



Religious Tolerance: A Panacea for Social Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Man is a social being whose inter and intra-personal existence cannot be extricated from cohabiting with others within the society in which he finds himself. Man's existence starts from fostering mutual relations with members of his immediate family and groups outside his family to members of the larger society/nation he identifies with as a citizen. Therefore, his belief in any creed or faith (religion) is a sign that man's social contact within society reflects his exemplification of God, who is a just being. This article mainly focused on promoting peace in Nigeria, even during the building or consolidating of democratic institutions. This paper adopted two methodological approaches - The functionalist approach emphasizes the contributions made by each component to the total and the interdependence between society's constituent parts. The research attested that religion is often, and rightly, seen as a semi-autonomous social space that resembles others; it is also closely related to the economic structure of society. The second approach is a sociology of religion approach, which discusses religion within the framework of a particular people group as a human and cultural phenomenon. In theoretical explanation, therefore, this paper expounds on how it makes a big difference in a society of peace and tranquillity and the workings of the democratic institutional framework. It is hoped that the leadership of our dear nation will be directed towards attaining peace and security across diverse Nigerian ethnic races or groups in such a way that religious tolerance will not breed hatred and enmity whatsoever to all citizens. Thus, development in whatever ramification is yearned for in this democratic dispensation would not be an illusion or wishful expectation but requires acceptance of everyone from all climes of life, race, creed, or ethnicity.

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INTRODUCTION

Systematic exploration of the roles of religion in development in Nigeria has yet to be given detailed academic attention in recent times. Numerous factors, such as the importance of religion and its influence on Nigerian culture and the state have been considered.¹ Second, since Nigeria's first

¹ Haldun Çancı and Opeyemi Adedoyin Odukoya, "Ethnic and Religious Crises in Nigeria: A Specific Analysis upon Identities (1999–2013)," *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 16, no. 1 (2016): 87–110.

university was founded in the late 1940s, a substantial corpus of research has been conducted on the phenomenon of religion. Thirdly, there is a highly active scholarly discussion on Nigerian development, especially from a radical standpoint.² Nonetheless, there has always been an implicit recognition of the usefulness of religion in issues that are now recognized in the mainstream of developmental discourse and that touch on ideas like morality, leadership, and worries about fostering "peaceful unity" and "progress" in the community.³

However, family is the most familiar primary social group into which everyone is born. Existence or life begins with a family into which one is born. Nobody exists outside a family where a father and mother are harbingers or precursors of that individual. Social relationships are limited to blood, kin, and kindred within the family. The group's development beyond familial ties results in relationships outside the family and contact with the community, society, state, and other diverse or more important groups than the family. However, the connections that may arise here will discuss conflict and how to resolve it among neighbours. In other words, conflict is bound to ensue among individuals about contact with others. Fixing it, therefore, introduces the concept of peace. In this sense, peace refers to concord that promotes cohabitation and the lack of animosity in society. Regarding behaviour, the absence of conflict and the fear of violence between individuals or members of various social groupings is what peace means.

Over the years, the geo-political tensions and ethnoreligious crises witnessed in Nigeria have watered down indivisibility onus but disintegrated the country much more by dampening its development. In terms of unity, national identity, and shared politics among various ethnic groups, the Nigerian concept is defective. This paper focuses on how maintaining peace and harmony in Nigeria's multiethnic and multireligious society is crucial for progress in the modern democratic system. Today, the nation's unity is gravely challenged by ethnocentrism, emotions, and religious fanaticism, given that Nigeria is separated geographically along Muslim and Christian lines, with over 250 ethnic tribes and a diverse range of religious views. The country's tolerance for other religions is essentially disintegrating, particularly in the north, where religious radicalism has erupted in the last ten years, increasing suffering and animosity among Nigerians. It is beyond conjectural opinion, therefore, now, to trade with peaceful co-existence and living in harmony with all and sundry. Thus, this paper's central claim is that Nigerians have become extraordinarily enthusiastic but antagonistic toward every view because of Islam, Christianity, traditional religious prejudices, bellicosity, zeal, and arrogance. The paper aims to promote social progress in Nigerian society while establishing a harmonious and peaceful coexistence amongst the followers of the three major faiths or belief systems. Put differently, the study examines the relationships between the three religions, concentrating on the ideals and worldviews of Christians and Muslims in fostering progress.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Conceptualizing religion may be complex because it is a multifaceted concept. What connotes religion to many may not appear to be religious. For some people, religion has to do with gathering in groups. It involves communal eating. It involves theoretical discourse about the nature of the universe and so forth. Theoreticians have proposed countless definitions. The most exciting thing is that an average person can tell when others engage in religious behaviour while many scholars and scientists have problems defining it. The concept of religion is like the concept of culture. It is easy to use in ordinary discourse but difficult to define precisely. Nwabuisi, Jensen, and Ajayi and Oluwafemi see religion as a system of social coherence commonly understood as a group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen or imaginary being, or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine, or the highest truth and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions, and rituals associated

² S. E. Oyovbaire, "The Nigerian State as Conceptual Variable," *Studies in Politics and Society: Journal of the Nigerian Political Science Association* 2 (1984): 129–49.

³ Peter John McLoughlin, "John Hume and the Revision of Irish Nationalism," in *John Hume and the Revision of Irish Nationalism* (Manchester University Press, 2013), 117.

with such belief or system of thought.⁴ One variable that denotes the absence of struggle, conflict, and war is peace. Ibeanu asserts that from a sociological perspective, social harmony free from social conflicts is a prerequisite for peace.⁵ He claims that social harmony results when individuals and organizations meet one another's needs, objectives, and expectations. Structural-functionalism provides a theoretical account of peace in this way. A sociological research tradition referred to as structural functionalism, George-Genyi sees society as a patchwork of structures serving various purposes.⁶ He gave an example of how a civilization needs to produce goods, raise its children, run its affairs, and protect its citizens to survive. Various institutions, including courts, legislatures, businesses, schools, and the military forces, must carry out specific societal tasks. It makes sense that order exists when these institutions carry out their duties effectively, and society naturally tends toward stability and order. Accordingly, from a structural-functionalist standpoint, peace is attained in situations in which the social institutions that are in place are sufficiently functional and are bolstered by the necessary norms, values, and culture.

Galtung defines peace more comprehensively by outlining two aspects of community peace.⁷ First, negative peace is the absence of overt hostilities, overt acts of violence, and fear for one's safety and that of one's nation, state, neighbourhood, and even global community. The second aspect of peace is the absence of unfair systems, unequal interactions, fairness, and inner serenity. Therefore, the lack of violence, pain or deprivation, conflict, worry, or fear can be used to characterize peace. It is, in the precise words of Galtung, the establishment and upkeep of a just order in society:

‘.... Indeed, conflict, development, and peace theories are closely related. Conflict research and development research must examine the circumstances that exist now, in the past, and in the future for peace fulfilment.’⁸

Islam, which implies peace and total surrender to God's will (Allah), is a religion that was delivered to humanity by the Prophet Mohammed, according to the Qur'an (Q. 5:3). The three fundamental principles of Islam are adoration of Allah, almsgiving to the needy and relative strangers, and humility, according to Khan.⁹ Okunnu emphasizes that the individual, Allah, and society comprise the web of social interactions by Islamic beliefs.¹⁰ As a result, religion is regarded as the foundation of all relationships, whether domestic, international, or national. As followers of Allah, Muslims must propagate ideals like spiritual purity and the advancement and reconstruction of society. Islamic principles encompass a solid moral code, selflessness, kindness, fairness, humility, and service to others. According to some, these virtues are absent from modern Nigeria, which, like other countries ruled by artificial ideologies, is at risk of prioritizing materialism over spirituality. Regardless of disagreements over the state's role in the zakah administration, it is evident that Islamic belief and practice prioritize the conceptual reduction of poverty. The expectation of almsgiving, or zakah, as a cornerstone of Islamic social justice embodies this. Traditional Islamic philosophy has felt the effects of liberal Western politico-religious thought in recent years, especially concerning development. Conversely, Christianity is recognized as a faith that guarantees that followers maintain a healthy

⁴ Gerald Ugo Nwabuisi, “Appraisal Of Impact Of Religious Bodies On Community Development Programmes In Abia State, Nigeria,” *Trinitarian: International Journal Of Arts And Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2023); Jeppe Sinding Jensen, *What Is Religion?* (Routledge, 2019); Johnson Olusegun Ajayi and Bodunde Oluwafemi, “Religious Practices and National Development,” *Social Sciences* 3, no. 4 (2014): 105–11.

⁵ O. Ibeanu, “Conceptualizing Peace,” in *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa*, ed. Gaya Best (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2005).

⁶ M E George-Genyi, “Good Governance: Antidote for Peace and Security in Nigeria,” *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2013): 56–65.

⁷ Johan Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 291–305.

⁸ Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 131.

⁹ Arshad Khan, *Islam 101: Principles and Practice* (iUniverse, 2003).

¹⁰ Latifah Okunnu, “Women, Secularism And Democracy: Women’s Role In The Regeneration Of Society,” in *International Conference on ‘Restoration Of Shariah in Nigeria: Challenges and Benefits’ Sponsored by Nigerian Muslim Forum, London, 2001.*

balance between their spiritual and material growth while concentrating on the will of the All-Powerful God.¹¹ According to Taylor, Christianity as a religion combats the theology of suffering while fostering human progress.¹² Nonetheless, there are disagreements among followers of the three major religions, especially between Christians and Muslims. Peace is still taught in every religion as necessary for a healthy life and the development of Nigerian society. According to Manus, every Nigerian faith affirms peace as a fundamental component of its tenets.¹³ For instance, traditional religious adherents hold that fairness, fair play, and peace are timeless principles. However, the Qur'an makes it abundantly evident that Allah desires peace and that peace is what He wants the faithful to pursue. In this regard, According to Dauda, all three of Nigeria's major religions have a duty and a right to address the urgent need to bring all peoples together to form a society that values peace and is governed by God's justice and peace.¹⁴

Religion, Peace or Harmony and Politics Intersection

In all human communities, peace is essential because instability, conflict, and violence are unavoidable without it. Peace becomes a prerequisite for believers and faithful to coexist in harmony in their shared religion. According to Dzurgba, peace is the absence of disagreements, animosity, violence, conflict, rioting, disorder, or war.¹⁵ Nwanguma defines peace as the absence of fear, worry, uncertainty, disruption, or tension.¹⁶ These two definitions situate personal wholeness, soundness, well-being, and general prosperity required for people professing religion. Also, Nwanguma pointed out that other Bible texts provide additional explanations of peace in connection to people living in harmony with one another in a balanced relationship (Matt.10:34; Rom.14:19), between nations (Luke 14:32; Acts 12:20), c) harmony (Acts 15:33; 1 Cor.16:11), freedom from molestation (Luke 11:21; Acts 9:31), the order in the State (Acts 24:2), the gospel's restoration of God and humanity's relationships (Acts 10:36; Eph. 2:17), and g) the ensuing sense of peace and contentment (Matt. 10:13; Mark 5:34; Rom 1:7; 3:17).¹⁷ These verses suggest that Arabic or Swahili etymological concepts like "pax," "shalom," and "salaam" are equivalent to the language used by Christians and Muslims to refer to peace.

Classical theorists like Weber, Marx, Durkheim, and others saw the secularization of the contemporary political system as a necessary counterweight to the emergence of the logical order that comes with industrialization and political progress. Being a secular, nonreligious person results from Nigeria's contemporary democratic development. This would guarantee a framework of just rules and fundamental human rights rather than divine injunctions of any religion, becoming the *prima facie* of her political entity. Nigerian politics and society have long been heavily influenced by religion, but this influence has yet to improve the public education system significantly. Therefore, no part of Nigeria's system is monotheistic, according to secularists and as stated in the constitutions. Because of this, all laws governing its political system should be seen as neutral from a religious standpoint toward majority and minority groups opposing division. The monotheistic message that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) conveyed to humanity throughout his lifetime, peace be on him (PBUH), is the foundation of global Islam and Christianity. He invited humanity to turn to the one and only real God and free themselves from the bonds of human service and submission to the All-Powerful God. From an Islamic perspective, According to John 17:3 in the New International Version (NIV), "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." The most well-

¹¹ James O Fiet, *Religious Doctrines and Their Influence on Entrepreneurship* (Springer Nature, 2023).

¹² Douglas Taylor, *Spirituality That Makes Sense* (Swedenborg Foundation Publ., 2000).

¹³ Ukachukwu Chris Manus, "Religious Values, Social Justice and Peace in the Nigerian Context," *Religion and Peace in Multi-Faith Nigeria. Ile-Ife: OAU*, 1992.

¹⁴ Dauda Abubakar, "Ethnic Identity, Democratization, and the Future of the African State: Lessons from Nigeria," *African Issues* 29, no. 1–2 (2001): 31–36.

¹⁵ A. Dzurgba, *Contemporary Ethics: Theories and Issues* (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd, 2007).

¹⁶ Chibuzo I Nwanguma, "James' Concept of Wisdom (James 3: 13-18): A Veritable Tool for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria?," *African Journal of Biblical Sites* XXXII (2014).

¹⁷ Chibuzo Ikechi Nwanguma, "Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria: An Analytical Study of Christian Perspective of Neighbourliness," *Journal Of Integrative Humanism Ghana Vol 9. No 1.*, 2018, 144.

known Prophet of Allah, Isa (Jesus Christ) (PBUH), travelled this same path. In Mark 12:32, the guy says, "Well said, teacher," according to the New International Version of the Bible. "

According to Bible Study Tools, "You are correct when you say that God is one and there is no other but him."¹⁸ The exact worldwide message was vigorously, resolutely, and decorously pursued by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), as the Glorious Qur'an 112:1-4 perfectly captures: Declare: "This is Allah, the Only Begotten, the One and Only; He Who Has No Need and Whom All Need." Furthermore, none can compare to Him, in Ali.¹⁹ What unites Christians and Muslims together is that both religions' followers are human, and as Nigerians have said, fate also ties them together. As much as they love God and their nation, followers of both religions ought to enjoy tolerating one another. It is not common knowledge that Nigerians, regardless of their ethnic background, are incredibly kind and welcoming. Nigerians have a long history of valuing peaceful coexistence, especially with people from other countries. Ethnicity and religion have recently been found to be powerful instruments employed by mischievous individuals to sow discord, hatred, divisiveness, and tribal warfare. Whichever side of the split one is on, one party usually has the upper hand over the other.

According to Ali, Muslims have faith in Allah's prophets and messengers throughout history, without exception.²⁰ Allah has given us this command, which is contained in Qur'an 2:128, saying, "Say: 'We believe in Allah and what was revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and his descendants, and the teachings which Allah gave to Moses, Jesus, and other Prophets.'" "We give ourselves to Him, making no distinction between the two. Thus, we need to acknowledge and value our differences as Nigerians sincerely. Crucially, we should concentrate more on topics on which we agree. We should fortify our bonds of common interest and devise a system that allows us to respect each other while appreciating our differences. According to Aristotle, man is a political animal."²¹ However, according to Imo, religion is the diverse, symbolic manifestation of a fitting reaction to what individuals consciously declare to be of unrestricted worth to them.²² Thus, Man is an animal with political and religious beliefs.²³ Humans are the only animals living in civilized conditions and practising religion. Religion is part of people's daily lives in all nations, including Nigeria. Regardless of one's views or denomination, religion in its purest form and spirit has always been and will always be sacred. Nigeria is a secular state, but religion has significantly impacted since its unification. Throughout history, religion has been a crucial tool or source of inspiration for accomplishing political goals. It is hard to dispute the legitimacy and support those religious regulations, especially Sharia laws, have for influencing public policy. Orthodox Christianity, Islam, and other traditional religions strongly emphasize spiritual growth and self-awareness realization. It is the leaders of different religious groups who indoctrinate for worldly gain through earthly organizations and formations, which then serve as a platform to secure social power. Put another way, the core principles of all religions are focused on the growth of the human race, but the worldly pursuit of personal fulfilment by religious leaders also influences them. This detour from achieving only materialistic goals causes societal struggle, fanaticism, hatred, confusion, chaos, etc.

At this point, it is critical to remember that before the British invasion of Nigeria, Islam had developed a foothold from the Sokoto Caliphate, the Borno empire, to the Yoruba region and down to the Atlantic coast of Lagos. Conversely, Christianity was brought about by colonialists, who were operatives of imperialism. The African traditional religion was about to be progressively defeated when independent missionary workers invaded Southern Nigeria and made their way through the minority populations in the North. Nigerians embraced both Islam and Christianity, which eventually

¹⁸ Bible Study Tools, "Complete Jewish Bible (CJB) [Homepage of Bible Study Tools (BST)]," 2014.

¹⁹ A. Y. Ali, *The Qur'an: A Guide and Mercy. (Translation)*, 4th ed. (Elmhurst, New York, USA: Tahrike-Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., 2012).

²⁰ Ali, *The Qur'an: A Guide and Mercy. (Translation)*.

²¹ S. Mukherjee and S. Ramaswamy, *A Political Thought History. Marx to Plato* (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India Private Limited, 2007), 105.

²² C Imo, "The Study of Religion," *University of Jos*, 1986, 4.

²³ I. A. Jawondo, "The Role of Islamic Scholars in Ilorin Politics," in *Nigeria under Democratic Rule (1999 – 2003)*, ed. H.A. Saliu, vol. 2 (Ibadan: University Press Plc, 2005), 180.

took over. Before this, traditional African faiths dominated all political activity. Chief priests were extraordinarily prominent and robust chiefs. This implies that religion has always influenced politics and that the same political actors in Nigeria used religion to maintain the status quo in the years that followed colonization. The pervasiveness of religion's teachings and their manipulation are the leading causes of disunity and sectionalism in Nigeria today. Abdulyakeen and Bello observed that systematic manipulation of religious sentiments is carried out in Nigeria with the nefarious and reactionary goal of deflecting believers' attention.²⁴ The political elite, which is composed of religious leaders and cohorts in some instances, is unable to absolve itself of responsibility for Nigeria's current situation. According to Egbu, "Religion is one of the banes of development in our nation today," and it has hampered the progress and development of the country.²⁵ The current state of Nigerian politics is characterized by the divisive use of politics and the name of God to influence Muslims and Christians. Within the state, religion is widely used against one another. It goes without saying that since Nigeria's independence, religion has controlled most of the country's leaders' actions, policies, and programs.

Religion, Politics and Development

Early in his study of Christian missions in Nigeria, Olukoju describes how the arrival of missionaries during that time led to the emergence of a new elite class in Nigeria.²⁶ He makes the argument that early missionaries of the Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Anglican, and Catholic faiths had a significant influence on economic, educational, and linguistic policy. He thinks that this helped to create an elite class:

‘...in their efforts to establish a class of western-educated elites, their economic policies, their linguistic and educational endeavours, and, most importantly, their nationwide influence unequivocally brought about significant advancements in technology, literacy, and education.’²⁷

However, Williams analysis highlights the political-religious participation of religious organizations and the functional and dysfunctional parts of this link.²⁸ This is carried out within a pluralistic, interest-group-welcoming theoretical framework that values power. Marshall asserts that religions serve as the ideological foundation of modern civilization and can serve as platforms for upholding political conscience and public order.²⁹ Her theoretical and descriptive examination of library resources is the foundation for her understanding of religion's role in Nigeria's democratic process. According to Marshall, "Churches should adopt a role similar to that of human rights organizations and that the great majority Christians who adhere to popular forms of Christianity receive little attention."³⁰ According to Marshall, democracy is a universal idea that may or may not exist outside the West. To allow for its institutionalization elsewhere, the focus must be on the political articulation's images, narratives, and symbolic forms beyond the purview of official discourse and institutional politics. She believes religion should be central to Nigeria's efforts to uphold and advance democratic values. However, over a long time, Islam has complicatedly shaped the development of Nigerian societies. During the colonial era, Nigeria saw the expansion and consolidation of Islamic dominance thanks to the British policy of indirect rule. From the end of colonialism till the present, this Islamic power has kept growing. Every time there is a constitutional review, the majority of Muslims in the

²⁴ Abdulrasheed Abdulyakeen and Mu'ammam Bello, "The Matrix of Ethno-Religious Politics in Kaduna State: Issues, Challenges and Prospects," *JORAS-Nigerian Journal of Religion and Society* 12 (2023).

²⁵ R. Egbu, "Politicization of Religion," November 13, 2016.

²⁶ Ayodeji Olukoju, "Abolition, Legitimate Commerce, and Christianity in Nigeria," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian History* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 223.

²⁷ Olukoju, "Abolition, Legitimate Commerce, and Christianity in Nigeria," 15.

²⁸ Pat Williams, "Religious Groups and the Politics of National Development in Nigeria," *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 7, no. 1 (1991): 32–44.

²⁹ R. Marshall, "God Is Not Democrat': Pentecostalism and Democratization in Nigeria," in *Modernity and Its Malcontents*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 240.

³⁰ Marshall, "God Is Not Democrat': Pentecostalism and Democratization in Nigeria."

North have persistently demanded the return of Shari'a, citing their religious convictions and discontent with the Nigerian government. According to a recent assessment, Shari'a is seen as a means of escaping crimes, moral decline, poverty, corruption, and other vices.³¹

The belief that Shari'a may lessen the sense of discomfort, deprivation, and injustice that define people's lives led to the reinstatement of Shari'a in several states in response to popular demand. For instance, the Sokoto elite was taken aback by the public's acclaim for the Zamfara State government's 1999 implementation of the Shari'a penal code, according to Last.³² He contends that a turning point was reached when the masses demanded the implementation of Shari'a criminal laws in northern Nigeria. He notes that public opinion began to lead Nigeria's political leadership instead of them for the first time. However, after three years of implementation, some have begun to question the states' sincerity because the Shari'a states do not seem to have anything to offer in better governance. Instead, corruption, the waste of tax dollars, and the absence of workable policies and programs are the norm. The political, gender, and class components of Shari'a legislation are significant considerations in its implementation. According to Salahu, the national discussions over properly integrating Shari'a courts with national and federal structures constitute a significant political arena dominated by the elite's financial and political interests.³³ Shari'a has distinct effects on the wealthy and the impoverished. The majority of those found guilty and given sentences are low-income rural residents. For instance, Mr Jangebe's hand was amputated for stealing a cow, and this was done without any consideration for the compassion that Islamic law requires of a leader. Many Islamic teachings do not justify amputation after conviction in a country where poverty is rampant. Although it is not enforced, a rich person is required by Shari'a to donate a percentage of their money to the poor. For example, the Zakkah and Waqaf Committee in Sokoto state had not received any additional funding beyond what the governor had provided during the inaugural ceremony two years after its establishment.³⁴

Instead, the wealthy and so-called "pen thieves," who are government officials, continue to profit from kickbacks, inflated contracts, and "fronts" (government officials using friends and relatives to obtain government contracts), which are forms of government favouritism. In addition to the class above issues, minority religious communities have been marginalized and mistreated as a result of the Shari'a law's implementation. This is so because the Hausa/Fulani and other ethnic groups are connected to Islam. Based on in-depth interviews, historical documents, and library resources, Salahu highlights the Hausa/Fulani supremacy in northern and overall Nigeria, which Islam has reinforced.³⁵ According to him, Islam is critical in inclusivity and political power. He concludes that as Islam consolidated in northern Nigeria, non-Muslim populations were sidelined, leading to strained relations among minority groups and the majority Muslim Hausa community, which in turn led to an ethnoreligious crisis in the area. The gender component of Shari'a implementation is another crucial element. Almost all of the chosen issues, such as (i) restrictions on their freedom of movement, (ii) state governments imposing the hijab, (iii) keeping women out of positions of authority or confining them to women's ministries within the state, and (iv) putting increased pressure on women to wed males rather than women are directed towards women. According to reports, the government in some states has reportedly asked unmarried civil servant women to either get married or quit.³⁶ The narrative of Bariya, a young unmarried mother who became pregnant after having an affair and was sentenced to 100 lashes, illustrates the Shari'a application's gender component. This case gave rise to three issues:

³¹ Rena Singer, "The Double-Edged Sword of Nigeria's Sharia.," *Christian Science Monitor* 22 (2001).

³² M. Last, *Notes on the Implementation of Shari'a in Northern Nigeria* (London: UCL Mimeo, 2000).

³³ Moshood Olayinka Salahu, "Politics, Religion and Electoral Outcomes in Nigeria: The 2023 Presidential Election in Perspective," *Journal of Administrative Science* 20, no. 1 (2023): 213–33.

³⁴ Fatima L Adamu, "The Dynamics of Gender and Poverty under Shariah Legal Systems in Zamfara and Sokoto States of Northern Nigeria," in *A Workshop on Law and Poverty, Nigeria, Social Science Academy of Nigeria and International Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP)*, 2003.

³⁵ Salahu, "Politics, Religion and Electoral Outcomes in Nigeria: The 2023 Presidential Election in Perspective."

³⁶ Adebola Afolake Adejimi et al., "Reaching out to Men in Ending Intimate Partner Violence: A Qualitative Study among Male Civil Servants in Ibadan, Nigeria," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being* 17, no. 1 (2022): 2128263.

(i) Pregnancy is seen as proof of infidelity without taking the circumstances surrounding the rape into account; (ii) It is wrong to penalize such underprivileged and immature girls while downplaying the importance of men. In a community where poverty has led to a high rate of prostitution and young women are regularly exposed to older men who prey on their innocence and poverty to get them into relationships, about those above, (iii) that only women can be found guilty of fornication by using pregnancy as proof. These states have made some progress toward implementing Shari'a law despite biases related to gender, ethnicity, and class.

The excessive consumption of alcohol, especially by men, can be curbed by law, which could hurt family earnings and domestic violence.³⁷ In addition, as mandated by Shari'a, women are pressing nations to implement mandatory education for them and to assert their right to an education.³⁸ It is also crucial to remember that the Alkalis, or Islamic judges, used to preside over civil cases involving child custody, marriage, divorce, and inheritance with no oversight from the government, often taking advantage of women in the process. The recent reform of the legal system may present some prospects for judicial monitoring because it includes an appeals mechanism.³⁹ The rising prominence of Islamic movements has allowed their leaders to enter the political sphere and given affluent backers the chance to obtain Islamic legitimacy through their affiliation with various movements. According to Adepeju-Fashina, the Islamic movements helped the elite grow throughout the 1970s regarding the aristocracy of merchants, aristocrats, and religious scholars used to influence society and politics.⁴⁰ He observed that there has been a substantial shift in society due to the competition between Islamic movements for public support. Therefore, Last noted that there has been a shift in social transformation marked by a growth in Islamic education and a departure from customs in favour of a purer form of Islam.⁴¹ A growing number of young men, whose sisters, like their brothers across the Islamic world, are married to the patrons of their fathers and have no chance of rising in the social hierarchy, are not being educated or hired by the state despite this expansion. Ironically, many of the services that the impoverished in northern Nigeria can obtain are provided by young, unskilled men, such as motorbike taxi drivers, black market gas vendors, and water vendors, even though deficiencies in the provision of services, especially in the area of state education, contribute to the youth's dismal prospects. These workers' trade groups have grown apart from governmental, emirate, and religious institutions and have the potential to be a powerful force in promoting more pro-poor administration. However, the large number of unemployed young men in the Muslim-majority cities of Nigeria is worrying the elite in the country's northern area. Politicians frequently exploit anti-neighbor feelings fueled by youth organizations to gain political advantage, despite or perhaps precisely because of this menace. The fact that they can accomplish this suggests that vertical networks of patron-client connections are still in place, emphasizing the racial and religious linkages between a patron and his clients while preventing underprivileged kids from forming common interests. Due to the increasing politicization of Islamic groups and their extensive mobilization efforts, a greater number of impoverished individuals are engaging in politics. They have not, however, yet made it possible for people with low incomes to further their interests.

Education and Religion: A Trigger for Harmony and Peace

Ignorance of man's inherent uniqueness may be one of the enduring consequences of religious tolerance. Being both spirit and soul in one makes a human being unique. Allah, Jehovah, Yahweh, Oluwa, Chineke, Abasi, Azibha, Krishna, Govinda, and so on are some names for this entity. Man will unavoidably encounter many problems when he deviates from this fundamental idea, including

³⁷ Singer, "The Double-Edged Sword of Nigeria's Sharia.".

³⁸ DFID, "Promoting Women's Rights Through Shariah" (Abuja, 2004).

³⁹ M A Lawan, "Implementing Shari'a in a Democracy: Kano State Experience," in *Report Submitted at the International Conference on 'Implementing Shari'a in a Democracy: Nigerian Experience', Organized by the Centre for Islamic Legal Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 2004.*

⁴⁰ D. Adepeju-Fashina, "Religious Diversity and Conflict in Nigeria: Identity Formation and Economic Development" (University of Kansas, 2023).

⁴¹ Last, *Notes on the Implementation of Shari'a in Northern Nigeria* .

hostility and religious crises. Insofar as a conditioned or embodied soul lacks transcendental insight, man must consider and act upon bodily identity. The deeply embedded adverse effects of our creator's ignorance of one identity led to spiritual crises. For example, being a Christian, Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, or any other identity will make little of an impact or knowledge in Nigeria.

Fervently speaking, all religions' core principle or worth is peace, possibly peaceful values. Every faith teaches that peaceful coexistence is a given. According to Isaiah 9:6, Christians refer to Jesus Christ as the prince of peace. "He is the name that will be called a wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace," according to what was reported. He preached, gave orders, and lived the virtue of peace. Jesus' earthly mission was marked by compassion and peace with everybody. He never spoke harshly to the Pharisees or other religious authorities, even though they fought vigorously. Islam also encourages the pursuit of kindness, tolerance, peace, and social, mental, spiritual, and physical harmony.

Also, Muslims are urged by Islamic principles to adopt an attitude of forgiveness and kindness. Furthermore, Muslims are supposed to oppose evil but instead to love and endure while being patient (Q 3: 200). In retribution, they should either enslave them or, at the very least, seize their possessions. They were nervous, wondering what statement he would make on this momentous day. The Prophet of Islam is an example of the kind of behaviour that is demanded of loyal Muslims. The life of the Holy Prophet has multiple instances of this kind. Assume that the teachings of the Bible and the Quran are this. Then, to respect everyone's human dignity and the sanctity of life, the followers of that religion or faith must be taught to be tolerant of others.

It is possible to achieve religious practices under the supervision of a live supramundane mentor, a holy book, and exceptional holy men, resulting in the country's integration, unification, and strong cohesiveness. Once more, followers of traditional African religions, such as Islam or Christianity, can be catalysts for growth and change if they make equity, justice, and fairness their guiding ideals. The fundamental ideas of all religions, even conventional ones, are based on these ideas since the countless mercies of God centre on justice, fairness, and equity for all people. Anybody who claims to be closer to God loses access to God if they reject the society of these three.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In actuality, religion has undermined Nigeria's state's secularism. The control of religious activities is not subject to the authority of the Constitution. Nigeria is known as the country of God, with a growing number of churches and other places of worship. The nation has not been absolved of the wicked vices, such as corruption, that have become more pervasive in society due to spiritualism's dominance over official institutions. Nigeria is still plagued by misgovernance in the twenty-first century despite religion and politics being inextricably linked to the country's politics. Although this work advocates for unity in Nigeria for development, the paper suggests that clerics and other religious leaders should stop politicizing religion to forge consensual polities among Nigerian stakeholders. Nonetheless, the following suggestions should be taken into consideration to prevent violations, fear and intolerance for one another's faith, creed, or belief because the country is a secular society governed by the constitution that disallows any religion as the official state religion:

1. Being a just citizen in modern Nigeria means believing in other people's faiths as much as accepting theirs since the constitution protects the right to freedom of association.
2. As Nigerian democracy advances, mechanisms should be implemented to rein in the excesses of religious leaders and sects.
3. No faith in Nigeria can be seen as superior to another, nor should any be legislated or promoted by the government.
4. Since faith or belief systems will now become unimportant in politics, devotion and the depth of religion should be secular and subject to the state's and political authority's authority.
5. Every religious discourse's lesson, theme, subject, or title needs to revolve around tolerance. This is a step toward the state's disassociation from various deities or religions.

CONCLUSION

Religion and politics have been adapted as inextricably linked in today's Nigerian political system. The belief that one has influenced the other, such as political religion or religious politics, makes the two inferiors. Since the arrival of the colonial overlords, the political climate has been perpetually inflamed by one of the two malignant perceptions or vice versa. Because of Nigeria's past, religion has been used as a divisive tool that fosters animosity, mistrust, and a complete lack of interreligious confidence among Nigerians. The rise of radical religious movements such as Pentecostalism and Boko Haram/Al-Shabab is disrupting the social interdependence that could lead to the growth of society. The rise of "important and powerful" identities is a result of nationalism and the "developmental state" failing to offer post-colonial Nigerians a secure framework for forming their identities. As "delocalized subjects," Nigerian converts, must reimagine their lives by being involved in a global network of images, personalities, discourses, and ideas that challenge conventional, cultural, and even orthodox theological systems.

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