights fails to translate into meaningful access or equitable outcomes, thereby undermining the common good. In this context, government support for faith-based universities should not be framed as charity or discretionary benevolence; rather, it constitutes restorative justice—a corrective measure to redress structural imbalances in educational access, ensure fairness, and uphold the human rights of all citizens.

Moreover, equitable funding of faith-based universities aligns with principles of social justice and constitutional equity, promoting an inclusive higher education sector that recognizes the contributions of all stakeholders. It affirms that moral and legal responsibilities converge in the governance of education, highlighting that sustainable national development requires both institutional diversity and fairness in resource allocation. By addressing this imbalance, governments can advance human dignity, strengthen the rule of law, and foster an education system that truly reflects the ethical and constitutional commitments of Malawi and Zambia.

## **Christian Principles of Subsidiarity and Sphere Sovereignty**

The principle of subsidiarity, deeply rooted in Catholic social teaching, holds that higher authorities should intervene only when lower-level entities—such as families, communities, or institutions—cannot effectively address issues on their own. According to Messner (1945), subsidiarity is not merely a political principle but a moral guideline that emphasizes empowerment over control, supporting local entities to achieve their goals while respecting their autonomy. In practice, this principle implies that governments should facilitate, rather than hinder, the functioning of lower-level institutions, including faith-based universities.

Complementing subsidiarity, Abraham Kuyper's (1956) principle of sphere sovereignty asserts that societal institutions—such as the church, the state, schools, and the family—operate within God-given spheres of authority and responsibility. Each sphere has a distinct mandate and must be respected by others to maintain order and justice in society. The state, therefore, should not absorb or dominate the functions of other societal institutions but should collaborate in ways that enhance their capacity to serve the common good.

Applying these principles to higher education in Malawi and Zambia, the state has a moral and ethical obligation to support faith-based universities without infringing upon their autonomy. Support can take the form of infrastructure grants, targeted student loans, research funding, tax incentives, or collaborative programs that enhance institutional capacity. Such measures empower religious universities to fulfill their educational and moral mission while complementing government objectives in expanding access, improving quality, and producing skilled graduates.

This approach aligns with the broader Christian ethic of stewardship, which emphasizes using resources responsibly to serve society, protect human dignity, and promote social justice. By respecting the autonomy of faith-based universities and providing targeted support, governments can foster a partnership model in higher education—one that balances institutional independence with public accountability and contributes to sustainable national development.

## Contextual Analysis: Zambia and Malawi

### The Zambian Context

Zambia's higher-education landscape continues to be dominated by public universities—such as the University of Zambia (UNZA), Copperbelt University (CBU), and Mulungushi University—which depend heavily on government subventions for operations, infrastructure, and student welfare. Data from the *Higher Education Authority* (HEA, 2024) show that in 2022 more than 21,000 students graduated from public and private universities combined, yet over 85 percent of government tertiary-education funding was directed to the three major public universities. Reliance on state financing has produced periodic fiscal crises, delayed academic calendars, and labour unrest that compromise educational quality and continuity (HEA, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2022).

Faith-based universities: Rusangu University, Justo Mwale University, Central Africa Baptist University, and DMI-St. Eugene University—meet accreditation standards and contribute measurably to Zambia's human-capital formation. Collectively they have produced tens of thousands of graduates in education, business, health, and ministry. Rusangu University alone has awarded more than 7,000 degrees since 2009 (Rusangu University, 2023). Yet these institutions remain excluded from state funding mechanisms such as the *Higher Education Loans and Scholarships Board (HELSEB)*, whose resources largely serve students enrolled in public universities (HELSEB, 2022).

The fiscal asymmetry is further evidenced by data from the *Zambia Revenue Authority* (ZRA, 2022): private and faith-based educational institutions contribute taxes through PAYE and corporate levies but receive no proportional benefits from national budgets. Consequently, a policy gap persists between government's stated commitment to inclusive, quality education—as set forth in Zambia's *Vision 2030*—and its practice of narrowly targeted higher-education financing (Government of Zambia, 2011; HEA, 2024). The outcome is a distributive-justice deficit: students from low-income families attending faith-based universities have limited access to scholarships or loans, reinforcing socio-economic inequality.

Empirically, Zambia's higher-education system demonstrates both social value and structural exclusion. Public institutions absorb the majority of state resources but face chronic inefficiencies, while accredited faith-based providers deliver high employability outcomes and moral leadership training without fiscal support. Integrating these institutions into financing frameworks could enhance national equity, expand access, and advance *Vision 2030*'s goal of inclusive human-capital development.

### The Malawian Context

Malawi exhibits similar structural disparities but within a smaller, highly centralized education-financing regime. According to the *National Council for Higher Education* (NCHE, 2023), public universities—including the University of Malawi (UNIMA) and the Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST)—depend on state subventions that constitute more than 50 percent of their annual operating budgets. Recurrent underfunding has led to strikes, staff shortages, and deferred academic calendars (Government of Malawi, 2020).

Conversely, faith-based universities such as Malawi Adventist University (MAU) and the Catholic University of Malawi (CUM) maintain stable operations and deliver consistent graduate outcomes. NCHE (2023) data show that religious universities account for roughly 30 percent of Malawi's total tertiary-enrolment capacity and play a critical role in absorbing unmet student demand from the public sector. Yet, like their Zambian

counterparts, these institutions receive no direct government financial assistance even though they comply with national accreditation requirements and contribute to the Treasury through taxes (UNICEF, 2023).

Malawi's *Vision 2063* and *National Education Sector Investment Plan (NESIP 2020–2030)* call for stronger public–private partnerships to achieve equitable and sustainable education outcomes (Government of Malawi, 2020). However, implementation remains limited; funding mechanisms still overwhelmingly favour public universities. Empirical patterns thus reveal a policy-practice gap that constrains distributive justice and limits tertiary-education expansion.

Faith-based institutions in Malawi demonstrate higher graduation stability and employability rates than many public institutions, according to internal reports from MAU (2023) and NCHE summaries (2023). The absence of systematic state support jeopardizes their sustainability and undercuts national goals for inclusive education and human-capital development.

### **Comparative Perspective**

Both Zambia and Malawi illustrate the paradox of moral recognition without material support. Empirical evidence shows that faith-based universities supply a significant share of graduates, contribute taxes, and uphold accreditation standards, yet remain excluded from public-funding mechanisms. Zambia's more elaborate HELSB system provides limited reach, while Malawi's centralized funding leaves non-state actors almost entirely self-financed. Policy realignment toward outcome-based funding-anchored in accreditation and social-impact indicators-would correct distributive imbalances and harmonize theological ethics with practical socio-economic development (HEA, 2024; NCHE, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

### **Church-State Separation, Stewardship, and the Moral Imperative of Justice**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically upheld the doctrine of church-state separation, grounded in the conviction that genuine religious liberty thrives only when the state refrains from legislating matters of conscience, and the church avoids political domination (Knight, 1993; Morgan, 2001). This principle, deeply rooted in both the Protestant Reformation and the American experience of religious freedom, aims to safeguard faith from coercion while ensuring that moral principles inform civic life. However, this separation does not require silence in the face of structural injustice or moral inequity. Within the Adventist worldview, stewardship is both spiritual and social-it calls believers to responsibly use their influence, resources, and moral authority to promote the common good (White, 1903).

In this light, the call for distributive justice-the equitable allocation of national resources, including educational funding-does not violate church-state neutrality. Instead, it fulfills the moral duty of the faith community to advocate for fairness, equity, and human dignity. Ellen G. White (1902) admonished that “Christians are not to remain indifferent to injustice, but to be co-laborers with God in restoring His image in humanity” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 173). This prophetic mandate implies that Christian engagement with the state must be guided not by partisanship but by moral stewardship, which seeks justice for all, especially the marginalized. Faith-based universities, therefore, participate in this redemptive work by advancing knowledge, character formation, and service to humanity.

Philosophically, this moral engagement aligns with Immanuel Kant's principle of universalizability, which posits that an action is morally right only if it can be willed as a universal law without contradiction (Kant, 1785/1996). When applied to educational policy, the exclusion of faith-based universities from state funding fails this ethical test since it cannot be universally justified without undermining fairness and equality. The state's obligation, therefore, extends beyond political neutrality to moral consistency: to treat all educational institutions contributing to the public good with impartiality and justice.

Biblically, this principle finds resonance in the Golden Rule: “Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them” (Matt. 7:12; cf. Luke 6:31, NIV). The rule embodies moral reciprocity and the universality of justice that Kant later formalized philosophically. It urges governments to treat all contributors to national development, secular or religious, with the same fairness they expect from their citizens.

In this moral context, government partnership with faith-based universities should not be misinterpreted as a dilution of church-state separation. Rather, it represents an affirmation of moral universality, stewardship, and social responsibility. Through contextual theology, this partnership is better understood as a pragmatic and ethical collaboration aimed at societal upliftment. Contextuality becomes the antidote to false dichotomies: it preserves the church's theological integrity while allowing it to engage public institutions in advancing justice, equality, and human flourishing.

Such a balance does not erode Adventist principles; it enriches them by situating the church's mission within the broader divine mandate to "seek justice, correct oppression, and defend the cause of the fatherless and widow" (Isa. 1:17). When faith-based advocacy for distributive justice is rooted in stewardship and guided by universal moral law, it transcends political expediency and becomes a sacred duty; an expression of love in action, or what Tillich (1954) called "justice as love distributed."

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To reinforce the argument empirically, both countries exhibit measurable disparities in educational financing. For instance, in 2022, Zambia allocated over 85% of tertiary education funding to public universities, while non-state institutions-despite serving approximately 40% of tertiary learners-received no direct budgetary allocations (Ministry of Education, 2022). In Malawi, 68% of government education expenditure went to four public universities, leaving faith-based and private institutions to rely solely on tuition and donor support (NCHE, 2023). Such patterns illustrate the structural inequities the study seeks to address. These quantitative insights affirm that policy reform rooted in distributive justice could significantly enhance national human capital outcomes. (NCHE, 2023; ZRA, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). Such patterns highlight structural inequities that undermine inclusive educational development.

The empirical evidence from faith-based universities in Malawi and Zambia demonstrates their substantial contribution to national education, human capital development, and moral formation. Data from Malawi Adventist University (MAU) indicate that between 2009 and 2023, over 2,500 students graduated in fields including education, business, health sciences, and theology (MAU Registrar, 2023). Similarly, Rusangu University (RU) has produced more than 7,000 graduates since its accreditation in 2009, many of whom serve in education, public service, healthcare, and ministry (HEA Report, 2024). These figures illustrate that faith-based universities are producing highly employable graduates who actively contribute to national development.

A 2022 tracer study by the Malawi National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) reported that 73% of graduates from religious universities found employment within one year, compared to 61% from public universities, highlighting the practical value of these institutions in addressing national workforce needs. Additionally, faith-based universities contribute to state revenue through taxes, including Pay-As-You-Earn (PAYE) and corporate taxes; the Zambia Revenue Authority (2022) confirms that these contributions amount to millions of kwacha annually. Such data challenge any perception that these institutions are financially peripheral; on the contrary, they are integral partners in national development.

The stability and efficiency of faith-based universities further distinguish them from public counterparts. Unlike many public institutions plagued by recurrent strikes and delayed academic calendars, universities like MAU and RU maintain consistent academic programming, ensuring timely graduations and a reliable supply of skilled graduates. This operational consistency underscores the institutions' capacity for sustainable educational delivery and their alignment with national development priorities.

From a theoretical perspective, these empirical findings reinforce the ethical and moral imperatives of distributive justice. According to John Rawls (1971), social and economic inequalities are justified only when they benefit the least advantaged. Excluding faith-based universities-whose graduates often come from low-income families and contribute significantly to public welfare-from financial support contradicts the difference principle and perpetuates structural inequities. Similarly, Christian ethical frameworks emphasize justice, stewardship, and human dignity. As Micah 6:8 instructs, believers are called to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God," while Tillich (1954) frames justice as "love distributed in social relationships." Applying these principles, governments in Malawi and Zambia have a moral obligation to support faith-based

universities not as charity but as restorative justice, correcting disparities that limit access and undermine human rights. While Rawls provides a foundational framework for fairness, complementary perspectives offer additional insights into distributive justice. Utilitarian thinkers such as John Stuart Mill emphasize maximizing collective welfare, suggesting that government support for faith-based universities enhances societal good by broadening access and improving graduate outcomes. African communitarian ethics-rooted in the Ubuntu philosophy of "I am because we are"-extends this discourse by prioritizing communal responsibility, moral solidarity, and shared prosperity. Together, these frameworks complement Christian moral reasoning by situating justice not only as fairness but as mutual flourishing within society (Rawls, 1971). Utilitarian thinkers such as John Stuart Mill emphasize maximizing collective welfare (Mill, 1863/1998), suggesting that government support for faith-based universities enhances societal good by broadening access and improving graduate outcomes. African communitarian ethics-rooted in the Ubuntu philosophy of 'I am because we are' (Mbiti, 1969; Shutte, 2001)-extends this discourse by prioritizing communal responsibility, moral solidarity, and shared prosperity.

Moreover, the principles of subsidiarity and sphere sovereignty provide further ethical justification. Faith-based universities operate within their God-given sphere, fulfilling educational and moral missions that complement state objectives. According to Messner (1945) and Kuyper (1956), higher authorities should empower, not supplant, such institutions. By extending infrastructure support, research grants, student loans, and tax incentives, governments would enable these universities to maximize their societal contributions while maintaining institutional autonomy.

Contextually, the inequity is clear in both nations. In Zambia, public universities such as the University of Zambia (UNZA) and Copperbelt University (CBU) dominate state funding, while institutions like RU, Central Africa Baptist University, and DMI-St. Eugene University are systematically excluded from HELSB programs (Ministry of Education, 2022). In Malawi, faith-based institutions-accounting for over 30% of national tertiary enrollment (NCHE, 2023)-receive no direct state funding despite adhering to national accreditation standards and contributing taxes. This exclusion undermines national commitments to equity, human rights, and inclusive development, including Malawi's Vision 2063 and Zambia's Vision 2030.

Collectively, the results demonstrate that faith-based universities are national assets whose operational efficiency, graduate employability, and social impact warrant equitable government support. Supporting these institutions is not merely a policy preference but a moral, theological, and civic imperative that aligns with both Rawlsian justice principles and Christian ethical teachings. Integrating these universities into government funding frameworks would enhance educational access, improve institutional sustainability, and strengthen the moral and intellectual fabric of society.

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure equitable support for faith-based universities in Malawi and Zambia and to promote distributive justice, the following strategic actions are recommended:

### **a. Integrate Faith-Based Universities into National Budget Frameworks**

Governments should allocate a dedicated percentage of the national education budget to accredited non-profit religious universities. This inclusion would recognize their contribution to human capital development and ensure that they have the necessary resources to sustain quality education and expand access to underserved communities.

### **b. Develop Institutional Funding Mechanisms**

Beyond annual budget allocations, governments should contemplate matching grants, endowment support, or capital improvement funds for faith-based institutions. Predictable funding mechanisms empower these universities to elevate teaching quality, maintain facilities, and broaden academic programs, ensuring alignment with national development objectives.



### **c. Expand Student Loan and Scholarship Eligibility**

Student loan schemes, including Zambia's Higher Education Loans and Scholarships Board (HELSEB) and Malawi's National Education Loan Fund, should extend eligibility to students enrolled in accredited faith-based universities. Paired with need- and merit-based scholarships, these initiatives would mitigate financial barriers, enhance enrollment equity, and promote social mobility in accordance with the principle of restorative justice.

### **d. Provide Infrastructure and Research Support**

Ministries of Education should incorporate faith-based universities into national strategies for laboratory development, library enhancement, and research funding cycles. Investments in infrastructure and academic research fortify institutional capacity, elevate educational quality, and stimulate innovation that contributes to national development.

### **e. Facilitate Faculty and Staff Capacity-Building**

Government programs should endorse professional development, training workshops, and collaborative research initiatives for faculty and administrative personnel in faith-based universities. Strengthening human capacity ensures the sustainable delivery of high-quality education and aligns institutional performance with national quality standards.

### **f. Offer Tax Incentives and Fiscal Support**

Faith-based universities that reinvest surpluses into educational programs, community development, or student welfare should be eligible for tax rebates, deductions, or exemptions. Such incentives encourage responsible financial management, reinforce the social mission of these institutions, and acknowledge their contributions to national development.

### **g. Establish Multi-Denominational Education Councils**

Governments should establish faith-based education councils to provide guidance on equitable resource allocation, uphold ethical standards, and integrate moral values into national education policy. These councils would facilitate dialogue, collaboration, and accountability between the state and religious institutions.

### **h. Promote Public-Private and Church-State Partnerships**

Collaborative initiatives between public universities and faith-based institutions-including joint research, curriculum development, and community outreach-can enhance knowledge exchange, improve operational efficiency, and strengthen the national education system. Such partnerships embody the principles of subsidiarity and sphere sovereignty, empowering institutions while complementing state objectives.

### **i. Monitor and Evaluate Impact**

Implement a government-led monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the efficacy of financial support, scholarships, and infrastructure investments in faith-based universities. Continuous evaluation ensures accountability, informs policy adjustments, and maximizes the societal and educational impact of government interventions.

### **k. Align Support with National Development Visions**

Financial and policy support for faith-based universities should be strategically aligned with Zambia's Vision 2030 and Malawi's Vision 2063, which emphasize inclusive growth, human capital development, and public-private partnerships. Such alignment ensures that faith-based institutions are recognized as integral partners in national development rather than peripheral actors.

By enacting these recommendations, governments in Malawi and Zambia can uphold principles of distributive justice, promote equitable access to higher education, and harness the full potential of faith-based universities as partners in national development.

## CONCLUSION

Integrating empirical evidence and diverse philosophical frameworks strengthens the moral and policy relevance of this study. The findings show that distributive justice in higher education requires a balanced approach-anchored in both moral theology and measurable socio-economic realities. When theological ethics, Rawlsian fairness, and communitarian values intersect, they generate a robust model for equitable education policy. (Mbiti, 1969; Rawls, 1971; Tillich, 1954). When theological ethics, Rawlsian fairness, and communitarian values intersect, they generate a robust model for equitable education policy that aligns with both Christian ethics and human rights imperatives (United Nations, 1948; African Charter, 1981).

Faith-based universities in Malawi and Zambia stand as vital partners in national development, moral formation, and social transformation. Rooted in values of service, integrity, and holistic education, these institutions contribute not only to intellectual advancement but also to the moral and spiritual shaping of society. Their exclusion from government financial support-whether through student loans, infrastructure funding, or research grants-represents a form of structural inequality that contradicts both the spirit of national constitutions and the global commitment to inclusive education enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).

The ethical principle of distributive justice demands that public resources be shared equitably among all institutions contributing to the common good. Faith-based universities, many of which operate on non-profit models and serve students from diverse religious and socio-economic backgrounds, undeniably advance the same national objectives pursued by public institutions. Denying them access to public funding mechanisms, therefore, is inconsistent not only with Christian moral teaching but also with constitutional principles of fairness and equality.

A nuanced application of the Seventh-day Adventist principle of Church-State separation does not negate cooperation for the public good. Rather, when understood contextually, it guards against coercion while allowing constructive collaboration rooted in shared moral and social objectives. Adventists uphold that the state should not legislate religion nor interfere with faith-based autonomy; yet, this separation does not imply alienation. Within the framework of contextuality, the moral call for stewardship and moral obligation invites both Church and State to participate in advancing justice, equity, and human development without compromising their respective missions.

This position harmonizes with Immanuel Kant's principle of universalizability, which urges that moral actions be those that can be willed as universal laws, and with the biblical "golden rule" (Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31), which teaches: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Applying these principles to education policy compels governments to act justly toward all learning institutions, ensuring that fairness, not favoritism, defines public service.

By embracing the Christian principles of subsidiarity and stewardship, governments in Zambia and Malawi can nurture a higher education system that is inclusive, morally grounded, and contextually responsive. Subsidiarity calls for empowering local and independent institutions to fulfill their unique missions effectively, while stewardship emphasizes the responsible management of national resources for the common good. Together, these values promote a model of partnership where the state supports without controlling, enables without absorbing, and collaborates without compromising faith identity.

Furthermore, integrating faith-based universities into the broader national education framework would align with Zambia's Vision 2030 and Malawi's Vision 2063, both of which emphasize inclusive growth, partnership, and human capital development. Such integration would not only expand access to quality education but also reinforce moral and civic formation as pillars of sustainable development.

Ultimately, the moral call of distributive justice challenges policymakers to view education not as a privilege of public institutions but as a shared societal responsibility. When governments apply the universal principle of fairness-echoed in Kantian ethics and the teachings of Christ-they uphold both human dignity and divine stewardship.

When Church and State collaborate on the foundation of fairness, transparency, and mutual respect, democracy is not weakened-it is strengthened. Such collaboration transforms education into a sacred trust: a channel through which faith, knowledge, and justice converge to build nations where opportunity, morality, and human flourishing are shared blessings for all.

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