NATION BUILDING AND THE DIALECTICS OF RELIGION AND RELIGIOSITY IN NIGERIA'S POLITICS

Clement Odiri Obagbinoko PhD
Department of Political Science and Public Administration
University of Delta, Agbor
Email: klement1306@gmail.com

Abstract
This paper interrogates the interface between politics and religion and the extent to which religion and religiosity has been deployed in Nigeria's politics to engender societal cohesion within the Nigerian polity. There has been popular advocacy for the deployment of religion in Nigeria's politics towards an organic society and for the purpose of strengthening national unity. Religion and politics are concepts that designate two different and interdependent subsystems of society. Although the concepts are separate analytically, the relationship between religion and politics is characterized by interdependence. Considering the critical role religion play in Nigeria's politics, the paper therefore gauges the efficacy and effectiveness of religion as a formidable unifier and dependable vehicle towards national unity. In doing this, the paper acknowledges the existence of an age-long controversy which obtains in the relationship between religion and politics. This controversy derives from two perspectives: 1. That religion in politics may get religion desecrated or contaminated and 2. That religion in politics may not serve as a debilitating factor to politics in Nigeria but rather would serve as a purifier of our very depraved politics.

Key Words: Nation-building; religion; religiosity; politics; and dialectics

Introduction

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.

Religiosity as a concept, has proven a bit more difficult to define than Religion. Nevertheless, different scholars have seen the concept of religiosity as broadly about religious orientations and degrees of involvement or commitment in religious affairs; a state of affected or excessive religiousness (Oxford English Dictionary). In Sociology, the term Religiosity is used to describe the quality of an individual's religious beliefs and experiences and the role that religion plays in society. It has been likened to spirituality, orthodoxy, piousness, and religious devotion. The term Religiosity typically describes how one participates in religious practices or customs. 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. (Idahosa and Idisi, 2005; Gunnell, 2013). Laswell on his part, described politics as *Who Gets What, When, How* (https://www.britannica.com). Harold Laswell's work not only served as the standard lay definition of politics but also viewed the elite as the primary holders of power. It is instructive to note that the whole idea of politics revolves round the concepts of power, authority and influence. Robert Dahl contends that politics refers to any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves to a significant extent, control, influence, power and authority (Idahosa and Idisi, 2005). J. W Iyoho sees politics as an enterprise which pertains to how power is shared between the various organs of government within a state and the relationship between those that govern and those that are governed. From the array of definitions above, it is logical to say that the hallmark of politics is the acquisition and exercise of power; the acquisition and allocation/distribution of the scarce resources of the State. How do the resources come about? How are they shared? Where do the resources go? Who shares the resources? What criteria are employed and under what circumstances are the criteria altered? (Ola, 2010).

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 school 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 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's Empire. In that sense both Caesar and his coin are under the aegis of God and the issue of separation is an aberration (Kukah 1998)

Inspite 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 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 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 seems 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 Medieval Era 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 have 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).

In the discourse of religion/politics dichotomy, 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.

Religiosity and Religion Dialecticism in Nigeria

Religion plays a dual role in every society. Religion 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 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

the dialectics of religion and religiosity; i.e. the combining effects of religion and religiosity; the negative impact of religion and religiosity on Nigeria's body politic.

Religiosity occurs mainly through the process of internalization of religious beliefs. In other words, religiosity is the outward manifestations of internalized religious beliefs. Religiosity is the noticeable evidence of imbibed religious beliefs and norms; a process known as religious socialization. According to Taggart et al (2018), religious socialization is the process through which an individual learns and internalizes religious beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors. This process occurs through interactions with socializing agents, including parents, religious organizations, and peers. They carried out a study to determine the nature of the associations between religious socialization, religiosity, and adolescent sexual initiation and results indicated that as black adolescents received more messages about religious beliefs and practices, their religiosity was greater and, in turn, they were less likely to report sexual initiation. Thus, constant exposure to religious beliefs and precepts has the propensity to influence the behaviour and behavioural pattern of the person so exposed. Also, it has been found that the influence of religiosity on adolescent sexual health behaviours are inconsistent, indicating that religiosity may protect against, or be a risk factor for, unsafe sexual practices (Taggart et al, 2018). Therefore, the phenomenon of religiosity can impact negatively or positively on the society.

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.

It is generally believed that all religions (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 'mightious person.'" Islam advocates freedom, peace and mutual agreement and admonishes aggression. (Quran 567).... And do not aggress; God dislikes the aggressors. (Quran 7 199) you shall resort to pardon, advocate tolerance, and disregard the ignorant. The relations of Muslims with others are based primarily on peace, mutual respect and trust. The theme in the Quran is peace as long as there is no oppression or injustice that cannot be resolved by peaceful means (https://www.dawn.com).

However, despite their avowal dispositions to 'peace', Christianity and Islam have been implicated in various forms of religious conflict or violence. The utterances and appearances of the leaders and adherents of the various religious groups in Nigeria like in other notable countries of the world have proved to be antithetical to the precepts of their religions. Christianity which is believed to be the largest religion in the world has over 2.18 billion people representing over 32.5 percent of the world's population. Statistics have shown that 95.7 percent of the population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are Christians; 95 percent of Mexican population are Christians; 93.1 percent of the population of the Philippines are Christians; 90.2 percent of the population of Brazil are Christians while 79.5 percent of the population of the United States are Christians. However, despite the high percentages of

professing Christians in these nations, they still record high rates of violence and conflicts (Jones, 2014).

Similarly, we might also ask to what extent can we say that the religion of Islam advocates and practices peace? Does being a religion of peace imply that Islam advocates pacifism? Some scholars have viewed the concept of Jihad in Islam which stands for physical fighting for the spread of Islam as a recipe for violence. To this extent, the concept of Jihad portrays Islam as a religion of violence. Although, there are over a billion Muslims in the world but the great majority of them are considered peaceful and moderate practitioners of mainstream Islam. However, it has been argued that Muslims who have succumbed to violence are motivated by politics, not religion. Nevertheless, it is believed that no monotheistic religion is a religion of peace; they experience lengthy periods of peace, but they also know lengthy periods of war. The militaristic history of Islam is well documented. In 21st Century Islam, there are more occurrences of violence and war and subjection of women than there are in other religions (https://www.intelligencesquaredus.org).

Flowing from the above, it is clear that although many religions (including the two major religions in Nigeria), advocate peace for nation building, the precepts of peace has not been adequately objectified and mobilized for national cohesion. To effectively facilitate the enterprise of nation building, every religion should pursue peace, cultivate and exhibit the tenets of egalitarianism and strive to eschew and fight against all forms of societal vices.

Religion, Religiosity, Politics and Nation Building in Nigeria

In Nigeria, like in many other countries, there has always been a point of convergence between religion and politics; the State and religion have interfaced and co-existed. For example, the Church has been enmeshed in politics from time immemorial; from the Roman Empire, to the Medieval Era 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. The separation of the State and the Church, or the separation of secular and religious power, has not always been so clear-cut. During the Crusades (circa 1095 – 1291), Christians fought wars to acquire or regain territory. The Holy Book itself is full of this intersection between the Church, power struggles and secular politics. The clergy are not just spiritual leaders, they fight political battles worse than what is found in the secular community. The argument that the state and religion should be separated is

largely theoretical. 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. The Anglican Church continues to play a dominant role in British politics (Abati, 2022).

Like Christianity, Islam has also been enmeshed in politics. For example, starting from the late medieval period, Sunni fiqh elaborated the doctrine of *siyasa shar'iyya*, which literally means governance according to sharia, and this is sometimes called the political dimension of Islamic law. Its goal was to harmonize Islamic law with the practical demands of statecraft. The doctrine emphasized the religious purpose of political authority and advocated non-formalist application of Islamic law if required by expedience and utilitarian considerations. It first emerged in response to the difficulties raised by the strict procedural requirements of Islamic law (Bosworth, C.E., Netton, I.R. and Vogel, F.E., "Siyāsa, 2012).

In some countries around the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, there has been an increase in the advocacy for more involvement of the Islamic religion in the politics of those countries. Many across the predominantly Muslim countries surveyed want Islam to have a major influence in politics. Most in Pakistan, Jordan and Egypt believe their laws should strictly follow the Quran, while majorities or pluralities in Tunisia and Turkey say their laws should at least adhere to the values and principles of Islam. Views in Lebanon are divided along sectarian lines. Majorities in most countries also say Islam currently plays a large role in their nation's political life – and they mostly view this in a positive light. Tunisians are particularly likely to see Islam as a major, and constructive, influence in their country's government. The sentiment that religion is influential in politics has increased substantially in Egypt over the past year. Jordan is the only country in which a majority (63%) says Islam plays a small role in their politics, with most saying this lack of Islamic influence is a bad thing for their country (https://www.pewresearch.org).

In Nigeria, although the participation of religious groups in politics has intensified, Christianity and Islam have divergent views on politics. Nigeria recognises three major religions and they are: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional religion. Also, Nigeria recognises the citizen's right to freedom of worship and association as enshrined in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). Section 38 (1), (2) and (3) states as follows:

(1) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

(2) No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or religion not approved by his parent or guardian.

(3) No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination.

The provision of the 1999 constitution as above is indicative of the sensitive and critical nature of religion in national cohesion. However, despite the secular nature of Nigerian, religious groups still play critical role in Nigeria's contemporary politics. The roles are both positive and otherwise. As Okoh (2010) rightly observed, the major religious groups in Nigeria have a disintegrating effect on the society and also served as agents of re-integrating. Although the early European Christian missionaries did not take active part in politics but they created a conducive atmosphere for the colonialists to entrench their foothold in Nigeria and to exploit the resources of the country. According to Coleman in Okoh (2010), "the most persuasive factor of Christian missionaries was their silence on such subjects as discrimination, inequality, exploitation, denial of opportunity and all the other features characteristic of alien rule." However, indigenous churches such as the United Native African Church founded in 1891, the African Church (Inc) founded in 1901 and the National Church of Nigeria founded in1948 and many others combined religious activities and politics. For example the National Church of Nigeria with its base in Aba became the religious wing of the Zikist Movement (Okoh, 2010).

It is interesting to note that under Nigeria's contemporary politics, there has been a renaissance and upsurge of participation of various religious groups in politics. And to a very great extent, the participation of these religious groups, though appear critical, has in several ways contributed to national integration and the unity and progress of the Nigerian State. Among the various religious groups that have played and have continued to play critical roles in Nigeria's politics are the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Catholic Bishop Conference, the Islamic Movement of Nigeria

and other numerous Islamic groups operating under an umbrella body.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the umbrella body for all Christian denominations has at sundry times declared the Christian view on national issues. For example, The Christian Association of Nigeria stated Christians opposition to Nigeria's membership of the Islamic Conference Organisation (IOC) during the Babangida military regime; that missionary schools that had been taken over by government should be returned to their original missionary proprietors and owners so that ethical and moral values could be restored. CAN also expressed discontent over the annulment of the June 12 1993 election by the Babangida military regime. Only recently, as Nigeria begins preparations for the general elections in 2023 a heated and emotional controversy was stirred when it became public knowledge that the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) had set up the Directorate of Politics and Governance. Many raised an eyebrow. Why would the Church create a Department of Politics and Governance? (Okoh, 2010; Abati, 2022).

The Catholic Bishop Conference has been a vociferous voice in the political affairs of Nigeria; playing prominent and critical role in the politics of Nigeria. In the time past, the conference has deliberated and issued communiques on political events and public policy issues. Recently, the Catholic Bishop Conference met, deliberated and issued a communique on the 2023 general elections. Part of the communique reads as follows:

> *The 2023 General Elections are fast approaching. We commend the National Assembly and the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for enacting and signing into law the Electoral Bill 2022. We acknowledge the President's commitment to ensuring a level playing ground for all candidates in the elections. Furthermore, we commend the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for its innovations, especially in the area of technology, to ensure free, fair and credible elections. We, however, enjoin the Commission to ensure that this technology is transparently deployed, in order to increase the confidence of the people in the electoral process.*
>
> *Politics is a noble vocation. We, therefore, encourage all politicians to uphold the values of integrity and decency. We strongly condemn as unlawful and sinful all forms of vote*

> *selling and buying and advise all politicians and voters to refrain from doing so. While it is not our responsibility as religious leaders to dictate to political parties the choices of their presidential, vice presidential and other candidates, we have the duty to advise the citizenry to bear in mind the implications of these choices while electing the next set of leaders. We, therefore, renew our call on all our faithful, laity and clergy alike, to come out en masse to vote for people of unassailable integrity, who have the good character, capacity and track record to lead our nation out of the present socio-political and economic doldrums, irrespective of party, religious and ethnic affiliations. It is through the right political choices that our current situation can be ameliorated* (https://citybusinessnews.com).

The contributions and participation of various Islamic groups in politics has also been evident in Nigeria. For example, Boko Haram is an Islamic sect that believes politics in northern Nigeria has been seized by a group of corrupt, false Muslims. It wants to wage a war against them, and the Federal Republic of Nigeria generally, to create a "pure" Islamic state ruled by *sharia* law (Walker, 2012). The Islamic Movement of Nigeria is another religious organization whose involvement in politics in Nigeria has been very vociferous in its agitation for the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria. It was founded by Ibrahim Zakzaky, who was inspired by the Iranian Revolution and rejects the authority of the Nigerian Government (Okoli, 2019). Following agitations and protests that trailed the extra judicial murder of Deborah Samuel who was alleged to have blasphemed against Islam by some Muslim students in Sokoto, thirteen Muslim groups in the country have urged the Nigerian government and state governments to enact laws or strengthen existing laws against blasphemy and killing for blasphemy outside of the law. The Muslim groups include the Muslim Rights Concern; Al-Usrah Incorporated, Port Harcourt, Rivers State; the Islamic Forum; Movement for Islamic Culture and Awareness; Muslim Public Affairs Centre; The Academy; Muslim Students Society, Lagos State Area Unit; Ansar-ud-Deen Youth Association of Nigeria (ADYAN); and Lighthouse Mosque. Others are IRFAN Centre; Zakaat and Awqaaf Amana Foundation; Guild of Muslim Professionals and Muslim Vanguard. The groups under the aegis of the Muslim United for Peace made the demands during a meeting on Sunday in the Ikeja area of Lagos State, while condemning the brutal murder of Deborah Samuel (https://saharareporters.com).

Religious leaders and clerics, representing the two major religions of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria, have continued to play prominent roles toward building an egalitarian and a peaceful society in Nigeria under the instrumentality of the prestigious National Peace Committee (NPC). For example, we have Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah as the convener of the committee, the Sultan of Sokoto, HRH Sa'ad Abubakar, Archbishop Nicholas Okoh, and John Cardinal Onaiyekan as prominent members of the National Peace Committee. The committee is a non-governmental initiative conceptualised in 2014 in response to emerging threats occasioned by the 2015 general elections. Since then, it has emerged as one of the leading lights and credible organisations in Nigeria's democratic journey. It is an initiative made up of eminent elder statesmen who undertake efforts to support free, fair and credible elections as well as intervene in critical issues of national concern through high-level mediated and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. (https://leadership.ng).

In the process of religion interfacing with politics in Nigeria, successive governments in Nigeria, as a matter of policy often tinker with religion and religious activities. For example, government at various levels, in most cases depending on the religious orientation of the those at the helm of affairs, have cultivated the tradition of constructing a Mosque or a Church in every Government House in the states and the State House in Abuja. Special Advisers and Assistants on Religious matters are appointed; Christian leaders send members of their constituency on pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Muslim leaders do the same for members of their religious community. Despite assurances over the years that the state shall no longer fund religious trips, the Pilgrims Welfare Boards of Nigeria continue to exist at all levels. On the issue of public holidays, government has taken steps to adequately taken care of the interest of Christianity and Islam as work free days are observed during their festivals. (Abati, 2022; Umeanolue).

Nevertheless, if the interface between religion and politics is to make any meaningful impact, religious groups should go beyond the mere advocacy level and avowal of their views. Further steps should be taken by various religious organisations and groups in Nigeria to register faith based political parties. This is the case in many developed countries and in some African states, For example,we have The Christian Democratic Party (French: *Parti Démocrate Chrétien*) which is a political party in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The party won 8 out of 500 seats in the 2006 parliamentary elections. In the 19 January 2007 Senate elections, the party won 6

out of 108 seats. In Egypt we also have the "Christian Democratic Party", a Coptic party in Egypt founded in the 1950s (DRC News, 2015).

Similarly, there exist faith based political parties in many European countries. For example, there is The Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) which is a Christian democratic and liberal conservative political party in Germany founded in 1945 as an interdenominational Christian party . It is the major catch-all party of the centre-right in German politics. The CDU is the second largest party in the Bundestag, the German federal legislature, with 152 out of 736 seats, having won 18.9% of votes in the 2021 federal election (*Lappenküper, 2004). E*xamples of political parties founded by Christians in other parts of the world include the Dutch Christian Democratic Appeal, the Centre in Switzerland, the Spanish People's Party, the Mexican National Action Party, the Austrian People's Party, and the Christian Democratic Party of Chile (Steven and Emmanuel, 2004).

There are also faith based political parties representing the interest of Muslims in several countriies of the world. In Algeria, we have the Islamic Renaissance Movemen founded in 1990 and a moderate Islamist political party (Tachau, 1994). In Egypt, we have The al-Wasat Party a moderate Islamist political party founded by Abou Elela Mady in 1996 (*Cairo Post. 28 August 2014). From the foregoimg, it has become clear* that the domain of faith based political parties is dominated by the Christian and Muslim faithfuls. Other religions such as the African Traditional Religion are not represented. However, it is interesting to note that even former non-secular states such as Egypt allowed a Christian political party. .

Conclusion

So far we have been able to establish the fact that religion play a critical role in politics virtually in every society. The question however is: what is the nature of the role religion play in the politics of Nigeria? Is it a unifying role or a divisive role? Is it a complementary role or an adversarial role? Despite the critical role religion play in Nigeria's politics, it is intriguing that the followers of the two major religious groups in Nigeria still co-exist with fear, distrust and suspicion. 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 situation 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. The recent conflict that arose from the same faith tickets of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) is a case in point. With a Muslim as Nigeria's president for eight years, the Nigerian Christian community is of the opinion that having another Muslim president and a Muslim vice president will engender existential crisis, and the Church in Nigeria appears resolved to get into the arena of politics. The Church has thus been drawn into the politics of zoning and rotation (Abati, 2022).

Nevertheless, the **role** of religion **in** nation building as far as Nigeria's politics is concerned **can**not be undermined. Over time, the two major religions groups have taken several steps in the past to promote peace and peaceful co-existence among their members. Recently, no fewer than 30 Pastors in Kaduna joined the Muslim faithfuls in the celebration of the 2022 Maulud, which signifies the Birth of Prophet Muhammad. The pastors who were led by the General Overseer of Christ Evangelical and Life Intervention Ministry, Kaduna, Pastor Yohana Buru, noted that the Maulud celebration provided the golden opportunity for both faiths (Muslim and Christian) to meet, interact, dialogue and exchange goodwill messages (The Punch, 2022).

For religion to continue to play a unifying role in the body politic of Nigeria, the secular nature of the Nigerian state as enshrined in the 1999 constitution should be given recognition by government to guarantee citizens freedom of association and thought. This will largely create the enabling social environment for the much desired politics of inclusion in Nigeria. The monotheistic religion system which appears to see Islam and Christianity enjoy special government protection and attention above all other religions such as the African Traditional Religion should be addressed within established legal framework.

It has been mentioned already above of the need for the various religious sects and groups to create a more formidable identity for themselves and articulate their interests more profoundly by forming faith based political parties.

Above all, a peaceful cohabitation of the adherents of different religions demands proper education concerning the religious beliefs of the other. Proper education and reorientation of the adherents of the various religious groups in Nigeria would promote unity, cooperation and reduce tensions, intolerance, violence,

fundamentalism and religious 'lunacy' among members of the various religious groups in Nigeria.

References

"religiosity". *Oxford English Dictionary (Online ed.). Oxford University Press*.

'Understanding Religiosity', Retrieved on October 4, 2022 from https://study.com/academy/lesson/religiosity-definition-measures-quiz.html

Abati, R (2022) Politics and the church in Nigeria; *Premium Times*, March 15, 2022

Adamczyk, A; Freilich, J. D and Kim, C (2017). Religion and Crime: A Systematic Review and Assessment of Next Steps *Sociology of Religion*, Volume 78, Issue 2, Summer 2017, Pages 192–232, https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srx012

Albanese, C. L (1999) America, Religions, and Religion; retrieved on 16 October, 2022 from https://books.google.com.ng

Andrew Walker What Is Boko Haram? (2012) UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE; SPECIAL REPORT accessed @ www.usip.org

Bosworth, C.E., Netton, I.R. and Vogel, F.E., "Siyāsa", in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 10 October 2022 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1096>

Democratic Republic of Congo - News; JASTOR (January, 2015

Durkheim, E (1912) The Elementary Forms of Religious Life; retrieved on 16 October, 2022 from https://www.amazon.com

First published online: 2012. First print edition: ISBN: 9789004161214, 1960-2007

Gunnell, J. G "The Reconstitution of Political Theory: David Easton, Behavioralism, and the Long Road to System," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* (2013) 49#2 pp 190–210.

Harris, W.H. & Judith, S.J. (1968) New Columbia Encyclopedia:

Holdcroft, B. B (2006) What Is Religiosity? September 2006; https//www.researchgate.net

DOI:10.15365/joce.1001082013, *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*

https://www.britannica.com/biography/Harold-Lasswell

Idahosa, S. A and Idisi, C (2005). The Concepts and Nature of Politics; in Augustine Ikelegbe (Ed) Introduction to Politics, Lagos, Imprint Services

Is Islam a religion of peace? *Christian Concern*; 7 November 2018; access @ https://christianconcern.com

Islam Is A Religion of Peace; October 6, 2010; accessed @ https://www.intelligencesquaredus.org

Islam preaches peace, not violence; *DAWN;* Retrieved from https://www.dawn.com

Justice For Deborah: Muslim Groups Ask Nigerian Government To Pass Laws Criminalising Blasphemy, Jungle Justice https://saharareporters.com

Kaduna: Christians, Muslims celebrate birth of Prophet Muhammad; The Punch, 8th October, 2022

Kukah, M. H (1998) "Religion and Civil Society", in Dukor, *Philosophy and Politics: Discourse on Values and Power in Africa* Lagos: Obaroh and Ogbiriaka Publishers, 1998, p. 16.

Laguda, D. O (2008) 'Religion and Politics in A Pluralistic Society: The Nigerian Experience'; retrieved on 16 October, 2022 from https://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com; DOI: https://doi.org/10.54561/prj0202123l

Lappenküper, U (2004). Michael Gehler; Wolfram Kaiser (eds.). Between Concentration Movement and People's Party: The Christian Democratic Union in Germany. Christian Democracy in Europe Since 1945. Vol. 2. Routledge*. pp. 21–32*

Okoh, A. O. (2010). Religious Cleavages, Inequalities, Unitarism Vs Federalism in R. F. Ola and J. E. Imhanlahimi (Eds) Nigerian Political System: Trends and Perspectives;Binin-City, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Benin, Benin-City, Nigeria.

Okoli, Al Chukwuma (5 January 2019). "ODR: An Islamic Jurisprudence Perspective". *Conflict Studies Quarterly (26): 53–67. doi:10.24193/csq.26.4. ISSN 2285-7605*..

Ola, R. F (2010). The Nature and Scope of Political Science in R. F. Ola and J. E. Imhanlahimi (Ed) Nigerian Political System: Trends and Perspectives;Binin-City, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Benin, Benin-City, Nigeria.

Olojo, A. E. (2016). 'Muslims, Christians and religious Violence in Nigeria: Patterns and mapping (2006-2014)' Leiden, Ibadan, IFRA-Nigeria, African Studies Centre; DOI : 10.4000/books.ifra.1705; Retrieved from https://books.openedition.org

Otedola, Yayale Ahmed, Agwai, Momoh, Hassan Join National Peace Committee; *Leadership* 24 September, 2022 retrieved from https://leadership.ng on 16 October, 2022

POLITICS AND THE GENERAL ELECTIONS 2023 Catholic Bishops' Conference Communiqué Posted on September 16, 2022 by https://citybusinessnews.com

Politics: Who Gets What, When, How; Accessed @ https://www.britannica.com

Role of Islam in Politics accessed @ https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2012/07/10/chapter-3-role-of-islam-in-politics/

Taggart, T., Gottfredson, N., Powell, W. *et al.* The Role of Religious Socialization and Religiosity in African American and Caribbean Black Adolescents' Sexual Initiation. *J Relig Health* **57**, 1889–1904 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0605-3

Umeanolue, I. L. RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES ON POLITICS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT; http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/og.v15i1.9s

James, W (1958). The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature New American Library, 1958 Retrieved on 16 October, 2022 from https://books.google.com.ng

Steven, V. H and Emmanuel G (2004). Christian Democratic Parties in Europe Since the End of the Cold War. *Leuven University Press.* ISBN 978-90-5867-377-0.

Tachau, F (1994) Political parties of the Middle East and North Africa, Greenwood Press, pp44–45

"Wasat Party withdraws from NASL, considers parliamentary elections". *Cairo Post. 28 August 2014*. Retrieved 28 August 2014.