FAITH AND GOVERNANCE: A RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper explores the multifaceted interactions between religion, Governance and politics in contemporary contexts, drawing on recent scholarship to examine the nuanced ways in which religion influences political ideologies, governance structures, and peace building efforts. By analyzing historical perspectives on church-state relations, the influence of religious beliefs on political ideologies and policies, the role of religious leaders as political actors, and debates surrounding secularism and theocracy, this study provides insights into the complexities of navigating the nexus between faith and political stability. This paper demonstrates both the potential and challenges associated with incorporating religious perspectives into broader peace building frameworks. Ultimately, by recognizing the diverse approaches to religion and politics and their implications for governance and society, policymakers and practitioners can leverage religious resources to address the issues of political Africa, Nigeria in perspective. The intricate relationship between faith and governance has been a subject of interest for scholars, policymakers, and the general public alike. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, understanding the dynamics between religious beliefs and political systems is crucial for fostering global cooperation and stability. Religion can promote good governance judging from its rich moral and ethical values, which are enshrined in virtually all religions of the world.

Keywords: Governance, Peace, Peace building, Politics, Religion

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Introduction

The intersection of religion and politics has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry and societal debate, influencing governance structures and dynamics worldwide. Recent research has increasingly focused on understanding how religion shapes political processes and governance, highlighting its impact on individual attitudes, societal norms, and policy decisions. This paper explores the multifaceted interactions between religion, Governance and politics in contemporary contexts, drawing on recent scholarship to examine the nuanced ways in which religion influences political ideologies, governance structures, and peace building efforts. By analyzing historical perspectives on church-state relations, the influence of religious beliefs on political ideologies and policies, the role of religious leaders as political actors, and debates surrounding secularism and theocracy, this study provides insights into the complexities of navigating the nexus between faith and political stability (Nantale, 2024)

This paper demonstrates both the potential and challenges associated with incorporating religious perspectives into broader peace building frameworks. Ultimately, by recognizing the diverse approaches to religion and politics and their implications for governance and society, policymakers and practitioners can leverage religious resources to address the issues of political Africa, Nigeria in perspective. As political controversies continue to spike, the intersection of religion and politics stands at the forefront of political disagreements. Isidoro Talavera (2024) The intricate relationship between faith and governance has been a subject of interest for scholars, policymakers, and the general public alike. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, understanding the dynamics between religious beliefs and political systems is crucial for fostering global cooperation and stability.

Religion can promote good governance judging from its rich moral and ethical values, which are enshrined in virtually all religions of the world. For example, in developed democracies, religion played a significant role in entrenching their current democratic ethos of good governance. However, in Nigeria, the importance of religion in entrenching good governance is often undermined during national discourse. Therefore, using a discursive approach in analyzing data gathered through literature review and personal observation, the paper examined the nexus between religious values and good governance in Nigeria's democratic landscape. The paper argued that religious values such as godliness and contentment, trust, selfless service, respect for human dignity, and hard work deep-rooted in the Christian Scripture and the islamic Quran can facilitate good governance in Nigeria if adequately applied. In this light, the study recommends that such religious values should be taught at various levels of the Nigerian education system as a way of promoting good governance in Nigeria. John Clerk Koko, and Asukwo Edet Oko, (2024)

In Nigeria, religious communities have suffered historically from a lack of accountability from the government. In the northwest, violent insurgent groups attack Christian communities, and

persecute Muslims as well. Due to Nigeria's size, population, and underdeveloped infrastructure, full and accurate data on these attacks and the religious communities they target are difficult to obtain. The information we do have, however, paints a disturbing picture. In 2022 in Plateau State, spiraling tensions between faith communities resulted in an attack on a convoy of Muslims, with deaths resulting on both sides. Armed bandits killed a Muslim Hausa woman and her children earlier that year. In 2024 in Zamfara State, bandits killed at least 49 people, many of them Muslims.

In the discourse of religion/politics dichotomy in Nigeria, arguments have gradually shifted from the emphasis on the sustenance of religion/politics dichotomy to the perspective of incorporating religion in politics and looking for ways religion can be harnessed by politics on one hand and how religion can enhance politics in Nigeria on the other hand. In other words, the paper intends to promote the denunciation of the negative and fixated perception that the interface of religion and politics will result in the desecration of religion. Thus, the paper will examine the interface between religion and politics, the role of religion in addressing national issues and the extent to which the interface between religion and politics has contributed towards making Nigeria a united and an organic society.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Religious Faith and Politics
A person's religious beliefs inform his or her worldview. This, in turn, affects how one acts in the world. It follows that a nation's prevailing religious belief system affects its politics. This is true not only in countries that are openly theocratic in nature, but even in those that attempt to maintain the separation between the church or religion and the state. Understanding how religion impacts the politics and governance of a society is essential to understanding how that society functions. There is a strong relationship between religion and politics in Africa, Nigeria in particular. For politicians trying to win elections in a nation with religious tolerance and religious pluralism, striking the appropriate balance between meeting the needs of one religious group without alienating another can be a delicate balancing act. Not every nation is so tolerant of religious pluralism, however, and there is often no separation between religion and government. Wienclaw, Ruth A. (2021) In an example of the influence of religion on politics and government in an Islamic nation, Casey (2008) analyzed the politics and perceptual bounds of Islamic authenticity in northern Nigeria.

Shariah law has served as the criminal law system for twelve Nigerian states since 1999. This change was implemented after a concerted appeal from the Shariah Implementation Committee to encourage Muslims from all sectors of society to institute Shariah as the criminal law for all Muslims in these states in order to effect desired political and economic changes. The change was encouraged in order to better comply with the religious principles of Islam and in opposition to the colonialism, elitism, and corruption of politicians and both the state and federal levels. Adoption of shariah as the state

criminal law did more than prescribe issues of enforcement and punishment, however. It also reframed what constituted a crime.

The colonial definitions of crime were replaced by those of Islam, and identity in these states was redefined in terms of ethnic and regional Islamic forms including dress and comportment (Casey, 2008). Religious beliefs inform one's worldview which, in turn, affects how one acts in the world. It is no surprise, therefore, that the prevailing religious belief system in a nation affects its politics. This is true not only in countries that are openly theocratic in nature, but even in those that attempt to maintain the separation between the church or religion and the state. Understanding how religion impacts the politics and governance of a society is essential to understanding how that society functions.

Impact of Religion in Politics and Nation Building

Nigeria as a secular state and in her 55 years of nationhood, is the most populated black nation in the world. She has to her credit a written Constitution being operated for the effective democratic governance of her population, comprising peoples of different religious freedom and cultural backgrounds. In Nigeria, Christianity, Islam and traditional religions are most widely practised. Religion is a faith-based process that is capable of impacting on governance and the behavioural attitudes of every believer. The concepts of religion and politics have a universal appeal. While religion carries more of a relative meaning to different people,

politics enjoys more consensus in its definition.

Thus, the definitions of religion are as numerous as those who try to define it. Harris and Judith (1968) see religion as a system of thought, feelings and action that is shared by a group and that gives the members of that group an object of devotion, code of behavior by which an individual may judge the personal kind, social consequence of his action, frame of reference by which an individual may relate himself to his group and his universe". Religion according to James (1958) can be described as the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude; so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine." "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." Religion is "the self-validation of a society by means of myth and ritual." (Durkeim, 1912).

Indeed, the array of definitions of religion is inexhaustible but to tie up all the definitions, religion is believed to be the totality of personal thoughts, feelings and beliefs of the individual, operating within a group of people with similar thoughts, feelings and belief with whom the individual relates, interacts and communes with a supernatural or divine being. The concept of religion also carries the element of persuasion and motivation in its practice. It should also be noted that the major elements of religion such as thoughts, feelings and beliefs of the individual or group are reified in the form

of Rituals, Doctrine, Ethics, Social dimension and Experiential dimensions. Generally, religiosity is based on experiences, ideas, beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and spirituality, relating to mental, social, and dogmatic rituals. Religiosity encompasses an individual's religious practices, beliefs, teachings, and frequency of participation in spiritual practices (Holdcroft, 2006). Thus, religiosity to a great extent is the reification and objectification of the phenomenon of religion.

The concept of politics is a generic one. The word politics is a derivative of the Greek word 'polis' which means City-State. To the Greeks, the 'polis' was the most meaningful community that is larger than the family level. The definitions of politics are so diverse and numerous but meaningful. At the forefront of scholars who tried to define politics are David Easton and Harold Laswell. Easton provided the discipline's most widely used definition of politics as the authoritative allocation of values for the society. He was renowned for his application of systems theory to the study of political science. Policy analysts have utilized his five-fold scheme for studying the policy-making process: input, conversion, output, feedback and environment. Easton's emphasis is on the entire political system. That is he is interested in the activities within and around the institutions of government. Religion and politics are two separate but undoubtedly interdependent and integrally related phenomena. Interestingly, religion has over the years continued to interface and play a critical role in the politics of Nigeria. Consequently, it has become increasingly difficult to ascertain whether religion is a

unifier or a disintegrating factor in a religiously pluralized society like Nigeria. No doubt, the critical role accorded religion in Nigeria's politics is a factor of the fact that religion is considered an influential agent of political socialization.

However, there are two contending schools of thoughts with regard to the relationship between religion and politics; while one school of thought advocates a religion/politics dichotomy, the other is of the view that there should be an interface and a convergence of religion and politics. Those who argue in favour of religion/politics dichotomy argue that both phenomena belong to different realms of existence – sacred and profane. Those in this group are mostly Christians. In the opinion of J.K Balogun in Laguda (2008), Islam does not discriminate between religious and secular matters. On the contrary, Christians always base their argument on the statement of Jesus Christ that "Give unto Caesar what is Caesar and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:17-22). This phrase has often been used to exclude clergymen, who want to venture into politics. Matthew Hassan Kukah however, disagrees with this school of thought, with an exegesis on this passage. He writes: *What Jesus really meant was not that religion and politics do not mix, nor did He mean that Christians should not participate in politics… The coin was a representation of the power of Caesar and that was why the coin had Caesar's sign…In the case of God, His authority is over and above the realm of Caesar'sEmpire. In that sense both Caesar and his coin are under the aegis of God and the issue of separation is an aberration (Kukah 1998).*

In spite of Kukah's clarification, the advocacy for religion/politics dichotomy remains a contentious issue.. Contentious in the sense that the Nigerian society is religiously pluralized and polarized and this significantly influences decisions and policies of government. However, those who canvass the religion/politics dichotomy view argue essentially from the position that religion mixed with politics is most likely to imbibe various vices associated with politics. Also that politics may not be properly and dispassionately played if mixed with religion considering the moral precepts of religion (Laguda, 2008).

There is however another school of thought which advocates that religion/politics dichotomy is unachievable and has called for the continued interaction and interface of religion and politics. The protagonists of this school have argued that the two institutions could relate effectively; even in a pluralistic religious society like Nigeria. They further argue that politicians, in their quest for political power and the use of such power, are manifestly guided by the ethics and doctrines of their religions. Despite the secular nature of Nigeria, it has been observed that public policies are often guided by religion and religious beliefs. For example, every year, the Federal Government declares a minimum of eleven days as religious holidays. Similarly, political parties, while jostling for power, often picked their governorship and presidential candidates vis-a-vis their running mates, for elections, based on religious considerations. This is to the extent that where a Christian is the candidate the running mate is most likely to be a Muslim and vice-versa. Therefore, it becomes unarguable that the distinction often proclaimed between religion and politics is a mirage as the two institutions in Nigeria seem inseparable (Laguda, 2008).

Taking examples from contemporary societies, it has become increasingly difficult to separate religion from politics.of modern societies. For example, the Church has been enmeshed in politics from time immemorial; from the Roman Empire, to the MedievalEra and to the present day. In the New Testament, the word "ekklesia", which is used to refer to the Church, actually means a political assembly, a political association, a gathering. Thus, there has never been a clear cut separation of the State from the Church, or the separation of secular power and religious power, In 1534, King Henry VIII of England established the Church of England, away from the Catholic Church, following disagreements with Pope Clement VII on the scope of papal authority over marital choices. And it is interesting to note that The Anglican Church has continued to play a dominant role in British politics till date. In Nigeria, regardless of the express provision of the 1999 Constitution that there shall be no state religion (Section 10 of the 1999 Constitution as amended), the government has continued to turn religion into a special centre of engagement. Worship centres by different religious groups and faiths have become a cynosure in many Government Houses in the states and the State House in Abuja. For example, there is usually a Mosque and a Church, and power shifts between both locations depending on the religion of the main leader in charge, who

accordingly appoints Special Advisers and Assistants on Religious matters (Abati, 2022).

Religiosity and Religion Dialecticism in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-religious society comprising several religious traditions but the major ones are Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. The first two are missionary religions and as such are bound to struggle for spheres of influence with mutual suspicion, rivalry and the eventual snowballing into the different inter-religious crises we have had over the past four decades in the Nigerian society. Religion plays a dual role in every society and it serves as a unifying factor as well as a destabilizing factor of any nation. Thus, within Nigeria's political space, religion has overtime been deployed by the political elites to subvert the will of the governed and the political process in order to acquire power. At some other time, religion has served as an instrument of virtue and a vehicle for national integration and nation building. To this extent, religion is believed to be a double edged sword.

This segment therefore will be discussing Pluralism in all its ramifications as primordial. It is not limited to Nigeria as a political society of men and women who have come to live as a composite in keeping with their true nature as social beings. Man is not only a social being, he is also a political and religious being. That is why men and women put in governmental structures to regulate their activities within the society. And man knowing fully well that he is not the author of his life forms ideas and beliefs about a Supersensible Being responsible for his being, an unmoved Mover, the Ultimate Reality and the like. The awareness of this Ultimate Reality made man form religious ideas and beliefs about Him, and each person has their own level of awareness situated within their own peculiar socio-political and cultural milieu. These different levels of awareness have led us to the paradox of the One and the Many; One God and many path ways to reach Him. This is the reality in the world today and indeed Nigeria.

Generally, it is believed that there exists an inverse relationship between religion and crime or vices; and findings indicate that religion decreases propensities for criminal behaviour. In other words, the more religious a society is, the less its tendency towards crime or vices (Adamczyk et al. 2018). However, various research findings have indicated the contrary. In Nigeria for example, adherents of various religious sects have been found to be involved in activities inimical to progress and social cohesion. The religious institutions of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria have served as major rallying points for various social and political groups with disparate and sometimes obscure agendas. In fact, the almost ubiquitous use of religious pretexts in Nigeria has at several periods been appropriated by 'non-conforming' groups to instigate violence (Olojo, 2016). This development no doubt has portrayed religion as an instrument of disintegration.

Most importantly, religion (including Christianity and Islam) preach peace and peaceful co-existence with the adherents of other religions. Jesus Christ for example is believed to be the Prince of

Peace and He imparted the need to leave in peace to His followers. The Sermon on the Mount (found in Matthew 5, 6 and 7) is one of the most detailed teachings of Jesus Christ recorded in the New Testament. In this vital sermon, Jesus Christ laid out the central facets of the way of life He taught His followers. One of the central themes of the Sermon on the Mount is Christ's expectation that His followers be characterized by peace—not violence or war. In the famous opening to this great sermon known as the Beatitudes, Jesus taught in Matthew 5:9; "Blessed [happy] are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Jones, 2014). Like Christianity, Islam (promotes peace, love and harmony among the people.). The word "Islam" in addition to meaning submission (to God) is derived from the Arabic word "Salam" (peace). The Muslims greet others by saying 'Salam'. The Quran says 4913) "O People, we created you from the same male and female, and gave you a distinct identity so that you may recognise one another. The best among you in the eyes of God is the 'righteous person.' Islam advocates freedom, peace and mutual agreement and admonishes.

Interactionism in Religion Practice in Nigeria

Interactionism is social behaviour that relates an individual's action to possible cost-reward implications. According to the Free Dictionary (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/interactionism), it is a theoretical perspective that derives social processes (such as conflict, cooperation, identity formation) from human interaction. It is the study of how individuals act within society. It is,

therefore, understandable that in a secular state like Nigeria it is not unusual for people of different religious backgrounds to relate to one another wherever it will be more rewarding to them than living in isolation. Blau (1969) describes reward to mean a positive reinforcement in any form that gratifies a person's needs. For example, religion is faith-based reward that satisfies an individual's mode of worship, freedom of association and room for interaction with others, thereby satisfying some of the human needs. Coser and Rosenberg (1969) trace the origin of interactionism to the work of simmel, malinowski, homans and blau. They also observe that by Malinowski's conviction, basic obligations and rights must be understood in terms of reciprocal obligations which the members of society have towards each other. As people worship in groups they interact with one another and conform to common doctrine this in turn leads to Political ideology.

The Nigerian Constitution pre-supposes that an individual has freedom to practise religion of his or her choice without government interference. This is where secularism comes into play. Secularism is a legal position in the supreme law of Nigeria, stating that religious belief should not influence any public and/ or governmental decisions. In other words, secularism is a documented position in a Constitution relating to political belief in the separation of religion and state. While people are allowed to practise whatever they believe in as their religion, the government must not allow that to influence public policy. Religion is the service and worship of God or gods. The word 'religion', which was first used in the 13th century, is Latin in its origin. From a sociologist perspective, the

society creates religion as an instrument in moulding, controlling and directing societal thinking and behaviour (Durkheim 1915, 207-211). Durkheim's theory of religion further sees God as a personification of the society, where all the laws and commandments of God are demanded from all members of the society for societal self-preservation. By this concept, a country ought to adopt a state religion to be in a position to demand good religious conduct from all members of her society.

As Maykovich (1980) explains, interaction theory assumes an interpretative approach where the individual interprets the situation and thus determines his or her behaviour accordingly. Such behaviour does not appear to be a product of adherence to normative orientation to macro social structure (functionalism), he argues. Secularism in the Constitution could have been borne out of previous experiences encountered for either non-inclusion, or viewed from the population's diversity in beliefs, culture and societal self-preservation. It could also have been included in the Constitution in fulfilment of human needs which generally arise out of the existence of concrete histories of each society, and to help colonial power subdue the people through religious conversion. Danbatta (1956) was alarmed by the inclusion of religion as a non-governmental affair. He says: 'By writing a clause about religious freedom in our Constitution, we are causing the elimination of that freedom, inviting unrest.' Events that followed thereafter in the 55 years of Nigerian independence tend to confirm this alarm.

Methodology

The research adopted the quantitative and the qualitative approach. The basic difference between the two is as regards the location of meaning and the manner in which inferences are drawn. The former emphasises a fixed meaning that is on the surface i.e. easily observable and measurable. It can be repeatedly identifiable by different researchers using the same analytical framework. The latter searches for multiple meanings, usually found beneath the surface meaning they can drive it or even contradict it. Moreover, this approach focuses as much on source and reception analysis as it does on message analysis. Therefore, the qualitative approach does not lend itself to easy replication. In practice we find both approaches being used. Through quantitative techniques we establish the frequency of occurrence or the comparative location of different categories of content and through qualitative techniques we understand the meaning of its message.

Deficiencies of Religion on Governance
Many reasons have been advanced as deficiencies of religious impacts on national development, among these are the following.
1. Religious intolerance: - This is a menace that is leached out through emotion, hatred, and bitterness for the tenet of other religious groups which can definitely lead to tension. This often manifests in anger, bitterness and hatred. Religious intolerance involves acts denying the right of people of another religious faith to practice and express their beliefs freely. Religious intolerance is expressed in discrimination, repression and religious rivalry, and results in or results from persecution. It leads to war

and persistent hatred between nations and between peoples within nations.

"Peaceful dialogue and coexistence are increasingly hindered around the globe by intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief. Religious differences have been weaponized and manipulated for political gain, feeding off the dangerous claim that one group is superior to another. Social media platforms continue to be vehicles for the spread of hateful messages, with unparalleled speed and reach, nourishing the echo chambers of ignorance and incitement to hatred against religious or belief minorities, with harmful repercussions both online and offline."
Report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, A/HRC/55/74

2. Religious fanatism: - Adherent zealously protect, defend and/or promote the interest of their group. They assume the responsibility of protecting their faith, Warren W. Wiersbe in trying to explain characteristics of a fanatic says "They had to examine every teacher and teaching that appeared in the land. They scorn other religious groups and attempt to legally trap them." Fanaticism can trigger aggression capable of destroying lives and properties.

3. Socio-Economic frustration: - This is a wide range factor that is real with the developing world, Nigeria inclusive. It has to do with poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, broken homes/bad parenting, failure, negative influence, myopic world view etc. These factors are capable of resulting in frustration and psychologically it can result in aggression. The victim of any of this upheaval. A proverb says "empty mind is the workshop of the devil" an idle hand can be engaged by miscreants who are always out manipulating others for their selfish purpose. Except the society/ nation is healed of these devastating diseases, religious upheaval will continue to prevail. The elites use religious sentiments to spur this class of people to crisis because they know and are very calculative on Marx's observation that religion is the opium of the masses where man once again loses himself. We found out that social frustration significantly reduces family-household activity of young people and increases their protest, radical protest and subcultural activity.

4. Leadership Quality of Religious Leaders: - Religious Leaders incite their followers directly or indirectly against other religious groups. This is common when they teach or hold public talks. There is really one test for leaders: do they have the character and integrity to do the right thing, for the right reason, at the right time. Some religious leaders for selfish reasons engineer pandemonium so that they can take advantage. Some are so careless about the sensitivity of their leadership role and irrationally act or react to issues; the result is better being imagined on insecurity that ensues.

Conclusion

The relationship between the adherents of Christianity and Islam has been characterized with animosity, palpable tension, in most cases degenerating into violent conflicts. No doubt, religion has been used and it is still being used to induce violence, to create conflict situations and threaten the security of the nation and its citizens. Policies such as the federal character which was introduced to inject fairness and equity in appointments in Nigeria's public service

has ironically become a source of divisions and conflicts among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, the role of religion in nation building as far as Nigeria's politics is concerned cannot be undermined. Over time, the two major religious groups have taken several steps in the past to promote peace and peaceful co-existence among their members. We recommend that Religious Leaders should keep preaching peace for the political and economic development of Nigeria.

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