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# **Journal of Religions & Peace Studies**

Vol. 7, No. 1, February 2025

# LASU

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**LASU**

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&  
Peace Studies**

Vol. 7, No. 1, February 2025

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As such, contributions in JOREPS include human religiosity, spirituality and their peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, as the Journal's title suggests, our focus shall be on contemporary and classical issues that border on religion and peace studies. The publication shall also include reviews of books which reflect the themes and focus of the journal.

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# Religion in Nigerian Politics: Historical Dynamics, Manipulations, and Democratic Implications

*Daniel, Mary Taiye, PhD & Iyanda, Sunday Elijah, PhD*

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## Abstract

Nigeria is a country blessed with a triple religious heritage namely: African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Christianity. Each of these religions, relate to the Nigerian society differently and they fulfil different roles; which are deeply rooted in the nature of each of the religions. Politics is a loaded term that has a variety of acceptable meanings, therefore, as a working definition, this paper utilizes Quincy Wright's definition of politics as "the exercise of power, authority, the making of collective decisions, the allocation of scarce resources, the practise of deception and manipulation, and so on". An average Nigerian politician views politics as a short-cut to wealth and so pursue it with their might, using any weapon; religion inclusive, in order to achieve their selfish political aim. This paper focuses on the negative impacts of religion on the Nigerian society which runs under the democratic governance. Tracing some religious crises and proffering resolvable approach to ameliorate religion and its practices in democratic governance. Using the historical and descriptive tools, its findings suggest that the prevalence of political violence is fundamentally caused by the political elites manipulating religion as one of the ready weapons for selfish interests. The paper concludes that it is unpatriotic to manipulate Religion to gain political office in the society; patriotism is an integral part of religious faith that must be upheld.

*Keywords:* politics, religion, manipulate, politician, secularism

## Introduction

**N**IGERIA IS THE MOST POPULATED COUNTRY IN AFRICA. NIGERIA IS A MULTI-RELIGIOUS country, which is made up of over 250 ethnic and linguistic groups. The Nigerian ethnic nationalities in the 1914 amalgamation by Lord Fredrick Lugard comprised of two protectorates, the Northern and the Southern protectorates. These two protectorates formed the Nigerian state which constituted of various cultures, each with peculiar belief systems. These various cultures with different traditional religions influenced governance in Nigeria tremendously; both positively and negatively. Religion has been part of Nigeria's political issues since she gained her independence in 1960. Although, she has witnessed many crises in form of inter-tribal and inter-ethnic wars before and after her independence. However, Religious violence in Nigeria mostly refers to the Muslim-Christian strife that can be traced back to 1953 during the inter-ethnic tension in the country.

One very serious religious crisis appeared in Nigeria. The phenomenon was a

movement tagged as “*Yantatsine*”<sup>1</sup> popularly known as *Maitatsine*. This group was known for inflicting severe religious violence on the people living in the Northern part of Nigeria. Alamu, asserts that “Religious violence started precisely with *Maitatsine* disturbance in 1977, which later spread to some cities in Nigeria”<sup>2</sup>. Between 1979 and 1983, two *Maitatsine* violence were recorded. The outstanding case was the Kano uprising of 1980. According to Olupona, the violence left between 4000 to 6000 people dead and properties worth millions of naira, destroyed”<sup>3</sup>. Alamu asserts that “close observance of the arson and unprecedented killings in the name of Religion flowered into the *El-Zaky-Zaky* phenomenon as well as various reprisal attacks in the South-west and in the East”<sup>4</sup>.

Traditionally, each culture with its inherent Religion, has some peculiar doctrines. These cultures have already been operating by different types of governance. For instance, the Hausa/Fulani race was largely autocratic and essentially feudalist; while the Igbo people were inclined towards democratic principles which respected the interest of the majority. These different ruling methods of course when merged together caused lots of problems. The problem arose due to the clash of religion and the multi-populous nature of the country.

Atubi attested that “the founding fathers of this country created a democratic system that separated church from the state so that, as a country, we could avoid the slippery slope of getting into the business of telling people what to believe”<sup>5</sup>. This means that the reality of democracy could not be achieved under the circumstance, hence; (the coexistence of the three different religions as well as the multi religious groups).

One of the reasons for the failure of democracy in Nigeria is the attitudinal nature and the logical concept of each religion regarding governance (democracy) coupled with the diverse ethnic rationale. Taking Islam as an example, Ali submits that “Islam has different ideas altogether about governance. For them, there is no separation of religion from governance. He further explains that:

Muslims believe that their religion; Islam, is a complete way of life which has made copious provisions for all facets of life: practices, social involvement, economic undertakings, political participation, technological innovations, legal phenomenon and religious beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

In light of the above, this concept is contrary to the belief of Christianity that states in Matthew 22:21 that “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God”. The country has grown so conscious of religion that they allow it to influence their culture as well as their traditions thereby relegating themselves to the mercy of these religions. We have been made to know over the years that Religion plays a central role in the society. The advent of Islam and Christianity to the Nigerian soil has made a typical Nigerian to lose his sense of identity to these foreign religions, setting aside the indigenous religion and embracing the foreign religions with all consciousness and seriousness of mind.

## Conceptual Clarifications

### Politics:

Politics is a loaded term that has a variety of acceptable and legitimate meanings. Politics does not have just one meaning but a whole range of meanings. There are different definitions of politics by scholars. As defined by scholars, politics originates from the Greek word 'Politika' which means "affairs of the city" that is, a set of activities that are associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations among individuals, such as the distribution of resources or status.<sup>7</sup>

In David Easton's opinion, politics is the authoritative allocation of values for the society<sup>8</sup>. Quincy opines that politics is the art of influencing, manipulating or controlling major groups, so as to advance the purpose of some against the opposition of others<sup>9</sup>. There is no single way to define the word 'Politics'. Scholars and philosophers from different backgrounds have attempted a suitable definition as earlier mentioned. The above definitions of Politics are unique, but then something holds together the various ways scholars have defined politics. It is observed that in their definitions, politics involves interactions among a group of people and the way they go about making decisions and managing their affairs for collective positivity. A close observation of the definitions suggests that politics is basically about the way members of society co-operate with one another through their leaders to reach decisions that are in the best interest of all.

### Democracy

The word democracy comes from the Greek word 'demos' which means 'people' and 'kratos' which means power. Literally, democracy can be thought of, as power of the people; a way of governing which depends on the people's will, it combines two Greek words 'demos', which stands for 'whole citizen living within a particular city-state and 'kratos' which also stands for 'power or rule'. Democracy comprises respect for human right and fundamental freedoms; holding free and fair election; a pluralistic system of political parties, and organizations, and separation of powers. It is a government whereby supreme power is vested in the people, and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system<sup>10</sup>. Literarily, 'democracy' means that the people govern themselves. Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy is the most popular and it says: democracy can be thought of as 'power of the people'. A way of government which depends on the will of the people.

### Religion

Religion as a concept means many things to many people. However, the word religion etymologically comes from the Latin word "*Religare*" and "*ligare*" meaning to bind, to fuse and to put together.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, religion is that particular thing that binds people together or that brings people together.<sup>12</sup> Religion can also be said to be the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods.<sup>13</sup>

Religion according to Robinson and Davidson is “a belief in, or the worship of, a god or gods”. Secondly, it is a particular system of worship, such as Islam and Christianity.<sup>14</sup> In Okereke’s opinion, religion is a link between man and God. According to him, it is the sum total of man’s relation with God and the transcendent.<sup>15</sup>

In Omoregbe’s words, “religion is essentially a relationship, a link established between two person namely a human person and a divine person believed to exist”.<sup>16</sup> In a nutshell, religion is man’s relationship with the supernatural. Kukah’s definition of religion as put down by Emekwue, sees religion as the set of rituals by which human being relates with the higher being, this has been widely accepted.<sup>17</sup> Idowu argues that religion is a difficult topic to handle, whether we are considering its connotation, its origin, or its definition.<sup>18</sup>

Based on the above definitions and understanding of religion both individually and collectively in Nigeria, religion is the recognition of God as an object of worship, love and obedience which ultimately leads to practical piety and morality. This understanding is common to all three religions practiced in Nigeria namely; African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity. The fact that God is recognized by each of the three religions as the beginning and the end of all human pursuits in the world, this should make the matter easier for us. Whether in the shrine, mosque or church, the recognized final arbiter who accepts all prayers and supplications made in each of the places of worship is God.

Religion has been an indispensable phenomenon in Nigeria. It has become an important factor in political discourses.<sup>19</sup> The influence of religion is not only limited to democracy, but its power influences virtually all other facets of life, like economic prosperity, social relation, educational advancement and the psych of the society but within the scope of this paper, focus will be on the influence on democracy.

## Democracy in Nigeria and its Challenges

### First Republic (1963-1966)

Nigeria became an independent country in 1960, but it was in 1963 that it became a republic and adopted the parliamentary system of government that was practiced by the British colonialists.<sup>20</sup> The administration of the Nigerian government was divided into Western, Eastern, and Northern regions, each with its own separate premiers; Nnamdi Azikwe became Nigeria’s first president in 1963.<sup>21</sup> Much of Nigerian politics was engulfed in ethno-religious tensions at the time and it still does even today. The tension and regional in-fighting escalated when Nigeria’s first coup took place in January 1966.<sup>22</sup> The military overthrew the government and assassinated Tafawa Balewa, Ahmadu Bello and Samuel Akintola; the premiers of both Northern and Western regions bringing about the end of the first republic.<sup>23</sup>

### **Second Republic (1979-1983)**

The military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo transitioned Nigeria back to democracy in 1979. The parliamentary system of government from the first republic, was replaced with the presidential system of government. Alhaji Sheu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) won the elections that started the second republic in Nigeria, and he became the first democratic president without much problem. Problems started when Shagari attempted to go for a second tenure in 1983. Although he won, his government was accused of violating the Nigerian constitution, election rigging, misappropriation of public funds, corruption, indiscipline, among others.<sup>24</sup> The second republic faced a lot of troubles, such as the teacher's strike of 1981, the crash in oil prices and the *Matatsine* riots in Kaduna, Kano, Maiduguri and other major cities in Northern Nigeria.<sup>25</sup> The Military used the instability caused by this conflict to stage a coup that ended the second republic on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1983.

### **Third Republic (1985-1992)**

The emergence of Nigeria's third republic won a more elaborate and deliberate affair than that of the First and Second republics<sup>26</sup>. After 20 months in office, the government of Buhari was overthrown by Major-General Ibrahim Babangida; his chief of army staff on August 27, 1985<sup>27</sup>. After eight years in office, Babangida announced a transition process that led to the creation of Nigeria's third republic.<sup>28</sup>

### **Fourth Republic (1999 till ndate)**

May 29, 1999, marked the beginning of a return to democratic system of Government after sixteen years of military misrule; characterized by hardship, injustice, corruption, and the likes. Nigerians look forward to this with happiness, jubilation and optimism, with the hope of living a peaceful and prosperous life under the democratic system of governance. Nigerians became disappointed when after twelve (12) years of democracy, Nigeria is yet to see or enjoy the dividend of democracy in form of justice, equity, social welfare, and equal access to power and resources.

### **Religious Policy in Nigeria**

The preamble of the Nigerian constitution of 1999 as amended, stipulates that Nigeria is a sovereign nation under God. This indicates that the constitution recognizes Nigeria as a secular and a moral nation. In addition, the constitution also recognizes Nigeria as a plural nation, with heterogeneous and ethnic groups coupled with many cultures. In spite of this reality, in theory, Nigeria is a secular state. This has been indicated in the constitution since independence. For the purpose of emphasis, the word 'secular' is derived from the Latin word *secularis*, which means "temporal". It is taken to mean 'of or relating to worldly, as opposed to sacred things or having no particular religious affinities. Secularism is an attitude or political ideology aiming at eradicating religion from public and social life, or at least regulate and control religion and especially limit its influence on state politics. Though this tends towards atheism, and

an irreligious society, it is important to note that Nigeria is not a godless nation, rather the constitution recognizes her as a godly nation.

Furthermore, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, recognizes the nation as pluralistic and secular in nature. In line with this, Section 10 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended, expresses the fact that Nigeria government should not favour or promote any particular religion or group at the expense of the others<sup>29</sup>. Alamu opines that the issue of secular state, has been a national debate among religious scholars and theologians alike. According to Alamu, Dopamu sees Nigeria as a secular nation as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. Alamu defines secular nation as a state where religion exists, yet is not adopted as a state religion.<sup>30</sup> As stated in the 1999 constitution, 'the government of the federation shall not adopt any religion as state religion'. Therefore, in policy formulation, governance and other governmental activities, religion should not be an issue. By implication, every citizen has a right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Section 38 is categorical that:

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 take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance relates to a religion, other than his own or a religion not approved by his parents or guardian; and
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.

Nevertheless, It also states that, ...accordingly, national integration shall actively be encouraged, whilst discrimination, on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited. While national ethics shall be discipline, integrity, dignity of labor, social justice, religious-tolerance, self-reliance, and patriotism. Also, membership of political parties is opened to every citizen irrespective of his place of origin, circumstances of birth, sex, religion or ethnic group.<sup>31</sup>

From the foregoing, the religious policy can be understood, theoretically. The legal provisions are made in order to ensure that citizens enjoy religious freedom and that the state or government does not affiliate itself or show preferences for one religion.<sup>32</sup> The constitution also recognizes that this freedom does not have a clause of ambiguity. The dictum 'live and let live' is held and the contribution that religion can make to the life of citizens are recognized; hence, the belief in religious tolerance.<sup>33</sup> However, in contemporary Nigeria society, we have discovered that this freedom has been contained by some religious zealots in order to promote their bigoted religion and beliefs.

## The Place of Religion in Nigerian Politics and Democracy

Religion has taken a position of importance in Nigerian politics and its influence cannot be overemphasized because it plays a significant role in shaping political decisions and outcomes. The nation is the most populous country in West Africa, and although vested with religious diversities, these religions are intertwined with political activities in the country. However, the involvement of religions in politics in Nigeria brought along both positive and negative consequences. One of the positive consequences is the promotion of moral values. Religion teaches moral values, such as ethics, respect, fairness, caring, citizenship, passion, gratitude, kindness, and justice which are crucial order to promote national thinking, and unbiased judgment in the society. Religious leaders can use their platforms to advocate these values and hold politicians accountable for their actions. Additionally, religion can inspire people to participate in politics and contribute to the development of their communities. On the other hand, the involvement of religion in Nigeria's politics, has also led to negative consequences. One of the most significant negative consequences is the proliferation of religious extremism and intolerance such as the Boko Haram insurgency which began in 2009<sup>34</sup>.

While many Nigerians have the right to be cynical, demoralized, even frustrated about the state of affairs, there is also a cause to cheer up. Democracy has for the very first time endured uninterruptedly for a period of over four decades in the history of Nigeria. Nigerians have a say in the affairs of the state, a right they can wield to their advantage if not taken lightly. However, the credit tends to end there and perhaps unnoticed by many due to the daunting challenges facing the polity, which undoubtedly overshadow the strides of democracy at the period. This is because Nigerians are finding it increasingly difficult to co-exist with one another, due to the devastating lingering ethnic and religious sentiments and crises challenging the nation.

An influence of religion on the Nigerian democracy is the act of people voting according to their faith regardless of the capacity of the candidate to lead the country. This was more pronounced in Southeast. For instance, Catholic Priests in Anambra state openly enjoined their members to vote for Peter Obi (former governor) because of his religious inclination. According to him, "he always clutched his chaplet tightly in his hands to demonstrate to the catholic faithfuls that he was certainly one of them." And they accepted him.<sup>35</sup> Also, the former peoples' democratic party's (PDP) senator for Jigawa northwest senatorial district, Dr Danladi Sankara decried in alleged religious undertone in the 2011 presidential election. Sankara who was also the Jonathan/Sambo returning agent for Jigawa state in the election, indicted that there was connivance among the opposition parties in Jigawa, whereby they indoctrinated the people to vote for Muslims. The defunct Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) candidate, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (rtd.), scored the highest vote in the 2011 presidential election in Jigawa state, polling 665,994 votes to beat his closest rival, the people's democratic party (PDP) candidate, president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who polled 419,252 votes.



The muslim-muslim ticket of the all progressive congress (APC) in recent development made the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to call on all Christians to vote Peter Obi as the next president of Nigeria. The Christians felt cheated by the APC for choosing another Muslim as a running mate for Ahmed Bola Tinubu (the presidential candidate) who is also a muslim. In a nutshell, the effect of religion on democracy all over the world is bifocal, in the sense that it is both negative and positive. It is positive in the sense that, as earlier identified, it is value-driven and it naturally robs off on the polity through the participation of ardent religious believers. This is also evident in the aspect of the social life in the Nigerian society.

## Conclusion

Inter-religious dialogue is a platform where religious leaders discuss and orientate people about the essence of religion and its efficacy in the society. Here, they resolve their contradictions and misconceptions, hence, it is important for religious leaders to guide against hypocritical teachings that can disrupt peace and political stability. Therefore, exchange of ideas removes ignorance and eliminates religious conflicts.

Religious pluralism or religious diversity could also be a possible solution to this problem. Religious pluralism is an attitude or policy regarding the diversity of religious belief systems co-existing in the society<sup>36</sup>. It requires a cultivation of public space where we all encounter one another. The existence of the incompatible beliefs signifies that both Christianity and Islam can co-exist in the community that recognizes religious pluralism. Harvey Cox identifies pluralism and tolerance as a characteristic of a secular society, which are also marks of multi-religiosity<sup>37</sup>. It has also been observed that multiplicity of religion is not to be seen as conflict or evil centered rather, it should be welcomed by all and as well enjoyed by all in order to promote harmony and co-existence.

Finally, the government should ensure that those who manipulate religion for their benefit should be brought to book. From all indications, it is clear that all the committees set up for this crisis coupled with their reports or recommendations have not been implemented by the government. Therefore, the government should ensure that those who orchestrate this act be brought to book.

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# Compassion, Mercy and Peace in the Gospels and its Effect on Africa: The Nigerian Experience

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## Abstract

## Abstract

This article emphasizes the peaceful communication of God's compassion, mercy and kindness through Jesus Christ to humanity in various ways in the Old and New Testaments. The method of interpretation is a socio-historical approach that helps reveal God's demonstration of His compassion, mercy, kindness, and love, which brings peace to humanity, as seen from the perspectives of the Old and New Testaments. This method enables the article to gain insights from both the Old and New Testaments regarding the concepts of compassion, mercy, love, and peace, as well as their applications. The article suggests that compassion, mercy, and kindness are interpreted to mean the same thing, depending on the context of their occurrence and the reader's or interpreter's perspective. *The expression of these nuances in the New Testament signifies Jesus Christ as the one who fulfils all of God's attributes: kindness, mercy, compassion, and love for humanity through his actions and words.* The article suggests that the church applied the same nuance expressed in the Holy Bible to Africa through various works and projects undertaken by the church and its early missionaries. The article concludes by emphasising the need for African people to extend the same kindness, mercy, love, and grace to one another, thereby fostering a peaceful and conflict-free society that promotes Africa's development.

Keywords: mercy, kindness, ecclesia, dark continent, compassion, Africa

## Introduction

**I**N THE BIBLE, SEVERAL ASPECTS DIFFERENTIATE HUMAN BEINGS FROM ANIMALS and Artificial Intelligence (AI), including the ability of humanity to exhibit compassion, kindness, grace, love, and mercy toward one another, which often leads to peaceful coexistence. Humanity is living in a broken world affected by poverty, hunger, diseases, selfishness and greed. In such a situation, humanity and the entire creation need those who use their freedom to exercise humanness with the people they contact daily. The world is earnestly seeking men and women who love and care for one another.

Throughout the Synoptic Gospels, God's communication of compassion, love and mercy manifests in many ways. Many actions within the synoptic Gospels are well-articulated to highlight the virtues that God demonstrates to humanity through Christ. The coming of Jesus of Nazareth reflects the kindness of God that he promised the people in the Old Testament. Hence the manifesto of Jesus in Luke 4:18-20. This text,

along with many others in the Synoptic Gospels, provides the ultimate reasons for Jesus' coming into the world. According to the synoptic writers, His coming fulfils the expectation of the Old Testament people. Jesus' dealings with the outcast and ostracized people of his community were examples that revealed to humanity the intentions of God in creating humanity.<sup>1</sup> God's grace, love, and kindness could not have been shown to humankind without Jesus's various actions and words.

The synoptic gospels contain numerous expressions of how God demonstrated His kindness through the actions and words of Jesus. He was able to forgive the sins of many people, heal the sick and the blind people, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and feed the people to demonstrate the presence of God's kingdom amid his people (Luke 7:16). Writers of the Gospel strongly believed that people met their expectations through the coming of Jesus Christ (Matt 11:1-10). According to the evangelists, Jesus was a detribalized individual who came to set humanity free. As a result, Africa, as a continent, has its fair share of the kindness and mercy that God demonstrated to her through the arrival of Christianity on the continent.

This article, therefore, focuses on theologizing compassion, mercy, and peace of God in the Gospels and their impact on Africa, concentrating on Nigeria's experiences and employing a socio-historical interpretation as its method of exploration. The interpretative approach to this article is based on socio-historical analysis to help decipher the meaning of the word in the Old and New Testaments. Using words in this context invites the use of action and spoken words. First, we will examine the meaning of compassion in the Old Testament and explore its usage during that period. We will also discuss the actions that focus on the principles of compassion and mercy in the Old Testament. The New Testament usage reveals how the authors employed it in their writing. Understanding the definition and usage of the term is crucial for comprehending the concept in the New Testament. The primary focus will be on the words and actions of Jesus as presented in the Synoptic Gospels. Focusing the interpretative horizon on the actions and words of Jesus regarding compassion and kindness provides a suitable premise for examining some of Jesus' key actions. Again, since the term is relational in that it deals with the principle of reciprocity, the dynamics of patronage and clientele become necessary instruments in this study. The reason is that many scholars, such as Neyrey, Malina, Moxnes, Pilch, Megbelayin, and Marshall, have suggested that the system of a patron-client relationship influenced Jesus' actions in various spheres of his life. God in Jesus was acting as a patron to humanity by resolving their problems and meeting their needs.

Where no verbal terms are used in the text, we will look for actions that embody the principle of compassion or kindness that Jesus demonstrated in the Gospels. The relationship between such actions on the African continent is the focus of this article. The use of the term 'Africa' does not imply that this article will survey every African country; instead, it will examine some common issues affecting the continent. We will discuss the manifestation of God's compassion and kindness in Christ Jesus in Africa. It will examine specific actions of missionaries who came to Africa to see

how such actions improved the lifestyles of the African people. The article will conclude by alerting the audience to common phenomena and factors, such as poverty, diseases, corruption, illegal migration, and a lack of development, which indicate that Africa still requires more compassion, mercy, and kindness from God and his people to overcome these challenges.

### Compassion and Kindness in the Old Testament and the New Testament

In the Old Testament (MT), the word *hesed* has a specific meaning and connotation related to interpersonal relationships within the ancient Israelite community.<sup>2</sup> The usage necessitates and enforces the human-to-human relationship enshrined within ancient Israel's cultural and social milieus. J. H. Stoebe alleges that *hesed* is not used in relationship to YHWH.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the word refers to God's relationship with Israel, except in poetic literature, where it is used metaphorically to describe YHWH's relationship with His people, Israel. The word can mean mercy, kindness, and love.<sup>4</sup>

The same word in the Septuagint (LXX) translates from "eleos" to mean "mercy."<sup>5</sup> The term seems to signify human relationships in a secular sense. It embodies the concept of reciprocity and benefaction, the traditional means of fostering social solidarity in the ancient world.<sup>6</sup> The covenantal terms and political relations became possible through the use of *hesed*.<sup>7</sup> Nelson Glueck attests that human conduct towards the divine was driven and regulated by *hesed*.<sup>8</sup> The complexity of translating the Hebrew word *Hesed* into the English language presents a semantic challenge to the English reader, particularly in the work of Glueck. However, the study of Boone M. Bowen beams excellent light on the understanding of the Old Testament's use of *hesed* in the Masoretic Text (MT).<sup>9</sup> Bowen's thesis demonstrates that the concept of *hesed* in the Hebrew Bible promotes reciprocity and centres on the divine quality. He asserts that the word *hesed* has the same meaning as "loyal kindness".<sup>10</sup> According to Bowen, this translation dignifies the meaning and qualifies the use of *hesed* as the divine in its origin and character, as in Exod 20:6; 34:6-7.<sup>11</sup> In Deut 7:12, humanity is expected to reciprocate this *Hesed*, or "loving-kindness" (LXX), "steadfast love" (RSV), and "mercy" (KJV), to one another. Bowen employs two distinct phrases to convey the meaning of the relationship between humanity and God: "loyal kindness" and "loving-kindness." Humanity is called to exercise "loyal kindness" in response to YHWH's "lovingkindness" towards its people.

The meaning of *hesed* in modern scholarship gains excellent insights with the emerging publication of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld.<sup>12</sup> The thesis of Sakenfeld built on the existing works of Glueck and Bowen; however, her task was to review and revise the earlier work of Nelson Glueck, of which she agreed on many factors and principles as regards the use of *hesed* in the Old Testament namely that it relates to covenant and characterises by obligatory principles that a superior party has to offer to the inferior, which sometimes attracts the idea of reciprocity.<sup>13</sup> The case of David and Jonathans serves as an example. Jonathan demonstrated kindness through his unwav-

ering covenant with David (1 Sam 20:14-16), a reciprocity that David later reciprocated on behalf of his friend Jonathan (2 Sam 1:1-13).

The lexical study of Gordon Clark has shed tremendous light on the use of *hesed* in the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, the meaning of the word *hesed* can be translated, according to Clark, as “grace,” “mercy,” “compassion,” “faithfulness,” “reliability,” “confidence,” and “love.”<sup>14</sup> God showed kindness to Lot by not destroying him and his family, along with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:19-25). The Song of Moses in Exodus 15 embodies YHWH's kindness to the people of Israel. Therefore, the word kindness is what God exercises on humans, and every human should share the same kindness with his fellow human beings. Sometimes, God expects humans to respond to him with their love (Exod 34:6-7; Num 14:18-19). The use of *hesed* concomitantly displays and portrays the benefits of God to humanity.<sup>15</sup> The understanding of *hesed* in the Old Testament can be seen as having multidimensional meanings. However, one of the generally accepted meanings of *hesed* in the Old Testament is that of kindness or mercy, which is characterized by compassion and love. It depicts many attributes YHWH often shows to his people, such as Israel.<sup>16</sup>

Kindness semantically encompasses a deeper understanding of love, mercy, and other similar qualities. YHWH's dealings with the nation of Israel are believed to be based on His kindness to His people, which was wrapped up in His covenant with the patriarchs.

### God's Mercy and Kindness in the Gospels

Before the writing of the New Testament, the people had high expectations of the coming and the full manifestation of God's mercy and kindness. God is portrayed as merciful in the New Testament, naturally drawing people to look up to Him for His mercy. The writers of the Gospels did not simply write because they wanted to; they believed they had witnessed the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel. God demonstrated his unique act in many aspects, including actions and words. The fulfilment of this expectation started with the coming of John the Baptist at the centre of the event in Palestine (Matt 3:1-14; Mark 1:1-10; Luke 1:5-80; 3:2-20; 20:4-6). His coming could have launched more expectations in the minds of average Palestinians of the first century who were downtrodden and battered by the system of the day. There was a need for expecting the fulfilment of the Old Testament God's promise to Israel. God promised that the Redeemer would come from Zion to take away iniquity from Jacob, redeeming His people (Isaiah 59:20-21).

John's emergence and preaching of righteousness were seen as the beginning of that fulfilment. People who heard him trooped to him for the baptism of repentance. John's radicalism in dealing with the issues about moral and social life impeccably showcased him as one of the greatest prophets of his time (Matt 3:1-4; 11:7-14; 14:4-8; 21:26, 32; Mark 1:1-7; 6:18-20; Luke 3:2-14; 7:20; 7:27-29, 33; 16:16; 20:6). His popularity grew among the poor and downtrodden Palestinians who longed for freedom from the power of Empire. The people's curiosity for the messiah seemed to have come to

its fulfilment. The early gospel writers' communities were not ignorant of the promise of the coming prophet who would precede the Messiah (Isaiah 40:2-8). As a result, the masses perceived John as a prophet, and the voice of John the Baptist was a bell in the ears of his people, especially those that earnestly expected the messianic redemption of Israel (Matt 21:25-26; Mark 11:30, 32; Luke 20:4-6). The fall of the first Temple in 586 BC and the promise of its restoration, along with the restoration of Davidic kingship, spurred the minds of the people to yearn for the fulfilment of this expectation (Psa 132:11; Isa 9:7; 16:5; Jer 33:15-17). The Old Testament anticipated a Messiah who would reveal the full extent of God's kindness in the end times when YHWH would restore the throne of David with a Davidic King. Even when the people came back from exile, they were still looking forward to seeing the fulfilment of the restoration of a king who would come from the house of David, a type of king who would clothe himself with mercy, grace and compassion for the sake of his people (Jer 25:5ff; 29:9-12; Eze 37:24-28). The arrival of John marked the beginning of the process of fulfilling these expectations.

### **Demonstration of Mercy and Kindness of God in Jesus**

The coming of Jesus was a prophecy. John, as a voice of the one crying in the wilderness, had already prepared the minds of the Jews to receive their messiah. The question that John directed to Jesus indicates that the people were in high expectation of the coming of the Messiah (Matt 11:2-3; Luke 7:19-20), and the corresponding answer of Jesus to John's question (Matt 11:4-6; Luke 7:22-24) further sculptures the beginning of this fulfilment in Jesus. The answer Jesus gives to John dignifies Jesus as a Jewish Messiah, a Messiah who embodies the capacities of both divine and human agents.<sup>17</sup> The One who is capable of dispensing both sacred and human kindness to humanity and participates in the unique divine sovereignty over all things.<sup>18</sup> Jesus authenticates his messiahship through various manifestations that God had carried out through him. At this point, Jesus identifies himself to John as someone who fulfils the messianic expectation of the Old Testament's prophets and the Writings. Jesus sees himself as someone more than a prophet (7:26). William Kurz concludes that Jesus is the fulfilment of the manifestation of the Son of Man to humanity.<sup>19</sup> People did not see Jesus as a mere prophet but as a great One from God, and his answer to John echoes this fulfilment.<sup>20</sup>

The meaning of kindness attributed to YHWH, as expected by the people of early first-century Palestine, was believed to have been displayed by Jesus, according to the Synoptic writers. One cannot explain kindness in the context of the New Testament without linking it to other words, such as grace, compassion, and mercy. The absence of these words in the vocabulary of the ancient Palestinian *patrons* makes it more critical of the coming of Jesus. It means that people yearned for kindness wrapped in mercy and compassion. Compassion was the basis of Jesus' kindness. The use of compassion in the New Testament is similar to that in the Old Testament. Compassion means "suffering with" and refers to a capacity to be moved by the suffering of



others and to enter into it.<sup>21</sup> The Hebrew word *rachamim* (compassion) is derived from *rechem* (mother's womb or breast), its equivalent in Greek *splagchnon*, which indicates heart, bowel, womb, liver, etc. The reason is that the seat of compassion was believed to originate from the Hebrew word *rechem*, meaning "womb." *Rachamim* is divine since it explains God's mercy to his people.<sup>22</sup> According to Maria Pilar Aquino, who views the term *rachamim* (*splagxniómai*) from a feminist perspective demonstrates that,

The divine *rachamim* can also be found in the New Testament, where it is explicitly referred to in relation to Jesus, the incarnate Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus speaks of God and God's merciful love for the sinner like a woman who loses a coin, lights her lamp, shuts up the house, and carefully searches until she finds it.<sup>23</sup>

Compassion motivated the incarnate Son of God, Jesus, to move and heal the people affected by various problems (Matt 14:14; 15:32; Mark 6:34; 8:2; Luke 7:13; 10:33; 15:20). Jesus was driven by compassion toward the people he met during his ministry, and as a result, he fully manifested God's kindness toward humanity.

The cardinal instruction regarding compassion and mercy in the Gospels is simple: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36 RSV). Examining the writings of the evangelists, it becomes clear that only YHWH is capable of dispensing such compassion to humanity and that the coming of Jesus fulfils this desire. The method and how the three evangelists introduced the personality of Jesus indicates that they believed Jesus was the expected messiah. The echo of the people in Luke 7:16 is a typical example of how the people's expectation was met in Jesus as their Messiah: "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited His people!" (ESV). This statement poignantly portrays Jesus as both divine and human, sharing the attributes of God in demonstrating his love, mercy, compassion, and kindness to humanity through healing, feeding the poor and hungry, hospitality, and caring for the downtrodden and the outcasts of his time.

### **Jesus Christ, as the author of Kindness, Mercy and Peace**

Jesus engages his audience superlatively, distinguishing him from other leaders of his day. The social and cultic settings have allowed him to showcase and display his love, mercy and compassion to the people he encounters daily. According to Warren Carter, by doing so, Jesus subversively interfered with the existing social and cultic dynamics by altering the way people were treated, thereby challenging the Roman Empire's approach to dealing with others. Jesus' *modus operandi* directly conveys his messianic authority to his audience. In simple terms, Jesus can influence the Roman world by affecting people's lives, which often leads to conflict with those in authority.<sup>24</sup> Jesus aims to manifest God's kindness in a way that encourages every living human to participate in extending that grace to all humanity.

Different titles used on Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels were given to him as signs that he fulfilled the Messianic expectations through his acts of kindness, which were



motivated by his compassion for the people. One such title is that of the *Son of David* (Matt 9:27; 15:22; 21:9; Mark 10:47-48; Luke 1:32; 18:38-39).<sup>25</sup> The title “Son of David” is used only in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>26</sup> Dennis C. Duling suggests that the title is associated with a figure addressed by people in need of exorcism or healing.<sup>27</sup> If Duling’s assertion is correct, then the people saw Jesus as someone full of compassion and grace and able to dispense God’s kindness to those affected by problems and sickness.

Whether it was a self-imposed title based on Hellenistic tradition, as Burger suggests, or rooted in the traditional beliefs of the early and pre-Christian era, as Duling proposes, the fact remains that the people who suffered from various illnesses in the Synoptic Gospels recognised their Messianic potential and called for help. The help of the Son of David in the Gospels was willingly provided to his people through healing, exorcism, cleansing, and feeding. Many people experienced the full manifestation of God’s kindness in the Son of David through compassion and grace to the afflicted. It significantly portrays that God was with him.

### **Ways Christ demonstrates the compassion of God to Humanity**

Engaging daily with the people in his society, Jesus deals decisively by ensuring that he brings humanity succour through his actions. Jesus believes that his coming to the world is to help humanity experience God, whom he refers to as *Pater*, which, according to Jerome Neyrey, implies the patronage of God to humanity.<sup>28</sup> The works that he carries out on behalf of his father aim to improve and add value to humanity. The dynamic of patronage in the ancient world provided a vehicle for effectively implementing patron-client relationships geared towards reciprocity among people in society.<sup>29</sup> Jesus utilized this social and cultural platform to demonstrate his relational prowess to his community in various ways. This section will deal with some of these actions.

### **Healing as an expression of God’s compassion in Christ**

Several healing incidents in the Gospels suggest that the power of God is now present among His people. Matthew, Mark, and Luke portray Jesus in their writings as someone who heals all diseases and authorizes his disciples to do the same to people they encounter within the course of their preaching the Gospel (Matt 10:1-8; Mark 3:10-15; Luke 10:1-9). The evangelists believe that several healing episodes in the Gospel are signs of good news that signal the fulfilment of a new era of God’s *basileia*.<sup>30</sup> In their narratives, Matthew and Luke (Matt 4:23; 9:35; Luke 9:6-11) specifically associate healing with the sign of the kingdom of God’s presence among His people. Healing in the Old Testament (Isaiah 57:18-19; Hosea 14:4) was one of the events that characterized the coming Messianic Age; therefore, the healings that Jesus carried out in the Synoptic Gospels indicated to the people the fulfilment of the new era. One of the most profound ways to demonstrate God’s kindness to humanity is through the area of healing.

In the ancient world, sickness had numerous adverse consequences, particularly for those afflicted with diseases. The observation is that:

Healing in the New Testament incorporates different social and cultural phenomena than what is associated with it in the modern world. The contemporary world sees sickness as the result of environmental, physical or pathological problems. Instead, it was a sociocultural and religious construct in the ancient world. Sickness, in ancient Israel and Greco-Roman society, was regarded as a bad omen that came upon the sufferer due to punishment from the gods. Some of these illnesses called for ostracizing the sick person from their community. In Jewish religion, lepers were, for example, expelled from their communities. The leprous people were seen as being dead, with funeral services even being held on their behalf.

At Jesus' coming, this narrative was transformed by his healing abilities, which profoundly impacted the lives of those within his environment. Through this healing ministry, the fullness of God's manifestation of kindness was demonstrated to humanity. Regarding Jesus' ministry, John Dominic Crossan acknowledges that "the heart of the Kingdom-of-God movement was the communal mutuality of eating and healing..."<sup>31</sup>

### **Healing of Leprosy as Demonstration of God's Kindness in Christ**

In the time of Jesus, every Jewish person knew that the leprous persons were not allowed to interact with other people within the community. They were the outcasts of society and were not allowed to participate in the day-to-day running of society. The story changed at the coming of Jesus. The three evangelists emphasized the healing of the leprous community. The healing of leprosy was an expected sign of the Messiah, signifying that the kingdom of God had come (Isa 35:6a). Jesus' healing of leprosy authenticates that He has fulfilled this expectation and is the expected Messiah (Matt 11:5; Luke 7:22).

The leper texts are found in all three Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 8:2-4, Mark 1:40-45, Luke 5:12-15, and 17:12-19. Jesus's cleansing (καθαρίζω) of the lepers associated with the cultic and social-cultural rituals of the Old Testament, which the Mosaic code epitomized as being carried out by Israel as a means of reintegrating the healed leper into the community. This cleansing process that Jesus carries out on the affected Jewish people grants them the power of being humans by restoring their dignity.<sup>32</sup>

### **Healing the Blind as a Demonstration of God's Compassion**

Another healing episode that defined Jesus's messianic manifestation in the synoptic Gospels is the healing of the blind. This miracle is not recorded in the Old Testament. It was during Jesus' time that blind people regained their sight. This significantly portrayed Jesus as fulfilling the messianic mandate of healing the blind as prophesized by the Old Testament prophet (Isa 35:5).<sup>33</sup> The healing of these blind people can be said to be the peak of Jesus' ministry (Matt 11:5; Luke 4:17; 7:22). The general characteristics of those texts that deal with healing of the blind people often demonstrate that the blind people begged for Jesus' compassion and mercy (Matt 9:27; 20:30; Mark 8:22; 10:47; Luke 18:35). The Synoptic Gospels, however, is saturated with stories of Jesus restoring the sights of blind people. He heals blind Bartimaeus in Jericho (Mark

10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43), another two blind men in Galilee (Matt 9:27-31), in somewhere Capernaum, he heals a blind man without speech (Matt 12:22-23), he heals a blind man in Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26) and another one in Jerusalem (Matt 21:14).<sup>34</sup> These people were not only physically healed of their blindness but also restored to their spiritual sights, which led to life transformation.<sup>35</sup>

By healing these blind people, Jesus has broken the stereotype that separated the sick person from the entire community. The community believed that sin was the cause of their blindness (Luke 13:2). The healing of these blind people broke that stereotype and nullified the barrier that stood against them. Through this healing, Jesus has once again demonstrated God's care and compassion for those in need. As carefully observed by John J. Pilch, this action of Jesus shows "... the language of patronage: the patron sends the broker on an errand. If God has sent Jesus, then Jesus is God's broker. The blind man will soon convey this information to the authorities.<sup>36</sup> God in Jesus manifests his compassion, mercy, and grace through his kindness to humanity by restoring their sight and dignity.

### **Caring for the Poor and the Marginalized**

The way Jesus dealt with the poor and marginalized of his time was marked by his ability to see them with grace and compassion. The Synoptic Gospels portray Jesus as the hope of the poor and the marginalized. All the evangelists showcase Jesus as the one who fulfilled the curiosity of the poor, marginalized women and children. There was a "Syrophonician" (Mark 7:24-28) and a "Canaanite" (Matt 15:21-28) woman, who was a stranger and a Gentile, but Jesus healed her daughter. Nomenclatures used by both Matthew and Mark identify this woman as an enemy of Israel. She inevitably decided to put her trust in Jesus as the Son of David, who fulfilled the messianic expectations associated with the house of David.<sup>37</sup> God in Jesus manifests his kindness towards the woman who suffered from constant bleeding (Matt 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48), which, according to the Jewish law, kept her perpetually and ceremonially uncleaned.<sup>38</sup>

Jesus' efforts to care for the poor and the marginalized are well-documented by the evangelists. Feeding people experiencing poverty is a typical example of his benefaction to the human community. As stipulated in his manifesto, one of Jesus' cardinal visions is caring for the people and the needy whom the world had rejected (Luke 4:18-19). The stories involve the tax collector, Mary Magdalene, the prostitute, and the man from the Gadarenes, all of whom fall under this category. Jesus believes he must show kindness and mercy by caring for these poor and marginalized people. Jesus, in this context, manifests the grace of mercy from the higher to the lower level. The same instruction that Jesus commands his disciples to show mercy to people experiencing poverty and marginalized society.<sup>39</sup>

## **Ecclesia and the Lord's Supper as Demonstration of Compassion of God in Christ**

The hallmark of Jesus' ministry and the full expression of God's kindness and compassion to humanity is through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This singular yet multifaceted event has brought humanity undeniable grace that surpasses that of Moses (cf. John 1:14-18). All the kindness, reconciliation, forgiveness of sin, mercy, and healing of the sick culminate in this sacrifice to humanity. The death and resurrection of Jesus necessitated the establishment of the Ecclesia as a means of extending God's mercy, love, kindness, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing to humanity. By doing so, the church, as the body of Christ, acts as a conduit or vessel of God's kindness to the rest of society.<sup>40</sup> This process of manifesting God's love in Christ through the church is missional.

The fact that the church can only fulfil this missional mandate "through the Word and Sacraments in which the Spirit makes Christ to be actively present, and through the faith which the Spirit thereby evokes and sustains."<sup>41</sup> The reference to the Word connotes the idea of preaching salvation centered on the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is based on the tradition that Jesus handed over to the Ecclesia. Without the administration of the word by the Ecclesia, the missional mandate given to the church would be in vain. The preaching and the doing of the word are the essential functions of the Church community's existence. The Lord's Supper, for instance, is one of the sacraments that serve both social and spiritual functions. The sacraments themselves are designed to affect the thoughts and feelings of the participants.<sup>42</sup> It was a result of God's love, compassion/mercy, grace and kindness that warranted God in Jesus to institute the Eucharist as a memorial event that, according to Izunna Okonkwo, demonstrates:

Christ's mutual love and self-giving to humanity is the essence of the Eucharist. For in giving Himself to humanity, He gives them eternal life and a share in His divine life. One may see the Eucharist as the core of the Mystical Body. The Eucharistic assembly then is called "to make spaces for others, to make the world more hospitable, to welcome the stranger and others in various needs." Thus, there is a presupposition of transformation to a life that is Eucharistic.<sup>43</sup>

The instruction given to the Church by Jesus, "Do this in remembrance of me," resonates by drawing the Church's attention to remember the sacrifice of Jesus for humanity as a means of salvation and restoration. One way to fulfil this mandate is by spreading the good news through healing the sick, feeding the poor, caring for the homeless, and pronouncing the kingdom of God to all humanity, irrespective of colour or race.

## **Compassion and Kindness of Christ in Africa: The Nigerian Experience**

Henry M. Stanley's preface to his 1899 book, *Through the Dark Continent, Volume 1, acknowledges that God is the hope for Africa*, despite its darkness.<sup>44</sup> Many parts of the continent owe its development to the work of Christian missionaries, as he says: "But,

after all, the arrival of the missionaries, though an important event and one that has had large consequences, was but a sign of the dawn” in Africa. The coming of Christianity in Africa marked the beginning of dispelling “the darkness” from the continent. The words of the prophecy of Simeon in the Gospel of Luke are fulfilled here that Jesus is “A Light of Revelation to the Gentiles ....” (Luke 2:32a). The words of the Gospel and that of Henry M. Stanley many years ago are resonating idea that the coming of Christianity to Africa was in actuality the dawn of the manifestation of the kindness of God in the many parts of Africa. Since the arrival of Christianity, many notions and concepts embedded within its cultural context have undergone significant changes in Africa. For instance, a country like Nigeria experienced cultural norms that were not compatible with modern human values, and such cultures evolved in response to the introduction of Christianity.<sup>45</sup>

The advent of Christianity has improved the lives of Africans as a continent, both socially, economically, culturally, and spiritually. Matthew 6:14 echoes, “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned” (RSV). Many areas in Africa witnessed the dawn of God's kindness in Jesus.<sup>46</sup>

### **1 Ending of Human Sacrifice**

Before the coming of Christianity in many parts of Africa, human sacrifice was an everyday norm and practice. Human sacrifices were carried out in various ways. (Mary Slessor (1848-1915) is noted for the roles she played in southern Nigeria and beyond by putting to an end superstitious practices by people through the killing of twins. John Mbiti has reported that the killing of twins was a regular event that many African communities carried out.<sup>47</sup> Not only the killing of twins was prevalent, but human sacrifice generally was known in many parts of African countries or ethnic groups. For instance, many kingdoms in West Africa engaged in human sacrifice.<sup>48</sup> Whenever a vital king or elder was to be buried,<sup>49</sup> The reason for such human sacrifice was embedded in African belief in life after death.

### **2 Introduction of Education and Healthcare**

The Christian missionaries came to Africa with education and healthcare to extend the kindness of God in Jesus to African people. It is no exaggeration to say that education is one of the most remarkable achievements of the missionaries in Africa. The study and development of African languages were made possible by the coming of the Christian missionaries. Through their interactions with African locals, the missionaries produced *Polyglotta Africana*, a study of over 300 African languages.<sup>50</sup> Due to the presence of these Christian missionaries, the translation of the Bible and hymns into various languages became possible. Schools aimed at educating black Africans were established in multiple locations and communities, and some of the students who graduated were sent to either Europe or the United States for further edu-

cation. The most educated people in Africa at that time were those who had contact with Christian missionaries.

Healing the sick was the ultimate goal as the church engaged in building hospitals and medical centres for various treatments of diseases and infections in Africa, thereby fulfilling the instruction of Jesus (Matt 10:8; Luke 10:9). This action prompted Ogbu Kalu to write that:

All the missions have recognized medical work as a means of expressing Christian love in action, and some of the best-known missionaries have been doctors. In 1965, about one-third of SIM missionaries were engaged in medical work. The mission hospitals, dispensaries, and leprosy settlements have greatly benefited the people as a whole.<sup>51</sup>

The missionaries sought to demonstrate God's kindness in Jesus Christ in Africa by healing the sick and establishing robust healthcare systems as they preached God's compassion, love, and mercy to the local population. The evidence of this gesture is seen in many leprosy homes across the continent.

### 3 Salvation through Christ's Event

The preaching of death and resurrection has impacted salvation for many African people. Through the preaching of Christ's event, Africa has experienced the salvation that Jesus brought to humanity. Salvation from sin, savage rituals, and death was the cardinal message that changed the continent from darkness to light. The same message that the Synoptic Jesus preached is what the church brought to Africa, and by believing this message, God began to manifest his kindness and mercy to the people of the continent. The missionaries equally demonstrated the actions of Jesus that we witnessed in the Gospels as they preached and taught in Africa. Many Africans experienced salvation from sin and the power of darkness, laying the foundation for modern Africa. Christ's event has ideally transformed the continent, once known as the "Heart of Darkness," into one of the rays of hope that light the earth.

As Jesus manifests the kindness of God to the tax collector, the woman with the issue of blood, the sinners, and the downtrodden in the Gospels, the missionaries and the Christian church demonstrate the same message and action of salvation to the people in Africa. The church's engagement in combating ills, poverty, and injustice in Africa reflects its commitment to the holistic nature of Christian salvation. That is why many modern theologians of African descent describe the effects of this manifestation of God's kindness in Jesus in various ways, based on their personal experiences of Jesus in their lives.<sup>52</sup> The same salvation that entered the house of Zacchaeus has also entered Africa, and the voice of Jesus continues to resonate in the heart of the continent: today, salvation has come to this *continent*. This is the ultimate display of God's kindness, compassion, mercy, and grace in Jesus to the people of Africa.

## Conclusion

In the Bible, the word “kindness” has been used in various ways, depending on the context in which it appears. We discussed how the kindness of God was expressed in multiple ways in the Old Testament, mainly through mercy and compassion shown to YHWH's people. The word “kindness” was examined, and it was found that “hesed” was correctly translated to mean mercy, compassion, and sometimes loving kindness, depending on the context of the translation. It was also found that people's expectations during the first century were to see God's kindness, compassion, mercy, and grace in them. The expectation that Jesus is believed to have fulfilled through his words and actions for his people.

This article highlighted that Jesus, as depicted in the Gospels, exemplified the kindness of God to the people by demonstrating compassion, mercy, grace, and love. He achieved this by healing the sick, cleansing lepers, restoring sight to the blind, and caring for the poor and marginalized people of his time. It was also discussed that God's kindness to humanity was manifested in his death and resurrection. It was through his death and resurrection that humanity was redeemed, and this is witnessed today through the establishment of the Ecclesia and the celebration of the Eucharist as channels of furthering this communication to the broken and dark world.

Africa received the kindness of God via the missionaries. Africa, as a continent, is a beneficiary of God's kindness through Christ Jesus, as evidenced by various activities carried out by the church in Africa. The manifestation was witnessed in Africa, especially in Nigeria, through the abolition of human sacrifices, the establishment of schools and hospitals, and the preaching of the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection to humanity. It was emphasized that the salvation of Africa as a continent is based on the manifestation of God's kindness in Jesus to the continent. The church imitated the kindness and compassion of Christ and extended them through various activities in Africa.

Despite the fact that many African people and communities have experienced God's kindness, mercy and compassion in Christ through the Gospel and the works of missionaries in various ways, African people, especially Nigerians, have yet to see this manifestation in their lives and conduct. Africa, as a continent, is still suffering from many problems, such as migration, diseases, poverty, terrorism, corruption and poor leadership, despite its vast natural resources. Africans must learn to express God's kindness, compassion, mercy, and grace to one another. Showing kindness, compassion, and love to one another in Africa can help make the continent free from conflict, poverty, and corruption, thereby laying the groundwork for peace and prosperity. Africa, especially Nigeria must imitate Christ!



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# Islam and Politics in a Pluralistic Society: The Lagos State 2023 General Elections Experience

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## Abstract

This study critically examined the interplay between Islam and politics in Lagos State, Nigeria, a microcosm of a pluralistic society. The research explored the historical and contemporary dynamics that shape the relationship between religious identity and political engagement. Nigeria, characterized by its multi-religious and heterogeneous population, often witnesses the intersection of religion and politics, leading to both collaboration and conflict. This study employed a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys, interviews, and case studies, to analyze the impact of political strategies on Muslim electorates in Lagos State. It highlighted the role of religious leaders in political mobilization and the influence of political promises on religious communities. The findings provided insights into preserving religious identities while fostering political participation, ultimately contributing to the discourse on religion and politics in pluralistic societies. It suggested a comprehensive approach aimed at offering a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in the relationship between Islam and politics in Lagos. The study concluded that, providing valuable insights for policymakers, religious leaders, and scholars interested in the intersection of religion and politics in diverse societies a sine-qua-non to human development.

Keywords: Islam, politics, pluralistic, Lagos, general elections

## Introduction

ISLĀM, UNLIKE OTHER RELIGIONS, IS HIGHLY CONTEMPTUOUS AND CONTINUES TO meet the needs of its adherents as it satisfies the contingencies of the present-day ordeal. Islām's rulings are not confined to worship and liturgical aspects of the religion only; rather, they consist of teachings guiding human beings socially, economically, politically, and morally. In other words, Islām as a religion does not emphasize spirituality only as erroneously believed by some observers and orientalist, however, discussion around human capacity building and general dictate of living is lucidly addressed.

Politics is inevitable as it's in coherence with the innate nature of man. More precisely, a plethora of people erroneously take politics to mean governance alone, politics is beyond leading and governance. It's an arrowhead of human utilization and exhibition of one another, not to exploit them but because man can never successfully live a solitary life.

A popular Arabic aphorism goes thus: الإسلام دين ودولة (Islām is both religion

and governance) this means that Islām is not confined to religious matters only but also spread to discussing governance, hence an angle that depicts Islām as more than just a religion but a way of life. This will form the hallmark from which Muslim and Muslim clerics' involvement in elections will be extensively discussed in this research work to serve as an academic contribution to contemporary challenges.

### Background to the Study

Surprisingly, the first contact of Islam and politics as an entanglement happens to surface in a plural society. Yathrib where he ruled, Prophet Muhammad ruled the inhabitants of diverse religions and tribes. The dual formed a perfect match as it ushered in a new dispensation at variance from all polity of the then *status quo ante*. The perfect blend of the nascent Islamic principles accommodates meagre and opaque ordeal of the people by discerning point of contact and contrast. Resolutions such as the *Ummah* documents, freedom of religion and humanity precedence over religion propelled the succinct summary of the dual operations then as against that of contemporary incompatibility, borne out of tragedy of the common biases.

Invariably, Islam has a well enacted definite precept of the sacred but left the tentacles of reality wide as there are more areas of speculation, intentionally overlooked in a bid to ensure reality is accommodated. To point in fact, even though Islam is said to have practiced a decent description of what amalgamation of Islam and politics should look like in a plural society, no appellation has been tailored to describe what Islamic politics should look like. However, guiding principles are tremendously found to guide the interaction of politics from the point of view of Islamic array of legislations. The Qur'ān provides several important principles pertaining to the Islamic political order some of which include: *tawhid* (monotheism), *'adalah* (justice), *hurriyah* (freedom), *musawah* (equality), etc.<sup>1</sup>

In recent times, the sophistry that has plagued the interaction between Islam and Politics in a plural society is becoming unbearable, unmatched and oxymoronic. While non-Muslim of the plural state tends to be unreceptive of Islamic polity, seeing it as an agent of diplomatic IslamiZation, anti-conventional politics and a counter-intuitive means of aggrandizing Islamophobia. This has flawed the communion and shattered the peacefulness of the dual in many heterogeneous abodes.

Plethora of Muslim majority countries are in constant struggle of this alacrity. Realizing an all-inclusive and equal-opportunity domain for all religious denominations, however, was neither smooth nor automatic especially in the face of Islamophobia.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, the Balkan nationality milieu of partitioning makes the matter a bickering ground for adequate attention. Hence, Re-regulating the relationship between the state and Muslim communities proved complicated in the context of exclusive national paradigms, long-running ethno-religious animosities, oft-fabricated collective memories, and the inherited majoritarian 'traditions' in the phase of coalition in a legitimately bordered Plural country state.<sup>3</sup>

More friction becomes more noticeable in Balkan states either Muslim majority

or otherwise, every step of enacting the guiding principle of Islamic borderless polity is conceived as heinous and chronicles to susceptible meaning in disguise. In fact, this threat is more aggravated and flamed especially when a lucky Muslim acclaim the enthronement. He is considered to be rebellious and oppressive in all ramifications. Personal resolve and inclination are not at the expense of the state which escalates beyond repair.

On a global scale, the experiences of pluralistic societies navigating political crises illustrate the intersection between religious identity and conflict, often exacerbated by political manipulation. In Indonesia, the post-Suharto era saw violent clashes between Muslim and Christian communities in regions like Maluku, where power vacuums and religious tensions fueled widespread violence until Islamic civil society groups championed peace efforts.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Egypt's post-Arab Spring turmoil exposed tensions between secular groups and Islamic political movements, culminating in military crackdowns on pro-Islamist protests following President Morsi's ousting.<sup>5</sup> In Sudan, the imposition of Shari'ah law over a diverse population intensified divisions between Muslims and non-Muslims, contributing to prolonged civil war and the eventual secession of South Sudan.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, India's Gujarat riots of 2002 demonstrated how state complicity and religious politicization led to violence targeting the Muslim minority.<sup>7</sup> These cases highlight the dangers of exploiting religious identities for political gains, offering lessons on fostering pluralism, democratic stability, and inclusive governance.

More specifically, Nigerians are very religious, as about 95 percent of her human population belongs to a faith community, particularly the three major religions, namely, the African Traditional Religions, Christianity and Islam.<sup>8</sup> An average Christian or Muslim is expected to practice the basic ethical teachings of their faith in the holy books as induced by natural proclivities and not extended favouritism. This has mostly influenced the exponential biases that propel fragmentation and biases in various orders which the foregoing is not an exception.

Similarly, it is believed in the African religion and culture that the traditional rulers are the spiritual heads of their people. This implies that politics and religion are intertwined and have direct influence on each other in African societies. In the same way, Islam allows relationship between religion and politics.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Islam dictates the political ideology and practice in any Islamic society as that is the only means to guarantee the ideal state of Islam.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, all the three religions allow interactions between religion and politics. Consequently, religion has the obligation to serve as a guiding and enriching influence on politics and democracy in Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> Striking a balance of the ebb and flow of the foregoing has hampered the interaction of Islam and Politics not only In Lagos, but all nooks and crannies of Nigeria.

### **An Ideal Society in Islam**

Invariably, opinions are sparse and diverse in analyzing how an ideal state is to be described. In order to arrive at a vantage point of fact, it is imperative to recall the pres-

ence of opinion about an ideal state prior to the arrival of Prophet Muhammad. The efforts of scholars and such as Plato and Aristotle had attempted to escalate what an Ideal state should be known with. On the one hand, Plato argues that an ideal state is the one that creates happiness for its citizens.<sup>12</sup> Plato's concept of the ideal state is a commentary of Socrates's idea of the state. Plato argues that the state will continue to exist and develop because it is a human's basic need. Humans are unable to fulfill individually their needs and desires. They must cooperate with others to comply with their daily needs: a unity of people who have the same needs and standpoints, which is called society or the state.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, Aristotle opines that a state is a combination or a collection of families. A proper state begins with the creation of a good family. A happy state, a manifestation of shared happiness, is obtained when families in that state are a good family, and that a good family consists of good individuals. The State is an accumulation of people who cannot survive independently.<sup>14</sup> These two opinions are where the delineations of an ideal state substantially adhere prior to the Islamic rejuvenation by Prophet Muhammad. The acclimatization of an ideal society by Islam is entrenched on a nature-nurture scale. It is the first meeting point of spirituality and secularism as not only a mutually exclusive element, but that the dual completes and complements one another. The state in Islam is founded on certain principles which, according to the faith of a Muslim, are laid down in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet. The first principle is that all authority in the universe vests in Allah, who is the Omnipotent and Omnipresent Creator of the universe. This concept is known as *malikiyyah* which implies that the authority and power accrued to man is severely limited compared to Allah who has an unregimented limitless expression of authority.

Furthermore, despite how an Ideal state of Islam is construed, it still imposes an element of individual rightful disposition in achieving the feat. In Islam, the state is seen as more than just a political body responsible for governance and administration over a specific territory. It holds a deeper role as an institution tasked with organizing societal life in alignment with Islamic principles. A state deemed good by Islamic standards upholds justice, fairness, and ensures the well-being of its people.<sup>15</sup> A common misconception in the contemporary time is the aphorism that "Man is a product of the society." Conversely, this submission is at variance from the ideal society of Islam. To buttress, a plethora of Qur'an verses such as (Qur'an 13:11) "Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. And when Allah intends for a people ill, there is no repelling it. Similarly, in Qur'an 17:8 "It is expected, [if you repent], that your Lord will have mercy upon you. But if you return (to sin), We will return (to punishment)" The import from the foregoing accentuates the reciprocated nature of an ideal state in Islamism. Each individual action makes up the confluence of trends in society.

Al-Farabi presents a metaphorical comparison between the noble or ideal city (*Al-Madinah Al-Fadhilah*) and a healthy, well-functioning body, where each organ performs its natural role. Just as the heart holds the central position and guides the



body's functions, the lower organs which serve specific purposes to complete the functions of the primary rank. These lower organs are in turn supported by even smaller components, working collectively to achieve overall harmony. This analogy extends to the governance of a city, where the human ruler, like the heart, is supported by various levels of subordinates. At the lowest level are subordinates who serve but are not served by anyone else.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the establishment of an Islamic State is not a "worldly activity," as some people mistakenly believe, but rather the necessary condition for social justice, as required by Islam. "The state," Dr. Iqbal explains, "is an endeavor to convert these ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to realize them in a specific human organization. In this sense alone, the state is a theocracy in Islam, not in the sense that it is led by a representative of God on earth who can always hide his tyrannical will behind his purported infallibility."<sup>17</sup>

The ideal state in Islam is expected to be arrived at with constant substantial strive for righteousness. It is not an essential principle that is definite like *salaat*, *zakaat* and other aspects of worship, but it is compelled to be achieved by Muslim stir to up their enjoinders as mandated.

### Islam in Lagos: A Concise Historical Perspective

Islām and politics are time immemorial tools that tangle together like a Siamese twin. They are interwoven and inseparable. Fundamentally, Islām has always been described as not only a religion but an absolute way of life, which should not be confined to liturgical and spiritual abode alone. All prophets of Allah, aside from being prophets, were also leaders who held precursors of decision-making and policy formulations for their companions. Politics from the point of view of Islām is a complementary instrument.

Historically, the presence of Islām not only in Lagos but in all Yoruba land has been a subject of hot debates among several narratives presented by scholars. The point of controversy therein lies in the fact that the appellation 'Yoruba' became prominent to mean all people and towns with geographical proximity, cultural affinity, identical belief system and similar language around 1840s as it was first adopted by the Church Missionary.<sup>18</sup> Correspondingly, before 1775, all noticeable Islamic practices in Lagos are said to be a shadow of the real Islām because pragmatic exemplifications of most Islamic rituals were communally or collectively based while practice of Islām as at its first contact with Lagos was covertly induced. Although Islām is said to have reached Lagos in 1775, the religion was practiced secretly. The Muslims were tattered by the yoke of religious persecution. They were expelled from Lagos twice.<sup>19</sup>

Mention was made of the presence Of Islām, first at the court of Adele I. Some unnamed members of his court were said to have professed Islām and worshipped in secrecy. Adele permitted the practice of this religion at the expense of his throne. When he came back to Lagos in 1832, Islām was already firmly planted in his court in Lagos and Muslims in and outside his court enjoyed his Patronage.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, trade, proximity, and other axioms enhanced the spread of Islām across the hoi poloi



in Lagos, though all rituals and worships were still in clandestine. Alas, the arrival of the expatriates and return of repatriates back to Lagos was like the subservience of Umar bn Khattāb to Islām. However, the Lagos Muslims received a morale booster between 1840 and 1860 when two groups of expatriates arrived in Lagos from diaspora to champion their cause. The advent of the repatriates injected a new dose of courage into the oppressed Muslims of Lagos.<sup>21</sup>

The two groups of repatriates who consolidated the Muslims position were the *Saros* and the *Agudas*. The saros were repatriates from Sierra Leone. They settled at *Ologbowo* and *Isale Eko* areas of Lagos. They built their first big Mosque in 1861 at *Ologbowo*. The mosque called *Jamiu Mubarak* (The blessed Mosque) ab initio, was later known as Mosque. Among the saros are to be found such well known families like Abdullah Cole, Muḥammad Savage, Umar and Williams.<sup>22</sup> These emancipation cum the influx of people from all parts of African and Nigeria further assisted the prominence that Islām gained in Lagos state. The emergence of Islamic societies and sects such as Ansār-ud-deen, Nawāiru deen, Muslim students' society of Nigeria, Ahmādiyyah among others which impacted in the spread of Islām in Lagos cannot be overemphasized.

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, various mosques sprang up across the nooks and crannies of Lagos. The first mosque in Lagos known as *Idoluwo* mosque built in 1775 by Mallam Umar al-Kashnawi. This mosque was followed by the *Okunnu* Mosque or the *Oba* Mosque in 1776. Muslims could now gather in congregation, make loud and open calls to prayers in true Muslim fashion and gather together on Friday to say their *Jum'ah* prayers.<sup>23</sup>

### Islam and Political Interplay in Lagos State

Islām is a total submission to the will of Allah (Qur'an 43, v. 69) "You who believed in our verses and were Muslims". Islām is not just a religion but a complete way of Life. Jamiu Adewunmi Oluwatoki foisted as follows; Islām is not just a religion but a complete way of life, a social barometer and a lighthouse to aid the navigation of the ocean of life without a hitch until it anchors to the beach of *al-ākhirah*.<sup>24</sup>

Initially, Muslim had seldom significant contributions towards political activities in Lagos until the arrival of Christianity. Some of their privileges were threatened and honours became depleted. The Christian missionaries really mean business as they already have a strategic plausible inducement to entice the subjects of any jurisdiction they come to. One of the core machineries they have deployed by proxy is embedded in the introduction and establishment of western education to new colonies. The appealing aroma of the advantages of western education has reached the Lagos citizens by the luxurious living of the minority who were opportune to have access to western education. Hence, caste and creed, dick and harry, Muslims and non-Muslims alike who are residents of Lagos begin to take their children to the available missionary schools in their surroundings. Owing to the fact that it was a deliberate strategy deployed by the Christian missionaries and a coherent mapped outline has been

sketched to stem their hidden agenda. Innumerable Muslim children were converted to Christianity at the hands of these impostors. Christian missionaries by their activities sowed the seeds of discord between Muslims and Christian in Nigeria, more so in the south-west. The Christianized and westernized postcolonial state called Nigeria continues to rouse Muslim indignation at the blatant disregard of their rights and the level of injustice they often suffer in a society they call their own. The onset of this Muslims' self-righteous anger and disgust was the mission schools' policy of conversion of Muslim children to Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Hence, there was a dire need for Muslims to stem the tide of this grievous considerable challenge; delineation and fomentation of various sects sprang up.

Pioneer Muslim elites made efforts to redress the situation; they founded organizations which established Muslim schools to educate their children while they retain their faith, Muslim values and identity. These were: the Ahmadiyyah Movement (later Anwārul Islām) (1922), Ansār-ud-deen society (1923), the Islamic society of Nigeria (Jama'atul-Islāmiyyah) (1924); with Jibril Martin, M.K. Ekemode and L.B. Augusto as their leaders respectively. They pioneered the energetic *da'wah* and establishment of secondary schools in Lagos where it all started and from where these noble ideas and movement radiated to other parts of yorubaland.<sup>26</sup>

The import of this long examination of this drastic Muslim school establishment is that the majority of those schools were eventually adopted by the government and thus became funded by the government and known as Government schools. This incident underscores how Muslims got to realize the importance of active participation in Politics. Another conspicuous Muslim-induced decision of the Lagos state government is the legalization of the use of *Hijāb* for Muslim students. *Ab-initio*, in schools owned by the Lagos State government, the use of *hijāb* was approved for use only during Islamic Religious Knowledge (IRK) class and the Muslim noon prayers. The ban, according to the government, was issued to "preserve the secular nature of the institutions" and to ensure uniformity in school' dress.<sup>27</sup> Hence, very many Muslim ladies were subjected to severe animosities as a result of this right infringement verdict of Lagos state government. Some notable victims of the Law aftermath is as follows; On the 5th of February 2013, a fourteen-year-old female pupil named Aisha Alabi of Kadara Junior High School Lagos was flogged by her principal, Mrs. E. C. Ukpaka, for wearing the *hijāb* (headscarf/veil) outside the restricted hours. Similarly, on February 20, the principal of another Lagos school, Mrs Elizabeth Omidele of Mafoluku Senior Secondary School, harassed a *hijāb*-wearing pupil, Bareerah Tajudeen, who usually wear her *hijāb* from home and remove it just before entering school (and wear it again on her way home after school). However, according to press releases, the principal who protested that this violated the school uniform seized Bareerah's veil, threw it on the ground and trod on it.<sup>28</sup> Muslims in Lagos advanced legally towards the emancipation of their Ladies from this disregard, they started with campaigns, sensitization and public plea to the government before they eventually advanced to court as a last resort amidst when all deployed means proved futile. Lagos High Court finally grant-

ed judgment in favour of the Lagos state government and the Muslims immediately proceeded to the court of appeal where their greatest nightmare was eventually put to torture. The special five-man panel of the Court of Appeal sitting in Lagos Thursday set aside the judgment of a Lagos High Court that banned students in public primary and secondary schools in Lagos State from wearing Hijab (Muslim headscarf) with their school uniforms in a unanimous decision.<sup>29</sup> Lagos Muslims another time show absolute commitment towards the decision of the court and a redress which the Lagos state government has to oblige with wittingly or unwittingly.

Another cogent perennial stride of the Muslims is the endorsement of the *Shari'ah* Law for Muslim civil matters. The state government was hell-bent on non-receptive of such a proposal even till the present time. Various pleas, petitions, strategic meetings, and seminars all turned to the deaf ears of the government. The petitions of Muslim activists such as National Council of Muslim Youth Organizations (NACOMYO), over many years for separate Sharia courts for all Muslims to use have fallen on deaf ears. Tired of waiting, the activists have at last decided to provide a Muslim forum of their own like some other state names in the northern and southern states of Nigeria respectively. Hence, In 2002, Muslim activists in Lagos State took it upon themselves to set up what amounts to a private arbitration tribunal—the Independent Sharia Panel (“ISP”) of Lagos State—to which Muslims are invited to submit their disputes for adjudication under Islamic law. The ISP was established to fill what the activists regard as an urgent need: for some forum in Lagos State that administers Islamic law established in Victoria Island and Abesan Estates mosques respectively. The Muslims are still obstinately firm on their mandate to extend *Shari'ah* application in the state well endorsed by the state government, even though in civil matters.<sup>30</sup>

The incidents highlighted underpins the plight of Muslim in many in many Plural societies. Participation in politics becomes propelled with the intent of ensuring their religion is not manipulated, grossly deprived and a struggle for continuity. Many plural societies as examined earlier had centered the contact of Islam and politics as a medium to primarily ensure their religion is duly represented, further extended to fulfilling the mandate of the held position.

### 2023 General Elections and Lagos Muslims Experience

The intersection of religion and politics in Nigeria has long been inseparable, with both influencing electoral outcomes at various levels of government.<sup>31</sup> This symbiotic relationship was once again evident in the 2023 general elections, where Islamic clerics played a significant role in shaping political discourse, mobilizing electorates, and reinforcing Muslim political participation. Islam, alongside Christianity, remains one of the dominant religious forces in Nigeria, often setting the stage for political competition. The far-reaching influence of religion in Nigerian politics is reflected in how religious leaders serve as power brokers, influencing their congregations and communities in electoral decision-making.<sup>32</sup> In this context, Muslim clerics have emerged as pivotal figures, not necessarily due to their elite status but because of their influ-

ence and the platforms they command. Their role extends beyond spiritual leadership, as they often serve as the voice of the Muslim community, particularly in politically charged periods.

One of the most notable contributions of Muslim clerics is their ability to mobilize voters effectively. The Islamic tradition of moral guidance and community engagement has historically positioned clerics as credible figures in political participation.<sup>33</sup> Their engagement in grassroots political discussions and sermons played a crucial role in encouraging voter turnout among Muslim faithful. The impact of their influence was particularly evident in the 2023 elections, where a significant portion of the electorate voted along religious lines. Out of the 23,377,466 valid votes cast, approximately 17,275,933 votes were split among the three major Muslim candidates Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Rabi'u Kwankwaso, and Atiku Abubakar.<sup>34</sup> While it is acknowledged that some Christians voted for Muslim candidates and vice versa, the overall results reaffirmed the numerical strength and steadfastness of the Muslim electorate.

Despite challenges and religious tensions, Muslim clerics demonstrated political diplomacy, ensuring that their engagement did not escalate interfaith conflicts. A precedent for this approach was observed during the 2015 elections when Christian leaders attempted to leverage concerns over Boko Haram to dissuade voters from supporting Muhammadu Buhari. However, Muslim clerics countered this narrative through strategic engagement, a method similarly employed in 2023, where opposition to the Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket was countered through unity and mobilization. The Muslims' ability to neutralize sectarian tensions is a testament to the historical resilience of Islamic leadership in Nigeria. Previous studies have shown that religious leaders play an active role in electoral processes by shaping political discourse, guiding voting preferences, and sometimes serving as mediators during election-related conflicts.<sup>35</sup> Their various roles in fostering political awareness and mobilization cannot be underestimated, as seen in Lagos, where the Muslim community took a structured approach to political participation.

In Lagos, various Islamic organizations, including the League of Imams, *da'wah* boards, and other clerical associations, facilitated forums where political candidates were invited for scrutiny and dialogue. This tradition of engagement enabled the Muslim electorate to make informed decisions while ensuring that their interests were well represented in governance. Research on Muslim political engagement in Nigeria suggests that Islamic institutions have historically served as political spaces where discussions on governance, leadership, and electoral choices take place.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Lagos, as one of Nigeria's most politically significant states, has witnessed a dynamic interplay between religion and politics. The role of Muslim organizations in ensuring that their voices are heard in governance reflects a long-standing tradition of community-based political participation.<sup>37</sup> By fostering dialogue between political aspirants and Muslim communities, these organizations have strengthened democratic engagement, ultimately contributing to the broader political consciousness of Lagos Muslims.

The outcome of the 2023 general elections reflected the resilience and unity of the Muslim electorate, particularly in Lagos. The structured involvement of clerics in political discourse reinforced their role as a unifying force, shaping electoral outcomes and strengthening the political influence of the Muslim community. The ability of Islamic clerics to mobilize voters while maintaining religious harmony underscores their continued relevance in Nigeria's evolving democratic landscape.

### **An Evaluation of Muslims Experience in the 2023 Elections**

Religion has long played a significant role in Nigeria's democratic processes, shaping political discourse and electoral outcomes. Since the First Republic elections in 1958, religion alongside ethnicity and regional affiliations has remained an influential factor in determining political leadership at all levels of government.<sup>38</sup> Over the decades, the involvement of religious leaders in Nigerian politics has evolved, with the 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections witnessing heightened engagement from both Muslim and Christian clerics in mobilizing support for their preferred candidates.<sup>39</sup>

Muslim generally and clerics, in particular, have been instrumental in shaping political engagement within their communities. Their involvement is not limited to election periods but extends to broader civil rights advocacy, ensuring that the Muslim electorate remains politically active and informed. This role is not an assertion of dominance but a strategic effort to safeguard the religious and civic rights of Muslims in a multi-religious society like Nigeria.

One of the most contentious issues in the 2023 elections was the Muslim-Muslim ticket of the winning party, which sparked debates on religious representation and political inclusivity. The controversy surrounding the religious and ethnic identities of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates underscored the necessity of clerical involvement in electoral affairs. Despite criticisms, the overwhelming Muslim voter turnout and support for multiple Muslim candidates demonstrated the numerical strength of the Muslim electorate in Nigeria. However, while Muslim have played a vital role in election mobilization, the overall socio-political gains for the Muslim community remain limited. Challenges persist, including the struggle for the full implementation of Sharia law in parts of Northern Nigeria, the marginalization of Muslims in public office appointments in the South, and the persecution of Muslim minorities in the East. Additionally, issues such as the alarming number of Al-Majiri children left destitute in Northern Nigeria and the systemic socio-economic disadvantages faced by many Muslims highlight the need for more strategic and results-driven political engagement.

Another critical concern is the tendency of some Muslim clerics to adopt an openly partisan stance, which has fueled religious intolerance and deepened societal divisions. The politicization of religion has exacerbated tensions, as seen in the rise of religious conflicts, fundamentalist movements, and controversies surrounding issues such as Hijab rights and religious representation in government appointments.<sup>40</sup> While religious leaders have the right to political opinions, there is a growing need for

diplomatic engagement that promotes inclusivity and mutual respect rather than exacerbating sectarian divides.

In light of these realities, Muslim clerics must refine their approach to political participation. Rather than outright endorsements, a more diplomatic method involves inviting all candidates to present their manifestos while ensuring neutrality in religious and ethnic matters. This approach fosters a sense of inclusion and encourages political leaders to remain accountable to all religious communities, regardless of their affiliations. The era of “do-or-die” politics must give way to a more pragmatic strategy where Muslim leaders negotiate effectively to ensure tangible benefits for their communities.

Bello categorizes the role of Muslim clerics in elections into three phases: pre-election, election period, and post-election. While their participation in the first two phases is commendable, he emphasizes that greater attention must be given to post-election engagements, where clerics can hold elected officials accountable for their promises.

Similarly, Paramole highlights the significance of Muslim political involvement, pointing out the strong backing Christian leaders gave to Peter Obi during the 2023 elections, which underscores the need for Muslim clerics to adopt a more coordinated and strategic approach in their political endorsements.

Moreover, religious leaders must shift their focus beyond election campaigns and actively participate in governance and policy making. The Head of department of Religion and peace studies further advocates for increased Muslim engagement in administration, arguing that greater political involvement will lead to better representation and policy outcomes for the Muslim community. The involvement of Muslim politicians has already yielded significant benefits, particularly in Lagos, where notable figures have championed the welfare of the Muslim populace. Among those recognized for their contributions are:

- Alhaji Tajudeen Oluyole Olusi (Former President of Zumratul Islamiyyah)
- Alhaji Engr. Murphy Adetoro (Eti-Osa)
- Alhaji Shakiru Bamu (Epe)
- Alhaji Rabi'u Oluwa (Badagry)
- Alhaji Chief Mutiu Aare (Secretary, Governor's Advisory Council)
- Mr. Babatunde Fashola, SAN (Former Governor and Minister)
- Dr. Obafemi Hamzat (Incumbent Deputy Governor of Lagos State)
- Senator Idiat Adebule (Senator and former Deputy Governor, Lagos)

These individuals have actively addressed the needs of the Muslim community, advocating for religious rights, social welfare, and economic empowerment. Their efforts should serve as a model for future Muslim political leaders.

Paramole further stresses the importance of structured demands from politicians. Rather than blind endorsements, Muslim clerics must present comprehensive demands covering religious freedom, economic opportunities, and social welfare. Poli-



ticians who fail to fulfill their commitments should be publicly held accountable, ensuring that future candidates understand the expectations of the Muslim electorate.

## Recommendations

1. Muslims and Muslim clerics should dissuade from their long-aged apartheid and negligence channeled towards political matters, if truly the Muslims want to aggravate its influence and core needs that will better the lives of Muslims. Since history holds many of the present spiritual luxury to political influence, future can even hold more better van-tages and an esteem research attraction.
2. The Muslim clerics should endeavour to be meticulously shrewd in dissuading non-Muslim candidates and obstinate solidification for honest Muslim candidates without fear or favour. This will instill a sense of reciprocation in the Minds of the emerging candidates to comply with the needs of the Muslim communities. Case studies of outstanding high-flyers in this regard is an area that has attracted scant research attention.
3. Muslim should wax from strength to strength in one voice and one decision before pledg-ing commitment to any political aspirants. Schism and dissension between them are at their peril. Already partitioned inter religious conflict is enough a disparity and a much bigger peril is intra- religious schism which can be studied in as an essential research focus.
4. Muslim clerics should document and be explicit in their requests at the point of show-ing commitment to political aspirants. This will enhance effective checks for review and strategy in the case of those who default. This review can be intermittent sequel to all election especially by legitimate bodies in charge of Islamic affairs.
5. More efforts should be dissipated to seminars, conference and open-air discourses to foster and fester amplified political awareness and awakening among Muslims. Another way that bolsters a turnaround against the status-quo-ante. More research focus can be targeted to imbue this awareness.
6. Islamic communal and developmental aggrandizement should be given preference above sectorial and individual uplift. This will unravel a more intensified unanimous stand to deliver the Muslim mandates.
7. Public announcement and glorifications of politicians who reciprocate and fulfil their vows to Muslim community and vilification and declaration of those who manipulate and try to outsmart the Muslim clerics and the Muslim community.

## Conclusion

This study has so far examined the component of how an Islamic ideal state is to be embellished in a bid to elaborate the individual expectancy in achieving the feats. This is an attempt to understudy the interplay of Islam and politics in a typical plu-ral contemporary society using Lagos State of Nigeria as a case study. Realistically, the epoch of the 2023 Election experience in Lagos is an exemplary advantage and other-wise of the Muslim and Muslim Clerics involvement in the 2023 general Election. It has also been taken into cognizance, the proper documentation of details subtleties and posterity benefit towards subsequent elections. Finally, it has been succinctly put to bear how Muslim of the past diplomatically endorsed political candidates and as well as safeguarding their mutual interest while bargaining. The study did not there-

fore elusive of some promising indexes of prospective better participation as a pathway for better Muslim dividends as they encounter subsequent future Islam cum Political synthesis.

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# Balancing National Language Policy with Religious Educational Needs: Challenges and Opportunities

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## Abstract

This paper examined the challenges and opportunities in balancing Nigeria's National Language Policy with religious educational needs. The study aimed to analyze the current state of language policy and religious education in Nigeria, identify challenges in harmonizing these aspects, and propose solutions for a more integrated educational framework. The research addressed the problem of tension between linguistic inclusivity and faith-based learning objectives in Nigeria's multicultural educational landscape. Methodology involved a comprehensive literature review of current policies, academic papers, and reports on language policy and religious education in Nigeria. The study analyzed the implementation of the National Language Policy, the status of religious education in the curriculum, and the challenges faced in balancing these two crucial aspects of education. Findings revealed significant challenges including resource constraints, cultural sensitivities, and gaps between policy formulation and implementation. However, opportunities for integration were identified, such as multilingual religious instruction, technology-assisted learning, and community engagement. Recommendations included revising the National Language Policy to explicitly address religious education, enhancing teacher training programmes, developing balanced curricula, integrating technology, engaging communities, implementing robust monitoring systems, and allocating adequate funding. The paper concluded that successful integration of language policy and religious education is crucial for Nigeria's multicultural society, fostering linguistic diversity, promoting religious literacy, and contributing to national unity. It suggested that future research should focus on evaluating the impact of integrated approaches on student outcomes and social cohesion.

**Keywords:** language policy, religious education, Nigeria, multilingualism, curriculum development

## Introduction

**N**IGERIA'S LINGUISTIC AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY PRESENT UNIQUE CHALLENGES in formulating and implementing educational policies that cater to both national language objectives and religious educational needs. This paper explores the intricate relationship between Nigeria's National Language Policy and the requirements of religious education, examining the challenges and opportunities arising from this intersection.

The Nigerian education system currently employs a multilingual approach, with the Mother Tongue (MT) or Language of Immediate Community (LIC) used in early education, followed by a transition to English as the medium of instruction (Plan International Nigeria, 2024). In 2022, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) approved the National Language Policy (NLP), stipulating that the language of instruction from Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECDE) to Primary 6 should be in Mother Tongue (MT) or Language of Immediate Community (LIC) (Mustapha, 2023).

Concurrently, religious education plays a significant role in the curriculum, reflecting the country's deep-rooted religious traditions. The implementation of these policies often leads to tensions between linguistic inclusivity and faith-based learning objectives. For instance, many parents prefer their children to learn in English rather than their mother tongue, believing that internationally 'important' languages provide a competitive advantage later in life (Ashing-Giwa *et al.*, 2004). This preference highlights the complex interplay between national language policy and parental expectations.

This study aims to analyze the current state of language policy and religious education in Nigeria, identify the challenges in harmonizing these two crucial aspects of education, and propose innovative solutions to create a more integrated and effective educational framework at all levels of educational systems in Nigeria. By examining the interplay between language, faith, and education, we seek to contribute to the ongoing discourse on educational reform in Nigeria's multicultural landscape.

This paper will comprehensively examine the current language policy in Nigerian education, investigate the status of religious education within the curriculum, and analyze the challenges and opportunities arising from the intersection of these two critical aspects of education. Furthermore, the study will provide concrete policy recommendations for revising the National Language Policy to effectively accommodate the needs of religious education in Nigeria.

## **Language Policy and Religious Education in Nigerian Schools**

Nigeria's current language policy embraces a multilingual approach, aiming to balance the use of indigenous languages with English-medium instruction. The policy recognizes the significance of linguistic diversity in fostering national unity, educational effectiveness, and cultural preservation. Additionally, religious education plays a crucial role in Nigeria's educational system, reflecting the country's deep religious diversity and the importance placed on moral and spiritual development. Major aspects of these policies are explored below.

### **Early Childhood and Primary Education**

The National Language Policy (NLP), approved in 2022, mandates the use of the Mother Tongue (MT) or Language of Immediate Community (LIC) as the medium of instruction from Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE) to Primary 6 (Multilingual, 2022). This policy marks a significant shift from the previous

practice of primarily using English for instruction, acknowledging research findings that children learn more effectively in their first language during the foundational years (Ogunmodimu, 2021).

Additionally, the policy seeks to reinforce literacy, numeracy, and cognitive development by ensuring that early childhood learners receive instruction in a language they fully understand. Studies suggest that early education in a familiar language enhances academic performance and reduces dropout rates (Bamgbose, 2019).

### **Transition to English**

While Mother Tongue (MT) and Language of Immediate Community (LIC) are emphasized in the early years, English is introduced as a subject from Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE) to Primary 6 (BusinessDay, 2023). The policy then transitions to English as the primary language of instruction at the Junior Secondary level.

This gradual transition aligns with global best practices, as it ensures students develop proficiency in both their indigenous language and English, a key global language (Igboanusi, 2020). The transition to English in secondary school equips students with the necessary linguistic skills to participate in higher education and the global job market while maintaining their cultural and linguistic heritage. However, challenges such as inadequate teacher training, lack of instructional materials in indigenous languages, and inconsistent implementation have been noted as barriers to effective policy execution (Olayemi, 2022).

### **Teaching of Major Nigerian Languages**

The policy encourages the teaching of major Nigerian languages alongside English, reinforcing multilingual education as follows:

- French becomes a compulsory subject from primary 4 onwards.
- One Nigerian language is compulsory at the post-basic level (typically referring to senior secondary school and beyond).
- Arabic and French remain optional subjects at the post-basic level (*Pan African Review*, n.d.).

This multilingual approach is designed to enhance communication skills, promote linguistic diversity, and equip Nigerian students with the ability to engage in both regional and international discourse. Furthermore, the policy aligns with the African Union's vision of promoting multilingualism as a tool for integration and development (Adegbite, 2021).

### **Higher Education**

The National Language Policy in Nigeria promotes bilingual education at the tertiary level to enhance communication skills, prepare graduates for the global workforce, preserve cultural heritage, develop cognitive skills, and cater for a diverse student body. This approach strengthens graduates' competitiveness in the global job mar-

ket, preserves Nigerian languages, and ensures inclusivity, allowing students to access knowledge and express themselves effectively in their preferred language (Ajol.info, n.d.). Furthermore, bilingual education at the tertiary level fosters intellectual versatility, allowing students to engage in research and discourse across different linguistic platforms. Some universities have begun implementing dual-language programmes in various disciplines, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, to reflect this policy initiative (Akinrinlola, 2023).

## Religious Education in Nigerian Schools

Religious education is a vital component of Nigeria's educational system, reflecting the country's rich religious diversity and the emphasis placed on moral and spiritual development. This section provides a comprehensive overview of the state of religious education in Nigerian schools, focusing on its curriculum status, confessional approach, challenges, and recommendations.

### Religious Education

Religious education is fundamentally the instruction focused on the teachings and principles of a specific religion, distinguishing it from moral education, which addresses broader ethical principles applicable across various contexts (EJ1227669.pdf, 2024). In Nigeria, the primary aim of religious education is to cultivate citizens who are honest, truthful, dependable, loyal, patriotic, and God-fearing. This is achieved by imparting essential moral and spiritual values that contribute to both personal growth and societal development (Molagun, n.d.).

### Objectives of Religious Education in Nigeria

The objectives of religious education in Nigeria are multi-faceted and are designed to align with the country's diverse cultural and religious landscape. These objectives include:

1. **Moral Development:** Religious education seeks to instill moral values that guide students in making ethical decisions and fostering integrity in their personal and communal lives (Molagun, n.d.).
2. **Spiritual Growth:** It aims to enhance students' spiritual awareness and understanding of their faith, encouraging them to live in accordance with religious teachings (EJ1227669.pdf, 2024).
3. **Civic Responsibility:** By promoting values such as loyalty and patriotism, religious education prepares students to contribute positively to society and uphold the laws of the land (Molagun, n.d.).
4. **Cultural Identity:** Religious education also plays a crucial role in reinforcing cultural identity among students by teaching them about their own religious traditions while fostering respect for other faiths (Disciplines.ng, 2024).

### Curriculum Structure

The curriculum for religious education in Nigerian schools is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of various religions, primarily Christianity and Islam.

It encompasses teachings on beliefs, practices, and traditions associated with these religions while also addressing the importance of tolerance and respect for individuals of different faiths (Disciplines.ng, 2024). At the Junior Secondary School level, religious education is a compulsory subject for all students. In contrast, at the Senior Secondary level, Bible Knowledge and Islamic Studies are offered as elective subjects (Molagun, n.d.). This curriculum design aims to balance foundational knowledge with opportunities for specialisation based on individual student interests.

### **Confessional Approach**

The religious education curriculum in Nigerian schools predominantly follows a confessional model. This approach involves teaching students the tenets of their own faith, which can be beneficial for reinforcing religious identity and community cohesion (Ajibola, 2010). However, critics argue that this model may marginalize students from minority religious backgrounds, raising concerns about religious freedom and tolerance in a pluralistic society like Nigeria (Lgjdxcn.asia, 2024). The confessional approach can also lead to a lack of exposure to diverse religious perspectives, potentially limiting students' understanding of other faiths.

### **Legal Framework**

The legal framework governing religious education in Nigeria is rooted in the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion. The Nigerian Constitution ensures that individuals have the right to practice their religion without interference (Federation of Nigeria, 1999). Furthermore, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) outlines guidelines for implementing religious education in schools through the National Policy on Education (NERDC, n.d.). This policy mandates that religious education be taught fairly and inclusively while respecting the diverse beliefs of students.

Thus, religious education plays a crucial role in shaping the moral and spiritual development of students in Nigeria. By addressing current challenges through policy reforms and resource allocation while promoting inclusivity and respect for diversity, Nigerian schools can enhance the impact of religious education on society.

## **Challenges in Balancing Language Policy and Religious Education in Nigeria**

Integrating language policy and religious education in Nigeria presents several significant challenges, including:

1. **Linguistic Diversity vs. Religious Instruction:** Nigeria's immense linguistic diversity (over 500 indigenous languages) complicates the implementation of both language and religious education policies (Ogunmodimu, 2015). Providing religious instruction in students' mother tongues becomes a logistical challenge. This diversity often leads to the use of English as a lingua franca, potentially undermining the goals of mother tongue education in language policy.
2. **Cultural and Religious Sensitivities:** The use of specific languages in religious instruction

can be perceived as favouring particular religious or ethnic groups. For instance, teaching Arabic is sometimes associated with Islamic education, while English may be linked to Christian missionary education (Bayo, n.d.). This perception can create tensions in multi-religious classrooms.

3. **Resource Constraints:** There is a significant lack of teaching materials and qualified instructors for both indigenous language education and religious studies (Ajol.info, n.d.). This shortage is particularly acute in rural areas, where schools often resort to using English due to a lack of teachers proficient in local languages (Evans & Mendez, 2024).
4. **Policy Implementation Gaps:** Despite well-intentioned policies, a disconnect often exists between policy formulation and implementation. The National Policy on Education's directives regarding the language of instruction are frequently not adhered to, with English being used instead of indigenous languages (Ajol.info, n.d.).
5. **Parental and Societal Attitudes:** Many parents in Nigeria prefer their children to be educated in English, viewing it as a language of opportunity and advancement. This attitude can conflict with policies promoting mother tongue education and can extend to preferences in religious instruction (Evans & Mendez, 2024).
6. **Balancing Secular and Religious Education:** Maintaining a balance between secular education goals and religious instruction remains an ongoing challenge, particularly in a country with strong religious affiliations (Lgjdxcn.asia, 2024).
7. **Political Interference:** Government policies on language and religious education are sometimes influenced by political and ideological considerations, leading to inconsistencies in policy implementation (Obasi, 2023).
8. **Lack of Standardised Curriculum:** Religious education curricula vary widely across states, making it difficult to ensure uniformity and quality across Nigeria (Adebayo, 2022).
9. **Teacher Training Deficiencies:** Many teachers lack adequate training in both indigenous languages and religious education, affecting the quality of instruction (Ogunmodimu, 2021).
10. **Interfaith Tensions:** Religious education in Nigeria occasionally becomes a source of conflict when different religious groups contest the representation of their faiths in school curricula (Eze, 2023).

## Integration Opportunities for Language Policy and Religious Education in Nigeria

While challenges exist, there are several promising avenues for integrating language policy and religious education in Nigeria. A well-structured integration approach can enhance both linguistic and religious literacy, fostering inclusivity, cultural preservation, and national unity.

1. **Multilingual Religious Instruction:** The National Language Policy's focus on mother tongue education offers a chance to deliver religious instruction in indigenous languages, enhancing comprehension and retention (Bayo, n.d.). This multilingual approach aligns with global best practices, making faith-based education more accessible and engaging (Adegbite, 2021).
2. **Cultural Preservation:** Integrating indigenous languages into religious education helps preserve Nigeria's cultural heritage by reinforcing traditional values and practices. This aligns with the National Policy on Education, which aims to protect and promote cultural heritage (Omotoyinbo, n.d.). It ensures religious teachings reflect indigenous linguistics.



tic traditions, upholding the cultural significance of both language and faith (Igboanusi, 2020).

3. **Interfaith Dialogue and Social Cohesion:** Using multiple languages in religious education fosters dialogue and mutual understanding among different faiths, promoting critical thinking, tolerance, and respect for diverse beliefs (Nwokocha, 2022). Introducing bilingual and interfaith studies can strengthen national unity by creating shared spaces for dialogue (Eze, 2023).
4. **Technology-Assisted Learning:** Technology can address resource limitations in multilingual religious education by providing access to digital platforms like mobile apps, e-learning portals, and virtual classrooms. These platforms enhance engagement and offer flexible learning opportunities, especially for remote students (Evans & Mendez Acosta, 2024). AI-powered translation tools can create multilingual resources, improving accessibility for diverse communities (Obasi, 2023).
5. **Teacher Training Programmes:** Specialized teacher training programs combining language instruction with religious studies can enhance integrated education. Training educators in multilingual strategies enables effective delivery of religious content while strengthening linguistic abilities (Ogunmodimu, 2015). Professional development workshops and certifications can ensure high-quality instruction (Adebayo, 2022).
6. **Community Engagement and Stakeholder Collaboration:** Engaging local communities in developing language-specific religious education materials ensures cultural appropriateness and public acceptance. Community participation helps tailor content to regional linguistic and religious diversities, enabling the creation of context-specific curricula (Ajol.info, n.d.). Grassroots advocacy can garner support from parents and policymakers, promoting multilingual religious education (Bamgbose, 2019).
7. **Policy Development and Government Support:** A well-defined policy framework supporting indigenous languages in religious education ensures sustainable implementation. Government agencies like the Federal Ministry of Education can mandate local language use in religious instruction, with funding incentives encouraging adoption (Oyetade, 2018). Countries like Malaysia and Indonesia have seen improved religious literacy and cohesion through similar policies (Abdullah, 2021).
8. **Standardized Curriculum Development:** Integrating language policy with religious education requires a curriculum aligned with national standards. A standardized curriculum incorporating indigenous languages, developed through collaboration with curriculum experts, religious scholars, and linguists (Salawu, 2020), ensures consistency across institutions. Periodic reviews (Umar & Lawal, 2022) are essential for maintaining relevance.
9. **Bilingual Religious Media and Publications:** Bilingual or multilingual religious media, such as books and broadcasts, can enhance language integration and religious education by making teachings more accessible. Media-based education improves retention and engagement, especially in oral societies (Usman, 2023). Digital platforms like YouTube and podcasts further promote multilingual religious discourse.
10. **Inclusive Learning for Marginalized Communities:** Integrating indigenous languages into religious education can help bridge the educational gap in marginalized communities, enhancing literacy and moral development. It also boosts participation and retention (Bamgbose, 2019). Incorporating sign language ensures inclusivity for the hearing-impaired (Olawale, 2021).

## Conclusion

The integration of Nigeria's National Language Policy with religious education presents both challenges and opportunities. This analysis explores the relationship between linguistic diversity and religious instruction in Nigeria's educational system. While the current policy supports mother-tongue education in early childhood, its implementation alongside religious education faces obstacles such as limited resources and cultural sensitivities. However, there are significant opportunities for improvement. By adopting multilingual approaches to religious instruction, utilising technology, and involving communities in developing relevant materials, Nigeria can create a more cohesive educational framework. The recommendations provided outline strategies to address these challenges and leverage opportunities. Balancing language policy with religious educational needs is essential for Nigeria's multicultural society. An effective integrated approach can enhance linguistic diversity, promote religious literacy, and foster national unity. Ongoing research, policy development, and collaboration among stakeholders are crucial to ensuring the education system meets the needs of all citizens. A collective commitment from policymakers, educators, and communities is necessary to build an educational system that honours linguistic heritage and respects religious diversity while preparing students for a globalised future.

## Recommendations

Based on the challenges and opportunities identified, the following policy recommendations are proposed to enhance the integration of language policy and religious education in Nigeria:

1. The government and private sector should collaborate on funding for high-quality multilingual religious education materials and provide incentives for teachers to become proficient in multiple languages and religious studies.
2. They should implement a system for monitoring and evaluation of the integrated policy, assessing its impact on students' linguistic and religious literacy.
3. They should establish regular consultation with religious leaders, language experts, and community representatives, and encourage parental involvement in the development and implementation of integrated programs.
4. The framework should be developed to integrate language policy and religious education in Nigeria, including guidelines for multilingual religious instruction.
5. The proposed plan involves establishing training programs for educators in language teaching and religious studies, as well as introducing modules on interfaith dialogue and cultural sensitivity.
6. The proposed curriculum should be balanced, promoting religious literacy while respecting linguistic diversity, and include multilingual religious education materials that reflect Nigeria's faiths and languages.
7. They should invest in digital platforms and resources for multilingual religious education and provide training for educators to effectively integrate technology into language and religious instruction.

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# Appraisal of the Theology of Eucharist and its Significance to Mission-Oriented Churches

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## Abstract

Observance of the Eucharist is evidently a common practice among believers of Jesus Christ and is upheld in most Christian denominations. Effort is made nonetheless, to appraise the Theology of the Eucharist and its Significance to the Church. Although this Christian liturgy dates back in origin to the Last Supper the disciples ate together with Jesus, its doctrinal understanding, theological interpretation, and practice come with varying degrees and approaches. This compels the need for a theological examination of the celebration and the place it occupies in church life, thus assisting in preserving the essence and purpose of its institution, the gap that this research intends to fill. For its nature, the research employed historical *and theological* analytical methods. Findings revealed the similitude of events that preceded the Eucharist from the Old Testament with the instance of the Passover event as a foretaste of the future sacrifice that will be made in Christ. This same prophecy is affirmed and cast by Christ himself when he instituted the Lord's Supper and gave it to the disciples to do as a commemoration of his death. It was observed that the Eucharist is considered a type of initiation rite for Christians. It is therefore considered a sacrament – both a sign and an oath that provides an avenue for believers in Christ to be in union not only with Christ in the new covenant but also with other members of the spiritual family of God. The church acknowledges the work of salvation that God has provided by sacrificing Christ Jesus through thanksgiving and offers worship to God with the Eucharist as a means. Assurance of salvation is deepened at the celebration of the Eucharist and eschatological hope is granted. This unarguably underscores the relevance of the Eucharist within Christian gathering.

Keywords: eucharist, lord's supper, sacrifice, thanksgiving, bread, wine

## Introduction

THE ASSEMBLY OF THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST, POPULARLY REFERRED TO AS THE church, like any other religious group is not without her peculiar sacred identities. Since the church of the Christians was established by the Lord - Jesus Christ himself, it patterned its doctrines along with some set of instructions it gleaned from the founder's life and speeches. For clarity, Baptism and Eucharist, which are part of the ordinances that are most peculiar to the church and widely practiced among Christians form the church's unique identity that cannot be found in other religious faiths. Aside from the account of Jesus' participation in the two practices (Matthew 3:13-16, Luke 22:15-20), the followers of Christ equally received express instruc-

tion from him on the need for continued observance of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 28:19, Luke 22:19-20, 1 Corinthians 11:24 and 25).

In its liturgy, mission-oriented church uses symbolism to convey the profound meaning of Christian initiation and spiritual vitality.<sup>1</sup> The observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper traces back to the early Christian church and remains pivotal in the Christian life today. We continually seek to understand their theological implications, their practical observance, and the profound mysteries they embody. This paper explores the theology of the Eucharist, highlighting its significant relevance to the church community within Mission-oriented churches.

### Defining Eucharist and Existing Understanding

The effort to bring to the fore, the meaning of the term Eucharist will require that the concept be made known through its different forms of rendition. This is meant to present the Holy Eucharist through the many names it is understood within Christian circle and to concisely explain the ideas which culminate into its other form of names. These include Sacrament, Lord's Supper, (Holy) Communion,<sup>2</sup> (Holy) Eucharist, and Feast.<sup>3</sup> Although these different renditions of the Holy Eucharist might have expression and peculiarity within each distinctive Christian denomination, their general ideas do not necessarily change.

#### Sacrament

The simplest way to define sacrament is to call it a sign. St. Augustine, in the 5th century, described a sacrament as 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace.' Historically, the word 'sacrament' developed from the Greek word '*mysterion*' and the Latin word *sacramentum*. *Mysterion* means 'something hidden or secret,'<sup>4</sup> which was largely particular among the pagans to describe rites of initiation. Although the rituals of 'baptism' and 'breaking of bread' had been in existence within the church, these celebrations were called by their names, and there was no generic term for them. By the third century, however, for what baptism and the Lord's Supper naturally represent, since these rituals were considered to symbolize initiation rites to gain entrance into Christ's spiritual family and a way of pledging allegiance – covenant; the early Christians adopted the term, *mysterion* and began to use it to describe these Christian rites. Conversely, in order to avoid any confusion with pagan thinking, the theologian Tertullian began to use the Latin word, '*sacramentum*' for '*mysterion*,' particularly in explaining baptism.<sup>5</sup> This explains the rationale behind Matthew Henry's deliberate categorization of the term sacrament into a sign and an oath. In his word,

"The Lord's Supper is a sign, an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, for such sacraments are designed to be. It is a parable to the eye; and in it, God uses similitudes, as He did of old by His servants the prophets."<sup>6</sup>

Whereas, the Lord's Supper is equally understood to be an oath. It is noted that,



That is the ancient signification of the word sacrament. The Romans called the oath that soldiers took to be true to their general, *sacramentum militare*; and our law still uses it in this sense: *dicunt super sacramentum suum*, “they say upon their oath.” So that to take the sacrament is to take an oath, a solemn oath, by which we bind our souls with a bond unto the Lord. It is an oath of allegiance to the Lord Jesus, by which we engage ourselves to be His dutiful and loyal subjects, acknowledging Him to be our rightful Lord and Sovereign.<sup>7</sup>

Typically, the *sacrament* is the *symbolic* representation of the inward and invisible reality in the physical form. Hence, *sacrament* in its broad term ordinarily carries its meaning beyond the elements of the Lord's Supper. It also includes Baptism and other sacred practices such as confirmation (or Chrismation), Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Order, and Matrimony<sup>8</sup> within some Christians' spheres. Therefore, sacrament becomes a generic term.

As water is symbolic in baptism, so too are the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. The use of the term *sacrament* for the Lord's Supper is not merely a tradition but a theologically sound designation. This sacred meal is more than a memorial it is a means of grace, signifying Christ's real presence through the elements. The bread and wine serve as visible signs of an invisible reality, affirming both the believer's communion with Christ and their covenantal allegiance to Him as Lord. Moreover, just as the church is understood as the mystical body of Christ in the world, the Lord's Supper embodies the tangible expression of this spiritual reality, reinforcing the sacred and sacramental nature of the ordinance.

### Lord's Supper

Mission-oriented churches would call it the 'Last Supper.' This can be considered to be appropriate justifying it from biblical account.

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom” – Matthew 26:26-29.

The above scriptural reference points to Jesus' word himself where he affirmed not to participate in the eating of the Supper apart from the one, he was eating in the very night with his disciples. This will imply that he was eating his 'last.' The scriptures hold that his passion began on the same night (Matthew 26:47-57). The ordinance is widely referred to as the Supper because it was not just a regular meal but was organized in a solemn way. It was a meal specially prepared to entertain friends in a special way, and it was first instated in the evening.

- Eucharist—The term Eucharist derives from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which literally means 'thanksgiving'. The word refers often to the celebration, thanksgiving, and worshipping which is the central part of the sacrament.<sup>9</sup>



- Holy Communion—This notion expresses the fellowship that is enacted through the celebration of the Eucharist. The communion is established in two dimensions. First, it is a communion with Christ. And, second, it is a communion with the universal church.<sup>10</sup>
- Feast—This celebration is seen to be a kind of feast from the perspective of the Passover feast. This understanding is premised on the word of the Apostle Paul. “Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:8).

This name, though not commonly used, is very significant, for it is such a supper as it is a feast. Gospel preparations are frequently compared to a feast: “And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees; of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined” (Isaiah 25:6). The guests are many, the invitation solemn, and the provision rich and plentiful, and therefore it is fitly called a feast of souls.<sup>11</sup>

“A feast is made for laughter” (Ecclesiastes 10:19); and so, it is for spiritual joy. The wine in Isaiah 25 is designed to make the heart glad. A feast is made for free conversation, so is this for communion between heaven and earth. In this banquet of wine, the golden sceptre is held out to the participants and this fair proposal is made, “What is thy petition, and it shall be granted thee?” (Esther 5:6).

From this foreground, Matthew Henry has categorized this type of feast into the following;

- a. A Royal Feast: God is the King of kings. Since it is such a celebration instituted by God through Christ himself, it is therefore recognized as a royal feast. So it is proclaimed, “Come and gather yourselves together to the supper of the great God” (Revelation 19:17).
- b. A Marriage Feast: The Lord’s Supper is a marriage-feast. It is a feast made by a King at the marriage of His Son. First, the believers celebrate the memorial of the virtual espousals of the Church of Christ when he died upon the cross, to “sanctify and cleanse it...that he might present it to himself (Ephesians 5:26-27). Second, the actual espousals of believing souls to Christ are here solemnized, and that agreement ratified. The soul that renounces all other lovers who stand in competition with Jesus, and joins itself by faith and love to him only, is in this ordinance presented “as a chaste virgin” to him (2 Corinthians 11:2). Third, a pledge and earnest of the public and complete espousals of the Church of Christ at his second coming is here given. The marriage of “the Lamb” comes (Revelation 19:7), and the Christians, according to the Lord’s promise, hereby declare that she looks for it. If anyone comes to a marriage-feast, they must not come without a wedding garment, that is, a frame of heart and a disposition of soul agreeable to the solemnity, conformable to the nature, and answering the intentions of the gospel as it is exhibited to the church in this ordinance. Holy garments and garments of praise (Isaiah 61:3) are the wedding garments.
- c. A Memorial Feast: The Lord’s Supper is a feast of memorial, like the feast of the Passover, of which it is said, “This day shall be unto you for a memorial, and you shall keep it a feast to the Lord...a feast by an ordinance forever” (Exodus 12:14). Whereas, Jesus declare that this Supper should be made in the remembrance of him (1 Corinthians 11:25).
- d. A Dedication Feast: The Lord’s Supper is a feast of dedication. Like Solomon

dedicated the temple to God in Ezra 6:16, so also is the feast of the Lord's Supper a dedication of believer's life to God. At the feast, every soul is consecrated in union with Christ.

- e. A Feast Upon Sacrifice: Jesus is understood from the Eucharistic celebration as the great sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. The Lord's Supper is therefore a feast upon this sacrifice in which believers in Christ receive the atonement (Romans 5:11).
- f. A Feast Upon a Covenant: It is a token of covenant between God and man. Whoever shall accept the offering of Jesus as the sacrifice of God for salvation and share in this celebration feasts upon the covenant of Jesus' blood.

### Background to Eucharistic Understanding – Old Testament Perspective

The Old Testament is occupied with the notion of sacrifice. God has related with people through the means of sacrifices either for thanksgiving, worship or cleansing/ atoning. Similarly, the exodus of the Israelites hinged majorly on divine instruction to the people through Moses. This tells of the Passover sacrifice.

Being a liberation event, the Passover was to be a day of remembrance: "This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution" (Exodus 12:14). One of the major keys to the unfolding of the celebration as the days went by, is 'remembrance,' for it constitutes the very essence of the people.<sup>12</sup> A keen study of the celebration of the Passover meal or event in its original form had five important steps. *One*, choosing an unblemished male lamb (Exodus 12:1-6). *Two*, sacrificing the lamb (Exodus 12:6). *Three*, spreading the blood of the lamb (Exodus 12:7). *Four*, eating the flesh of the lamb (Exodus 12:8-12). And *five*, Keeping the Passover as a day of remembrance (Exodus 12:14).

To some extent, the Passover sacrifice was completed by the eating of the flesh of the lamb. To a reasonable degree, it will not be a delusion to agree with those who see Passover sacrifice as a prelude to the Christian communion of the Eucharist – of course in a typological way. Furthermore, as earlier noted, the remembrance is a key element to consider – for it shows how the Passover celebration evolved as can be justified from these scriptural references, Exodus 12:14, 12:24-27, 13:1-10; Deuteronomy 16:1, etc.). With time, the shape of the Passover celebration evolved. Hence, the celebration was no longer in people's homes. The location of the celebration became the temple and the sacrifice was done by the Levitical priest (Deuteronomy 16:5-7). The Jewish Passover was not just a meal but the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover. The lamb had to be offered in one place – the Temple of Jerusalem – seen as the dwelling place of God. The Passover lamb(s) had to be somehow 'crucified', for it was slain. The participation in the First Passover was, to a larger extent, the sharing in the original act of redemption.<sup>13</sup> Some other Old Testament outlook on the Eucharist includes the mention of Melchizedek. "Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was a priest of God the Most-High. And he blessed Abram" (Genesis 14:18-19). He is said to foreshadow Christ's priesthood, who also offered bread and wine: "[Melchizedek] is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever" (Hebrews 7:3). St. Jerome wrote in the 5th century, "Just as Melchizedek had done, the priest

of the Most-High when he offered bread and wine in the prefiguration of him, he [Christ] too would present it in the truth of his own body and blood.<sup>14</sup> Others include the divine provision and eating of Manna, the showbread or Bread of the presence (Exodus 25:23-30; Leviticus 24:5-9).

### Origin of Eucharist

Without mincing words, if any other, the narration about the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus on the night before his Crucifixion is the most prominent. This is reported in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; and Luke 22:17-20) and in the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 11:23-25). From the gospels, Jesus opened the meal with a psalm that praised God, he then took the bread, gave thanks for it, and, breaking tradition, followed this with new words: "Take and eat. This is my body that will be given up for you." This bread was now his body. It would be given up, that is offered on the cross. Jesus had broken with the Jewish traditions by breaking the bread – and so this was the first celebration of the Eucharist in history.

At the end of the meal, Jesus took the cup filled with wine and instead of making the usual toast he again broke tradition and said, "Take and drink...This is my blood. . . It will be shed for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins." As they drank of the one cup and ate of the one bread, they experienced their unity in Christ. Finally, Christ gave them and their successors the power to celebrate the Eucharist: "Do this in memory of me." This marked the beginning of the Eucharist, and in this event, Jesus gave his followers the sacrament of the Eucharist.<sup>15</sup>

This is why the sayings of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-27 come in handy in almost all of the Eucharistic expositions.

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. *Do this in remembrance of me.*" In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. *Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.*" For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord.

Thus, the eucharist was instituted by Christ himself as noted in the above biblical reference. Aside from the Old Testament's direct allusions earlier identified, the origin of the Eucharist is nothing hidden from the regular knowledge of the New Testament scriptures.

The letters of Paul, written between the year 40AD and the year 60AD speak of the tradition of the celebration of the Eucharist originating in the words and actions of Jesus at his Last Supper which were passed on to him and which he in turn passed on to the communities he established.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke recount the meal Jesus shared with his

disciples the night before he died in which he associated the actions and words of that meal with his death on the cross on the following day. The Eucharist celebrates and represents this same mystery throughout the ages of the Church. John's account of the Last Supper has a different emphasis but Chapter 6 of his gospel contains an extended reflection on the meaning of the Bread of Life which is deeply Eucharistic.

The Acts of the Apostles also shows that the Eucharist (at first called 'the Breaking of Bread') was one of the cornerstones of Christian life and identity from earliest times. While the first context for the Eucharist was an actual meal, Paul's Letters show that, even by the mid-first century, the Eucharistic meal was separated from an ordinary meal.

Christianity grew from Jewish roots, and the development of the Eucharist was influenced by Jewish prayer and practice, especially the offering of praise and thanks to God and the liturgical understanding that when the great events of salvation are celebrated ritually, for example at Passover, their power and reality are extended into the present and are immediately available to each person.

The New Testament texts as well as being based on Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper were influenced by the words and actions of the first Christian communities as they celebrated the ritual that Jesus gave to his own on the night before his death. The basic shape of the Eucharist is established in these early texts: bread and wine are taken, thanks and praise are offered to God over them, the bread is broken and the bread and wine are received by all. All experience the presence of Christ with them as they eat and drink the Body and Blood of the Lord. The basic meaning of the Eucharist is also established in the texts of the scripture: the Eucharist proclaims and makes present through the ages the mystery of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### Theology of the Eucharist

The Eucharist forms an intrinsic aspect of Christian Doctrine. Hence, its theology serves as a distinctive branch of Christian theology. This is all that is emphasized at the Second Vatican Council in the constitution on the Sacred Liturgy that the Eucharist is the *true centre of the whole Christian life* for both the universal Church and the local congregation of that Church. It submits further that it is *the summit* of both the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and *the worship* which Christians offer to Christ and which through him they offer to the Father in the Spirit.<sup>16</sup> Several theological understanding that lurks around the doctrine of the Eucharist include but are not limited to the theology of sacrifice, theology of thanksgiving, theology of worship, theology of the mystery of faith, theology of New Covenant, and theology of communion with Christ. Each of these would be examined as follows:

#### As a memorial of the sacrifice of Christ

Earlier, in John 1:29 and 36, the Bible was direct when Jesus, who was quite living was labelled as the lamb of God. "The next day John saw Jesus coming unto him, and said,

Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world. And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God!" Jesus had been foretold to be the lamb of God that would be sacrificed for the remission of the sins of mankind. He never denied this knowledge about himself as he has been found in a number of his statements referring to himself as the bread. The parallelism of the lamb and the bread in the context of this theology is one and the same, which means the divine provision on purpose – sacrifice. While instituting the Eucharist, Jesus did not simply say *"This is my body..., this is my blood,"* but he went further to add, "which is given for you, which is shed for you" Luke 22:19-20.

Although he was not yet sacrificed, he had instituted the Eucharist in advance for the sacrifice he came to fulfill. His words, if closely examined, present a clear connection between the Last Supper and the sacrifice of the cross. As a matter of fact, in the words of Mbala, "Jesus did not simply state that what he was given them to eat and drink was his body and blood; he also expressed its sacrificial meaning and made sacramentally present his sacrifice which would soon be offered on the cross for the salvation of the world."<sup>17</sup> Observance of the Eucharist therefore becomes an imperative from the instruction given by Jesus himself - "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:20). This forms the basis for the celebration of the Eucharist by the Christians and why it must be observed – as a memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

### **As a thanksgiving to God**

This is a liturgy of thanksgiving. Since all that describe the essence of the solemn ordinance is thanksgiving, and Christ himself at its institution gave thanks, so it is called. The act of giving thanks for the blessings received is deemed to be natural so as to complete the cycle of offering. Jesus had taught the importance of thanksgiving in every situation – even before his prayer is answered. He is always fond of saying, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me," (John 11:41). Consequently, the provision of sacrificial lamb by God himself through Jesus Christ compels thanksgiving. If Christ would give thanks at the breaking of the bread, then Christians should be filled with thanks not only during the observance of the Lord's Supper, but at every day of their lives. For it is in it that the essence of Christianity is consist through salvation in Jesus Christ by his sacrificial death.

### **As a worship to God**

Giving that the original intent of Jesus' sacrificial death is to atone for the sins of the world, the sacrifice becomes the bridge that connect humanity with God. Man is therefore united with their God. At this celebration, humanity is earned a right standing with God again to fulfil the purpose of their existence – giving pleasure to God in their worship. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11). At Eucharist, the spirit of men is concerned with the sole purpose of worship of God.

### **As a mystery of faith**

What is celebrated in the Eucharist is not an event that can be apprehended with merely human senses; it is simply a mystery of faith. In Paul's words to the Corinthians, the Eucharist is profoundly marked by the event of the Lord's passion and death of which the Eucharist is not only a *reminder* but the sacrament of re-presentation. It reminds the church of ever presence of Jesus. He was, he is and he will be forever. Jesus is seen in the communion in mystical body and blood through faith.

### **As a participation in the new covenant**

The Old Testament has been anonymously summarized to be the record of the failure of humanity. While, on the other hand, the New Testament is the account of the success of man. This can be admissible when it is justified with Hebrews 8:7, "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second." Jesus himself had declared: "saying, This cup is the *new covenant* in my blood, even that which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). Eucharist is understood as one of the initiation rites after confession and baptism into the body of Christ and spiritual family of God (Christian community), without which a man is deemed to profess his faith in Christ but in vain. He ought not to be considered as a believer.

### **As a communion with christ and unity of the church**

Through the Eucharist, a believer is in communion with Christ. The b5Eucharist provides a believer in Christ the opportunity to dine and fellowship with him on his table. Through it, the life of Christ is made manifest in the partakers. If anyone feels unworthy of this communion, he does not have a place with Christ. He is not in Christ and Christ is not in him.

"Jesus therefore said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he that eateth me, he also shall live because of me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven: not as the fathers ate, and died; he that eateth this bread shall live for ever. These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum" (John 6:53-59 ASV).

The spirit of Christ is united with that of man at the table of the Lord. Consequently, His church is bond in the same covenant and is become one body. This is what is meant in Romans 8:9 and 1 Corinthians 10:16-22 respectively. "But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9 ASV).

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ? seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: have not they that eat the sacrifices communion with the

altar? What say I then? that a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have communion with demons. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons: ye cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?" (1 Corinthians 10:16-22 ASV).

### **Anticipation of the eschatological fulfilment**

While on this all-important church ordinance, the Apostle Paul had emphasized not only the need for its repetition and regular observation, but went further to stress its eschatological implication. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Mbala had rightly noted that the Eucharist is "a foretaste of the fullness of joy promised by Christ. It is in some way the anticipation of heaven, the pledge of future glory. This eschatological thrust is already expressed in the celebration of the Eucharist.

### **A Discourse on the Element of Eucharist**

Now as they were eating Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the (new and better) covenant, which (ratifies the agreement and) is being poured out for many (as a substitutionary atonement) for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28 AMP).

The two major eucharistic elements and its celebration are found in bread and wine. Although, there have been serious debates on these two elements. The bread represents the body of Christ, and the wine represents His blood, signifying His sacrifice for humanity (Luke 22:19-20). Different Christian traditions interpret the presence of Christ in the elements differently; in Catholic View it is called *transubstantiation* which means the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ. In Lutheran View it is called *Consubstantiation* which also means Christ is spiritually present alongside the elements. *Reformed View* (Calvinism), Christ is spiritually present but not physically. Churches differ in how they administer the Eucharist, such as the frequency (weekly, monthly, or occasional) and whether wine or grape juice is used. Some churches practice open communion (all believers can partake), while others practice closed communion (restricted to members of a particular denomination or church). Over time, cultural and doctrinal differences have shaped Eucharistic practices, leading to ongoing discussions about the true meaning and mode of celebration.

While Jesus typifies the 'bread element' that is eaten in the Eucharist as his body, and the 'wine element' that is drunk at the same table as his blood monotonously, many scholars and Christian denominations defer in the theological interpretations of this discussion. The interpretation of Jesus' words regarding the bread and wine in



the Eucharist has been a subject of deep theological reflection and debate across various Christian traditions. Rooted in Thomas Aquinas' theology, the Catholic Church teaches that the bread and wine undergo transubstantiation, meaning they become the actual body and blood of Christ while retaining their physical appearance. The Council of Trent (16th century) affirmed this belief, emphasizing that Christ is truly, really, and substantially present in the Eucharist. Martin Luther rejected transubstantiation but maintained that Christ's body and blood are truly present "in, with, and under" the bread and wine.

The Formula of Concord (1577), solidified this belief, emphasizing Christ's real presence while affirming the physical elements remain bread and wine. John Calvin rejected both transubstantiation and consubstantiation, arguing that Christ is spiritually present in the Eucharist. The bread and wine are not merely symbolic but serve as means through which believers experience communion with Christ. Ulrich Zwingli held that the Eucharist is purely symbolic, a memorial act rather than a means of receiving Christ's presence. This view is common in Baptist, Pentecostal, and many non-denominational churches, emphasising that communion is an act of obedience and remembrance. Orthodox Christians believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist but reject the precise philosophical explanation of transubstantiation.

The Eucharist is seen as a divine mystery where Christ's body and blood are truly received through bread and wine. The Anglican tradition holds a middle ground, allowing for both Real Presence (closer to Catholicism) and a symbolic interpretation (closer to Protestantism) depending on the theological stance of individual believers and clergy. The 39 Articles of Religion (1563) reject transubstantiation but affirm that believers partake in the body and blood of Christ in a spiritual sense. Across Christian traditions, the understanding of Jesus' words about the bread and wine varies significantly, ranging from a literal transformation (Catholicism) to a symbolic memorial (Zwinglianism). These diverse perspectives reflect different theological emphases on the nature of Christ's presence, the role of faith, and the meaning of the Eucharistic celebration.

However, the task for the moment is to present a theological understanding of the bread and wine for what they represent in the Eucharist.

### **The bread and the wine of the eucharist**

From the Old Testament background, the event that led to the final deliverance of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt centres on sacrifice. The Lord had instructed Moses to lead the Israelites in sacrificing a lamb each per a household. This was meant to ultimately distinguish them from the Lord's visitation in the land for the purpose of smitten the firstborn of every household. This was the basis and the concept of Passover. The Passover was fundamentally observed with the sacrifice of the lamb that involved its blood being sprinkled upon the entrances of the Israelites, while the *flesh* is eaten with unleavened *Bread* (dough) to certain prescriptions (Exodus 12:1-39). The understanding of the usefulness of lamb and bread in this context



translates into the mission of Christ in the John's statement of John 1:29, where Jesus is described as the lamb of God. His birth was meant for the deliverance of humanity and the notion of the unleavened bread expresses a state of emergency.

Hence, when he would eat his Last Supper, Jesus, who had earlier made himself known as the bread of life (John 6:35), broke the bread at the table that was meant for the celebration of Passover. After he had given thanks, he gave it to his disciples that they should take and eat, and called it his body that was offer up for them (as a sacrifice). The same he did, when he took the cup, and gave it to them; he called it his blood, which is shed for humanity.

By this action, while the 'accidents' (the substance of the Eucharist – bread and wine) is understood as being used by Christ figuratively (*Consubstantiation*) by some, it has been argued to be the exact presence of Christ body and his blood (*Transubstantiation*) in another school of theological thought. The latter, which St. Thomas Aquinas is the major proponent is being defended by maintaining that a complete change occurred in the "substance" of each of the species, while the "accidents," or outward appearances, remained the same. However, both the early church fathers, the medieval theologians and also the reformers find consensus in the sacramental nature of the Eucharist. Although some would prefer to retain its concept as a memorial and call it ordinance rather than sacrament.

### **The Place of Eucharist in the Life of the Church**

Broadly stated, no argument can be deemed successful against the centrality of the Eucharist in Christians' beliefs. The Eucharist has formed the central rites of Christian worship. All Christians would agree that it is a memorial action in which, by eating bread and drinking wine (or, for some Protestants, grape juice or water), the church recalls what Jesus Christ was, said, and did. They would also agree that participation in the Eucharist enhances and deepens the communion of believers not only with Christ but also with one another. Some significant areas that the rite of the Eucharist has occupied in the Church include but are not limited to salvific benefit, communal opportunity, and commemoration of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. These can be expanded as follows;

1. The Eucharist celebration is a reassurance of the work of salvation that is provided for humanity through the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross.
2. It is a means to enter into a covenant relationship with Christ since sharing his body and blood with him is deemed as a mark of covenant.
3. A believer becomes a bonafide member of the church (the spiritual family of Christ) and is united with this family and Christ, who is the Lord of this body in spirit.
4. It offers the community of believer the opportunity to express their gratitude to God through thanksgiving.
5. The celebration reminds the believers of the death of Jesus' Christ and consequently leads to remorsefulness and repentance from filthy lifestyles.
6. It serves as an expression of the church's obedience to the institution of Jesus concerning the observance of the Lord's Supper.
7. It provides joy to the church for having the privilege to dine with Christ at his table,

hence, it gives eschatological hope to the church. Christ had said, he would not partake in it again until the in the kingdom of his father. This gives the church the hope of sitting with Christ again in the kingdom of God.

8. It fosters unity within the body of Christ (church). They have a common body to eat and common blood to drink from one table – the Lord's Table.

## Conclusion

The theological understanding of the Eucharist celebration has lived for ages. Although, it has been subjected to several arguments on the variations in the doctrine and practice across Christian denominations, which may justify the need for extensive research, but the centrality of its essence remains with the church.

Giving the number of its significance for the church, Eucharist is therefore worthy of observing with solemnity and in strict adherence to the principle of its practice to avoid maladministration of it.

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- 2 Ralph N. McMichael, *Eucharist: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 1.
- 3 Henry Matthew, *The Lord's Supper*, p. 4-24, <https://zlibrary-ng.se/dl/16768549/087937>, Accessed June 2023.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 The sacramentum was a sacred oath of allegiance to the emperor taken by a Roman soldier. Tertullian suggested that just as the soldier's oath was a sign of the beginning of a new life, so too was initiation into the Christian community through baptism and eucharist. 'Sacramentum' then became a general term for the rites of Christian initiation.
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# Exploring African Symbolism in Evaluating the Status of Women in Christianity and Yoruba Religion

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## Abstract

Women in Christianity and Yoruba religion are confronted with perplexing issues. One of them, is the question of the role they play in their religious beliefs. As a matter of fact, little to no attention has been paid to the role that women play in their communities. However, the traditional view of women in both religions, have subjugated them and their role to that of men. The objective of this paper, is to shed light on the predicament of women in Christianity and Yoruba religion in trying to gain recognition in various communities and the role they play. The paper explores African symbolism as a lens for evaluating the status of women in Christianity and Yoruba religion. African Religion, Yoruba spirituality inclusive is deeply rooted in symbolism that reflects societal structures, gender roles, and divine representation. It is in view of this, that the study adopts historical and comparative approaches; looking into how women have been treated and limited, in their roles due to gender differentiation. This paper argues that both male and female according to creation, are equal partners and that their roles to each other are that of complementation, in accordance to African symbolism. To this end, the paper concludes that women should be given a veritable chance to display their God given purpose and skills to improve their community.

Keywords: Christianity, Yoruba religion, women's status, African symbolism, gender roles

## Introduction

**W**E ARE IN AN ERA WHERE WOMEN ALL OVER THE WORLD, ARE AGITATING FOR the recognition of their role and equality with men in all spheres of lives.<sup>1</sup> Women play very vital roles in the community which they are found, thereby enhancing the progress of such communities. Therefore, non-recognition of such roles in the communities create a vacuum, that would be very difficult to fill. Corroborating the above view, Abogunrin reiterates that:

It is an undeniable fact that women play certain irreplaceable roles in society, but quite often, these unique roles are not given adequate recognition and sometimes not acknowledged at all. Also, when it comes to various opportunities of life, in some cases, women are often denied equal rights with other male counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

The view of Abogunrin seems to be a projection of the subjugation of women in a male dominated world where their rights are denied. It is on this note that Crowley

asks these rhetorical questions; Who are women? What is their real role? Is there a creator God? What did He intend for them to be?<sup>3</sup> It is against this backdrop that we shall consider an overview of Christian religion on the status of women *vis-à-vis* the role they play, coupled with a panoramic view of Yoruba religion on the status and role they play comparatively.

### **Christianity: An Overview**

It is of interest to note that Christianity was born in a world that is already old. No wonder Christianity is described as an offshoot of Judaism. Greek philosophy archaeological discovery contributed immensely to the birth of Christianity.<sup>4</sup> After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus to Heaven, He told His disciples to tarry in Jerusalem for the endowment of the Holy Spirit which they received on the day of the Pentecost, (Acts 2:2-10). They, therefore, became itinerant evangelists and witnesses, preaching the message of the kingdom of God to all nations of the world in accordance to His instructions (Acts 1:8, Mathew 28:19-20). It is important to note that it was in Antioch that the disciples were first named Christians because they were said to have behaved like Christ Himself so they were called 'little Christ', (Acts 11:26). To a good observer, they constituted nothing other than a reformist party with Judaism.

No doubt, Christianity has been described as a way of life and essentially, a monotheistic religion. Alamu in his writing cited Tiwari to have observed that Jesus himself was a Jew, He never thought of floating a new religion while He was preaching His own religious view. However, it is to be noted that Jesus was trying to correct the misconceptions, superstition, rituals representations and ceremonies that clustered Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Alamu added further that Christianity originated from the teachings of Jesus which presently constitute the body of Christian beliefs and practices and not entirely the gift of Jesus alone. He further said that there have been other saints, mystics and thinkers who have added to the teaching of Jesus and have advanced the kingdom. In fact, the impact of Paul cannot be ignored in his contribution to the formation of Christianity.

### **The Status of Women in Christianity**

For us to establish the Christian position on women, we would need to examine the prevalent norms within the Old Testament in connection to the value placed on women and their supposed position within the Jewish culture and religious setting. Aluko in his view, asserts that the Jewish world is essentially male dominated.<sup>7</sup> In Judaism, a woman was portrayed as an eternally accursed devil who did not possess personal integrity and independence.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the Jewish law addresses only men. Women are not considered legally responsible, rather they are seen as property of men.<sup>9</sup> Omoto-sho in his inaugural lecture when carrying out an assessment of the status of women in different culture, law, and countries of the world, had this to say about Jewish law on the status of women:

Women were not treated any better under Jewish law. They were degraded, denied

the right to own property and whatever they owned including their dowry belongs to their husbands. Jewish law allowed a man to sell his daughter to solve financial problems ... women were not allowed to enter places of worship out of fear that they might bring dirt associated to the place of worship.<sup>10</sup>

This and other treatments are the plights of women under the Jewish culture. Giving an account of women's plight, Aluko quoting Sheila Colling who carried out a survey of what the plight of women was like under Jewish culture has this to say: "women were regarded as an inferior species to be owned like a cattle and unclean incapable of participating in the mysteries of the worship of Yahweh for whatever historical reason. Ancient Hebrew society was blatantly misogynist and male dominated."<sup>11</sup> Corroborating the above view, Orebiyi observes that, contempt, discrimination and demeaning references often characterized rabbinic teaching about women. Rabbis were not encouraged to teach (Luke 10:39) or speak to women (John 4:27). Jewish culture is solely patriarchal.<sup>12</sup>

With the above submissions, on Jewish cultures and laws, Ikenga-Metuh, points to the fact that there are parallel perspectives on the status of women in the Old Testament. One perspective sees the women's position as one of inferiority and subjection to the man (Gen. 3:16). The other perspective sees the woman as an equal partner of man his companion and help-mate. Certainly, women are like men, and they are equal in all respects. She is the "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh", for which man leaves his parents and goes to share his life with.<sup>13</sup> The point Ikenga-Metuh is making here, is that equality seems to be implied in both creation narratives in Genesis.

It is however, important to state that the inferior position given to the woman has been traced to her greater susceptibility to temptation which made her instrumental to the fall as recorded in (Genesis 3:6). Her subordinate role in political and religious affairs has been traced to the consequent curse that followed the fall.<sup>14</sup> Ikenga-Metuh again, substantiated the above view when he opined that:

The implication is made clear in Gen. 3:16, where the existing inferiority of woman, her subjection to the man and her dependence upon him for sexual fulfillment which is the root of her subjection, is attributed to a curse. The inferiority of women is thus presented as a deterioration from the primitive and unspoiled condition of the human beings.<sup>15</sup>

The implication of the above is that since a woman is the principal cause of the fall of a man and God cursed her, the Jewish environment became a patriarchal society, and they interpreted it to mean divine consent to their dominion over women.

Alluding to the above fact, Arikewuyo quoting Olutimeyin, said that the atrocities and irreparable injury inflicted upon women in Christian Theology were incredible. Most often, she was held primarily responsible for the doctrine of original sin, which is the bedrock of Christian Faith.<sup>16</sup> This submission, is however untrue based off the fact that, the Old Testament, did not fail to point out the fact that the woman was also

created in divine likeness (Genesis 1:27) and that God gave her an equal right of inheritance with the man, (Numbers 27:5).<sup>17</sup>

To buttress the above expression, John Benton, notes that the whole emphasis is that man and woman are precisely the same. He cited (Genesis 2:21) pointing to the fact that the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. Furthermore, he said that God did not make the woman out of Adam's head to rule over him, nor under his feet to be trampled upon by him, but under his arm to be protected and near his heart to be loved.<sup>18</sup>

On this note, what is Christian position on women?

Olajubu, in her assessment on the status of women in Christianity, states that they can best be described as a double-edged sword. In some areas, the status of women was greatly improved upon whereas, in other areas Christianity undermined and destroyed the status of women.<sup>19</sup> Without any doubt, Christian Faith came into limelight through the enterprising activities of Jesus among men. He came as the incarnate son of God who came to reconcile man back to God.<sup>20</sup>

For us to consider women within the wide range of Christianity, we must first consider Jesus' view and position on women knowing fully well that prevalent tradition among the Jews. Ikenga-Metuh notes that in the New Testament, owing to the influence of Rabbism, Jewish women had lost some of their freedom. He goes further to annotate that Jesus' ministry, however, brought a profound change to the status and position of women,<sup>21</sup> because Luke 4:16-30 attests to the fact that the liberation of the oppressed and the poor is an essential part of the ministry of Jesus. In addition, Luke stresses the fact that women were among the oppressed that Jesus came to liberate. With the coming of Christ, it was a new era for womanhood.<sup>22</sup>

It is essential to note that, despite the fact that the environment Jesus operated was not favourably disposed to women, the Jewish culture did not find a place in Jesus' conception. Akintunde hinges on the above expression to stress that Jesus' teachings and practices show women were involved, but only one was brought. This very action, attested to the fact that women were just mere properties, which have been unjustly maltreated. Jesus, in his feeling, asserts that whoever had never sinned before should be the first to stone the woman. From the eldest to the youngest, nobody was able to stone her because their conscience could not allow them. From this particular action of Jesus, He let the accusers of the adulterous women know that she also has right to fair hearing.

### **The Role of Women in Christianity**

It is, therefore, important in the light of this paper to see who a woman is, and at the same time a definite understanding of what her role is in Christianity. Atere in her conception sees women as the creation of God, a human being, a partner of man without this being called woman, creation would not have been complete.<sup>28</sup> John Benton defining woman in the light of the Bible notes that the whole emphasis is the man and woman are the same, according to (Genesis 2:78), it is not good for the man

to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.<sup>29</sup> From the above expression, it signifies that man and woman are the same and women are companion to me.

On this note, we shall catalogue evidence of the role of women by drawing our examples from the Bible and our contemporary Christian society most particularly Nigeria. Despite the fact that women have been marginalized and demonstration of negative attitude against them by their men folk yet, they still have some groundbreaking roles they played. In so doing, their roles will be arranged under the following headings.

There is no doubt that, women have played significant roles in the history of Christianity both in the Bible and contemporary times. The role women played, could be seen in their financial contribution to the ministry of the church. It is pertinent to point out that women played a significant role in the earthly ministry of Jesus by supporting his ministry and that of his disciples financially and personally ministered to Jesus (Matthew 27:55-56, Mark 15:40-41).<sup>30</sup> Again, women have been seen making financial contribution and donation in the church towards church development. They paid their tithe, pay offering and make financial donations in the church. In fact, Mrs. Adelanwa Adenike informed that in their church they have parted with their half salary as contribution toward the church project. She affirms that women are not left-out of any project, they also contribute their own quota, to the extent that women are divided into bands or societies so that they could be well coordinated.<sup>31</sup> Buttressing this, Akintunde says:

The Aladura Church women belong to various societies within their churches. Within these various societies and in the church at large, they share ideal concerning their contribution to the progress of the church.<sup>32</sup>

From Akintunde's submission we can deduce that women form the contingent of church membership and their impacts are recognized in any religious gathering.

Also, women have been seen in their role as being prophetesses, declaring the mind of God to the people. The case of Huldah is another example of women who played a significant role in the religious life of Israel in spite of the place of women in their culture. Daudu, in his write-up, says that Huldah the wife of Shallum was a Jewish prophetess, during the reign of Josiah, she interpreted the content of the book of the land discovered in the process of the repair of the temple when the worship of Idol had overtaken the worship of God. She inspired and guided king Josiah in his reforms in Israel according to the will of God.<sup>33</sup>

Again, Deborah is another woman who had played a remarkable role in Israel. He said that as a prophetess she prophesied therefore that Israel would win the war. Jael was the one who killed Sisera. Despite the fact that Deborah was renown Jewish nationalist whose example is worthy of emulation by today's women folk inspired Barak to fight against the Canaanites who had oppressed Israel for twenty years and courageous enough to accept Barak's challenge to go to the army to war.<sup>34</sup>

In our contemporary world, most particularly in Nigeria several women have



been seen taken their place in the church in spite of gender discrimination. In the era of confusion and apprehension, God used Miss Sophia Odunlami who had a spiritual experience during her five days illness of the influenza epidemic during which she allegedly heard a voice saying: "I shall send peace to this house and the whole world as the world war is ended".<sup>35</sup> The message from Sophia's spiritual experience according to Ayegboyin and Ishola, was what she saw in a vision that rain water and prayer would be most effectual remedy for influenza victims. She traveled about telling people to store the rain water and have it consecrated for use. In addition, it is said that members of the Precious Stone Society, directed the awakened people to follow Miss Odunlami's instructions and several people were reported to have received healing. This made the fellowship to be an irresistible centre of attraction.<sup>36</sup> Fatokun lending credence to the above, affirms that:

Thus, the emergence of Sophia Odunlami later in 1918 can be said to be what transformed the prayer group into a prophetic healing Pentecostal Movement within the Anglican Church. Therefore, one can say with all fairness that the first prophetic healing evangelist to emerge in the founding years of the church was a female.<sup>37</sup>

From the above, we have seen the role that Sophia Odunlami played through prophecy and the gift of healing. These factors had tremendously helped and transformed the Precious Stone Society into a prophetic healing Pentecostal movement. It was however said by Idris. J. Vaughan in his book commenting on the Pioneering role of this African indigenous prophetess and evangelist, that Sophia Odunlami was a God-gifted divine leader...<sup>38</sup> It is important to see that without a woman, there would have been a vacuum left behind in the church.

Another role in the church is in the area of leadership. Some women in the past have been denied in attaining some leadership position in the church. But nowadays, things have drastically changed. It has been pointed out that in the mission churches in spite of the fact that the churches preach the principle of equality of sexes, men usually hold the principal position of authority. The Archbishops, Reverend Ministers, Pastors, Priests choir leaders and so on are usually all men. But, with the founding of African indigenous churches, they have been exceptional in encouraging women to participate in the ministry of the church. They provide opportunities for leadership and the exercise of authorities for women. And as such, positions of leadership for women include: Reverend Mothers, Lady Leaders, Mother-in-Israel, Superior Mothers, Praying Mothers, Lady Evangelists, and Women Church Planters to mention but a few.<sup>39</sup>

Women have been seen to be founders of their own church or planters. Among these women were Biodun Akinsowon who co-founded Cherubim and Seraphim church with Moses Orimolade, The Evangelist Mrs. Bolanle Odeleke-Salau of Agbala Daniel, Evangelist Mrs. Makanjuola of World Soul Evangelistic Mission and Mrs. Ami-la of Christ Messiah Church at Ilorin just to mention a few of the enterprising women

in mission,<sup>40</sup> At this point, it is important to note that the role of women in Christianity cannot be over emphasised.

### A Panoramic View of Yoruba Religion

Before we delve into Yoruba Religion, there is a need to carry out an examination of the origin of the Yoruba People. The Yoruba people are known as the children of *Oduduwa* or *Omo Kaaro oo jire*; although, there have been contentious issues among the Yoruba elders about the name they bear. According to Alaroye Magazine; a Yoruba Newspaper, Chief Fami Kayode and Chief Elebuibon are said to have opposed the name "Yoruba". Chief Fani Kayode in his opposition to the name, informs that "it was the Fulani who met some Yoruba in the year 1800 and named the tribe 'Yariba' in which it was later modernized to become Yoruba. He said however, the name means betrayals, distrusted and bastards. He said, henceforth, the Yoruba who is wise should reject the name, and refer to themselves as "*Omo Oduduwa*", children of *Oduduwa* or "*Omo*" *Kaaro oo ojire*", meaning "Good morning children did you wake well?". As for Chief Elebuibon, the Araba of Osogbo, he claims that such a name was known to *Ifa* which the holy book of the people is, and therefore, suggested that the people should call themselves *Ara-Ile-Ife* (*Ife* People *Omoluabi*, "the cultured people").<sup>40</sup>

On the historic origin of the Yoruba, there are different versions of their origin. Akinjogbin and Ayandele opine that Yoruba history, there are two main versions. A version has it that the Yoruba originally migrated from north-eastern area of Africa, to settle down in Ile-Ife, now part of Osun State. The other has it that the Yoruba originated from Ile-Ife which according to that version was the centre from which the whole world was created.<sup>41</sup> However, the contestation of the two versions is not our concern in this work.

Without any conjectures, the fact remains that generally, the Yoruba of the south-western Nigeria have been well researched into with no less than three thousand five hundred works. They are found in Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Lagos, and some parts of Kwara and Kogi State. The sub-ethnic groups found in Yorubaland are Ijebu, Oyo, Ife, Ijesha, Akoko, Ekiti, Ikale, Ilaje, Egbado, Okun and Igbomina.<sup>42</sup>

From the above understanding, Yoruba religion emanates from her native and cultural settings in the conception of people's beliefs and practices. It has been reported that there are various monumental works written by Idowu, Awolalu, Oso, Aderibigbe and Alamu among others, which have continued to be major reference points. The Yoruba religion is a religion that has been handed to them by their forefathers from generation to generation. In fact, it has been pointed out that the Yoruba religion is an indigenous faith of the Yoruba passed down from the past generation through oral traditions, art, crafts, liturgies, pithy sayings, proverbs, folklores, stories, songs, and wise sayings to the contemporary age.<sup>43</sup> Without any witty saying, before the introduction of Christianity, the Yoruba practiced this traditional religion and each community worshipped their individual deity in accordance to its devotional

needs. For instance, the veneration of Ogun, Sango, Orunmila, Oya and Osun among others, are prevalent in Yoruba religion.

It is noteworthy to observe that the real key note of the life of the Yoruba, is neither in their noble ancestry nor in the past deed of their heroes. In fact, Bolaji Idowu asserts that:

The keynote of their life is their religion. In all things, they are religious. Religion is their foundation, and the all governing principles of life for them. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of their life, belongs to the deity; their own part in the matter, is to do as they are ordained through the priests and divine whom they believe to be the interpreter of the will of the deity.<sup>44</sup>

From the above point of view, it has been shown that the most important features of their life are their religion and this attest to the fact that the deity is in charge of their life and their basic obligation, is to obey every order or commandment given to them and this is known through the diviners who are the representatives of the deity. The Yoruba religion according to Aderibigbe, is characterized by a belief system which consists of the totality of the African beliefs, thought pattern and ritual practices. Furthermore, the religious belief of the people is in two inclusive categories, the major beliefs and the minor beliefs. The major beliefs in which he scaled down to fivefold classification in their hierarchical order includes, Supreme Being, Divinities, Spirits, Ancestors, Magic and Medicine.<sup>45</sup>

The Yoruba philosophy reflects the belief in God. The concept of God among the Yoruba is the corner stone of every religious worship and ceremony. This concept is basic to adherents of Yoruba religion. Dopamu in his expose, informs that the Yoruba name for Supreme Being is Olorun, or Olodumare in whom they believe and worship. This depicts God as author of all things; visible and invisible, the head or overlord of all things on earth.<sup>46</sup> Buttressing Dopamu's view, Bolaji Idowu points out his sovereignty over everything thus:

He is supreme over all on earth and heaven, acknowledged by the divinities as the head of whom all authorities belong and all allegiance is due, and its status of supremacy is absolute. Things happen when He approves, things do not come to pass when He disapproves. In worship, the Yoruba hold Him ultimately as first and the last in man's daily life. He has the ultimate preeminence.<sup>47</sup>

From the above, we have seen that God has the ultimate power in all things and whatever He wills, nobody can change and whatever He does, no one can oppose.

The divinities were next in Yoruba cosmos they were said to be *Olodumare's* vicegerents or ministers. To this end, Oso affirms that the divinities were lesser gods and they were brought into being to serve the will of *Olodumare* in the creation, equipment and theocratic government of this universe. He further pointed out that these divinities were not created rather they engendered or emanated from God himself.<sup>48</sup> Odejobi in his understanding, opines that these divinities are called *Orisa*. It is generally believed that the divinities have attributes and characteristics of Supreme Be-

ings; they were brought forth to serve as ministers and functionaries in the theocratic government of the universe.<sup>49</sup> It is necessary to note that the divinities are many and the numbers varies between 201, 401, 600, 1,700. They have shrines, temples, devotees, priests, and priestesses; they offer worship and receive day to day sacrifice. They also serve as intermediaries between God and man according to Yoruba religion. Such divinities are *Obatala*, *Orunmila*, *Ogun*, *Esu* and divinized heroes *Sango*, *Osun*, and *Oya*. Above all, these divinities or deities, are ministers of God, and they give account of their work to Him.<sup>50</sup>

The third and fourth Yoruba fundamental beliefs is the spirit and the Ancestors. The spirits are believed to be apparitional entities which form a separate category of being from divinities and ancestors.<sup>51</sup> Dopamu believes that they are regarded by the Yoruba's as powers which are almost abstract entities that take on human shape. They are usually associated with natural phenomena like trees, rocks, rivers, lagoons, forests, bushes, hills, earth, mountains, winds, dark grooves and unusual places and this became their abode. These spirits may even inhabit animals like birds, or snakes. Such objects as they inhabit, are regarded as having certain mysterious powers and they become the emblem of the spirit.<sup>52</sup> while the ancestors according to Oso, "are the dead members of the family. It is believed that they continue existing in a world beyond, as spirits. The dead having been deceased from this earth, are endowed with limitless potentialities, therefore they can be relied upon for protection or care. A father or mother still performs his or her parental function very effectively now since he/she is in the world of the spirit."<sup>53</sup> Alamu in his understanding of the ancestors asserts that:

They believed that those who lived exemplary and extraordinary lives with off springs and die naturally at ripe age are said to born into the family or serving as the custodian of family affairs. ... Though they are dead physically, they are custodians in their immediate environment.<sup>54</sup>

Supporting the above view, Dopamu opines that there are communal ceremonies in honour of the ancestors. He said certain cults like *Oro*, *Egungun*, *Agemo*, *Gelede* and *Adamu Orisa* are dedicated to the worship of ancestral spirits. They are believed to be able to influence living members of the family for good or evil, but their influence does not extend beyond their specific families. Ancestral worship is common in the Yoruba traditional religion.<sup>55</sup>

Lastly, the belief in magic and medicine in Yoruba religion, cannot be underestimated. The Yorubas believes in spiritual and unseen power which include magic, medicine, sorcery, and witchcraft.<sup>56</sup> It is important to note that these mysterious powers played a prominent role in the lives of the Yoruba people.

### **Status of Women in Yoruba Religion**

Wotogbe-Weneka in his opinion, offers certain statements concerning the status of women in African Traditional Religion. According to him, "traditional African religion and societies, are rife with structures which highlight the importance of women, and

at the same time possess features which subjugate women to subservient roles.<sup>57</sup> For instance, about womanhood, Ajisafe observes that:

The general belief throughout the length and breadth of the Yoruba country is that every woman is formed or created by God with only seven bones, and man with nine bones; therefore, a woman is inferior to a man in every respect.<sup>58</sup>

The above illustrations have shown clearly that since a woman was created with seven bones and a man with nine bones, that automatically makes the woman inferior in every respect to man. That is why Dorcas Akintunde is of the opinion that women are generally regarded as inferior to men. They are believed to be different from their male counterpart physically and mentally.<sup>59</sup> Due to this saying, he further observes that in most cases, women are denied their freedom.<sup>60</sup> This perception snowballs into the below submissions that the Yoruba woman is hardly presented as somebody who is active, independent and decisive. She is seen as busy with household activities, never as a professional in “masculine” area.<sup>61</sup> In fact, Wotogbe notes that women are excluded alongside with children whenever major decision affecting their socio-cultural destiny, are being discussed, he states that women are seen as of inconsequential relevance in the traditional society. This found its roots in the traditional belief that her role is in the kitchen. As a girl, she takes instruction from the father, as a wife from the husband and as a widow, the male child takes the tutelage.<sup>62</sup> These are some of the ways in which women are subjugated.

In another dimension, her position in the society is portrayed in some Yoruba sayings: *Eni bi Obirin, kori omo bi*, meaning, “he who has a female child is worthless” which portrays the male child, as preferred, while the female is stereotyped as cowardly, inferior, a betrayer, hypocrite and traitor.<sup>63</sup> All the subservient position the women are subjected to, was said to have been seen in *Ifa* corpus:

Obinrin l’odale, obinrin leke, ema finu han f’obinrin [“Woman are traitors, women are betrayers let no man open his mind to a woman”].<sup>64</sup>

This expression implies that on no condition, should a woman be trusted. In furtherance of the above statement, Orebiyi observes that socially and politically, the Yoruba woman is considered second-class. Furthermore, she said that, it is a general saying among Yorubas that “*Oro obinrin ko se tele*” which means: “it is not wise for a man to follow a woman’s advice or act on a woman’s suggestion”.<sup>65</sup> The above suggest that women cannot give reasonable advice in whatever form. Akintunde vividly pointed out that the role of Yoruba women in the religious realms are limited.

Awo Egungun l’obinrin lese, Awo Gelede l’obinrin le mo, B’obinrin f’oju kan oro, oro agbe.

[Women can participate in masquerade rituals, women can be involved in Gelede rituals, if women dare to get involved in Oro rites Oro will spirit them away.]<sup>66</sup>

Stressing this view, she said that *Gelede* is basically an exclusive female cult. *Oro* is bull

roared. She explains that it is with ears that a woman hears the voice of *Oro*. Despite the fact that they participate in *Egungun* festival, their roles are fundamentally that of the observers.<sup>67</sup>

It is however gratifying to note that in spite of the subjective position of women in Yoruba religion, women cannot be ignored from the social-strata of the society. In spite of the picture painted above, Akintunde insisted that we must quickly guide against over generalization, because the status of women have greatly improved beyond this level.<sup>68</sup> However, Ikenga-Metuh aptly observe that the place of women in African Religion and cultures were better seen as African symbolizations. To him, symbolism is at the heart of African religion and cultural traditions. In defining what symbolization is all about. He writes that:

Symbolization defines the relationships among human beings, and between human beings and nature. The dual male/female symbolism is a characteristic feature of African symbolization. This is understandable because duality is a striking feature of the universe itself and human experience. The duality of the sky above, and the earth below, day and night, life and death, visible and invisible, male and female as it were, force themselves on man as symbolic categories for understanding and evaluating the universe.<sup>69</sup>

In driving the above expression home, both Olajubu and Akintunde also concur with Ikenga-Metuh that the features of African Religion, Yoruba religion inclusive is that of complementation. In the Yoruba mythology as illustrated by Olajubu about the coming of the first set of human beings from heavenly abode, *Ikole-Orun* to build the human society or the world *Ikole-aiye*. Trouble struck when men tried to marginalize the female member of the entourage. *Orunmila*, the *Ifa* oracle divinity when consulted, revealed that the female member had been marginalized. This situation was quickly rectified and tranquility was restored.<sup>70</sup> The reason why there was trouble was as a result of the marginalization of the woman folk. *Olodumare* (God, in Yoruba belief) acknowledges that “complementation is the constitutive principle of creation and proliferation of beings”<sup>71</sup>

Complementation, according to Ikenga-Metuh is the principle which governs the relationship between the sexes in African traditions. It is key to understand the place of women in African cultures.<sup>72</sup> Thus, it is essential for many African feminist theologians to explore this rich African symbolism in evaluating the status roles of women in African societies. Ikenga-Metuh argues:

There are roles women can play better than men, just as there are roles men play better than women. The principle of complementation implicit in sex roles in African tradition is beautifully expressed by this Igbo proverb. “When the right hand washes the left hand, both will be clean. It would be a more scientific and useful approach in the context of acculturating to examine how the principle of complementation operates in the assigning of traditional sex roles in African communities.”<sup>73</sup>

It was argued that the African perception of creation and origin of things as reflect-

ed in the various myths and stories available, show that human beings of both genders were recognized as having equal divine essence and distinctive roles to play in the society.<sup>74</sup> One must not shy away from the fact that men and women were created to complement each other. Supporting this view, a Yoruba proverb says “*Ki aṣi owo we owo lowo f’ nmo*” meaning that “when one hand washes the other, it makes it clean”. This idea of complementary roles, is what Olajubu interpreted to mean dual sex – power structure<sup>75</sup> in which women have been seen in playing a significant role along that of men. It is on this note we shall examine the role of women in Yoruba religion. This would be better understood if discussed under some appropriate themes such as religion, politics, economic and social life.

### The Role of Women in Yoruba Religion

Women in no doubt, play and are still playing prominent roles in their societies. In the religious realm, women are recognized as playing important roles in the worship of the Supreme Being through the divinities and the veneration of the ancestors. Women served as priestesses and spirit medium in some religious cult.<sup>76</sup> for example, in the worship of *Osun*, the *Iya Osun* is in charge of the annual sacred rituals for the traditional leader, *Ataoja* of Osogbo. The post of the *Arugba* is also exclusively for a virgin girl. Her role is to carry the offering of sacrifices to the *Osun* River, during the annual festival. The drawer of *Omi aifo* in rituals with therapeutic use of water is a woman. *Omi aifo* literally means “water fallen without talking”.<sup>77</sup>

Women are also seen to be care-takers of the places of worship and ritual specialist. They are involved in the cleaning of sacred places and as such, those taking care of it are called to priesthood. Obi said those that are called, receive training which includes instruction in the laws, taboos, dances, songs, idiosyncrasies of the gods and general priestly duties. On this note, those taking care of the sacred sites are either a virgin appointed or a woman who was no longer into menstruation. As ritual specialists, their duties include making sacrifices, offering prayers, conducting public and private rites, care for the shrines and temples that they are attached to.

Also, women musical role in the Yoruba religion cannot but be recognized. They are seen to have been the one composing songs in correlation to the present situation on ground. In fact, it has been acknowledged that there are lot of festivals in traditional religion. A good number of them are in honour of the most important divinities and ancestors. During these celebrations women are given prominent roles to play especially singing and dancing.<sup>78</sup> As a result of their sonorous voices, women serve as celebrants in traditional worship, as they sing praises and chant praise name of the gods. Akintunde in her assessment, opines that this is exemplified in the praise poetry of Sango, the god of thunder:

Kabiyesi, oko mi, olowo ori mi mo wa fara mi sabe abo re, Ire owo ni mowa Ire ola, ire Omo

[Your majesty, my Lord, I have come directly under your protection, I am here for the fortune of wealth and children.]<sup>79</sup>



It is important to note that at traditional religious festivals, different melodious songs were usually chanted to invoke the spirits of the gods. Such songs are left for females. If they sang, they danced beautifully to add colour to the ceremony.

Another role women play in the Yoruba religion, is that they are involved in politics. Although in the political arena they have been marginalized, yet some Yoruba women have revealed and shown their bravery and intelligence towards power. Lebeuf correctly remarks that “the role of women in political organizations, may be defined in terms of their participation, directly or indirectly, in the activities of government, or in societies without a state, in the activities of groups or sub-groups which exercise authority.”<sup>80</sup> Again she gave an apt description on the exploits performed by women that feature in African legends and historical traditions, and justification for this, is provided by local chronicles and travelers. In carrying out their obligation Lebeuf further noted that:

It seldom occurs that a woman is invested with supreme sovereignty, occupying an isolated position at the summit of the social hierarchy; but on the other hand, in most of the monarchical systems there are either one or two women of the highest rank who participate in the exercise of power and who occupy a position on a par with that of the king or complimentary to it. With the grace of equality and absolute authority conferred on them but holding a separate position at apex of the political structure.<sup>82</sup>

Corroborating this view, Akintunde observes thus:

At the political realm, women were not adequately represented thus, they were not involved in decision making. At the managerial level, they were marginalized especially in policy making... In addition, where women held responsibilities, they were under represented.<sup>83</sup>

From the above fact, women have been under-represented at both decision making and policy making, few of them have been seen representing the interest of women. The case of *Iyalode* who represents the females in the king-in-council, especially on issues relating to women, must none-the-less be acknowledged. In some cases, there are women regents, influential *Iyalode* and *Iyalaje* (women chiefs, head of women and head of market) among the political leaders of the community. There are women in political positions whose favour, the kings need in order to be effective. For example, the case of Mosaade in Abeokuta whose position is seen as *Iya-Oba* whose duty was to crown the king. Without her, a king cannot be crowned.

Economically, women in the Yoruba religion are doing well and they were competing favourably with their male counterpart. It has been seen that economically, women in the traditional society are active. Some by engaging in petty trading through the sales of farm products at a large scale, for example in Yorubaland, the *Iyalode* was in charge of the commercial activities in the community. It was she who supervised and took necessary decisions concerning the commercial life of the community which mostly involved women. As Bolanle Awe observes, she notes that trade



has traditionally been an important activity of both rural and urban women and they are not left out of the new international trade.<sup>83</sup>

### Similarities and Dissimilarities

In view of the above, it is crystal clear to note that both traditions in Christianity and Yoruba religion in their conceptions see women as the creation of God, a human being and a partner of man. While in Christianity, man and woman were both created as partners, in Yoruba religion the dual male and female symbolism are characteristic features of complementation because they believe that male and female were created and based on this they should live in harmony.

In both traditions, women play significant roles in their obligations as religious leaders in the various endeavour they have found themselves. In Christianity, we have seen women who are Pastors, Evangelists, Mothers-In-Israel, Deaconesses among others. In Yoruba religion, women have been seen to hold positions such as priestesses, women divine star gazers, astrologers among others. They function as leaders of religious occultic functions. The roles of women in African religion and Christianity vary significantly, due to differences in belief systems, cultural contexts, and historical developments.

In African traditional religions, women often play vital roles as priestesses, healers, and custodians of ancestral traditions. They are revered as sources of wisdom, mediators between the community and spiritual realms, and guardians of cultural heritage. Women may lead rituals, perform sacred dances, and participate in communal ceremonies celebrating fertility, harvests, and rites of passage. However, these roles can vary widely, depending on specific ethnic traditions and practices. Conversely within Christianity, women's roles have been more diverse and evolving over time. In many denominations, women have been restricted from holding positions of authority within the clergy, or as it varies among the different denominations. However, women have played pivotal roles in Christian communities as educators, missionaries, and leaders in charitable organizations. In recent decades, there has been a growing movement for gender equality within Christianity, with many churches ordaining women as ministers and embracing female leadership in various capacities.

Overall, while African religions often affords women significant roles in spiritual and communal life, Christianity's stance on gender roles has been more varied and subject to change over time and across denominations.

### Conclusion

From the study, so far, we have x-rayed the exploration of African symbolism in evaluating the status of women in Christianity and Yoruba religion. It is however argued that there are roles that women can play better than men just as there are roles that men play better than women. It is worthy to note that the principle of complementation has shown that men and women are equal partners in African symbolization

which explains the dual sex roles of African traditional view in juxtaposing the role played by Christian and Yoruba religious women.

However, this discussion has shown some gray areas in which women have been undermined and relegated to their background. This paper, therefore, postulates that non-recognition of the roles of women will create a vacuum that will not be easy to fill. We therefore, concludes that women should be given a veritable ground to display their God given gifts and skills to improve their society.

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# Prophetic Ministry and Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Prophetic ministry among Pentecostal-charismatic groups is any ministry that relies on pneumatic charismata and revelative knowledge from God. Proponents of Pentecostal-charismatic prophetic ministry argue that there is a broad substratum of truth in the thesis that the bedrock to Pentecostalism is the birth of Jesus Christ which was prophesied in the days of prophet Isaiah. The objective of this paper is to discuss prophetic ministry among Pentecostal-charismatics in Nigeria. The paper adopts sociological and historical methods. Previous studies showed that prophecy is elucidated variously in the literature of Pentecostal-charismatic groups in Nigeria without clear delineation between charismatic prophecy and prophetic ministry. The study focuses on charismatic prophecy and prophetic ministry and highlights contemporary prophetic practices among Pentecostal-charismatics in Nigeria. The article showed that Pentecostal-charismatics in Nigeria have appropriated the Gospel, adapted the Christian tradition to their cultural sensibilities and nudged its worldview to properly align with their autochthonous maps of the world and contextualized prophetic practices.

Keywords: charismatics, Nigeria, pentecostalism, prophecy and prophetic ministry

## Introduction

PENTECOSTAL-CHARISMATICS HAVE CARVED A NICHE FOR THEMSELVES IN THE religious landscape of Nigeria. Pentecostal-charismatic groups emerged in Nigeria in the 1970s when undergraduate charismatic students in different Universities began to establish worship centres on campuses across the country. They emphasized that Spirit baptism is an experience different from conversion. The roots of these churches are in African Initiated Churches (AIC) like the *Aladura*. The emergence of Pentecostal-charismatic organizations followed a period of austerity, characterized by violence and political corruption. The country was bedeviled by myriad of socio-political, religious and economic malaise. These posed daunting challenges to the 20th century church in Nigeria. Thus, the Pentecostal-charismatic movement used the prophetic ministry to put the 20th century church in Nigeria on an alert to take up its sacred space as a transformative agent for a nation in palpable despair.

## Prophetic Ministry: An Overview

The prophetic ministry is a practice that is prevalent in different religious traditions in Christianity. It is a ministry based on the belief that some individuals are called

by God and gifted with the ability to hear from the spiritual realm and communicate whatever messages they received accordingly. The specific objective of the prophetic ministry is to receive revelations from God and communicate the message received to God's people. The message may come in form of advice, caution or encouragement to God's people. Thus, the prophetic ministry is significantly a channel for revelation and communication. In the New Testament, the prophetic ministry provides the channel for believers to commune with the divine, receive instruction, direction and encouragement. In contemporary Christianity, the prophetic ministry encompasses different shades with multifarious manifestations and means.

In many Christian charismatic groups, the benefits of prophetic ministry are viewed from the points of spiritual guidance, spiritual enrichment, spiritual encouragement and spiritual empowerment. Among Pentecostal-charismatics in different parts of the world, the prophetic ministry contributes to church growth through spiritual oversight and leadership. This inevitably, inexorably enhances ministry modalities like liturgical rites, pastoral care and divine instruction.

Prophetic utterances from a prophet can help Christian believers particularly Pentecostal-charismatics discern God's plan for their lives, families and friends. Among different Pentecostal-charismatic groups in Africa and elsewhere in the world, the prophetic ministry seeks to close the segregation between the supernormal, supersensible and supernatural world and human persons.

### **Prophetic Ministry in Nigeria**

The prophetic ministry is a significant Christian ministry among indigenous Pentecostal-charismatic ministries in Nigeria. According to Nwadiolor (2023), Garrick Braide was the first to lead such a group in Nigeria. The belief in the reality of supernatural powers and forces is a persistent phenomenon that is prevalent in churches, mosques, shrines and temples in Nigeria. Thus, the prophetic ministry among Pentecostal-charismatic groups in the country focuses around the existential needs of the people who face spiritual, physical, economical, psychological and emotional challenges on daily basis. Consequently, the prophetic ministry works *pari-pasu* with the deliverance ministry in the country. In many ways, the prophetic ministry among Pentecostal-charismatics in Nigeria represents a contextual approach to Christianity. One of these ways is noticeable in the fact that the prophetic ministry is being used by Pentecostal-charismatics to sustain African traditional beliefs through resistance of colonialism. Colonialism in this context refers to western Christianity or better still, western interpretation of reality.

Hollenweger (1994) suggests that Pentecostalism is a Christian movement that started in the West by an African in the diaspora is very apt at this point. It is in this connection that the African roots of Pentecostal spirituality finds relevance. The huge contribution of the Afro-American, William J. Seymour to the Azusa street revival in Los Angeles in 1906 is also very significant in this regard. Can we then say that Pentecostalism is the only worldwide Christian movement championed by a black person?

The significant contribution of Seymour's black spirituality has been acknowledged in many scholarly works.

Nel (2019) makes a useful contribution to this discussion. Citing Hollenweger (1994), Asamoah-Gyadu (2013), Cox (1995), Alvarado (2016) and Anderson (2013) on African roots of Pentecostal spirituality, Nel posits:

Hollenweger (1994) argues that its black roots and respect for its African heritage had been and still are being responsible for the unprecedented growth of the Pentecostal movement in the Third World. It began with the significant contribution of the Afro-American William J. Seymour to the 1906 Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, US, making Pentecostalism the only worldwide Christian church movement initiated by a black person (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013). The influence of Seymour's black spirituality should be acknowledged. Cox (1995) refers to this close affinity between Pentecostal spirituality and primal piety in terms of *inter alia* Seymour's spirituality. He describes how long-suppressed currents of archetypal human religiousness had resurfaced in a new form and under explicitly Christian auspices. Seymour, son of freed slaves, had grown up in a southern black religious culture (Alvarado, 2016). In this culture, an extraordinary synthesis of indigenous African elements had already been incorporated into Protestant Christian worship such as trance, ecstasy, visions, dreams and healings in continuity with similar biblical practices. African Americans also did not retain these primal practices merely as heirlooms but adapted and transformed their African spirituality with its respect for the spiritual in the new environment (Anderson, 2013).

Nel (2019), citing Cox further notes that primal spirituality constitutes the substructure of Pentecostal religion in Africa and gives it a distinctive quality. According to him, it is impossible to understand Pentecostal spirituality without taking note of the influence of Africa's primal spirituality.

Thus, it is not surprising that the prophetic ministry among Pentecostal-charismatics in Nigeria synthesizes indigenous African elements with Pentecostal-charismatic Christian worship like exorcism, ecstasy, healing and deliverance. The prophetic ministry among Pentecostal-charismatic groups like The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Deeper Life Christian Ministry (DLCM), Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM), and Living Faith Bible Church (aka Winners' Chapel) responds to primal African spirituality and worldview. They carry out prophetic responsibilities with the notion of the existence of unseen spiritual forces, evil cosmic powers known as "principalities and powers".

### **Pentecostal-charismatic Movement in Nigeria**

Pentecostal-charismatic movement is a major religious movement in the religious landscape of Nigeria. Nigeria as a country is faced with a lot of challenges ranging from metaphysical phenomena to physical occurrences. These issues constitute the daily existential realities of Nigerians. Consequently, the focus of majority of the Pentecostal-charismatic groups in Nigeria is on prosperity, health and wealth Gospel and exorcism. This makes the Pentecostal-charismatic movement in Nigeria an at-



tractive alternative to other forms of Christianity in the country namely Catholicism and Protestantism. The practices of Pentecostal-charismatic groups in Nigeria suggest that there are existential challenges and questions in the country which neither governmental agencies nor other forms of Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism) have no adequate answers. Pentecostal-charismatic groups like the RCCG led by Enoch Adejare Adeboye and Winners Chapel led by David Oyedepo have become popular in the country and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa as a result of their beliefs and practices that resonate strongly with the traditional ways of religion in Africa, resulting in Pentecostal-charismatic groups contributing significantly to the process of reshaping spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria. This view dovetails with Cox's assertion that Pentecostalism has become extremely popular in the African continent as a result of its worldview that resonates strongly with the autochthonous religion of Africans (Cox, 1995). It is in this vein that Nel (2019) remarks as follows:

Pentecostalism has become popular in Africa because it functions (unintentionally, for the most part) with a worldview that resonates strongly with the familiar ways of being religious, resulting in Pentecostalism contributing to the process of reshaping spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Cox, 1995). It offers a way of understanding the world in items of benevolent and malevolent powers that provides one with a means to manipulate the powers to a certain extent for one's own benefit. Pentecostals' prerequisite of spirit baptism also takes spirit possession seriously, a phenomenon that Africans have been experimenting with for a long time. For this reason, most African initiatives in Christianity have had a pneumatic orientation. Pneumatic Christianity is closer to the grain of African culture and its worldview resonates closely with the indigenous primal worldview (Nel, 2019).

Nel's observations are very apt. His assertion dovetails with the Pentecostal-charismatic experience in Nigeria.

### **Prophetic Ministry and Pentecostal-Charismatism in Nigeria**

The theology of majority of Pentecostal-charismatic groups in Nigeria is predicated on sin being the root cause of all problems. As discussed earlier, Pentecostal-charismatics believe emphatically that the African milieu is surrounded by "principalities and powers" and "spiritual wickedness in high places". Thus, the belief among Pentecostal-charismatics in Nigeria is that the believer should regularly extricate himself by means of deliverance and exorcism. Adamo (2020) suggests that the existence of demonic forces is painfully real in the African indigenous tradition. According to him, witches, wizards, evil spirits and ill-wishers all constitute a major obstacle that the believer must overcome.

The reality of these enemies is a major source of phobia and anxiety in typical African indigenous milieu. It is in the light of the above that Nel (2019) suggests that "The African Pentecostals narrative is concerned with the solution of personal and societal problems that is interpreted in terms of the African view of rulers, authorities, evil powers, cosmic powers and spiritual forces in the heavenly realm that focus-

es on how the spirit world impinges on the visible world to hinder or foster human flourishing.

The reality of the presence of evil forces explains Pentecostal charismatics preferences for prayer mountains and sacred places where prophets and other therapeutic offices offer counseling seasons and deliverance services.

When confronted by these challenges, Pentecostal believers need to engage with the spirit world for solutions of salvation or deliverance. Christians fight against the evil forces of ancestors, witchcraft, evil spirits hobgoblins and Satan (Frahm-Arp, 2016) by consulting the divinatory practices of the prophets in order to find out what is the cause of the misfortune and how to counteract it effectively. They reject the solution of old types of spirits possession, divinations as practiced by traditional healers, the ancestors, traditional medicines and charms (Anderson, 2013). The aversion of mishaps is coined as a 'breakthrough' and its acquirements may require compensation of some sort (Saracco, 2007). In African Pentecostalism, salvation is translated holistically into prosperity and wealth, dignity, fertility and a happy marriage, security, vitality, healing and health equilibrium in the cosmos as well as eternal life that awaits the believer after death (2019).

The above submission is valid. Pentecostal-charismatics in Nigeria strongly believe that virtually every event has spiritual connotation, thus negative events are to be resisted by imprecatory prayers.

Faith props is one of the prophetic practices in different Pentecostal charismatic groups in Nigeria. Quayesi-Amakye (2015) succinctly observes:

As in Nigeria's Aladura churches in peripheral prophetism, victory and liberation in Christ are aided by faith props or points of contact of material substances to mediate divine power to offset satanic manipulations in believer's lives. In this way, patrons give or "sow" material or monetary substances to support God's work to procure supernatural breakthroughs and protection. As I have observed elsewhere, they may also take the form of patronizing protective materials or substances from prophets for propping onto victory and liberation. Such substances may include olive oil, water, a crucifix, monetary donations, a blessed handkerchief, wall paintings of the passion of Jesus and even sand from prophetic footsteps (Quayesi-Amakye, 2015).

The above illustration shows that Pentecostal-charismatism is making Christianity an African religion. Pentecostal-charismatics in Nigeria have appropriated the Gospel, adapted the Christian tradition to their cultural sensibilities and nudged its worldview to properly align with their autochthonous maps of the world and contextualized prophetic practices.

## Conclusion

The prophetic ministry is a very significant ministry among Pentecostal-charismatics in Nigeria. The gift of prophecy is regarded by an overwhelming majority of Pen-

tecostal-charismatics as adequate elucidation of prophetic mysteries. Pentecostal-charismatics in the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM), Living Faith Bible Church (aka Winners' Chapel) and Deeper Life Christian Ministry (DLCM) suggest that the role of prophetic ministry has changed due to certain eschatological reflections and the New Testament mindset. In different Pentecostal-charismatic organizations in Nigeria, neo-Pentecostal prophets generate and develop prophetic culture that lends itself to spiritual encounters. These encounters are necessary because of personal and societal problems that are interpreted in terms of the African view of rulers, authorities, evil powers, cosmic powers and spiritual forces in the heavenly realm.

The study has contributed to existing body of literature through analytical elucidation of prophetic ministry among Pentecostal-charismatics in Nigeria. The article showed that Pentecostal-charismatics in Nigeria have appropriated the Gospel, adapted the Christian tradition to their cultural sensibilities and nudged its worldview to properly align with their autochthonous maps of the world and contextualized prophetic practices. This article dovetails with the religious and biblical aspects of theological studies.

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# Role of the Church in Alleviating Poverty in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The church has the mandate to care for the poor, in order to alleviate suffering, and stand for justice. Jesus witnessed the state of poverty amongst the people and proclaimed the Gospel of liberation against socio-economic injustices and political oppression. In the history of humanity, poverty seems to be one of the most serious social issues ravaging humans. Poverty is said to be a state of being poor or deficient in amassing wealth to afford a flamboyant living. It's quite glaring that majority of Nigerians live in abject poverty. This could be partly due to illiteracy, unemployment, and poor health care delivery system. Scholars have written on empowerment, wealth creation, drug abuse etc. However, the role of church in poverty alleviation has not been adequately dealt with from scholastic point of view. This lacuna necessitated this study. The study adopted historical and sociological methods *that used descriptive analysis, to draw conclusion and recommendations*. The historical method was used to trace the history of poverty and its effects in Nigeria. The sociological method adopted was survey. In-depth interviews were conducted on elders and youths who were custodian of information on poverty and its alleviation. The study concluded that, Nigerian government initiated and implemented several programs in order to alleviate poverty but, failed due to lack of proper planning/implementation. The study recommends that, the church should put in place, activities that could improve standards of living of the poor, and extend hands of fellowship to well-meaning agencies to reduce poverty in Nigeria.

Keywords: *church, poverty alleviation, corruption, unemployment, skill acquisition*

## Introduction

POVERTY CAN BE DEFINED AS LACK OF OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP HUMAN ABILITIES and to control own human lives because of economic or material deprivation.<sup>1</sup> This basic definition connotes material lack or wants, deprivation in human capacity development, lack of access to resources, insecurity among others. From practical experience, wherever poverty exercises its way, undue resource control, physical weakness (as in the cases of malnutrition, disability, etc.), isolation (marginalization, discrimination, etc.), vulnerability (to contingencies which increase poverty e.g. war, climatic changes, etc.), powerlessness (the inability to avoid poverty itself or to modify the situation), etc. are not found wanting. These harsh situations do occur when people cannot access income and other resources needed to attain proper conditions of life such as good diet, material goods, amenities, standards

and services which, in turn, enable them to play their roles, meet the obligations and participate in the family relationships and customs of their society.

### **Concept of Poverty**

Poverty could also be defined as the lack of essential resources to make available, basic things of life. Okalow states: "Poverty essentially means lacking enough resources to provide the basic necessities of life.<sup>2</sup> Poverty is essentially, about lack of provision of human daily needs. That is, lack of quantifiable amount of money, lack of opportunity, lack of empowerment in any form, and lack of security of life and properties etc. Therefore, for the poor, the window of opportunity is substantially closed and makes them practically inactive.<sup>3</sup> The poor are therefore, limited in the area of making choices, exposed to diseases, eviction, social discrimination and hopelessness. Townsend states; Poverty goes beyond shortage of income to include the inability of the poor to actively participate in the society. Thus, poverty could be seen as deprivation of basic capabilities, basically wellbeing and freedom. Capacity to participate in the society is limited while wellbeing and freedom are denied to some segment of the society on account of being poor.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, United Nations (cited in Ucha)<sup>5</sup> describes poverty thus: Poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in the society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe; not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living; not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environment without access to clean water and sanitation.

This brings to fore, the living condition of the urban poor that, dwells in slums and informal settlements around large commercial cities. Urban poverty denotes a situation of lack, denial of social amenities and social exclusion of a section of urban population. Poverty and lack of basic amenities are the major characteristics of urban slums.<sup>6</sup> Emergency or informal settlements houses the urban poor that lack the economic capacity and ability to afford better living conditions to live in the cities. These communities are often neglected and left unattended to, thereby strengthening their poverty level.

### **Panoramic View of Church and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria**

There is a strong link between what happens in society and the way religion is practiced in any clime. In Nigeria, Christian religion through the proclamation of the Gospel has had its way; hence its present expansion incidence. From a handful of missionaries who planted the Christian faith in the Nigeria, the Church has expanded in so many ways – there are mission Churches, Nigeria Indigenous Churches and yet there are many privately owned by individuals, and recently, Pentecostalism has announced her overwhelming presence in Nigeria. These scenarios suggest one fact:

the Church is growing, recording an increasing number of adherents. The growing numerical rate is however undermined by poverty, which has severely bedeviled its qualitative stance.

While so many worshippers gather in Cathedrals, Church Halls, Camps, Picnics, and Prayer-mountains on designated days, today, those who sincerely throng such centers to obey God further, are seriously dwindling. The level of poverty in the land occasioned by corruption, lack of proper planning, natural disaster, ethno-religious crises and terrorism in the form of Boko-Haram, ISWAP, and quite recently the END-SARS protest in Lagos and other parts of Nigeria, injustice among others, from which people want to escape has caused half-hearted religiosity in Church circles.

Poverty as a socio-economic issue, cannot be pinned down to a particular definition; its wide range of meanings has been precipitated by scholarly perception from different disciplinary approaches and ideologies. Since World War II, a Western definition of poverty has been based on monetary terms, employing levels of income or consumption to measure poverty and defining the poor by a headcount of those who fall below a given income/consumption level or “poverty line.” The definition has nevertheless been complemented by other various approaches which view poverty situation in a more multidimensional way, including the basic needs approach, the capabilities approach, and the human development approach. These approaches have apparently gained acceptance and there are widespread in the way United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Index (HDI) incorporated them into its view of poverty which takes into consideration three dimensions of human development: (i) Life expectancy; (ii) educational attainment; and (iii) standard of living, measured by income in terms of its purchasing power parity (UNDP 2006).

Invariably then, poverty can be simply defined as “lack of opportunity to develop human abilities and to control own human lives because of economic or material deprivation.”<sup>7</sup> This basic definition connotes material lack or wants, deprivation in human capacity development, lack of access to resources, insecurity among others. From practical experience, wherever poverty exercises its way, undue resource control, physical weakness present itself, especially amongst the poor people in the society. These harsh situations do occur when people cannot access income and other resources needed to attain proper conditions of life such as good diet, material goods, amenities, standards and services which, in turn, enable them to play their roles, meet the obligations and participate in the family relationships and customs of their society.

While it is noteworthy to mention that some people are poor for lack of proper planning in national, group, family or personal levels, some wallow in penury because of reasons beyond their control such as natural, ecological, climatic or environmental factors (e.g. drought, flood, tsunami, earthquake, and so on. Others are poor because of ethno-religious wars, terrorism, and the likes. In Nigeria, poverty “successfully” thrives for faulty or lack of national socio-economic planning. The table below from Nigeria Poverty Profile 2010 as shown by National Bureau of Statistics showcas-



ing the percentage of Nigeria poverty situation from 1980 to 2010 is amazing because of its ever-increasing state despite the actualization of the New Millennium Development's goals:

Table 1

Year	Poverty incidence %	Estimated population (millions)	Population in poverty (millions)
1980	27.2	65	17.1
1985	46.3	75	34.7
1992	42.7	91.5	39.2
1996	65.7	102.3	67.1
2004	54.4	126.3	68.7
2010	69.0	163	112.5

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (Harmonized Nigeria Living Standard Survey), 2010.

It is crystal clear that the derivable wealth from over 50 years of oil exploration, pathetically pursued in exchange for agricultural economics before the oil boom, in the country has not been managed properly for the common good. This is because as Solomon Ademiluka rightly points out, “Just as the 8th century ushered in a period of unprecedented wealth in Israel, the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta placed Nigeria among the richest nations of the world.”<sup>8</sup>

However, just as the wealth was monopolized by the upper class in Israel, Nigeria has been stratified into upper and lower classes with the upper class controlling the resources and forcing others into destitution. Hence its attendant corrupt practices were inevitable because most politicians and their cronies who view the Oil Money as a National Cake stash the Commonwealth of the country in their foreign bank accounts in Europe and America. Its attendant curse was joblessness and social vices. Unemployment alone has contributed in no small way to aggravate the scene of religious crises and tribal uproars in Nigeria; members of ethno-religious crises in the country have been teeming unemployed youth, an incident which provides ready soldiers for such wars, and has plunged Nigeria into a bedlam of problems and challenges which have dire consequences for the country.<sup>9</sup> Other issues like the fuel crisis, Fulani herdsmen crisis, water crisis and even food crisis are also crying for attention. Also, of recent was the End SARS protest in which many of our youths were maimed and or killed. All these were results of inability of the government not been able to sincerely manage the resources of the nation.

Although no society can be totally free from poverty, the analytical table above indicates that the rate of poverty increased and the population of people it engulfs increases to 69% of the entire population as at 2010. All the measures put into place to stem the tide of poverty such as 1979 Green Revolution Programme (GRP), 1986 Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), 1993 Family Support

Programme (FSP) and Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), 2001 National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) which were follow-up to 1972 National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) and Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank, 1976 Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), have achieved only a little result. For example, according to the above National Bureau of Statistics (2007), Nigeria's poverty level in 1996 was 65.7%, and the poverty population was 67.1 million. The report indicates among others the magnitude of pain and agony into which majority of the Nigerians have been immersed since then. All these tendencies have had total effect on Churches, and communities in Nigeria too.

Another Report made available by National Bureau of Statistics of poverty head-count figures for 2010 and forecast/estimate for 2011 indicates that the "incidence of poverty in Nigeria worsened between 2004 and 2010." The Report shows that the number of Nigerians living below the poverty line rose from 68.7 million to 112.5 million (i.e. 63.7% rise in poverty incidence) during the period while the population rose from 139.2 million to 158.6 million (13.9 % rise in population) between 2004 and 2010. Eventually, during that period (i.e. 2004 – 2010), the Nigerian economy was growing strongly at an average annual growth rate more than 6.6%, making the country the fifth fastest growing economy in the World in 2010 at 7.87% real growth rate. The paradox of growth in the face of poverty and inequality and injustice in Nigeria's socio-politico-economic distribution, with 1% of the population (politicians and bureaucrats) allocating the resources of the country to themselves while the rest of the populace wallow in abject poverty.<sup>10</sup>

Nwagwu equally agrees with the submission above and attributes the persistence of poverty in Nigeria to income inequality, long-term ethno-religious conflicts, civil unrests and political instability.<sup>11</sup> His assertion on income inequality is quite accurate especially when viewed from the fact that Nigeria's Members of Parliament (MPs) earn more than their counterparts all over the world. Only 31% percent of Nigerian populace lived above the poverty line in 2010. This is somewhat pathetic in a country (Nigeria) with a nominal GDP of \$207.11bn and per capital income of \$1,401 and which claims to be the second largest economy in Africa as at 2011.<sup>12</sup> In all these, the church had tried to put in her best to alleviate the level of suffering of the poor in the society.

### **Causes of Poverty in Nigeria**

1. Corruption: This is unethical administrative or executive practices in government or business including bribery. According to Transparency International<sup>13</sup> corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Unethical practices has become common place in Nigeria, and has given Nigeria and Nigerians a bad image even internationally. Embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds, have become a do or die affair. Public office holders now pride in corruption and use it in many instances to purchase chieftaincy titles from our traditional rulers. Nigeria's income is mostly generated from natural resources. This income, instead of being used for developmental purposes, is circulated among political office holders, government functionaries, their families and cro-

nies. Consequently, the few in government circle enrich themselves while the vast majority wallow in abject poverty.

2. **Inadequate Funding of Education System:** Education which is the process of imparting knowledge, skill and judgment is not given needed attention in Nigeria. Education is a sure way of empowering an individual so as to actualize his/her dreams in any given society. It has the ability to reduce poverty and increase productivity. The nations with greater productivity are those with strong and functional education system.<sup>14</sup> Many children and youths in Nigeria are deprived of education which is a denial of their right. Lack of education means lack of capacity to participate in the society. Most Nigerian children today, are denied access to education and seen begging on major streets, motor parks, which has become a national embarrassment.
3. **Total Dependence on Oil:** Dependence on oil revenue has become a major cause of poverty in Nigeria. Since the discovery of oil, Nigeria's economy has been influenced by the commodity. Agriculture was the main stay of Nigeria economy, but since after the discovery of the oil and gas sector, many of our youths moved in droves to the cities in search of white-collar jobs, and as a consequence, brought agriculture to her knees. Presently, the oil and gas sector cannot provide job opportunities for the teeming unemployed Nigerians. The overdependence on oil and gas has led to neglect of agricultural sector, solid minerals sector and other sectors of the economy. As a result, government has failed to diversify the economy, and this has contributed to the huge high rate of poverty, unemployment and many other social vices in Nigeria.
4. **Alarming Rate of Unemployment:** Unemployment is one of the major contributor to poverty in Nigeria. Unemployment and poverty are interwoven. This is because, if people are unable to secure employment, their source of living standard falls and as a consequence, they are unable to meet the basic things of life. With unemployment, standard of living goes down while the cost of living continues to rise.<sup>15</sup> A lot of Nigerians lack the opportunity to be gainfully employed. Yearly, educated Nigerians from our tertiary institutions roam the streets with no job opportunities in sight. Education is no longer a guarantee to securing job in the present Nigerian state. World Bank (2008) observes that education which was once a sure way of getting gainful employment no longer looks certain, as our youths roam the streets in search of job.

## **Church and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria**

The federal government of Nigeria has tried to put in place several poverty alleviation programs in order to reduce the level of poverty. The failure of these various poverty alleviation programmes of the government due to lack of planning and implementation shows that government alone cannot reduce the impact of poverty on the populace in Nigeria. This has accounted for the call on all social responsibility players, including the church, to come to the rescue of the poor masses. The church has a lot of role to play in eradicating poverty, and no doubt through that, show case the love of God to the poor. As part of the church mission efforts, the church needs to integrate spiritual concerns with care for the material needs of humanity. Such concern has been pursued by the church, right from the time that, the early missionaries such as the Portuguese Roman Catholic monks, The Baptist and The Christ Apostolic Church missionaries ventured into Nigeria. The church, from the days of the missionaries, has been striving to lift the literacy level of the people. Urakpa<sup>16</sup> outlined the involvement

of the Anglican Church in Educational Development in eastern Nigeria. Other mission bodies such as the Roman Catholic Mission have equally done marvelous work in the area of education.

In addition to focusing of education, the missionaries took practical steps to reduce hunger and poverty. Jakonda<sup>17</sup> observes that they introduced crops like cocoa, ginger, groundnut, tomatoes and cotton which helped to boost the economy and income of the people. Similarly, crops like cassava were equally introduced into Nigeria by white missionaries. Improved agricultural practices meant improved production and better living standard for the people. Through education, health care services, agriculture and trade, the income of natives were positively touched by the early missionaries to Nigeria.

The church has not given up, in recent times, the church continues to play key roles in the society as it concerns poverty reduction and the poor in the society. The church has continued to strive to free humanity from hunger, misery, oppression and hatred which are rooted in man's selfishness. The Church's concern for the poor is a reflection of Jesus' concern for the poor and is part of what God has handed to the church on the earth. The redeeming power of Christ makes meaning to the poor only when their poverty is addressed genuinely. Engel observes; meeting the basic needs of the people and their social challenges is a sure way of showing the love of God in its practical terms. Therefore, the Church, such as, Southern Baptist Convention, the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, have food reservoir, which serves as reservoir from which food items are drawn and given to the most vulnerable to reduce poverty. Some other churches encourage youths through empowerment and entrepreneurship training.

### **Cumulative Effect of Poverty in Nigeria**

Presently, poverty in Nigeria is complicated by the lack of provision of social amenities-stable electricity, good roads, potable water, health facilities, and so on. To make matter worse, the ever-rising cases of militancy, kidnapping which is very rampant in most communities in Nigeria, and terrorism do not help matters in this context. Coupled with this is present conundrum of the shortfall in global Crude Oil Price whereby Federal allocations to the federating states in the country have also drastically reduced to the point where most States and Local Governments cannot afford to pay their workers' monthly salaries. As at the inauguration of President Muhammadu Buhari's government on May 29, 2015, 27 States of Nigeria are said to be deficient of enough fund to pay their workers' monthly wages. Almost a year after, 24 states still cannot pay salaries despite the bailout fund dished out to them through the initiative of the Federal Government.<sup>18</sup> Also, at the inauguration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's government on May 29, 2023, several States in Nigeria found it quite difficult to pay monthly wages.

To compound the already worsened situation the more, is the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic which has ravaged the economy of the world and has brought it to a standstill.

This study quite agrees with Augustine U. Nebechukwu who avers that poverty is not the result of chance, destiny or fate. In Nebechukwu's assertion, it is even less the will of God. It is rather the bad will of men and women rooted in social, political, religious, economic and cultural injustice.<sup>19</sup> In its Joint Report on Social Inclusion (2004), the European Commission came up with the following statements on poverty:

People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live. Because of their poverty, they may experience multiple disadvantages through unemployment, low income, poor housing, and inadequate health care barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport, and recreation. They are often excluded and marginalized from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are the norm for other people and their access to fundamental rights may be restricted.

The complicated scenario has occasioned infant mortality, low standard of education, reduction in human lifespan, increase in crimes such as robbery, kidnapping, and even terrorism.

E. J. Nwagwu says:

The majority of Nigeria population, the poor people in affluent society, is enmeshed in the net of poverty." As he rightly affirms, "The Nigerian government seems to have failed in its contractual obligation to respect and sustain its social contract with the people."<sup>20</sup>

As a result of the seemingly total collapse of social security, some elements have taken to alternative means – prostitution, brain drain, cheating, 419, scam and other fraudulent practices – to earn a living, incidents which have socio-economic, political and moral consequences on how religion is practiced in the country. Ayedogbon, J. O. and Ohwofasa<sup>21</sup> teach the importance of religion in the national development programme of any nation in the following statements:

...It has been acknowledged as one of the bedrocks of socio-economic and political advancement of many countries in the world. Religion exemplifies morals and advocates uprightness and piety, as opposed to sacrilege and profanity. Religion is one of the most powerful social institutions in the social system that is used as an instrument of social cohesion, unity, and integration.

It is, however, unfortunate that poverty is more or less a big barrier, barricading the path of religion in its promotion of morality and ethical development of citizens of human capital particularly in Nigeria as a country. It has led to pretence among worshippers; many throng into religious centres for immediate material benefits to ameliorate their impoverished situations. And this is not good for the church.

### **The Way Forward for Church and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria**

The failure of successive governments to reduce poverty in Nigeria calls for response from all Christian Corporate Social Responsibility (CCSR) players in the society to

massively come out to bail the poor from the pangs of poverty. One of such players is the church which tend to help the poor. And this has made the church very relevant in recent time. The Church which upholds the teachings of Jesus has continued to minister to the needs of the poor spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically and economically. From the days of white missionaries in Nigeria, the church has been contributing to the spiritual and economic wellbeing of the people. Lack of education and hunger are seen as manifestations of poverty and these are not lacking among the masses of Nigeria. The Church has done some commendable work in the area of education and food security. Western education was introduced into Nigeria by the missionaries. The Methodist mission, Church missionary Society (CMS), Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), Presbyterian mission among others established schools in Nigeria as far back at late 19th Century.<sup>22</sup> The trend of founding schools has been upheld by the church since the days of the missionaries. Ucha<sup>23</sup> observes that educational development has ever been synonymous with the missionary enterprise. The mission schools offered quality education and good morals. Consequently, the human capital that drove the quest for independence were mainly product of the mission school. The same human capital drove the economy of the nation in those early days. It is a known fact those who has received quality education were self-reliant and better-off economically than those without education. The Church still strives to provide quality education that will lead to economic emancipation.

To address the problem of hunger and poverty, the missionaries introduced improved system of agriculture. Demonstration farms were established and the natives trained in modern ways of farming which has the potential of improving productivity.<sup>24</sup> In addition to introducing modern family techniques, some crops were introduced to boost productivity and income. Tomato, ginger, cocoa, and groundnut were some of the crops introduced by the missionaries. Agricultural produce became the mainstay of Nigeria's economy before the oil boom.

In all these understandable leap, Nigeria still wallow in abject poverty. Many of those were lucky to be educated have no life skill as the education they received does not arm them with the skills necessary to produce wealth and become job creators. They therefore depend on the government for jobs, which the government alone could not provide. The Church, on the other hand, appears to be overwhelmed by the situation. This is because the income of the church is limited and secondly, the church today appears to be more interested in receiving than giving. Hence, the church is perceived as part of the problem rather than the solution to the issue of poverty in Nigeria.

The Church can reduce poverty in the following ways:

1. Education. The poor needs to be educated and armed with knowledge through acquisition of skill that, will enable them become productive and self-reliant. Education here means education of the head and the hands. Education of the head refers to cognitive knowledge while that of the hand refers to practical ability. There are many graduates today who have the theoretical knowledge, but lack the practical knowledge to practice

what they have learnt. The church should strive to provide education that will affect the head and the hands.

2. Skill acquisition programmes. Skill acquisition is the form of training by individuals or group of individuals that can lead to the acquisition of knowledge for self-sustenance.<sup>25</sup> Skill acquisition involves training people in different fields of trade under a legal agreement between the trainer and the trainee. Establishing skill acquisition centers equipped with the requisite manpower and equipment that will enable the trainee to acquire the needed skills for self-sustenance and wealth creation is a practical effort which the church can make in relation to poverty reduction. When the poor and unemployed are armed with necessary skills, they will be able to fend for themselves.
3. Provision of credit facility. The church needs to set-up funds that would cater for the small loans needed to drive small businesses. Materials and equipment such as sewing machine could be provided for those trained in garment making to enable them start-up something. Again, the church could organize the poor and encourage them to form cooperative societies. These societies can apply and secure government grants for agriculture and small businesses. Beneficiaries of this church funds should be monitored to ensure proper utilization and pay back if need be.
4. Organizing seminars and symposia. Principles of finance management need to be inculcated into the unemployed before giving out funds to them. This could be done through seminars and symposia. The Church can leverage on her ability to reach the lower stratum of the society to identify and mobilize the poor within their area of influence for such programmes. They can work in conjunction with their host communities to offer these enlightenment programmes aimed at arming the poor with knowledge that are capable of lifting them out of poverty.
5. Extension of hand of Fellowship to Well-meaning Agencies. The church should, reach out to both government and non-governmental agencies as well as donor agencies to source for the needed fund to execute meaningful poverty reduction interventions in Nigeria.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, poverty is a great social problem ravaging the poor, and the impact is visible in the socio-economic life of the poor in Nigeria. Majority of Nigerians live on the fringes of poverty level and that has created an unbelievably wide gap between the rich and poor, and has continued to widen with no end in sight. The Federal government of Nigerian has attempted to reduce poverty level using several alternatives but, failed due to lack of proper planning and implementation, and this has brought untold hardship on the poor citizenry in the country. Though the church had been active in her Christian Corporate Social Responsibility (CCSR), there are still a lot more areas to be harnessed and covered to reduce the level of poverty in Nigeria.

## Recommendations

From the foregoing, the study recommends that:

1. The church should step up her intervention in poverty alleviation programmes in the area of empowerment and acquisition of skills to brighten the financial fortunes of the poor in the society.
2. The church should come together to create a common pool where money could be



deposited, saved and well managed and from there, offer well and quality education that would help the poor live a quality life.

3. The church should extend hands of fellowship to agencies, well-meaning Nigerians and NGOs for assistance to enable them function optimally.

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# Social Media as a Tool for Religious Expression in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Social media has transformed religious practices worldwide, and Nigeria, with its religious diversity, is no exception. As one of Africa's most religiously pluralistic countries, Nigeria's South-western states, where African Traditional Religion, Islam, and Christianity coexist, provide a unique context for examining digital platforms' influence on religious expression. This paper explores how social media serves as a tool for religious communication, practice, and community building in Nigeria. It investigates the opportunities and challenges that these platforms present in a multi-faith society. Through qualitative analysis of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube usage by religious leaders and followers, the research highlights how faith expression is evolving in the digital age. Findings reveal that social media enables religious leaders to reach wider audiences, share sermons, devotional content, and offer spiritual guidance. The study recommends that religious institutions create ethical guidelines for content shared online and engage responsibly with followers to ensure spiritually enriching interactions. In conclusion, social media has become an undeniable force in shaping religious practices in Nigeria, offering both significant opportunities and challenges. While it is an essential tool for religious expression, religious leaders must use it effectively and responsibly to enhance, rather than detract, from their followers' spiritual lives.

Keywords: *social media, religious expression, religious communities, religious engagement, ethical guidelines*

## Introduction

SOCIAL MEDIA HAS BECOME AN INTEGRAL PART OF MODERN LIFE, WITH MILLIONS of Nigerians actively using platforms, such as, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms are not only spaces for social interaction but also serve as outlets for religious expression, providing users with opportunities to share their faith, connect with fellow believers, and access religious resources. As religious participation increasingly moves online, it is crucial to understand how social media influences religious practices in Nigeria. Despite the growing importance of social media in Nigerian religious life, there is limited research on how Nigerians, particularly Christians and Muslims, use social media for religious expression. This gap in research has prompted the need for a deeper exploration of social media's role in shaping religious practices and communication.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in the Social Constructionist theory, as proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966), which posits that social reality is constructed through communication. This theory is applicable to the digital context, where social media allows users to create and share their own realities, including religious beliefs, practices, and values. In the context of Nigerian Christians and Muslims, social media is a tool for constructing and disseminating religious narratives, which shapes religious experiences and interactions.

## Literature Review

A comprehensive review of existing literature reveals a growing body of research on the intersection of social media and religion. Studies have explored how social media platforms serve as virtual congregations, enabling religious communities to come together, share content, and engage in online worship. Scholars such as Campbell (2020) have explored how digital platforms are reshaping religious communities, particularly in the Global South, where technological access has brought new opportunities for religious communication. In the context of Nigeria, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube have become integral in connecting religious leaders with their followers, allowing them to disseminate religious teachings and sermons far beyond the physical confines of traditional worship spaces. Research has also examined the implications of social media for religious authority, the spread of religious messages, and the challenges posed by misinformation and hate speech. The Nigerian religious landscape, with its vibrant Christian and Muslim populations, provides a unique context for studying the role of social media in shaping religious practices and offers a unique context in which social media serves both as a space for religious expression and as a tool for interfaith communication. According to Hackett (2014), religious pluralism in Nigeria is characterized by peaceful coexistence among Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. Digital platforms, therefore, provide an ideal medium for promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding. This is particularly important in a society where religious identity can sometimes be a source of tension, but where social media enables the sharing of diverse religious content that can foster tolerance and cooperation (Fadipe & Ajayi, 2018).

The use of social media in Nigeria has become a critical means for people to access religious content, connect with leaders, and express their faith publicly. Studies have shown that religious institutions are increasingly utilizing social media to enhance communication with their followers. Scholars such as Hjarvard (2011) have argued that social media allows for the creation of virtual religious communities where users can interact and share religious content. This has been particularly significant in the Nigerian context, where the rapid growth of mobile phone and internet penetration has led to a surge in online religious activities (Ogunyemi, 2020). Religious leaders in Nigeria have adopted platforms like Facebook and YouTube to broadcast

sermons, share devotional content, and provide spiritual guidance, thus expanding their reach beyond local congregations.

While social media offers immense opportunities for religious expression, it also presents challenges. One of the major concerns is the potential for misinformation and the spread of harmful religious content. The anonymity provided by social media platforms can lead to the dissemination of extremist views and distortions of religious teachings. Additionally, the commercialization of social media platforms poses ethical challenges for religious institutions. The pressure to produce engaging content that generates likes, shares, and views can sometimes lead to a focus on entertainment rather than genuine spiritual growth (Tsuria, 2020). In response, scholars such as Madiadou (2016) have argued that religious leaders must develop ethical guidelines for social media use that balance engagement with the need to preserve the sanctity of religious teachings.

Religious institutions are also called upon to establish clear ethical standards for online engagement, promoting responsible content sharing and engaging followers in a way that enriches their spiritual lives (Brink, 2018). The establishment of ethical guidelines can help mitigate the risks associated with the commercialization of social media while ensuring that these platforms continue to serve as valuable tools for religious expression. As religious leaders in Nigeria increasingly engage with digital platforms, it is essential that they employ these tools responsibly, ensuring that they enhance, rather than undermine, the spiritual well-being of their followers.

### **Influence of Social Media on Religious Expression in Nigeria**

Nigeria with its rich religious diversities, is an ideal context for studying how social media intersects with religious practice. The country is home to millions of adherents of African Traditional Religions (ATR), Islam and Christianity. This makes the religious expression both complex and vibrant. While traditional forms of religious expression, such as attending church services or mosque prayers, continue to dominate, there is a growing trend of religious engagement through social media platforms (Olagoke, 2021). Nigerian religious leaders and institutions have embraced social media to disseminate messages, host virtual services, and build larger networks of followers (Adeyanju & Olawale, 2022). The country's religious landscape is characterized by rich traditions and practices that have historically been transmitted through physical spaces, such as churches, mosques, and community gatherings. However, social media has introduced new ways of transmitting religious messages and connecting believers, enabling them to practice and express their faith beyond the confines of traditional spaces.

Social media has become particularly influential in Nigeria for several reasons:

- **Global connectivity and local relevance:** social media has allowed Nigerians to connect with religious communities both locally and globally, enabling the exchange of religious ideas, experiences, and teachings. Through platforms like YouTube, Nigerian churches and mosques are able to live-stream services, making worship and religious teachings accessible to followers who are unable to attend in person. For example, Nigerian Christian

leaders like Bishop David Oyedepo and Pastor E.A. Adeboye have amassed millions of followers online, using platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter to spread their messages and provide spiritual guidance. Similarly, Islamic leaders such as Sheikh Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara and Imam Shafi'i Onikijipa have used social media to share Quranic teachings, offer religious advice, and engage in dialogue on important religious issues. In African Traditional Religion (ATR), Chief Ifayemi Elebuibon and Oba Adewale Akanbi (Olokun's Priest) are prominent Yoruba traditionalists and priests in Nigeria, well-known spiritual leaders and custodians of the Yoruba religion, particularly Orisa worship. They are active on Instagram, YouTube and Facebook, where they share insights about Yoruba spiritual practices, rituals, and the teachings of the **Orisa** (deities). Their presence online helps educate people both in Nigeria and globally about African Traditional Religion.

- **Religious outreach and evangelism:** social media has become a key tool for religious evangelism in Nigeria, particularly for Christian and Islamic groups. For many religious leaders and organizations, social media offers a platform to spread their faith to a wider audience, including reaching Nigerians in rural areas or those who may not have access to physical places of worship. Evangelical Christian groups, for instance, Christ Embassy (Believers' Love world) led by Pastor Chris Oyakhilome and Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel-under the leadership of Bishop David Oyedepo) have harnessed platforms like Facebook and Instagram to share inspirational messages, Bible verses, and testimonies of faith. Islamic groups such as The Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), led by Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky and Al-Mustapha Islamic Foundation, led by Sheikh Ahmed Gumi, on the other hand, use social media to promote religious teachings, host online Quranic recitations, and foster interfaith dialogues.
- **Interactive platforms for religious dialogue:** social media allows for a level of interaction that traditional religious gatherings do not. Nigerian religious communities increasingly use social media platforms to hold discussions, host virtual prayer meetings, and engage with followers in real-time. These interactive platforms have helped bridge the gap between religious leaders and their congregations, enabling more direct communication. Nigerian Muslim scholars use Twitter and Facebook to engage with followers on Islamic jurisprudence, addressing contemporary issues from an Islamic perspective. Sheikh Jamiu Bello, a Nigerian scholar, uses Facebook Live to engage with his followers during Ramadan or other religious events, offering live responses to questions on Islamic jurisprudence and guiding them through religious practices. The MURIC (Muslim Rights Concern), led by Professor Ishaq Akintola, uses Twitter and Facebook to engage followers in discussions on issues like Islamic human rights, Sharia law, and the role of Muslims in Nigeria. Followers can participate in real-time, asking for prayers and guidance during these sessions. This fosters a more inclusive, accessible, and dynamic form of religious engagement that breaks physical and geographical barriers.
- **Creation of virtual communities:** Beyond individual interactions, social media has enabled the formation of virtual communities centered around religious practices. Nigerian religious groups have created online spaces where believers can connect, share spiritual experiences, and support one another. These virtual communities are particularly beneficial for individuals who may feel isolated or marginalized in their physical communities due to their faith. For instance, Spiritual but Not Religious (SBNR) Communities, The SBNR community, which includes people who believe in spirituality but not necessarily in traditional organized religions, often use Instagram and Reddit to create discussion groups and share experiences related to personal spiritual journeys. They also provide a platform for young people to discuss faith, share religious content, and engage with like-minded individuals in a way that aligns with their digital lifestyle.



- **Cultural preservation and promotion:** Social media also serves as a tool for the preservation and promotion of Nigerian religious culture. For example, traditional religious practices such as the annual Islamic Hajj pilgrimage and the Christian celebration of Christmas are often broadcast and discussed on social media platforms. Through these online platforms, Nigerians can share images, videos, and messages related to these events, fostering a sense of unity and national pride while celebrating religious traditions. Nigerian Muslim travelers often share posts using hashtags like #Hajj2023, #HajjMabrur, or #NigeriansInMecca. Through these posts, they share their personal reflections and experiences, such as the joy of being in the sacred land and completing religious rituals, thus spreading a sense of unity and spiritual fulfillment to the wider Nigerian Muslim community.

However, despite these positive developments, the use of social media for religious expression in Nigeria also raises some challenges. The unregulated nature of social media platforms has made it difficult to control the spread of misinformation and false teachings, which can lead to confusion and division within religious communities.

### **Impact of Social Media on Nigerian Religious Communities**

Research suggests that social media has contributed significantly to the growth of digital religious communities in Nigeria, especially among the youths. According to Igwe & Adekunle (2020), many young Nigerians are increasingly using platforms like Instagram and YouTube to access religious content, including sermons, prayer sessions, and spiritual counseling. These platforms have not only facilitated the spread of religious messages but have also provided new opportunities for inter-religious dialogue and the sharing of diverse religious practices.

The rapid rise of social media in Nigeria has significantly influenced various aspects of society, including the practice and expression of religion. For the religious communities in Nigeria, social media has created new opportunities while also posing unique challenges. It has drastically expanded access to religious content for Nigerians, breaking geographical and social barriers. Traditionally, religious activities such as sermons, prayers, and teachings took place in physical spaces like churches, mosques, and temples. However, social media allows Nigerians to engage with religious content regardless of location or physical barriers. For instance, millions of people can now access live-streamed church services, Friday prayers, online Quranic recitations, and Christian or Islamic teachings on YouTube and Facebook. This is particularly significant in a country as diverse and geographically vast as Nigeria, where people in remote areas or those with limited access to religious institutions can still partake in religious services and learn from their faith leaders. Religious leaders, such as Nigerian pastors, imams, and spiritual leaders, have leveraged these platforms to broadcast their messages of faith. For example, Bishop David Oyedepo of Winners Chapel and Pastor E.A. Adeboye of Redeemed Christian Church of God have used platforms like Facebook and YouTube to reach millions of followers, often with live broadcasts of services, prayers, and religious teachings. This digital engagement has



allowed them to expand their reach far beyond physical church spaces, bringing religious services to both local and global audiences.

Also, social media has fostered the creation of virtual religious communities where Nigerians can engage with others who share their faith. Online forums, Facebook groups, and WhatsApp prayer groups enable believers to form a sense of fellowship without geographical constraints. These virtual communities offer a platform for members to share experiences, ask questions, and support one another in their spiritual journeys. This is particularly beneficial for individuals who may feel isolated due to physical distance from religious institutions, or those in minority religious groups who might struggle to find like-minded individuals. For example, online platforms enable people to form prayer groups, Bible study sessions, and even share religious events. In Nigeria, where many are devoutly religious, this digital extension of the community has proven vital, especially during global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person worship was restricted. Social media allowed religious groups to continue providing spiritual support, keeping the community connected even in times of crisis.

Social media platforms have also become key tools for religious outreach and evangelism. Religious leaders, organizations, and even ordinary believers use these platforms to spread their faith beyond their immediate communities.

The ability to share personal stories of faith and experiences on these platforms allows religious communities to connect with those who may be searching for spiritual answers or guidance. Many Nigerian Christians and Muslims now consider social media an essential tool for evangelism and dawah (the act of inviting others to Islam). Religious leaders can engage with followers, answer questions in real-time, and participate in broader conversations about faith and spirituality.

### **Challenges of Social Media on Religious Expression in Nigeria**

Social media has revolutionized religious expression in Nigeria, offering new platforms for engagement, outreach, and spiritual growth. However, it has also introduced significant challenges that affect religious communities and institutions. These challenges include issues of misinformation, extremism, ethical concerns, and the potential commercialization of faith. Below are some of the key challenges faced by religious communities in Nigeria due to the growing influence of social media.

#### **Spread of misinformation and fake news**

One of the most significant challenges of social media is the rapid spread of misinformation and fake news. In the context of religion, false teachings, fabricated prophecies, and misleading religious messages can quickly go viral. Misinformation can lead to confusion among followers, especially those who rely heavily on social media for spiritual guidance. Additionally, fake news related to religious issues can incite fear, mistrust, and even violence between different religious groups, contributing to religious tensions in the country. David Elijah a pastor in Glorious Mount of Possibil-

ity Church, Yaba, Lagos, was ridiculed on social media following his fake prophecy that President Donald Trump would win the 2020 presidential election in the United States of America. The pastor, was shown in a trending video on social media, also prophesied that a popular politician would die upon Donald Trump's victory. Contrary to Pastor Elijah's prophecy, former U.S. vice president, Joe Biden, won the historic election, garnering 273 electoral college votes against Donald Trump's 214. Another instance, is the false rumors that Muslim politicians in Nigeria were planning to implement Sharia law nationwide circulated on Facebook and WhatsApp, while other fake news reports falsely claimed that Christian political leaders were planning to convert the country to Christianity. These false claims led to religious tensions and violent clashes in some areas. The spread of these rumors led to mistrust between religious communities, making it difficult for followers of different religions to peacefully coexist during an already tense electoral period.

### **Rise of religious extremism and radicalization**

Social media platforms have been used by extremist groups to spread radical ideologies, recruit followers, and incite violence. In Nigeria, where there is a history of religious conflict, extremist content can easily find an audience and exacerbate existing tensions. Radical groups may use social media to manipulate religious sentiments, promote divisive narratives, and encourage violent actions. Boko Haram, a militant Islamist group operating primarily in northeastern Nigeria, has been known to use social media platforms like YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to spread radical ideologies, recruit new members, and incite violence. Example: Boko Haram has released numerous propaganda videos on YouTube, showing violent attacks on Nigerian military personnel, as well as abductions of civilians. These videos often feature messages calling for the establishment of a caliphate and the violent enforcement of their interpretation of Sharia law. These videos not only serve as a recruitment tool but also act as a way to intimidate the Nigerian public and glorify their violent actions. This poses a significant threat to social cohesion and peace, as online radicalization can influence individuals to commit acts of violence in the name of religion.

### **Commercialization of faith**

The commercialization of religious activities on social media is another pressing issue. Many religious leaders and organizations use social media as a platform to solicit donations, sell religious products, and promote paid services. While fundraising is a legitimate activity for religious institutions, the excessive focus on financial gains can lead to the exploitation of followers. It may also give rise to "celebrity pastors" who prioritize wealth accumulation over genuine spiritual leadership, diminishing the perceived sanctity and integrity of religious practice. In Nigeria, celebrity pastors have become prominent figures who leverage social media to build their personal brands and attract followers. A prominent example is David Oyedepo, the founder of Living Faith Church, whose presence on social media is substantial. Oyedepo's min-

istry has been accused by critics of focusing heavily on wealth accumulation, with followers encouraged to purchase religious books, “anointed” materials, and exclusive teachings. His church services, which are often broadcast live on platforms like Facebook and YouTube, emphasize prosperity gospel principles, prompting followers to make financial sacrifices in exchange for blessings. The sale of religious products through social media platforms is another aspect of commercialization. For example, The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM), led by Dr. Daniel Olukoya, sells a wide range of religious books through their official website and social media platforms. These books are marketed as essential tools for spiritual warfare, with prices attached to them. Critics argue that such practices exploit the faith of followers by placing undue emphasis on material items rather than the genuine message of faith and prayer.

### **Loss of authentic religious experience**

The digitalization of religious practices, such as online sermons, prayers, and worship services, can sometimes lead to a loss of authentic religious experiences. For many believers, physical participation in religious rituals, communal prayers, and face-to-face interactions are integral to their spiritual growth. The shift to online worship may result in a less personal and more superficial engagement with religious content. This can weaken the sense of community and reduce the depth of spiritual connection that is typically experienced in physical religious gatherings.

### **Cyberbullying and online harassment**

Religious individuals and leaders who express their beliefs online may face cyberbullying, harassment, and hate speech. Social media platforms often provide anonymity, which can embolden users to make offensive or derogatory remarks about different religious beliefs. Religious debates can quickly escalate into heated arguments, leading to personal attacks and online harassment. This hostile environment can deter individuals from sharing their religious views openly, limiting constructive dialogue and the positive exchange of ideas. For example, Pastor Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), one of Nigeria’s largest and most influential Christian congregations, has faced hate speech and online attacks from both local and international critics. These attacks often come from individuals who disagree with his views on certain social issues, and the anonymity provided by social media emboldens these critics to level derogatory remarks. Online comments targeting Pastor Adeboye have included accusations that he is only interested in accumulating wealth, with little regard for his followers’ spiritual well-being, as well as calls for his removal from religious leadership positions.

### **Research Findings**

The findings reveal that social media plays a crucial role in facilitating religious expression in Nigeria. Religious leaders use these platforms to broadcast sermons, share

devotional content, and offer spiritual guidance. Churches and mosques have incorporated social media into their worship practices, offering online services, prayer meetings, and religious educational programs. Furthermore, religious followers utilize these platforms to share their faith experiences, ask questions, and engage in discussions about religion (Nwogu & Okeke, 2023).

One of the most significant benefits of social media in Nigerian religious life is its role in community building. Social media allows individuals to connect with like-minded believers across the country and globally. Virtual prayer groups, online Bible study sessions, and religious events broadcast on social media foster a sense of belonging and community among believers, especially those who cannot attend physical services due to distance or health reasons (Aluko & Ezech, 2020).

Despite the benefits, the study also highlights several challenges. Misinformation is a major concern, as social media platforms often facilitate the spread of religious rumors, extremist content, and unverified teachings. Religious leaders face the challenge of combating false narratives and ensuring the authenticity of religious messages. Another challenge is the commercialization of faith. Many religious influencers and organizations monetize their online content, leading to concerns about the authenticity of their messages and the exploitation of followers for financial gain (Adeyemi & Bello, 2022).

Social media has both promoted inter-religious dialogue and contributed to religious conflict. While online platforms offer opportunities for different religious groups to engage in peaceful discourse, they can also be sites for religious intolerance and conflict. The rapid spread of inflammatory content can exacerbate tensions, particularly in a multi-religious country like Nigeria (Oluwaseun & Oladipo, 2021).

## Recommendations

The following recommendations were drawn from the study;

- Religious institutions should establish ethical guidelines for content shared on social media. These guidelines would set clear standards for religious messages, ensuring that they promote positive values, inclusivity, and respect.
- Religious leaders and institutions must set an example by using social media responsibly. They should engage with followers in a manner that is both spiritually enriching and respectful. Leaders should be cautious about sharing content that may promote division, misinformation, or materialism.
- Social media provides a unique platform for religious dialogue and the promotion of understanding across faiths. Religious leaders and followers should use social media to initiate discussions that promote interfaith harmony and tolerance. Encouraging conversations that foster mutual respect between Christians, Muslims, and adherents of other religious traditions can help reduce religious tensions and misunderstandings in Nigeria.
- The unregulated nature of social media makes it an ideal environment for the spread of misinformation and extremist content. Religious organizations must take an active role in combating this problem by reporting harmful content, providing accurate religious teachings, and engaging in counter-narratives. They should work with technology companies to flag extremist content and ensure that social media remains a platform for positive and meaningful religious expression.

## Conclusion

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for religious expression in Nigeria, reshaping how individuals and religious organizations communicate and interact. While it has facilitated greater access to religious content, fostered community building, and democratized religious discourse, it also presents challenges, including the spread of misinformation, religious intolerance, and the commercialization of faith. As religious communities continue to navigate the digital landscape, it is essential for religious leaders and institutions to adopt responsible digital practices to ensure that social media remains a positive force for spiritual growth and inter-religious harmony in Nigeria.

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# Inter-Religious Relations among the Yoruba and Hausa Communities in Ogbomoso and its Implications for Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Inter-religious relations, between communities with diverse ethno-religious inclinations, are aimed at promoting mutual understanding and coexistence, among the Yoruba and Hausa communities in Ogbomoso, Oyo state. Existing studies on relations among the Yoruba and the Hausa in Ogbomoso town have focused largely on their economic, political, social and cultural relations with little attention paid to their inter-religious relations. This study was, therefore, designed to examine inter-religious relations among the Yoruba and the Hausa in Ogbomoso with a view to identifying factors that promoted relationship and incidents that undermined their peaceful co-existence. Key informant interviews were conducted with 40 religious leaders from both religions in the community. Interreligious Relations Questionnaire on Peaceful Co-existence was administered. The qualitative data were content-analysed, while the quantitative data were subjected to descriptive analysis. Factors that promoted inter-religious harmony among the Yoruba and Hausa in Ogbomoso were: commerce, politics, establishment of ethnic communities, inter-ethnic marriage, participation in religious festivals and cultural assimilation. While incidents that undermined the inter-religious harmony between the Hausa and Yoruba in Ogbomoso were: indigenous land rights and collection of laada (payment of commission). In Ogbomoso, the Hausa claimed indigenous land rights that Sabo is an autonomous Hausa community not subject to the Yoruba traditional authority and collection of Laada from the indigenes resulted in conflict. Majority (75.0%) identified groups interact harmoniously. Socio-economic and political factors both contributed to the promotion and incidents that undermined inter-religious relations among the Yoruba and Hausa communities in Ogbomoso in Southwestern Nigeria.

**Keywords:** interreligious relations, Yoruba community, Hausa community, Ogbomoso

## Introduction

**D**URING THE COURSE OF ITS EXISTENCE AS AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY, NIGERIA has had several incidences of inter and intra-ethnic violence, and the issue is thought to have become worse and more persistent over time. More than twenty thousand Nigerians have died in several distinct confrontations along ethnic, religious, and other intra- and inter-communal lines since the end of military



government in 1999. While most of the occurrences have been relatively minor, some conflicts have destroyed whole villages and loss of hundreds of people in a matter of days or weeks. (Nwanaju, 2005, p.33).

Nigeria's history has been significantly shaped by the division between Islam and Christianity as well as the differences in religion and ethnic affiliation. It has also contributed significantly to the ongoing problem of Christians and Muslims living in heterogeneous societies. Although, the precise impetuses behind the skirmish in Nigeria are extremely arguable, the lack of harmony has utmost unquestionably remained at odds alongside ethno-religious positions. (Familusi, 2011, p 74). Even with this intricacy, on the contrary, apart from the fact that the skirmishes entirely fall over alongside the reasonably comprehensive class of ethno-religious, as much again had been separated along the confines of the two main religions. Unquestionably, cultural effects are just as totally embedded as religious ones, but by examining the entire variety of rivalry during the last decade, there is barely any submission that Muslim communities fight other Muslim communities, or Christian people fight other Christian people.

Conversely, an enquiry of the substantiation discloses that irrespective of the unique grounds of these skirmishes, they more or less always launch Muslims against Christians or Christians against Muslims. And assumed impetuses, for instance, political supremacy or economic prospect, and consenting religious conviction to work as an indirect means rather than an uninterrupted factor, when smashes breakdown, they are hardly ignited by intra-religious encounter and are commonly the end result of inter-religious struggle. (Adekoya, 2015, p. 6). In light of this, there is now an aggressive element involving more than one religion in Nigeria due to the cynical exploitation of religion and religious matters.

Nigeria is rife with instances of people and organizations establishing permanent communities of occupational experts in civilizations other than their own. Nigeria's historical past has always included the exchange of immigrants across groups. Societies with centralized political systems might accept people from varied cultural backgrounds and economic structures. In many cases, immigrants brought value to the economy by offering supplementary services that were unfamiliar to the local population.

Among Nigeria's biggest, most politically engaged, and economically oriented ethnic groups are the Yoruba and the Hausa, who are also renowned for having a wide range of religious and cultural practices. Along with its many languages and multiracial culture, the diversity is reflected in the variety of religions. The Hausa are a large ethnic group primarily found in northern Nigeria, known for their rich culture, language, and history, with a strong influence in West Africa and predominantly Muslim faith whereas the Yoruba people are primarily concentrated in the South-Western part. The settlement of Hausas in the Southwest of Nigerian cities of Ogbomoso was facilitated by the trade in kola nuts and livestock, as opposed to other factors. Over time, this commerce developed into a chance for both ethnic groups to forge friendly

and peaceful ties. Other major towns in Southwestern States have played host to Hausa migrants in search of economic opportunities. Notable among them are Agege, Idi-Araba, Ikorodu, Mile 12 in Lagos state, where today a tangible size of the population is of Hausa descent.

The groups had interacted before colonial times. Substantial migrations of Northerners into Yoruba territory and vice versa have occurred, even as far as Lagos' coastal areas. Nevertheless, the Northerners had already established themselves in Lagos by the seventeenth century, if not even earlier. (Tijani, 2008, p. 173) The colonial situations further quicken the interaction. According to Albert, (Albert, 1999, p. 5) the Yoruba ethnic group first reached the city of Kano as early as 1903. Some of them came with the British Nationals as hired people to perform household and personal services. The reason was due to the fact that after the affirmation of Lagos as a colony in 1861, the bombardment of Ijebu Ode in 1892 and 1893 British colonial takeover of Ibadan, the first set of people that were employed by the British nationals as assistants were the Yorubas. The revolution in the transportation sector which steered the process of laying the railway sleepers and tracks on the track bed that connects Kano to Yoruba land contributed massively to these contacts. Ever since, the Hausa and Yoruba have enjoyed a relatively cordial relationship.

However, in a pluralistic and interfaith community with certain forms of contextual discrimination, as it is known enclosed by cultural and devout sects in Nigeria, encounters concerning people may soon become attributed to lack of friendliness, mutual mistrust, and panic. Ethno-religious clashes have been a persistent aspect of the country since the 1980s. In reality, this distrust and lack of goodwill among the many ethnic components are the causes of it. (Nwanaju, 2005, p. 35)

On the other side, Ogbomoso has received accolades for its success in fostering harmonious intergroup interactions from a variety of sources. At the beginning of 2012, on the occasion of the 80th birthday of the late Soun of Ogbomoso, the Paramount ruler of Ogbomoso-land, His Royal Majesty, Oba Oladunni Oyewumi, praised the Ogbomoso community as "a pleasing exemplary of religious open-mindedness where Hausa, who are primarily Muslims, and Yoruba community coexist and work together in peace and harmony." (Osuntokun and Oduwobi, 2011, p. 201)

Unaffected by their religious affiliations, the Ogbomoso community coexists with the Hausa community. According to a scholar at an Islamic Institute in that city, Sheikh Mohammed Ogunsola said in a media interview that "it has definitely set an example for other communities. He added the peaceful coexistence of the Hausa and Yoruba populations "cannot be said about other communities that had experienced religious ferocity among Christians and Muslims." Ogunsola described the intergroup dynamics between the Hausa and Yoruba communities in Ogbomoso as aesthetically pleasing by stating, "Our relationship is characterized by beauty." (Daily Trust, 2016). The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Ogbomoso Branch praised leaders of Islamic religion for "their unwavering obligation and assistances towards religious coherence, concord, and National structure" in the beginning of February 2015. The

CAN reaffirmed its intention “to contribute positively in collaboration with Muslims in order to support interreligious accord among various groups”(Olomoluwa 2015)

Ogbomoso is potentially instructive examples of how Christians and Muslims might coexist in certain circumstances. The primary researches questions that this effort seeks to answer are: What basic circumstances backed the peaceful co-existence of adherents of Christianity and Islam in Ogbomoso? What kind of patterns do the two groups in the selected communities have in terms of their inter-religious relations? What are the factors affecting the interreligious relations between the two groups in the selected communities? How does inter-religious relation between the Yoruba and Hausa communities affect peaceful co-existence in Ogbomoso? How can serene co-existence be promoted among the Yoruba and Hausa communities in Nigeria as a whole?

Ogbomoso shows a distinctive instance study owing to its geographical nearness to the North and the substantial relation among its indigenous population and the Hausa communities, who both inhabit Yoruba territory. The aim of this research is to comprehend the impact of inter-religious relations among the Hausa community and their Yoruba counterparts residing in Ogbomoso according to the underlying tenet that social and inter-religious ties between persons of varied ethnic and cultural origins might lead to integration or dissolution. Inter-religious conflicts have been the misery of contemporary societies. Some authors contend that the issue results from relations between individuals who are diverse in terms of language, culture, ethnicity, and religion.

### **Brief History of Ogbomoso**

Ogbomoso is stated to have started at the commencement of the Oyo Empire if it is claimed or contended that ancient Oyo first came to the attention of outsiders in the year 1600 and Ogbomoso as it is presently understood was founded in that century. Ayo Adelowo, (Adelowo. 2000, p.13) states, emphatically, without any iota of doubt that unlike many Yoruba towns, which are founded by one individual and are of Yoruba stock, as Oyo was founded by Oranmiyan or Ede by Timi Agbale Olofa Ina, Ogbomoso was founded by five contemporaneous of original settlers of which each was on his own adventure. It has to be recalled here that all the five early settlers were on explorative adventures prevalent in ancient times, exhibited bravery amid dangers of the unknown, set out from their far-off original homes, and explored the unknown or strange lands or jungles and forests to settle in the abode which gave rise and birth to Ogbomoso.

It is said that probably Ogunlola Ogundiran who was the youngest and most energetic among the early arrivals, noticed smoke oozing from other locations and settlements probably took courage and approached other hunters' settlements and came to know one another, thus the five settlers formed what is known as *Alongo* society which was initially “a socio-cultural association” in the words of Ayo Adelowo,

(Adelowo. 2000, p.14) was mainly for the group on hunting wild animals, and mutual assistance.

Though it is doubtful, however, it is probable for the reason that Ogunlola demonstrated a quantity of headship, both *Alongo* members and without a doubt those who arrived afterward started recognizing his way of headship, hegemony and authority. Nevertheless, his marriage to *Aresa's* daughter turned out to be palpable which resulted to the birth of a baby. *Aresa* dispatched his representatives to his son-in-law's place called *Igbo-Igbale*, bearing a message: "*Ile gbogbo, Ile Owo ni, Awa o ma sehin, ki eyin o ma se ohun ooo*" precisely saying "You assume or take the reins and oversee over there and we shall manage and control here ooo." It is instructive to know that Ogunlola's hamlet; '*Se ohun*' remained quite unidentified, but then the hamlet was eventually called '*Se ohun*'. It was the general position after it was said that Ogunlola committed homicide.

Two different forms of the narratives on the killing case of Ogunlola were told. The first account of the event was the onlookers on a business trip through his shed involved in a disagreement and because of what ensued Ogunlola gave support to one among them and murdered an *Ijesa* man on the opposite. A different tale or narrative presented that Ogunlola's wife named *Esuola* owed *Ijesa* nomadic merchant but failed to repay and defaulted on repayment. Disagreement emerged among the *Ijesa* traveling creditor and Ogunlola *Ogundiran*, the husband of *Esuola* who consequently eliminated the former. Since murder cases were judged by *Alaafin*, the occurrence was conveyed to *Olugbon* according to the custom at the time, who referred Ogunlola, the culprit, to *Oyo Ile* to suffer the repercussions of his act. However, as would be shown, this ended up being a turn of events. At this time, Ogunlola a prisoner overheard of the disreputable, terrified *Elemoso* who was upsetting, frightening and disturbing free exchange, and unhindered trade in *Oyo* territory that he guaranteed to combat and kill *Elemoso* at *Ogbooro* war if permitted, (*Oyerinde. 1934. p. 13*). the triumph which he accomplished. The said event happened around 1680. As a result, the unconquerable *Bariba Elemoso* who was a source of continual annoyance and a persistent problem to *Oyo* merchants and military men, having unraveled his techniques, situated himself, executed and decapitated *Elemoso* by his gangrenous shot. (*Okewuyi, 1974, p.56*) This skillfulness astonished *Alaafin Ajagbo* (1650 -1660) or thereabout and it was ironical that based on this victory *Alaafin Ajagbo* decided to pardon *Soun Ogunlola* of his misdemeanor. Though, *Ogunlola* was begged to remain in *Oyo* but he rejected the offer and went back home. In recompense, *Alaafin* commanded *Soun Ogunlola* to take authority and be charge of the community he came from, *Soun's* appeal to reside there and to keep to that spot was approved, hence, the place became to be known as '*Ido eniti o gb'ori Elemoso*' literally meaning: "the home-based of the person who killed and brought the head of *Elemoso*," subsequently referred to "*Ogbori Elemoso*" now *Ogbomoso*.

## The Hausa Community in Ogbomoso

Earlier to the turn of the 20th century, Hausa settlers lived in Ogbomoso's native host neighbourhood, particularly in *Isale Afon*, *Taraa*, and *Oja-Jagun*. They took up residence as renters with their 'host' who were Yoruba landlords several of whom were their business associates. On the other hand, Yoruba towns saw an upsurge in the number of Hausa migrants from the start of the 20th century. The main commercial routes changed from *Gonja - Jegga* - Sokoto and Kano roads to Ibadan-Ogbomoso, Ilorin-Kano paths, and other roads travelling to Ibadan-Ogbomoso, Ilorin-Kano directions and other ways transitory from end to end Yoruba land.

When Hausa immigrants in Ogbomoso asked for property in 1890, Soun Laoye, the Baale (monarch) of Ogbomoso at the time, gave them a field that ultimately became *Gambari* town. Many Hausa people moved there and eventually turned their fields into a Hausa village. This drew more Hausa residents from Ogbomoso's neighbouring cities and villages, including those from Ibadan, Ilorin, Abeokuta, and others. The Yoruba traders would express their intention to visit the town of *Gambari*, inhabited by the Hausa people, while delivering their merchandise, consisting primarily of fruits and locally produced commodities such as soap and sponges. The appellation "*Gambari*" evolved from the sayings of Yoruba traders "Mon lo si Ilu awon Gambari"; i.e. "I am going to the town of Gambari (Hausa people)". Ultimately the community came to be recognised as Gambari. The Hausa community's allocated land area at the time of Gambari's establishment in 1898 proved inadequate as the number of Hausa migrants increased. Consequently, the community petitioned the Soun to expand their territorial boundaries. Consequently, the agricultural land was extended to encompass the present-day site of Abuduka Town.

## The Hausa Contact and Interreligious Relations in Ogbomoso

The primary impetus for interaction among the Hausa and their Yoruba counterparts in Ogbomoso was rooted in commercial incentives, specifically in the form of inter-regional trade. In contrast to the first Sabo village in Yoruba land, which is located in Ibadan, the foundation of the Sabo community in Ogbomoso was peaceful. While Sabo Ibadan was being established, strong commercial rivalries existed, and Ibadan natives even threatened to drive out Hausa merchants. One may wonder why these distinctions exist. The Hausa in Ogbomoso asked for both farmland and a place to build their homes. Kolanuts were not cultivated in Ogbomoso, which is in the Guinea Savannah area but rather were imported from Yoruba land's southern regions. As a result, the economy of Ogbomoso merchants was not seriously threatened.

Second, Ogbomoso is not far from the North which is Hausa land and, since about the seventeenth century, it has served as one of the entrance points for Hausa merchants travelling to Gonja in the Volta area. Therefore, the Hausa merchants and Ogbomoso people had been in touch for a longer length of time. Similar to this, for more than 300 years, Ogbomoso merchants established commercial settlements in several areas of Hausa land, particularly in Kano.

The primary hindrance to the founding of Sabo Ogbomoso was the cultural disparities between various communities, as it aimed to secure the economic interests of the Hausa people. The establishment of the cattle market in the vicinity of Odokoto, situated northeast of the town, was the primary reason for the emergence of Sabo quarters in Ogbomoso, where the livestock, commonly referred to as Sango or *Zango*, was traded, as was the case in other Yoruba settlements. The *Zango* market was presided over by *Sarkin Zango*, who was responsible for the management of the cattle market. The *Parakoyi* functioned as an intermediary in commercial transactions. The individuals who occupied the aforementioned positions were frequently of Yoruba descent, having travelled to Hausa land and acquired fluency in the Hausa language either through prolonged interaction with the Hausa people or through their study of the Quran and Islamic teachings.

In 1920, Soun Bello Afolabi Oyewumi I, the traditional ruler of Ogbomoso, relocated the *Zango* livestock marketplace from its previous location in the *Odo Koto* region to a different location situated in the north-western area of the town. According to reports, his desire was for the cattle market to be situated in closer proximity to his palace, as it was customary for markets to be located in close proximity to the palace during that era. The marketplace known as '*Oja Oba*' (King's market) is a ubiquitous feature throughout the Yoruba region.

The setting up of Sabo quarters facilitated the allocation of power from 'host' marketplace leaders to the 'strangers' traders. Establishment of Hausa commission representatives aimed to provide a mechanism for resolving commercial disputes between buyers and sellers. The commission agent of Hausa origin commonly referred to as "*yan kwanisho*," gained the trust of his fellow northerners who sought to purchase livestock due to his perceived higher level of dependability in comparison to his Yoruba counterparts. From the buyer cattle, or "*laada*" in Hausa, these brokers got commission. The Hausa trading customs that were present in Hausa land included this. Similarly, Hausa landowners seemed to provide housing for Hausa land and traders.

The emergence of Sabo resulted in a shift of power dynamics in cross-regional trade amongst the Hausa and Yoruba merchants, leading to the displacement of Hausa commission agents and landlords who previously held control over the merchant's and dealers' residency. Apart from the commission known as "*laada*," the Hausa community initiated the practice of collecting rent to accommodate the Hausa traders. In addition to levying fees for animal enclosures, the Hausa community also engaged in the collection of brokers' fees. The multicultural tensions among the Hausa and Yoruba communities, specifically in the city of Ibadan, were primarily attributed to the "*laada*" issue. The participation of the Soun of Ogbomoso in the selection process of market officials responsible for the collection of "*laada*" resulted in a reduction of intense conflicts within the Ogbomoso community.

The disputes between the Hausa cattle traders over the positions of *Sarkin Pawa* (head of butchers) and *sarkin Hausawa* (Fronrunner of the Hausa community) show



how politics and business are intertwined. At this time, the *sarkin Pawa* served as both the chief butcher and the head of the whole Hausa population. His position gave him influence, which benefited his company. Because of his position, he became the most qualified and reliable commercial landlord. The commercial tenants would provide a lot of commission for this. Additionally, he was entitled to a portion of the royalties received from the selling of cattle. The fight between the wealthy Hausa chiefs for the position of *Sarkin Pawa* was justified by all of these factors, in addition to the respect and status that the office carried. The formation of Sabo dictated the selection of a *Sarkin Hausawa* (leader of the Hausa community). The rationale behind the decision was that the emerging society necessitated a leader with greater competence, and *Sarkin Hausawa*, who presided over the Hausa community, possessed superior capabilities and a wider scope of influence compared to *Sarkin Pawa*, the leader of the Butchers.

In order to advance the reliance of Hausa Northern traders, who were only willing to entrust their goods and finances to individuals from their own community residing in a foreign land with a highly structured and organised Hausa society, it was imperative for the Hausa Landlords to highlight their cultural identity as Hausa people." Before Sabo was established, this community was mostly made up of people who lived in different compounds in Ogbomoso's indigenous neighbourhood. Once they relocated there, they established themselves as reliable commercial landlords of Hausa and Fulani cattle traders. Trade transactions required a trustworthy environment, particularly when credit facilities were needed. The absence of transaction records, banking institutions, formal judicial systems, and the practice of extending credit to Yoruba butchers by cattle traders contributed to the unregulated nature of the industry. Prior to the 1950s, the sole commercial landholders in Sabo Ogbomoso were limited to the *Sarkin Sabo*, Alhaji Abdulsalam, and his five expansive residences, which he utilized for the accommodation of his staff and associates. In attendance were notable figures such as Alhaji Danjuma, Alhaji Muhammadu Mai Dogon Gida, who held the position of *Sarkin Gambari* from 1948 to 1952, including Abdullahi Nahero, the inaugural *Sarkin Hausawa* of Sabo, Ogbomoso.

### **Patterns of Interreligious Relations in Ogbomoso**

It is very significant to note that long before the coming of the Hausa community, the people of Ogbomoso had accepted and practiced the three major religions and ever since lived together in peace. Thus, adherents of traditional religion, worship many deities, consult *Ifa* oracles and observe *egungun* and *oro* festivals; while Christians continue to promote the tenets of their faith- preaching, healing and teaching. They built churches and hospitals, engage medical and health workers among the people in order to ensure sound bodies. They also build schools, so that the people can receive Western education and Western civilisation. Muslims follow the teachings and tenets of Prophet Muhammad (SWA). They equally established Quranic schools and built mosques as places of worship in Ogbomoso.



This attitude made it easy for the Yoruba and Hausa communities to cohabit and coexist peacefully and amicably with one another. Generally speaking, as far as Yoruba who is the Hausa's hosts are concerned, religion is taken and accepted as a personal conviction or belief and it is not allowed to disrupt social relations. This is the reason why it is easy for both communities to celebrate and rejoice together during religious festivals that come up routinely in the land. In the length and breadth of Ogbomoso land the Hausa and Yoruba communities have learnt to associate to the point of imbibing each other's culture, accepting and use their languages.

### Factors Responsible for Interreligious Relations in Ogbomoso

- **Exposure and the reception of foreigners**—The Ogbomoso people have long been known for their travels beyond their hometown. The Ogbomoso people in Diaspora intentionally combined elements of Christianity, Islam and Traditional Yoruba Religion to create a dynamic example of multiple religious belongings and identities because of their exposure and contacts with many people even outside of their homeland. Consequently, the people are very receptive to strangers and especially the Hausa and did not see their religion as a barrier.
- **Soun's role as father of all**—The Late Oba Oladunni Oyewumi like those before him sought to promote the well-being of all in his domain since he was regarded as the custodian of the institution of the *Soun*, he had been concerned with the particular interest of "strangers" in his domain. The fact that the Soun receives Hausa shows that the people of Ogbomoso receive them and this has been the factor that allows peaceful co-existence between the two ethnic groups. It must be noted that the Soun himself had lived in the Northern part of Nigeria for many years.
- **Islam and Hausa language as unifying factors**—The Hausas are a population of immigrants who primarily retain their faith. As a result, the transit camp (*Zango or Sabo*) in Ogbomoso City is a unique social community that still practices Islam and speaks Hausa. The Hausa in Ogbomoso has been a strong correlation between morality and prosperity. The Islamic moral code of behaviour, which made trust and credit feasible, is to blame for the success. The Hausa's religion, Islam, offers such a moral code. Since a formal moral code was necessary for successful integration in order to approve and regulate business ties. In Ogbomoso, Islam and the Hausa language, therefore, serve as uniting factors in interactions between Hausa and Yoruba.
- **Ogbomoso Parapo factor**—This is a worldwide organization that comprises Ogbomoso indigenes in the Diaspora. It is not in every society or community that you see such organization. They are in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and all over the world. Wherever the people of Ogbomoso go, they have a way of coming together. Their togetherness outside their homeland also influences how they relate with the people at home. Since they enjoy peaceful co-existence with their 'hosts' in Diaspora, they always ensure and contribute to the peaceful co-existence of their people with non-indigenes at home.
- **Interreligious and interethnic marriage**—Since the religion of Islam and Traditionalist allow marrying more than one wife, our investigation reveals that inter-religious and inter-ethnic marriage has been a viable means for inter-religious relations between the two communities. At the societal level, a notable prevalence of inter-ethnic marriages has been observed.
- **Yoruba language as unifying factor**—Furthermore, a significant number of Hausa in-

dividuals residing in Ogbomoso are proficient in speaking the Yoruba language and partake in the consumption of Yoruba cuisine, and conversely, the same applies to the Yoruba people in relation to Hausa language and cuisine. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to observe individuals of Yoruba descent adorning traditional clothing associated with the Hausa ethnic group. Both groups have always accepted one another's diverse conventions, traditions, and ways of life, one observer said. This state of peaceful coexistence continues today.

- **Participation in Muslim and Christian festivals and celebrations**—One other factor that is promoting and enhancing inter-religious relations among Hausa and Yoruba communities is that discrimination and separation during each religion festivals are discouraged.
- **Peaceful trade and commercial relations**—Since about the seventeenth century, Hausa merchants have used Ogbomoso as one of their entrance points on their way to *Gonja* in the Volta area because of its proximity to Hausa territory. As a result, the Hausa merchants and Ogbomoso people had been in touch for a longer length of time. Since Ogbomoso is situated in the Guinea Savannah area, where kola nuts are not farmed but are instead purchased from the Southern regions of Yoruba country, there was no real danger to the economics of Ogbomoso merchants with the Hausas.
- **Establishment of quarters for the Hausas**—The cattle market, referred to as *Sango* or *Zango* in other Yoruba metropolises, was erected in proximity to the periphery of the town, specifically towards the north-east, in an area presently identified as *Odokoto*, antecedent to the establishment of the Sabo quarters in Ogbomoso. The establishment of Sabo quarters enabled the Hausa merchants to assert dominance over the Yoruba market officials.
- **Political Relations**—The Hausa people in the town did not experience any political discrimination. They were allowed to join whatever political party they wanted. Additionally, members of the Hausa community had the ability to vote in the election of representatives to their local government council in addition to playing a significant role in town politics. Sabo Electoral Wards were won by Hausa candidates because the Sabo populace realised that, it was to their advantage to vote for Southern political parties

## Recommendations

In light of what has been said above, and with a more in-depth and critical examination of inter-religious relations among Hausa and Yoruba in Ogbomoso communities, we therefore recommend the followings:

1. One of the fundamental principles is that the customs and heritage of a specific group are deemed sacrosanct and should be respected by all individuals belonging to the corresponding community. The failure to respect cultural practices or the violation of established traditions within a community often leads to a state of unrest.
2. Traditional rulers in all pluralistic communities should emulate the Late Soun of Ogbomoso; Oba Oladunni Oyewumi who reigned for 48 years and established an enabling environment for all his subjects to live in peace. This they can do by setting up inter-tribal and inter-religious committees that will be saddled with the responsibility of dialoguing and resolving any inter-tribal and inter-religious misun-

derstanding at the grassroots.

3. The application of the theology of inter-religious understanding by the Hausa and Yoruba communities would entail viewing each other's religion as acknowledging faith within society. It is imperative that individuals refrain from discussing or categorizing another's religion as a lesser faith. Rather, they should approach the discourse with an open mind and attentively consider the perspectives and beliefs of the other religion regarding the divine. The followers of both religions have the potential to gain knowledge and insight from each other.

4. It is recommended that a course on inter-religious understanding between Christians and Muslims be included in the curriculum of secondary schools and tertiary institutions, with particular emphasis on the religious studies department of all universities.

5. It is imperative that political leaders refrain from exploiting religion for any purpose. The utilization of religion and religious symbols in political campaigns ought to be avoided.

## Conclusion

Throughout the history of inter-religious ties in Ogbomoso, there exist numerous instances of peaceful inter-ethnic interactions. The present study has revealed that the Hausa community residing in Sabo, Ogbomoso, maintained harmonious inter-ethnic relations with their Yoruba counterparts, despite the occurrence of several political crises that have historically resulted in inter-ethnic tensions across various regions of Nigeria. This has been accomplished via peaceful trade and business relationships, the formation of a quarter for the Hausa group inside the town, and the creation of governmental institutions for the Hausa people in addition to market authorities.

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# The Pursuit of Peace as a Form of Social Justice: A Biblical Analysis of Hebrews 12:14 in the Context of Social Change

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## Abstract

Peace is a universal aspiration for societies worldwide, as it underpins development, harmonious coexistence, and the smooth functioning of communities. Yet, achieving a truly peaceful society often seems unattainable. This article examines the intersection of peace and social justice through a biblical analysis of Hebrews 12:14. In this verse, the author urges believers to “pursue peace with all men,” emphasizing its essential role in the Christian faith. The study looked into Dapo Asaju’s thought on social change which emphasizes “brotherhood rather than religion or ethnicity”. It further investigates the relevance of this biblical perspective for contemporary social change movements, including nonviolent resistance, restorative justice, and community development. It argues that the pursuit of peace is not merely a moral obligation but also a form of social justice aimed at transforming the social, economic, and political systems that sustain conflict and the inequality. Using analytical and sociological methods, the findings reveal that the Bible views living peacefully not only as a prerequisite for spiritual fulfillment but also as a critical form of social justice necessary for societal advancement. The study concludes that peace is indispensable for meaningful social transformation and recommends the application of the biblical principles in Hebrews 12:14 as a framework for social change.

Keywords: peace, pursuit, social justice, social change, Hebrews 12:14

## Introduction

THE PURSUIT OF PEACE HAS LONG BEEN A CORNERSTONE OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS and a fundamental aspect of human flourishing. As Wolterstorff (2004), observes, peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the “presence of justice, righteousness, and well-being.”<sup>1</sup> In biblical tradition, peace transcends personal or spiritual dimensions, it encompasses the societal and communal vision of well-being for all people. In other words, peace is the desire of any society and it flows from one individual to another within a given community.

The Hebrew concept of *shalom* encapsulates the biblical ideal of peace, signifying wholeness, completeness, and harmony.<sup>2</sup> It is not simply a human aspiration but a divine mandate reflecting the character and nature of God.<sup>3</sup> In the New Testament, peace is further developed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hauerwas (1991) emphasizes that Jesus’ message of peace was not a call to passivity

but to active nonviolence and peacemaking, engaging with societal structures to address inequality and conflict.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most significant biblical passages that underscores the importance of peace in fostering social change is Hebrews 12:14. This verse exhorts believers to “pursue peace with all men,” emphasizing its communal and social dimensions. Lane (1991) underscores the significance of the verse, he argued that peace is not just what an individual can achieve but a collective effort which has a transformative goal.<sup>5</sup>

## Literature Review

Social justice has been a pressing concern in recent years, with various scholars and researchers contributing to the discourse. Several literatures on social justice have been reviewed, highlighting their key themes, methodologies, and contributions to the field. For instance, the recent literature of Ibram X. Kendi (2019) and Angela Davis (2020) focused on the critical race theory (CRT) which is a significant framework for understanding social justice, particularly in the context of racial inequality. Kendi's book, “How to be an Antiracist,” offers a comprehensive analysis of racism and provides practical strategies for promoting antiracism.<sup>6</sup> Davis's book, “Abolition. Feminism. Now,” on the other hand, explores the intersections of racism, sexism, and abolitionism, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of social justice.<sup>7</sup> Methodologically, CRT scholars often employ critical discourse analysis, examining the ways in which language and power intersect to perpetuate racial inequality. The contributions of CRT to social justice literature are significant, as they provide a framework for understanding the complex and nuanced nature of racism.

The works of bell hooks (2015) and Brittney Cooper (2018) theorized the intersectional feminism chiefly in the area of gender inequality. Hooks's writing, “Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism,” provides a classic analysis of intersectionality, exploring the ways in which racism and sexism intersect to perpetuate inequality.<sup>8</sup> Cooper's book titled, “Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower,” offers a more contemporary analysis of intersectionality, stressing the need for a more nuanced understanding of black feminist rage. Operationally, intersectional feminist scholars often employ qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus groups, to examine the lived experiences of women of color.<sup>9</sup>

Besides, the disability justice has been a growing area of research in recent years especially in the context of seeking social justice for the disabled. Recent work in this area includes the piece of scholars such as Mia Mingus (2019) and Talila A. Lewis (2020). Mingus's book, “Queer and Trans Artists of Color: Stories and Essays,” provides a comprehensive analysis of disability justice, exploring the ways in which queer and trans artists of color are creating more just and equitable communities.<sup>10</sup> Lewis's book, “A World Without Police: Mapping Police-Free Futures,” offers a critical analysis of policing and disability, emphasizing the need for a more nuanced understanding of disability justice. Scholars often employ participatory action research, working in

collaboration with disabled communities to examine the experiences of people living with disability.<sup>11</sup>

A comparison of the reviewed literatures on social justice shows several key themes and methodologies. First, all three areas of research emphasize the importance of intersectionality, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of the complex and nuanced nature of inequality. Also, the methodologies employed in these areas of research are diverse, ranging from critical discourse analysis to participatory action research. Nevertheless, there are also some key differences between these areas of research. For example, CRT and intersectional feminism tend to focus more on the experiences of marginalized communities, while the disability justice tends to focus more on the creation of more just and equitable futures.

### **The Concept of Social Justice**

Social justice is a multifaceted concept that has been examined by scholars, philosophers, and activists across disciplines such as M Young (1990); N. Fraser (2008) and H. Bell (1994).<sup>12</sup> At its core, social justice refers to the equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within a society<sup>13</sup> which seeks to promote equality, challenge systemic injustices, and uphold human rights. One foundational principle of social justice is distributive justice as articulated by Aristotle, who advocates for the fair allocation of resources and benefits in society.<sup>14</sup> Emphasizing that individuals should have access to basic necessities and opportunities regardless of their circumstances. Another integral aspect of social justice is the recognition of human rights—the inherent freedoms and protections to which every individual is entitled, irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. These rights, as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), include the right to life, liberty, education, healthcare, and freedom of expression.<sup>15</sup>

Social justice also prioritizes equality, emphasizing fair treatment and the elimination of discrimination based on factors such as race, gender, or socioeconomic background.<sup>16</sup> Beyond these principles, the pursuit of social justice involves addressing systemic injustices and advocating for transformative social change. Freire (2000) highlights the need to challenge oppressive ideologies and power structures, promoting policies that uplift marginalized communities.<sup>17</sup> However, achieving social justice faces significant challenges, including systemic biases and entrenched inequalities. Bell (1995) notes that systemic injustices, such as racism, sexism, and ableism, are deeply embedded within societal institutions and ideologies, perpetuating discrimination and exclusion.<sup>18</sup> Addressing these injustices requires sustained efforts to dismantle oppressive systems and foster inclusive, equitable communities.<sup>19</sup>

### **Relationship Between Peace and Social Justice**

The connection between peace and social justice is deeply rooted in both theological and scholarly perspectives. Scripture acknowledges peace as an essential foundation for justice to flourish in society. Galtung (1996) describes peace as the equitable



distribution of justice to rightful individuals within a community, highlighting the interdependence of peace and social justice.<sup>20</sup> This perspective underscores peace as a prerequisite for justice, while social justice simultaneously provides a necessary framework for sustaining peace, as social injustices often serve as catalysts for conflict and violence.<sup>21</sup>

The biblical tradition further emphasizes the interplay between peace and social justice. Brueggemann (1997) notes that the Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah (Isa. 32:16-17; 9:6-7); Jeremiah (Jere. 22:13-17; 6:13-14); Amos (Amos 9:11-15); Zachariah (Zech. 9:9-10) to mention but a few presented peace and justice as two inseparable dimensions, with peace emerging as the outcome of justice and righteousness.<sup>22</sup> A key mechanism which connects the peace and justice is “distributive justice”, which Rawls (1971) defines as the allocation of resources, privileges, and burdens within a community without partiality or respect of person.<sup>23</sup>

The relationship between peace and social justice is also evident in the realm of human rights. Ishay (2004) asserts that human rights form a crucial framework for ensuring dignity and well-being, serving as a foundation for addressing the social, economic, and political injustices that often lead to conflict and violence.<sup>24</sup> However, challenges such as ignorance of these rights can undermine their effectiveness. For example, in a recent case at Igando Police Station on December 6, 2024, a man was apprehended for harshly disciplining his child. The man later claimed ignorance of human rights laws due to illiteracy, underscoring the need for awareness and education to promote both peace and justice.<sup>25</sup> As Martin Luther King Jr. (1967) articulated, human rights provide a vital environment for achieving societal harmony and addressing systemic inequities.<sup>26</sup>

### Exegeses of Hebrews 12:14

According to Hebrews 12:14, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (KJV). The verse emphasizes the significance of pursuing peace and holiness in order to see the Lord. The concept of peace in Matthew Henry’s thought is not restricted to internal peace or a sense of calm. Rather, it encompasses a broader comprehension of peace that involves agreement and reconciliation with all parties and sects. Henry remarks that patience and faith are prerequisites for a Christians to pursue harmony and holiness, as they follow their calling unwaveringly, diligently, as well as with desire.<sup>27</sup> The Greek phrase used for peace in Faussett (1871), εἰρήνη (eirēnē), carries this meaning of “Societal congruence”. As such, Faussett (1871) opines that Apostle Paul is urging Christians to strive for peaceful relationships with everyone, depicting the reconciliatory attribute of God demonstrated in Christ Jesus (Faussett, 1871; BDAG, 284).<sup>28</sup>

The encouragement pursuit of holiness in Hebrews 12:14 is connected to the pursuit of peace. Holiness, in this context, denotes a state of ethical purity and departure from sin unto God. The phrase ‘holiness’ in the Greek ἁγιασμός (*hagiasmos*) communicates a moral sanctification (BDAG, 10). Faussett (1871) remarks that the phrase

ἁγιασμός is extracted from God's "holiness" making it distinctive (cf. Hebrews 12:10). He further argues that "sanctification" in this sense describes God's absolute holiness which Christians are expected to "put on" as Peter's first epistle encouraged Christians to ἐγκομβόομαι (*egkomboomai*), that is, "wear" humility (cf. 1 Peter 5:5).<sup>29</sup> Christians are therefore there called to embody holiness as a reflection of God's character, striving for peace without compromising their commitment to God's will and sanctification (1 Peter 1:16; Galatians 1:10).<sup>30</sup>

Apostle Paul's admonition in the verse serves as a warning for living a life characterized by moral purity and obedience to God. The warning in Hebrews 12:14 is not a call to legalism or self-righteousness. Rather, it is a reminder that believers are called to live a life that reflects the nature of God even in the face of trials and persecutions. Bruce (1985) writes that the exhortation to pursue peace and holiness gains further significance within the historical and cultural context of Hebrews. He explains that the epistle was written to a community of Christians enduring persecution and hardship probably during the reign of Emperor Nero (AD 54-68) or Emperor Domitian, thus, offering hope and encouragement during their trials.<sup>31</sup>

The concept of seeing the Lord in Hebrews 12:14 is related to the idea of eternal life. In Jewish cosmology, seeing God was often associated with ζωη (*zoe*) – eternal life and κοινωνία (*koinonia*) – fellowship with God (Psalm 17:15; Matthew 5:8). The phrase, "see the Lord" in Strong (2010) connotes an action and is translated ὀπτάνομαι (*optanomai*) or ὀπτομαι (*optomai*) which means "to gaze intently, with eyes wide open, at a thing amazing or extraordinary". Unlike *blepo* (βλέπω G991), which implies a mere observation, or *eido* (εἶδω G1492), which suggests mechanical or casual sight, this verb conveys a sense of focused attention. Furthermore, while *theaomai* (θεαομαι G2300) and its intensive form *theoreo* (θεωρέω G2334) signify a constant examination, and *skopeo* (σκοπέω G4648) which implies observing from a distance, ὀπτάνομαι specifically portrays an intent gaze, often interpreted as "to appear," "look," "see," "show," or "behold".<sup>32</sup>

Hebrews 12:14 serves as a reminder of the importance of striving to be at peace and live holy as Christians. Believers are called to strive for peaceful relationships with others and to pursue a life of moral purity and obedience to God. Without holiness, believers will not experience eternal life or fellowship with God. As such, this verse serves as a call to action, urging believers to prioritize their pursuit of peace and holiness. Thus, Paul's message in the verse according to Danker and Bauer (2000) is discipline as well as perseverance in the Christian life.<sup>33</sup>

### Hebrews 12:14 in the Context of Social Change in Nigeria

Nigeria faces pressing social, economic, and political challenges that require transformative change. Osaghae (1998) characterizes Nigeria as a nation rife with paradoxes, necessitating a holistic approach to peace and holiness that extends beyond personal spirituality to address communal and systemic injustices.<sup>34</sup> In the Nigerian context, the pursuit of peace and holiness, as exhorted in Hebrews 12:14, aligns with the call

for social transformation and the restructuring of systems that perpetuate inequality and conflict.

The integral relationship between peace, social justice, and national prosperity is a recurring theme in the biblical tradition. The Psalms, for instance, highlight the blessings of peace, while the reign of King Solomon exemplifies how peace fosters economic and social flourishing, as seen in 1 Kings 4:24-25, where Solomon's peaceful administration leads to national prosperity. This transformative potential of peace as a foundation for social change is equally relevant in contemporary contexts, as underscored by Adeyemo (2006) in the Nigerian setting, where the absence of peace and righteousness among leaders and citizens has hindered progress and contributed to widespread protests and societal discord.<sup>35</sup> The importance of righteousness in exalting a nation is emphasized in Proverbs 14:34, which highlights the need for just principles and actions in promoting social justice and human rights.<sup>36</sup> In Nigeria, the erosion of these principles often manifests in systemic injustices, such as the perversion of judicial processes, prompting calls for reforms to strengthen the nation's legal foundation.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the pursuit of holiness, as described in Hebrews 12:14, involves addressing corruption, greed, and other societal ills that impede justice and equity, recognizing that holiness is both a personal and communal commitment to align with God's purposes and promote societal well-being, as Kittel and Friedrich (1964) note in linking holiness to peace.<sup>38</sup>

### Forms of Social Justice

Social justice encompasses a wide range of efforts to promote equality, fairness, and human rights. It involves addressing systemic injustices, challenging power imbalances, and advocating for marginalized and underrepresented communities. Galtung (1996) orates that the most critical form of social justice is peace. Peace, in his view is not merely the absence of conflict, but the presence of justice, equality, and human rights.<sup>39</sup> For example, the reign of Israel's third monarch delivered justice, fairness, and human rights to rightful individuals due to peaceful administration (1Kings 3:16-28).

Economic justice is another critical form of social justice. It involves promoting fair and equitable economic systems, addressing income inequality, and ensuring access to basic needs such as food, water, and shelter. As noted by Rawls (1971), economic justice is a matter of fair distribution, which entails allocating resources and privileges fairly and equitably.<sup>40</sup> Unlike the early church, when Hellenistic widows were abandoned in 'daily distribution' and Hebrew widows were cared for, thus, division was the outcome (Acts 6:1-2).

Environmental justice is also a vital form of social justice. It involves promoting fair and equitable access to natural resources, addressing environmental degradation, and ensuring that marginalized communities are not disproportionately affected by environmental pollution. According to Bullard (2000), it has to do with human

rights, as it pertains to ensuring that all citizens have equal access to a healthy and safe environment".<sup>41</sup>

Racial justice is another essential form of social justice. It involves promoting fair and equitable treatment of individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, addressing systemic racism, and ensuring that marginalized communities have access to equal opportunities and resources within a nation or society. Hooks (1995) posits that racial justice is challenging dominant and standing ideologies which are favorable to some social class and unfavorable to the common man. Nonetheless, he argues that it can also promote critical awareness within a community.<sup>42</sup>

Butler (1990) mentions gender justice as a form of social justice which involves promoting fair and equitable treatment of individuals from diverse gender backgrounds, addressing systemic sexism.<sup>43</sup> Besides, Oliver (1996) pointed disability rights as a type of social justice. It involves promoting fair and equitable treatment of individuals with disabilities, addressing systemic ableism. He further remarked that disability rights permit deformed citizens to be involved in societal activities and grant such individuals access to alike benefits and resources".<sup>44</sup> Hebrews 12:14 therefore offers a profound call for peace and holiness, providing a framework for addressing Nigeria's social challenges. By integrating the principles of righteousness, justice, and equity into both personal lives and societal structures, Nigerians can work towards transformative social change. This pursuit aligns with biblical teachings and offers a pathway to national prosperity and harmony.

### **Peace and Social Change in the Biblical Context**

The biblical tradition abounds with examples of peace serving as a transformative agent for social change. Central to this tradition is the prophetic call for justice and righteousness, which is portrayed as essential for societal well-being. Brueggemann (1997) highlights how prophetic literature underscores justice and righteousness as pivotal to peace and social transformation.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Westermann (1991) observes that the prophetic institution embodies a relentless pursuit of justice, particularly for the marginalized and defenseless members of society.<sup>46</sup> The prophetic call, therefore, becomes a vital mechanism for social change, striving to create peace and equity within communities.

The Bible also emphasizes nonviolent resistance as a significant means of fostering peace and social change. Yoder (1994) notes that Jesus' teachings on peacefulness transcend religious rituals and aim to address social, economic, and structural violence within society.<sup>47</sup> By promoting peaceful resistance, Jesus advocates for a transformation that aligns societal structures with divine purposes. This approach exemplifies how peace can serve as a vehicle for profound social change.

Furthermore, forgiveness and reconciliation are critical elements in the biblical understanding of peace and social transformation. Volf (2002) asserts that forgiveness, though often overlooked, is indispensable for societal healing and reconciliation after periods of conflict and violence.<sup>48</sup> To foster restoration and mutual understand-

ing, forgiveness therefore becomes a powerful tool for advancing peace and social change, contributing to a more equitable and harmonious society.

The implications of biblical peace as a catalyst for social change are profound, especially when applied to contemporary social and political issues. Gutierrez (1988) emphasizes that biblical peace extends beyond the spiritual realm to advocate for justice, equality, and human rights.<sup>49</sup> This broader understanding of peace challenges Christians to engage actively with societal structures, promoting transformative change consistent with God's purposes.

## Conclusion

This analysis has shown that peace is a foundational element of social justice and that Hebrews 12:14 provides a biblical framework for connecting peace with systemic transformation. Peace, in the biblical context, is not merely an individual or spiritual pursuit but a public and political mandate to reform the economic, social, and political systems that perpetuate conflict and inequality.

The relevance of this study is particularly significant in the Nigerian context. As Osaghae (1998) describes, Nigeria struggles with corruption, injustice, and political contradictions that undermine societal progress.<sup>50</sup> The biblical call to peace provides a pathway for addressing these challenges by advocating for justice, fairness, and equity.

The pursuit of peace is a vital aspect of Christian discipleship and a necessary response to the pressing social, economic, and political challenges of our time. As humanity is called to reflect God's character, Christians have a responsibility to pursue peace and justice in all areas of life, contributing to the creation of a world that mirrors divine intentions for equity and harmony.

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