Religion and Politics in Nigeria: Products of A Twisted Value System

By

Stephen Egwuatu Amadi, Ph.D.
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
stephen.amadi05@gmail.com
08032667347

Abstract

Overtly or covertly, religion and politics in Nigeria are two phenomena that have defined the course of history through the ages. Where the two are on the same page, they serve as centripetal force. However, at any point they differ or pursue separate interest, they become divisive. This paper focused on the relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria. It identified the symbiotic relationship between the two. The paper noted that the two phenomena dictate relationship among Nigerians even in other spheres of life. While religion in Nigeria is seen as a divisive force between the majority Muslim north and the majority Christian south, politics to an extent unites politicians in the country because it is a game of number. The purpose of this study is to identify, present and discuss the relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria. The research derived its theoretical lens from Durkheim's functionalist perspective. It employed the historical and descriptive approach in data collection, presentation, and discussion. It observed that at any time practitioners need something across the divide, they resort to religion or politics the same way they will fall back on their religion where politic does not favour them. The study concluded that Nigerians should explore the positive tendencies of religion and politics to build a just and egalitarian society.

Key words: Religion, politics, value system

Introduction

Religion and politics are human phenomenon and arguably constitutive of the human question. They are social facts and incontrovertibly connected rather than being diametrically opposed except for their misuse. While the actual role that religion plays in politics and vice versa has remained debatable, the nexus between the two concepts has been established for long (Falana, 2010). The misuse of religion and politics has led to the call by some for their separation, a tendency that further lend credence to the secularization debate. Be that as it may, religion and politics are ordered towards the wellbeing of mankind. They both promote human integration and values for ordered society.

In Plato's Republic, the quest to understand the human being and the city in which he lives are inseparable, whether the city is the just or the unjust city. The question that arises thereof is, is a happy city a habitation of the just or unjust persons. It follows therefore that one cannot ordinarily comprehend mankind if not in relation to their existence in the city and vice versa. The fact of this knowledge brings to bear the intrinsic relationships that exist between religion and politics in any given society. Man because of his rationality is not only a being with others in politics but also a religious being. Religion and politics are part of human essence. However, religion and politics has sometimes served as an instrument of oppression and deceit, repression, and conflict in Nigeria. This unfortunate situation further worsens the negative perception that politics is a dirty game that only the swindlers, corrupt and blood thirsty people are meant to participate (Awolowo, 1961; Egbewole and Etudaiye, 2011 cited in Afolabi 2015). Besides, religion plays an important role in the daily lives of people; in the way they interact with one another, their choices of who to marry, modes of dressing, food, politics, and lots more. Thus, the domains of religion and politics are incontrovertibly connected in both overt and covert ways. Therefore, there is a need to look at the effects of religion on politics and vice versa in Nigeria. The fact should be stated ab initio, that since the relationship between the sacred and the profane is symbiotic, there is no reason why religion should not influence political ideologies and vice versa. Where this interaction is possible and allowed, the nature of the society and the strata therein has a lot to do in dictating the mode of such a relationship.
Since religion and politics are mutually and exclusively related, there is constant need for symbiotic relationship. Hence, religion and politics can either bring conflict or peace, development or destruction, growth or retardation, stability or instability, security, or insecurity. The mixing of both religion and politics does not necessarily constitute a problem, but the level of moral standard, patriotism towards the country and proper understanding of religion and politics are the determining factor.

Religion and Politics: Towards a Conceptual Clarification.

The word religion has its etymological roots from the Latin *religare* which means to tie or bind. It has its English correlate as *rely* which means to be dependent on, to place confidence in, to trust and *religio* which means 'relationship'. They both derive ultimately from the Indo-European root *leig* which connotes to place together, to bind. From its originating terms, it becomes very explicit that one of the essential functions of religion is to bind people together, a unifying force that is community oriented. But modern scholars like Tom Harpur and Joseph Cambell favour the derivation from ligare, bind, connect, probably from a prefixed re-ligare, that is, ligare or to reconnect, which was made prominent by St. Augustine, following the interpretation of Lactantius (Harpur, 2004).

In every community of humans, big or small, the institutions of social life grow and develop in their own way. As time passes, the ways in which the community does and organize things become fixed. So also, the rules that govern social behaviour become the laws of the community of the nation, and the way in which a country becomes a fixed political system. The institutions may of course, be changed and sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. In like manner every community tries to build up its own religion.

Religion has evoked man since time immemorial to attempt to work out their relationship with supernatural beings or powers often regarded as God. Absolute to this regard is the interaction between religion and the society within which it functions. Subsequently, this has changed due to the divisions that existed among various human groups in pursuit of their perceived interest, and as such religion has become a major influence in politics and crises, thereby playing a significant role in the entire societal process, especially in religious societies (Alhaji-Shehu, 2012). Scholars of religion like Imo (1986) do not agree on a single definition of the word 'religion' because religion is a combination of two things: the profane and the supernatural. Therefore, a good definition must bring the two aspects into focus. Such definition Imo insist must feature specificity and inclusiveness. He advances that religion is the varied, symbolic expression of, and appropriate response to that, which people deliberately affirm as being of unrestricted value for them. McGee (1986) posits that the religious communities of human beings are often distinguished by reference to their central object of worship. Around this sacred object, person or concept, belief patterns, ritual practices, ethical system, and social organization take form. He went further to define religion as "a set of activities organized around the sacred- that nonempirical source of power, transcendence, mystery and awe''. The basic dimensions of religion include the belief patterns which accommodate the sacred reality people experience through revelation, reflection, or divine illumination; ritual practices which are prescribed for believers as appropriate human responses in the relationship to the ultimate source of being or value; ethical codes which are behavior directed towards other person; and cultic organization. For Durkheim (2001), religion is 'a unified system of beliefs and practices which unite into one moral community called a church all those who adhere to them'. This definition gives a sociological interpretation to religion and its practice. It is from this premise that Durkheim draws his popular dictum of relationship between the sacred and the profane. To him, even though, there should be communication between the sacred and the profane, in the psyche of man, the difference between them is clear. One of the functional elements of this theory lies in the claim that religion produces integration in a moral community. But as Laguda cited in Aderibigbe et al (1997) points out, the definition has the potential of admitting into the religious phenomenon all matters that constitute an obsession to a society, to adorn the garb of religiosity. Further, the

definition is a clear reference to organized religion to the exclusion of the primal or oriental religious ideologies. It also suggests a religious origin to sociopolitical associations with their set of rules and regulations. For Durkheim, religion was not only normal but also healthy in contradiction to various psychological theories that saw religious practice as a sign of personal weakness, psychological defect, or the obsession of infantile neurosis (Christiano, et al. 2008). However, it tends to indicate that religion cannot relate with other institutions in the society since it is a mere 'moral community' which might restrict its adherents to its tenets thereby limit their socio-political interaction. However, Robertson (1970) defines it in terms of supernatural belief, hence, Religion refers to the existence of supernatural being that has governing effect on life. Spiro (1965) combines both supernatural element and institutional aspect of religion to define it as an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally patterned superhuman beings. Although, none of the definitions given above is all embracing, it reveals, however, that religion comprise of sacred, supernatural, and institutional elements. Thus, religion can be deduced as the system of culturally patterned faith that is based on the existence of god or gods (sacred or supernatural). From the foregoing, religion provides more general guidelines for action in the form of beliefs, values, and system of meaning which is necessary for value consensus, social order, and collective conscience.

Every society or group evaluates the behavior of its members as appropriate or otherwise through the wide conception about what is good, right, or desirable, known as value. The concept of value is conceived by Tukur (1999) as a conception of the desirable which influences or a guide in the selection of one from any number of available means and end action. Schaefer (2004) also sees values as collective conception of what is considered good, desirable, and proper or bad, undesirable, and improper in a culture. Deriving from above, it is logical to say that values influence people's behavior and serve as criteria for evaluating the action of others. Religious value, therefore, can be explained as the conception of desirable, standards, or principles dictated by the belief system.

On the other hand, the term politics is derived from the Greek *polis*, which connotes management of the affairs of the city. Politics is the activity through which people make, preserve, and amend the general rules under which they live. As such, it is an essentially social activity, inextricably linked on the one hand to the existence of diversity and conflict, and on the other, to a willingness to co-operate and act collectively. Politics requires a constitution and political parties. It involves ideology. It includes criticism (opinion); it requires the public and the state which is made up of individuals (Dzurgba, 2008). It is about the struggle and acquisition of power and the use of such power. Onyekpe (1998) defines it as, 'The struggle for power which itself is the authority to

determine or formulate and execute decisions and policies, which must be accepted by the society, it is the struggle for power of governance, especially executive authority'.

In the light of the above, politics is an everyday affair. We make use of politics in our home, club or association, office, school, organization, church, mosque etc. It is about control, supremacy, and authority. Hence, there are undoubtedly elements of power play in religion and politics. Abearian & Masannat (1970) define politics as 'a phenomenon which has its origin in the class of individual preferences, its process in public demands for accommodation of competing goals and its output in the form of binding public polices'.

In a similar vein David Easton (cited in Olaniyi, 2001) famously defined politics as being concerned with the process of 'authoritative allocation of values in any social system'. Values here include all things sought after in the society such as wealth, respect, prestige, position, security, power among others. In a nutshell, politics is the science or the art of management of public affairs.

Looking at the different positions of scholars on the concepts of religion and politics, both seem to have a set of well stated objectives. These structured objectives are directed or targeted at the people who could be adherents or citizens. The question now is: are their boundaries coterminous? Or do their stated objectives converge at a point which ultimately necessitates infiltration by both? Hank sees religion as a tool of politics and that in the real sense of it both make strange bedfellows. In his words: 'Just as soccer is singularly the sole and most unifying factor in Nigeria, nothing is as divisive as religion-especially when it is used as a tool of politics' (Hank, 2003). It should therefore be noted that in sharply divided societies, like Nigeria where Islam and Christianity are in competition, ethnic sentiments are wielded, and this invariably threatens the stability of the system. Despite efforts to keep religion and politics separate, history offers many occasions when the two have often been very closely intertwined.

Sometimes, a religion endorses or supports a particular leader or system. In Nigeria, the choice of candidates for political offices is dependent on their religious inclinations/affiliations. This tends to suggest that religion and politics intertwine as far as Nigeria is concerned. This development, no doubt is a clear manifestation of the popular Mbiti thesis that Africans are notoriously religious, and each person has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates fully all facets of life that it is always difficult to isolate it (Mbiti 1969). Relating this to politics recalls the idea of theocracy, which is a government by a god/God that is, a kind of polity in which, God is regarded as the sole sovereign and the laws of the realm are regarded as divine commands.

In practice, theocracy manifests in the belief that God is the political king, ruler or leader who rules his people indirectly through a set of people (leaders). These rulers in the words of Mbiti (1980) are regarded as earthly viceroys or earthly vicegerent in traditional African societies. It is interesting to note that this belief is also very common in Islam (Qur'an 3:27) and Christianity (Roman 13:1-3). Under such an arrangement, the state is seen as the enforcement and necessary agency of religion because of the tendency of people to deviate from societal norms but to depend on religion for its authority. This perhaps further explains why many African nations and even advanced nations in history were subordinated to the religious institution in their acts of governance. For example, we remember in history, the theory and practice of church-state relations the world over, especially in the medieval Europe prior to the 18th century enlightenment age when educated people thought that beliefs should depend on reason and scientific proof (Johnstone, 2001). While advanced nations like the US have to a large extent tried to severe religion from their polity, the Nigerian nation still invokes religious sentiments in acts of governance. No wonder, every now and then you hear Nigerian leaders say a thing like 'God is in control of the situation' over their failure to enforce their primary mandate of securing the life and property of the people they govern. However, there has been much demand today for the separation of religion from politics, so that each could exist on its own without undue interference. The workability of the total separation remains in doubt as religion continuously manifests in her body polity, including its public sphere.

Theorizing Politics and Religion

The relation between religion and politics continues to be an important theme among theorists of sociology and political philosophy. Despite the emergent consensus on the right to freedom of conscience and on the need for some sort of separation between religion and state the debate is still inconclusive. Regardless of this assertion on the supposed separations, religions often make strong claims on people's allegiance, especially on their votaries. For example, the established religions like Christianity and Islam have traditionally held that all people owe obedience to God and his will. Thus, it is probably inevitable that religious commitments will sometimes come into conflict with the demands of politics in civil society. But religious beliefs and practices also potentially support politics in many ways. The extent and form of this support is as important to the theorists as is the possibility for conflict. In this regard T. S. Eliot (1936-1967) deeply influenced by Aristotelian philosophy argued that it was to the peril of the democratic societies to reject the influence of the established religion, in this case, the church which is the repository of the ethical wisdom that can come only from participation in her tradition without which society would degenerate into social and cultural fragmentation.

Furthermore, Scruton (1980) was concerned about the benefits that will accrue to the political system or society at large in aligning with established religion. In this regard, the healthy *polis* would require a substantial amount of extra-political and social cohesion which to a large extent are necessary both to ensure that citizens see themselves as sufficiently connected to each other and that they have a common framework within which they can make coherent and collective political decisions. This cohesion in turn will be dependent on a substantial amount of cultural homogeneity, especially with respect to adherence to certain values which most times are essentially religious. Again, rather than laying more emphases on the distinctively political benefits of religion, a different version of this argument could appeal to the ethical benefits that would accrue to citizens. For example, in most understandings of politics, one of the purposes of the *polis* is to ensure that citizens have the resources necessary for living a worthy and flourishing life. One such resource is a sense of belonging to a common culture that is rooted in a tradition, as opposed to a sense of rootlessness and social fragmentation (Sandel, 1998; McIntyre, 1984). On the contrary however, the liberals are at variant to establishment with the conservatives' positions, but rather favour the value of fairness to all. It is the view of liberals that the state should remain neutral among religions since it would be unfair to favour any religion or group of citizens especially in a democratic dispensation in their pursuit of the good as they understand it, religious or otherwise (Rawls, 1971). They also argue that fairness precludes devoting tax revenues to religious groups because doing so amounts to forcing non-believers to subsidize religions that they reject. A different approach for liberals is to appeal directly to the right to practice one's religion, which is derivable from a more general right to freedom of conscience. If all people have such a right, then it is morally wrong for the state to force them to participate in religious practices that they would otherwise oppose their chosen inclinations. It was also considered wrong to use proceeds from the tax of non-adherents to support religious institutions and their programs that they would not otherwise wish to support or benefit from. The liberal consequentialist on their part has some concerns about the notion of religious establishment in the *polis*. They argue that this may lead to some form of religious repression and curtailment of people's liberty (Audi, 2000). There are worries also that a political role for religion may well corrupt the faith and its mission.

Contextualizing Religion and Politics in Matthew 22:21

The Matthean text seems to bring religion and politics to conflict or as being diametrically opposed to each other. *Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God*. These words of Jesus are perhaps the most misinterpreted statements in the scriptures and the tendency to apply this text as the basis for the principle for the separation of 'religion and state' implying that they are separate sphere which should never be brought together.

The Pharisees and Herodians came into contest with Jesus to bring Jesus to conflict with the Jewish and Roman authorities. The Pharisees were notoriously religious who held unapologetically to their religious tradition and resented payment of tax to a foreign King. To do so it was believed amounted to an infringement of the divine right of God. The Herodians on their part were politicians who owed their support and allegiance to the Roman Emperor. The tax in question was the *kenes*, that is, the 'poll tax' also known as 'head tax' or 'capitation' is a tax levied as fixed as fixed sum on every liable individual without reference to income or resources. The payment of such tax was a condition for living peacefully as a subject of the Roman Empire and exercising the rights thereof. With the subjugation of the province of Judea under Roman rule in 6AD, poll tax became a sine qua non for all and sundry including slaves within the ages of twelve and sixty-five (Barcley, 2001; Philips, 2004).

At the time when the question about paying tax to Caesar or not were posed, the currency widely in circulation was the denarius which bore the image of Emperor Tiberius Caesar who reigned as Roman emperor between AD 14 and AD 37. The existence of poll tax and its mode of payment were sources of controversy and political discontent among the Jews. Therefore, to the question, 'should taxes be paid to Caesar' Jesus recommends that taxes be paid to the emperor on the grounds that the Coin belongs to the emperor and his government, while commanding at the same time the spiritual duty to be diligent about the things of God.

To this end, Jesus laid a timeless principle as a guide to all and sundry and to Christians in particular. Every Christian therefore has a dual citizenship. A citizen of his earthly city, the state, and to which he owes allegiance because of the public services the government renders. This being the case, because the Christian is a person of honor, it follows necessarily that he must be a responsible citizen. However, the Christian is also the citizen of heaven since he is a composite of body and spirit (imago Dei). There are matters of religion and of principles in which the responsibility of the Christian is to God. In all, to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God rather than mean total separation of religion and politics implies that just as the Coin carries the image of Caesar, the human beings, the animal species in which Caesar too belongs carries the image of the creator, God. This follows necessarily therefore that both Caesar and the Coin belongs to God their ultimate creator (Barcley, W. 2001, Daniel, J. 2007 and William, F. 2007).

All of the world, the universe, everything is God's, and we can't separate our lives into a secular sphere and a religious sphere, or as Emile Durkheim calls it, "the sacred and the

profane''. It has to be all one for 'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and its people belong to him' (Psalm 24:1).

Some Manifestations of Religious Factors in the Nigerian Civil Society.

It is worthy of note to state at this point that religious practitioner and, in fact, religious institutions are integral part of the Nigerian public sphere. They have capacity to influence politics and society. There are some fundamental principles underlying religious factors in the electoral process in Nigeria. One of such is how religion often determines the choice of political party flag bearer/running mate for the posts of the president and governor in most states. This is done to ensure that the interests of adherents are protected. Where this principle is adopted, there is usually a Muslim/Christian or Christian/Muslim ticket.

In the previous elections between 1960-2019, religion and ethnicity were the dominant features in the selection of the presidential candidates and their running mates are as follows: Nnamdi Azikiwe/Tafawa Balewa (1960), Shehu Shagari/Alex Ekwueme (1979), Buhari/Idiagbon (1983),

Babangida/Ebitu Ukiwe, Aikhomu (1985), Shonekan/Abacha (1993), Abacha /Diya, (1997), Abubakar/Akhigbe (1998), Obasanjo/Atiku (1999), Yar'Adua/Jonathan (2007), Jonathan/Sambo (2011), Jonathan/Sambo (2015), Buhari/Osibanjo (2015).

In the 2019 election circle which featured the highest number of presidential contestants in Nigeria's history, Kunle (2019) noted that Seventy-three out of the 91 registered political parties have presented candidates for the election as shortlisted by the nations apex election governing body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on January 17. The list reveal over 90% of the flagbearers were chosen based on religious considerations.

Again, from the unfolding of the present electoral dispensation preparatory for the February 2023, the same factors are dominant in the determination of candidates. Almost all the political parties had featured candidates in consideration of religion 'except' the All-Progressive Congress in his choice Muslim/Muslim ticket. Some political pundits are also of the view that the choice of Bola Tinubu/Kashim Shettima tickets were also religiously motivated, in share disregard to the Nigeria's diversity and religious plurality. This of course has the tendency of making some groups feel alienated in already very volatile country where the leaders have not shown much neutrality their handling of the national affairs. In the contention of Reuben Abati "The convention is to have a balanced Muslim Christian ticket or vice versa, while to do otherwise is to exhume and oxygenate

religious passions and prejudices". According to him no other general election in the recent history has elicited a nationwide condemnation from the various groups od CAN, AREWA Christian, and Indigenous Pastors Association, and the Christian Global Network and even elicited the resignation of some party stalwarts (Premium Times, July 12, 2022). Also, the coalition of Christians in northern Nigeria has this to say in a communique that was promptly issued as reaction to this Ahmed Tinubu/Kashim Shettima tickets, "the fear of Christians in the north and in the nation in general is that APC will be viewed as an Islamic party and the Muslim-Muslim ticket was not possible in 2015, why should it be possible in 2023? According to the insensitive expressed in this communique, it went further to state that, "Considering that the chairman of the party is a Muslim, deputy chairman north is a Muslim, the president of the senate is a Muslim, the speaker and the deputy speaker are Muslims and now both presidential and vice-presidential candidates are Muslims" (Punch, 12th July 2022). In a similar vein, Babachir Lawal, the immediatepast Secretary of the Government of the Federation and a chieftain of the APC berated his party over the choice while demanding that the party rescind her decisions which described as disastrous error and dead-on arrival. In his words, "I thought I would be able to avoid commenting on the disastrous error…it appears that the gods want to destroy the APC and its presidential candidate and have chosen the instrumentality of the northern Muslim governors and their super ambitious tool and Kashim Shettima for this purpose...He has chosen to bring religion to the front burner of Nigerian politics. And being a Muslim, he has chosen to side with his own religion. For all he cares, Christians can go to blazes with their votes" (Leadership 9th July 2022). Whereas this kind of sentiments expressed above may easily dismissed in favour of other narratives like competence and popularity, it is no gain saying that the recent events, especially with the lopsided appointments in government in favour of the predominantly Muslim north and the wanton killings of Christians is of grave concern that seriously agitates the minds of the Christian minority groups in the north and the Christian majority (Olayinka Shehu, 2021, Premium Times, May 31 2020; June 9 2022; The Guardian May 15 2022; Vanguard 8th June 2022).

Religious influence in Nigeria's political and civil space is undeniable. There is hardly any political gathering that does not begin with the opening and end with closing prayers are not said by the Christmas and Muslims even before the national anthem. Aspirants and winners of elections celebrate their victories with thanksgiving service in Churches and Mosques. The inauguration of this winners require that they take oath of office and allegiance that are usually expressive of religious sentiments with the use of Bible or Koran and others while soliciting the help of God. It is also common knowledge that most public holidays declared and observed in the Nigeria has much to do with either of the two major

religions, Christianity, and Islam. In almost all the states of the federation, there are institutionalized Pilgrims boards, with government appointees as board chairman, that organizes pilgrimages to Rome and Mecca annually and financed by the states and the federal government making the whole exercise an appendage of political activity.

Put succinctly, Onwubiko (2010) notes that:

> The two dominant religious organizations viz: Christian religion and Moslem religion have held both the federal and state governments on the jugular veins to be committing unimaginable amount of scarce public funds to sponsoring their adherents to the yearly pilgrimages abroad. Since the blackmail to sabotage government if it fails to sponsor pilgrimages gained ascendancy, federal and state governments have been contending with the needs of these religious organizations and their leaders (pp. 137-138).

This put to question the significance of pilgrimages as sponsored by the taxpayer's money, and who all may neither be Christians or Muslims. It is mind boggling to see the budgetary provisions of billions of naira spent by national and state governments annually to win political patronage in a country with persistent unemployment rate, poor infrastructure, epileptic electricity, poor health services and persistent rise in inflation and free fall of the naira and the suffocating debt burden (Umeanolue**,** 2020**)**.

Although, there are some who are of the view that religion and politics must go their separate ways. Whatever may be the reasons for their postulations, it is difficult to accept how convincing and possible this might be as it appears the human nature is not taken into considerations. The records of the involvement and intervention of religion in the public space globally and in Nigeria precisely, cannot be quantified. The religious organizations apart from her inalienable role of building faith and morals are one of the highest employers of labour, provision of critical infrastructure like educational institutions at all levels, financial institutions, health care services, water and sanitations, agriculture to mention but a few. So, to argue that religion should rescind to the private space, would at best be a misguided disposition.

This kind of system is symptomatic of Nigeria's backwardness in the comity of nations, where sentiments such as religion or ethnicity instead of merit defines who the leader. Contemporary efforts to impose Sharia law in various places around the world, outside the pre-existing Islamic states also fit this description (Reeves and Taylor, 1999). Nigeria fits in perfectly to the above assertions with the imposition of sharia in some parts of the

North and the intractable Boko Haram onslaught for the purpose of achieving this supreme agenda. The idea of religious or ethnic considerations over competence is the direct consequence of the abuse of trust by those saddled with the responsibility of steering the ship of the statecraft. For this reason, every ethnic and religious group want to be represented at all in order have a sense of belonging.

Theorizing Religion and Politics in Nigeria

While some would always want to blame religion others would rather blame politics for many societal challenges. The historical antecedents especially after Nigeria's independence in 1960 shows that the Christian and Muslim live in fear and suspicion of one another. The tension and suspicion have remained for decades amidst violent conflicts, and recently the protracted Islamic Boko haram terrorism orchestrated by the timeless desire to Islamize and control the political affairs of Nigeria. Situations like this have continued to provoke the call to exclude religion from the public square. To the contrary, religion and politics as such is not the problem, rather the question lies in how to face the challenge of religion and politics in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society such as Nigeria. This no doubt does not call for an easy way out of the quagmire. To effectively address this challenge, the human question must be squarely addressed. Politics and religion belong to the human species and as such a human phenomenon. The other animal species like our cows and goats practice neither religion nor politics. A discussion on religion and politics compels us to raise this question because religion and politics are constitutive of the human question. According to Plato in the *Republic,* the quest to understand the human being and the city in which the human being lives are two inseparable quests, that is, whether the happy city is the just city or the unjust city? Since a city is an aggregate of persons, a habitation of human persons, the question then arises; is a happy city a habitation of just persons or a habitation of unjust persons. It follows therefore that we cannot fully comprehend man as such if not in relation to his city/society and vice versa. The fact of this knowledge brings to bear the intrinsic relationship that exists inevitably between religion and politics in any society. Man because of his rationality is not only a being with others but also a religious being. Religion and politics are part of human essence. According to Aristotle, man is a political animal (Mukherijee and Ramanswey 2007 cited in Akinwale, 2016) seeking always to control and influence others which ordinarily exposes him to the use and exercise of power and authority. To understand man therefore one must as a matter fact understand him in relation to his society. Human being is characterized by rationality, relationality, and religiosity. To be human is to be rational, relational, and religious. Being consciousness of this reciprocal relationship between man and politics is a necessary condition for the resolution of the relationship between religion and politics in any society.

Politics for the sake of the politician represents a monstrous misconception of human nature, of the human being as one who can attain the good without others. Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* represent an attempt to place leadership at the service of the common good. The subject matter of their political discourse is the good of the *polis* while the subject matter of the political discourse of Machiavelli is not the good of the *polis* but the good of the politician. Machiavelli ridiculed and repudiated the philosophical doctrine of convergence of morality and politics, substituting it with his doctrine of the separation of the two, and the history of political instability and religious tensions in Nigeria eloquently testifies to the fact that he has never ceased to win political disciples. But what immediately concerns us here is the notion of human nature that the political doctrine of Plato and Aristotle puts before us. It is of vital importance for our understanding of the delicate relationship between politics and religion in our multiethnic and multi-religious Nigeria. Although some politicians and religious bigots have repeatedly employed religion to their selfish ends because of their inability to differentiate between piety and public nuisance. The issue is not religion and politics per se. Religion and politics are complementary in their functions. The purpose of Politics and religion is the material well-being of man and additionally for religion, to the spiritual welfare of man. In many modern States as it were, especially where democratic culture is well entrenched, what we see is not a separation of Politics from Religion but a division of labour between them.

Apart from both being complementary, the best in politics derives from and is firmly rooted in religious ideals. Religion teaches a man to love, and to do unto others as he would like them to do unto him and that all are equal before God. It is a fundamental principle and an accepted practice under a good government that all citizens are equal in the eye of the law, with reciprocal rights and duties. Anything to the contrary is forbidden under pain of legal sanctions in domestic international protocols and laws. Again, in all great religions, women are treated based on equality with men. The Christian scripture for instance present Jesus Christ as the most outstanding exemplar in this respect for women (John 8:1-11). Today, politicians all over the civilized world are eloquent in their advocacy for equal treatment for all persons irrespective of sex with emphasis on non-discrimination against women (CEDAW, 1979). In doing so, they are merely reflecting in public life the unparalleled example of our Lord.

The principles of Fundamental Human Rights especially those associated with freedom of Conscience, Association and Speech, have their origin in the divine laws and taught among the great Religions. Many Prophets, Saints and martyrs were incarcerated or killed for daring to exercise their freedom of Conscience and of expression (UDHR, 1948).

Many great names in Politics drawing their inspiration from Religion also suffered or died for the same cause. It was for this cause that Socrates was sentenced to drink the hemlock and to death. From the forgoing, one can rightly conclude that politics is not only complementary to Religion but also that the most beneficial political system derives its strength from the tenets and practices of the great Religions. Hence, politics and religion must exist side by side for the good of man. The tragedy of these modern times is that in some cases there is so much lack of understanding among some religious leaders that they are intolerant of some of the maneuvers of politicians. In other cases, religious leaders have allowed themselves to be completely subordinated to governmental institution to the extent that some Religious Organizations are mere arms or projections of the Government.

However, in order that religious organizations may effectively discharge its functions, it must be seen to be independent of Government patronage. It must never be subordinated to its dictates or whims and caprices. Otherwise, the sole compass by means of which the masses of believers must be guided in their Spiritual pursuits on the confused and stormy ocean of life becomes thwarted and unreliable. Religious Organization is expected to distant itself from being the mouthpiece arid instrument of the powers-that-be. Else will be made to sink or swim with the Government concerned; and in any case it would no longer be well-placed to tell the truth as it knows it. It is incumbent upon Government and politicians to conduct their affairs in strict adherence with their religious teachings and ethical standards. `Nothing is politically right which is morally wrong,' says Daniel O'Connell. Therefore, when politicians do the right, they can rest assured that they will be covered in a favourable manner by the non-partisan detached and fearless pronouncement of religious leaders of undoubted uprightness and godliness. The problem is the corruption of religion and politics. Religion is corrupted when man turns his addiction into religion. In the case of politics, the problem is when power is sought as an end. This leads to the triple addiction to power, riches, and pleasures (Akinwale, 2016). In this triple addiction, power is acquired for personal aggrandizement and pleasure, and even in the name of God. We must never overlook the transformative effect of religion when rightly understood. Religion is not any kind of submission. If at all religion is submission, it is not submission to the love of power but submission to the power of love—to God who is love.

Conclusion

Any nation where people lack religion is bound to lack conscience and progress. The practice of religion and politics must be free and supported unreservedly too as it is essentially part of the human inclinations. Religion and politics, however, are not

Nigeria's problem, it is the way and manner they are being practiced. History is replete with religious zealots who in the name of piety only constitute societal nuisance. Admittedly, the Christians have their crusaders and the Muslims their Jihadists, with both inflicting one of the worst and irreparable damages ever recorded in human history. Vestiges of both and recidivists can be found in every modern nation state where religions co-exist and are practiced. Therefore, Nigeria is not an exception. However, we must as a matter of fact continue to admit that religion has a place in the life of every nation. Irrespective of the faith or denomination, religion when truly practiced in its truest form and spirit, has been and remains sacred. It plays a vital role in purposeful leadership, community building, social justice, law, and order, peace-making, reconciliation, forgiveness, and the healing of wounds, by the political, family, and personal.

Given the experience of post-colonial tensions and conflicts in Nigeria, it is becoming fashionable to blame politics by calling it a dirty game. But politics, rather than be a dirty game is a virtue and a duty. It would have been right to call politics a dirty game if politics were as Machiavelli conceived it as an end. But politics, conceived and practiced as intelligent regulation of common life for the sake of the common good is a virtue and a duty. In the same way, it is becoming fashionable to blame religion for Nigeria's problems. Indeed, religion would be indistinguishable from a vice if, in the name of "evangelism", one was to mistake public nuisance for piety, which is quite often the case in contemporary Nigeria.

Neither politics nor religion can be wished away. But both must be intelligently regulated to avoid the fanaticism and banditry that make society unsafe. The current concern of most Nigerian populace on Muslim/Muslim presidential ticket of a political parties shouldn't have been a concern but for the notable abuses of the past. To this end, the populace seems to be less concerned if the government is composed of incompetent people. Obviously, the religion of a leader has got little to do with competence and good governance. In the absence of intelligent regulation, politics is deformed, and deformed politics becomes a religion, and instrumentalized religion becomes a servant to politics of Machiavellian inspiration. Religiosity and rationality are corrupted by a materialist trinity of power, possessions, and pleasure. Religion and politics become instruments in the hands of power addicts who seek power for the sake of riches, and riches for the sake of pleasure, and who do all that in the name of God.

References

Abati, R. (2022, July 12). Tinubu and the APC Muslim-Muslim tickets. www.premiumtimesng.

Aberian, G. & Masannat, S. (1970). Contemporary political systems: An introduction to government. Charles Scribner's & Sons.

Akinbade, J.A. (2004). Dictionary of Nigerian government and politics. Macak Books Ltd.

Awolowo, O. (1961). Politics and religion. A lecture given to students at Adventist college of west Africa, Ilishan-Remo.

Audi, R. (2000). Religious Commitment and Secular Reason. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ayorinde, S.A. (2007). Religion and National Unity. In Folorunsho, M.A. Oyeneye, I.O.E Adebayo R.I. (eds). *Religion and Modernity*. National Association for the Study of Religions and Education (NASRED).

Barclay, W. (2001). The daily study bible, the gospel of Matthew volume 2 chapter 11- 28. Revised edition. Theological publications.

Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), 1979.

Egbewole, W. O. and Etudaiye, M. A. (2011). Religion, politics, and justice: Interplay of forces in Nigeria. Retrieved July 15, 2022, from http://www.etudaiyeandco.com/.../religion_ politics and justice_ interplay of_ forces_in_nigeria.pdf.

Eliot, T. S. (1967). The Idea of a Christian society and notes toward the definition of culture. Christianity and culture. Harcourt Brace & Company.

Falana, F. (2010). A public lecture delivered at the 51st birthday anniversary of Rt. Rev Alfred Adewale Martins, Catholic Bishop of Abeokuta, Ogun State.

Hank, E. (2003). "Nigeria: Religion as a Tool of Politics". http:// www.mbuhari.com

Imo, C. (1986). The Study of Religion. University of Jos.

Kunle, S. (2019). For the record: Nigeria's 73 presidential candidates (Full list).

MacIntyre, A. (1984). After virtue: A study in moral theory. 2nd ed. University of Notre Dame Press.

McGee, R. (1980). Sociology, An Introduction. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Mukherjee, S. & Ramaswamy, S. (2007). A History of Political Thought. Plato to Marx. Prentice Hall of India Private Limited.

Olaniyi, J.O. (2001). Introduction to contemporary Political Analysis.__Lagos: Fapsony Nigeria Limited.

Onwubiko, P. (2010). *50 years of independence: Road map to optimum growth and development in Nigeria*. Chuka Educational Publishers.

Rawls, J. (1996). *Political Liberalism.* Columbia University Press.

Rawls, J. (1999). The Idea of Public Reason Revisited. The Law of peoples. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Reeves, M. & Taylor, W. (1999). Intellectuals in debate. The moot. In Reeves, M. (ed) Christian Thinking and Social order. Conviction politics from the 1930 to the present day. Cassell.

Rotimi, T. (1999). "Religious Organisation" in Oyediran, O. E. Agbaje, A. (eds) Nigeria, politics of Transition and Government 1986 – 1996. Council for the Development of Social Science research in Africa: Dakar, Senegal.

Sandel, M. J. (1998). Liberalism and the Limits of Justice. Rev. ed. Cambridge University Press.

Sandel, M. J. (1996). Democracy's discontent: America in search of a public philosophy. MA: Belknap Press.

Schaefer, R.T.E. & Lamm, R.P. (1997). Sociology, a brief introduction. Mchraw Hill Companies.

Scruton, R. (1980). *The Meaning of Conservatism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Tukur, M. (1999). Leadership and Governance in Nigeria. The Relevance of values. Trowbridge: redwood Books.

Umeanolue, I. L. (2020). Religious influences on politics in Nigeria: implications for national development. Ogirisi: *a new journal of African studies*, 15, 139-157.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (UDHR), 1948.