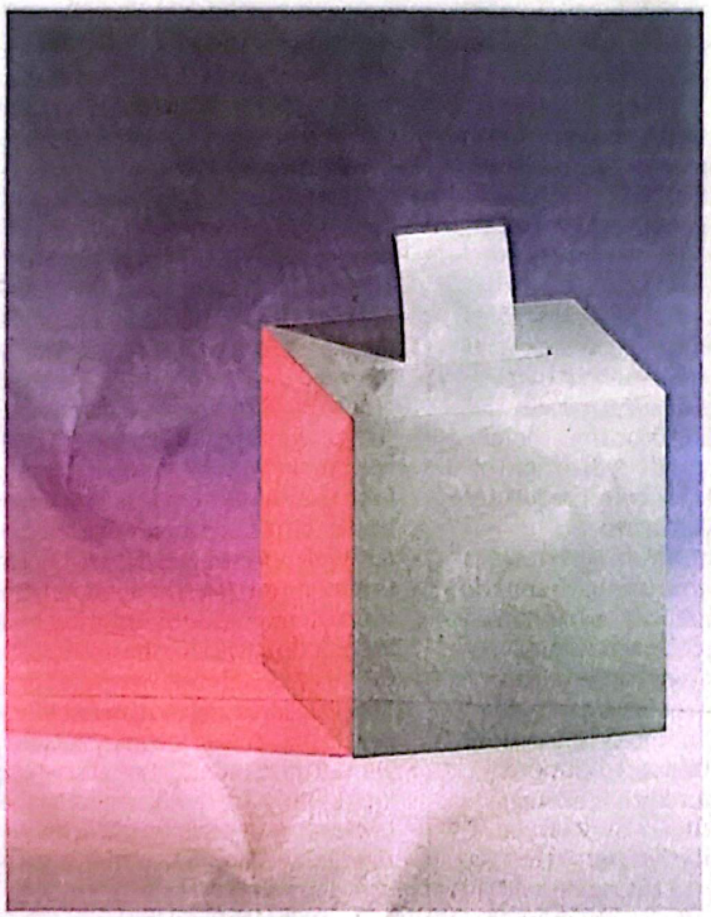
LETTER OF THE DAY

Competence not, religion should determine our vote



Born in the hills of Kabindi Village, Nyamiyaga Ward, Bubaare Town Council, Rubanda District, I grew up in a household where Church and community life were deeply intertwined. My mother, now 82, served in several leadership roles within our Catholic parish for many years.

During my childhood, I watched her actively participate in campaign teams for politicians who, in most cases, were also Catholics. Like many families in our village, we quietly accepted the notion that Catholics should support Catholics, Anglicans support Anglicans. This idea went largely unquestioned—until recent events forced me to reflect.

A few months ago, my mother suffered a severe accident that left her with a dislocated hip. The nearest facility, Bubaare Health Centre III, could not manage the complexity of her injury, so we rushed her to Kabale for emergency treatment.

Anyone who has faced medical emergencies in rural Uganda knows the challenges: ambulances are scarce, and hospitals often require upfront payments before treatment. In our case, we needed about Shs3 million immediately. It was a sobering moment. I asked myself: how many ordinary Catholics, Anglicans, or Muslims in our villages could raise such an amount in an emergency?

At the hospital, no one asked about our religion. What mattered was urgency and access to care. My mother received treatment at Rugarama Hospital, founded by the Anglican Church. In that moment, religion did not determine who received care—humanity did.

This reminded me of another incident. In 2024, a relative applied for a job at a district office where most political leaders are Catholic. She was informally asked to pay Shs4 million to secure the position. We declined. Later, during the interview, the panel asked only basic questions drawn from her national ID, and she did not get the job.

Such experiences are far from unique. Many qualified people encounter similar hurdles but rarely speak openly about them.

I have also observed heated debates online, with some Catholics criticising fellow Catholics who do not vote along religious lines. Reports from Kabale and Rubanda describe instances where Anglican leaders were intimidated or pressured to step down for not endorsing candidates recommended on religious grounds. In some cases, dissenters are branded "useless Catholics" or "rebel Anglicans."

I have personally experienced backlash; I was removed from a WhatsApp group simply for questioning the notion that Catholics must always vote for Catholic politicians.

This raises a critical question: what does an ordinary citizen gain when political leadership is determined by religion?

In our daily lives, hardships are universal. When we apply for jobs, attend hospitals, send children to school, or navigate poor roads, challenges affect everyone—regardless of faith.

Yet during elections, religion becomes a divisive factor, even though post-election life and church activities continue unchanged.

Kigezi is a region where families are closely connected across religious lines. Catholics, Anglicans, Muslims, and Pentecostals are relatives, in-laws, business partners, and neighbours. Our shared challenges—unemployment, high living costs, struggling businesses, and access to healthcare—affect all of us.

Perhaps our energy should focus on empowering communities rather than dividing them along religious lines during elections. When citizens are economically empowered, they support churches and community initiatives with dignity and contribute to development not because of political pressure but because they have the capacity to do so.

As we move forward, the conversation in our region should shift from religious identity to leadership competence, integrity, and commitment to public service.

Faith should guide our values, but our votes should shape the future of our communities.

If we prioritise competence and accountability, everyone—regardless of religion—stands to benefit. That is the kind of politics our communities deserve.

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