



# A Study of Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Nigerian Polity

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the synergetic activities between religion and civil society's organizations in addressing issues in Nigerian polity using the exhortation of Paul to the Roman Christians in Romans 13:1-7 his epistle to the century Christians. Generally, Romans 13:1-7 is known for its teachings regarding the cooperation the citizenry needs to accord civil rulers by the former's willingness to submit to the constituted authorities. This study, however, treated the question as to the limitation of this overemphasized overblown submission to the governing powers in any democratic dispensation away from the imperial societies of Paul's time. Basically, the selected text was exegeted in the course of the study which the seven verses of the pericope were analytically appraised in the context of the study. The result of the exegesis was used to treat salient issues in the Nigerian polity from two different perspectives viz., the civil society and the pericope as well as the Nigerian government and the civil society organizations. The study unveiled with dismay the uncordial relationship the present administration has consistently had with civil organizations in the Nigerian society contrary to what the experience has been from the inception of the country and regrets as well as decries the pathetic aftermath of such. The work concludes that such an undemocratic attitude on the part of the present administration is highly frowned upon and recommends that the Church and civil organization societies need to disallow such to dissuade them in their synergetic efforts to enforce good governance in the country.

**Keywords:** Religion, Civil Society, Christian ethics, Nigerian Polity

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## INTRODUCTION

Addressing Nigerian polity based on Romans 13:1-7 could be a herculean task especially given certain notions that often trail the interpretation of the pericope. Some experts have often used it to justify various political orders, whether benevolent or oppressive. It has allegedly been used to justify Hitler's obnoxious reign in the 1930s and 1940s during which many Jews were massacred. It is unequivocal that some may have equally used it to justify the cruel and oppressive ruling of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 when he ordered his army to shoot his protesting people with helicopter gunships and heavy artillery to retain power.<sup>1</sup> This work is therefore poised to address the big question as to what extent believers or the general public have to submit to any constituted authority, especially the civil

<sup>1</sup> George O. Folarin, "The Challenge of Romans 13: 1-7 to Civil Governance in Nigeria" in J. K. Ayantayo, Oyinloye A. Dada, & Helen A. Labeodan (eds.), *Religion and Governance in Nigeria*, Vol. 4 (Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 2012), 362.

governments in a democratic setting other than that of Paul's immediate audience. Leadership in Paul's time was imperial where the emperor reserved the right to lord it over the citizenry whereas the people were expected to succumb to his whims and caprices. This was particularly because it was apparent that they were unentitled to anything, not even the life which God has given to all freely (cf. Matt. 14: 4-12; 1 Kgs 21:5-13).<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the active synergetic engagements of two variables, religion and civil societies, of seeming similar thrusts and focuses instigated the desire to undertake this study. While the dissimilarity of the duo is basically in the esoteric nature of religion, which is not characteristic of civil society, the similarity of both is essentially in the social salvific tendencies of the two institutions. In history, both have salvaged societies in the past and brought about hope to the common humanity and the weak in the nations where applied.<sup>3</sup> The redemptive nature of the two-of-a-kind cut across several parts of life endeavour, viz., economic, social, or even political, etc., to ensure emancipation of the human race.

In the course of this work, as already noted above, Paul's exhortation to Roman Christians in 13:1-7 is considered appropriate for the study. Nwanguma shows in one of his books that this Romans text is intriguing in several regards.<sup>4</sup> It cuts across numerous, if not all, facets of man's endeavours. In several circumstances, Paul appears to be God's mouthpiece in various Christian matters. He touched virtually, perhaps, all aspects of human concerns, viz. social, religious, economic, intellectual, and even political. In the text, he endeavoured to exhort the Christian faithful towards practical engagement with society, especially regarding civic responsibilities. Consequently, he commanded the believers to submit to the state. His instruction to the believer to be submissive or loyal to the authorities has often been misinterpreted by people from different sectors, whether political, sacerdotal or the like. Tax payment to the state by the believer is a consensus view among some scholars using this command of his. It could also mean a commitment to integrity and good governance which may naturally engender some kind of dissidence on the part of dissatisfied members of the public among which are some concerned Christians. Be that as it may, his word here "must not be taken as blind support of totalitarianism" amidst tyrant governance, hence "resistance of such for moral and religious reasons"<sup>5</sup> would quite be apt (cf. Acts 5:29), because the Christians' question must not be "Is it expedient, safe, or popular among other humans?" but "What is right in the sight of God?" (cf. Gal. 1:10).<sup>6</sup> The later question along with the statement that totalitarianism deserves passionate resistance from concerned members of the society constitutes the main theme of this work given the maxim that government is meant to be such that ensures equity and accountability punishing offenders but praising law abiding citizens. Indeed, this is where religion and civil societies tend to meet and the same is the reason for this study.

### **Exegesis of the Text: Romans 13:1-7**

This passage is one of Christianity's most referred verses when it comes to believers' attitudes towards civil government. Paul here urged his recipients to be loyal to the government of the day because there is no power except that ordained by God. Beale and Carson hold that Paul premised the passage on "deep roots in biblical thought and early Judaism." To them, this is particularly traceable to the "Jeremianic injunction to the Judean exiles to 'seek the welfare of the city'" (Jer. 29:1-23) where they were exiled to.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in Daniel's narrative where Nebuchadnezzar learnt that God gives

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<sup>2</sup> Chibuzo I. Nwanguma & Alexander E. Attah, "Peter's Theology of Good Citizenship in 1 Peter 2:13-17 As Motivation for Christian Participation in Political Issues in Nigeria," *ACU Journal of Humanities (ACUJOH)*, A Journal of Faculty of Humanities, 1 no 2, (2018): 184.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew H. Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1999), 185.

<sup>4</sup> Chibuzo I. Nwanguma, *Biblical Missions and Church Growth Strategies: the Nigerian Examples*, (Beau Basin: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2018), 67.

<sup>5</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 283.

<sup>6</sup> Donald C. Stamps, *Life in the Spirit Study Bible (formerly Full Life Study Bible)*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 1678.

<sup>7</sup> Nwanguma, *Biblical Missions and Church Growth Strategies: the Nigerian Examples*, 32.

sovereignty over the “kingdom of human beings” to whomever he pleases, a lesson which Belshazzar his son failed to learn and was doomed (Dan 4:25, 32; 5:21, 22-28)<sup>8</sup> is also part of the basis for the pericope, according to them. Taking their view for it, the big question is what if the government goes contrary to God’s way even where he (God) would have set such up? Put in plainer language, what if the government is tyrannical? These two-in-one questions and the like constitute the main thrust of this work and requisite Christian answers will be provided in this segment and the subsequent ones.

Before any further statement in this segment, a brief historical background is very necessary. It is generally agreed that this letter was written about 58 A.D.,<sup>9</sup> four or five years after the edict of Emperor Claudius, by which all the Jews were banished from Rome.<sup>10</sup> And since in those early times the Christians were generally confused with the Jews, it is likely that both groups were included in this decree. It is also possible that the reason this edict was issued was because the Jews were engaged in continuous disturbances under their leader Chrestus<sup>11</sup> (cf. Acts 18:2). That the Jews were in general seditious people is clear enough from every part of their own history.<sup>12</sup> They had the most rooted aversion to the pagan government; and it was an erroneous maxim with them that the world was given to the Israelites; that they should have supreme rule everywhere, and that the Gentiles should be their vassals. With such political notions, grounded on their native restlessness,<sup>13</sup> it is unequivocal that such gave cause of suspicion to the Roman government, who would be glad of an opportunity to expel from the city persons whom they considered dangerous to its own peace and security; nor is it unreasonable on this standpoint to suppose, with several other scholars, that the Christians, under a notion of being the special people of God, and the subjects of His kingdom alone, might be in danger of being infected with those unruly and rebellious sentiments. Therefore, the Apostle disclosed to them that they were, nonetheless their honours and privileges as Christians, bound by the strongest obligations of conscience to be subject to the civil government.

To present a coherent and meaningful exegesis of Romans 13:1-7, there is a need to present a formal structuration of the unit generally recognized by commentators as the most notable Christian civic responsibility which reflects the famous word of Jesus, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Matt. 22:21) as follows:

**Vv. 1-2:** God ordains government and disloyalty to it is to God

**Vv. 3-4:** The purpose of governance

**Vv. 5:** Loyalty should be natural

**Vv. 6-7:** Civic responsibilities include payment of taxes

**Vv. 1-2:** The phrase Πᾶσα ψυχὴ (*papaasa psuchē*), in v. 1 suggests that the author addresses “everyone,” unbelievers inclusive. Some other scholars are of the opinion that the pericope is exclusively addressed to the church. The first injunction is that of “submission” ὑποτασῶμαι, (*hypotassēthē*) which is from the verb ὑποτάσσω. The word ὑποτασῶμαι, could be middle, but it is probably passive since the aorist form of the verb is always passive.<sup>14</sup> According to G. O. Folarin,<sup>15</sup> if taken as middle, the word (ὑποτασῶμαι) means, “Let him submit himself.” He further notes that if taken as passive, then it means “Let him be submissive” or “Let him be made to submit himself.” Thus, the word refers to a willing disposition in which a person places himself under someone else rather than being forced to do so. Harrison and Hanger note that Paul’s position is that God ordains every

<sup>8</sup> G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (eds.), *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 681.

<sup>9</sup> Adam Clarke, *Electronic Database Commentary*, (Biblesoft Inc., Copyright 1996, 2003, 2005, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> J. I. H. McDonald, “Romans 13:1-7: A Test for New Testament Interpretation,” *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989), 546.

<sup>11</sup> Clarke, *Electronic Database Commentary*.

<sup>12</sup> Solomon Andria, *Romans*, (Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbook, 2012), 236.

<sup>13</sup> Harry R. Boer, *A Short History of the Early Church*, (Ibadan: DayStar Press, 1976), 21.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas J Moo. *Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 797.

<sup>15</sup> A Telephone interview with George O. Folarin, an Associate Professor of New Testament in Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, on Frida, February 7, 2020.

authority without exception. They note further that Satan only exercises the power given to him by God (cf. Luke 4:6).<sup>16</sup> In Christian theology, the power and influence the devil wields over humans has been retrieved from him on the Calvary Cross by Christ and has been handed over to those who believe in him (cf. Gal. 3: 13; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 4:7-11). One can thus conclude from the above materials that the power and influence which Satan wields over human beings is restricted to those that have not accessed the saving grace of Christ though he tempts the believers in Christ very sorely. All the same, God has so arranged the world from the beginning – at the creation, by all means, if you like – as to make it possible to render Him service within it, and for this reason, He created superiors and subordinates.

As stated above, Paul re-echoes in that epistle that the saying of Jesus that his disciples “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Matt. 22:21).<sup>17</sup> Such is well animated in v. 2 when he says that he who “resists the authority resists what God has appointed.” In the second half of the verse the author shifts from the singular “he who rebels” to the plural, οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες, (hoi de anthestēkotes; “those who have taken a stand against it”) signifying the possibility of an organized rebellion by a group. Every existing sovereign is a representation of God for peace and order in the society, and resisting it is like kicking against God himself and any such action hardly goes unpunished by God. At one time or the other when such happened in the Bible days, the consequences were regrettable. For example, the rebellion that led to the sacking of Jerusalem vis-à-vis the dispersion of the nation in 70 AD was avoidable.<sup>18</sup> The issue as to whether rebellion could be justified is not what one may want to spend time on at this level of the exegesis till the exercise is through.

**Vv. 3-4:** As a twenty-first-century commentator, one notes the depth of these two verses. Reading the verses from the perspective of the government is not tyrannical, it is easy to agree with the author’s point of view. But if Harrison and Hanger are right that “a few years after he [the author] wrote these words [in Rom 13:3-40, Nero launched a persecution against the church at Rome; [and] multitudes lost their lives,” then the statement is stressful to interpret. Some other emperors also lashed out against Christians in several waves of persecution for more than two centuries.<sup>19</sup> Whenever such was the case, the church referred to Romans 13:1-7 as a guide to the believers to endure all pernicious hardships under any such a nefarious tyrannical government because they that suffer with Him will reign with Him (cf. 1 Tim. 2:12)? Nelson’s comment on the passage attempts an apt answer to these questions:

Ultimate authority belongs to God, as Paul pointed out. But that raises a tough question for the believers, then as now: If governments are subordinate to God and accountable to Him for what they do, then aren’t there limits on the extent to which believers must submit to them? Aren’t there times when Christians need to obey God rather than human officials? If so, shouldn’t the church pay attention to whether any particular civil government is usurping God’s power and undermining His purposes rather than carrying out its intended functions?<sup>20</sup>

All the questions posed in this quotation fall in the category of such that is called apparent interrogation – questions that are suggestive of their answers. Such is often asked to ginger up the addressee to necessary actions. As anachronistic as all this may sound to some, the reality this work addresses, demands some practical interpolations. Following the stance of Nwanguma and Attah,<sup>21</sup> if

<sup>16</sup> Everett F. Harrison & Donald A. Hanger, “Romans” in T. Longman III & D. E. Garland (eds.) *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* Vol. 11 (rev. ed.), (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 195.

<sup>17</sup> Harrison & Hanger, “Romans” 192.

<sup>18</sup> Boer, *A Short History of the Early Church*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Harrison & Hanger, “Romans”, 196.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Nelson, *The Word in Life Study Bible: Discover the Truths of God’s Word for You and Your World*, (Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 564.

<sup>21</sup> Nwanguma & Attah, Peter’s Theology of Good Citizenship in 1 Peter 2:13-17, 179.

Paul wrote his exhortation today, especially in reference to the Nigerian situation, he would have said something other than asking the believer to submit to the ordinances regardless of the approach. This is because believers are not under the government of kings today but in the era of democracy when all are equal before the law. As a matter of fact, in a subsequent paragraph, the questions were suitably addressed; and thus, it is read:

The early church had to wrestle with these issues. Roman's government was far more tolerant of Christians when Paul likely wrote Romans 13 than in the 90s, when John penned Revelation. Within 30 years, believers changed their view of Rome from God's 'minister for good' (v. 4) to a usurper of power that deserved to fall. In fact, the book of Revelation is seen at one level as the story of Rome's fall.<sup>22</sup>

As noted earlier, there is only one way one has to view the whole issue here. Paul, no doubt, would have had the true government setting where God is the overlord, that is, the state as functioning in terms of fulfilling the ideal for the government which includes punishing the offender and praising or rewarding adequately the law-abiding citizens of the society. As a church, the believers are not encouraged to lead any rebellion but could engage in calling any straying government to order as citizens of the Commonwealth.

The Apostle starts v.4 with a very pointed clause, θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν (*Theou gar diakonos estin soi eis to agthon* "For he is the minister of God to thee for good"). Here the apostle puts the character of the ruler in the strongest possible light. He is the minister of God - the office is by divine appointment: the man who is worthy of the office will act in conformity to the will of God. And since the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears open to their cry, consequently the ruler will be the minister of God to them for good. Paul presents the state as "God's servant" (*diakonos*) for just one reason, the servant of God has no option but to do that which was good. This verse implies that the believer ought to respect the established authorities because the consequences where the reverse is the case are often regrettable."<sup>23</sup>

Many arguments have been adduced in reference to this verse and the entire pericope. To some, represented by Uzoigwe<sup>24</sup> and Chukwuma-Ofo<sup>25</sup> Paul was not necessarily referring to personal crime but rather warning against any action that could constitute instigation of revolution against the state. Whichever, Harrison and Hanger in their postulation particularly call readers' attention to the fact that the term *liu gladii* referred only to the power given to provincial governors who had Roman citizen troops under their command to maintain military discipline without being hampered by the provisions of the law of *provocation* ("right of appeal"). That being the case, it is also necessary to state that the excesses in those days were far cries compared to what is prevalent in the current Nigerian administration where the executive uses its powers to maim and frustrate his perceived enemies at will, marred nepotism, tribalism, inter alia. Such unconstitutional practices need organized attention by well-meaning citizens of the nation.

**V. 5:** Paul means that the believer should be subject to the government not only because of fear of punishment should one break the law, but necessary because of the fear of God, who knows the hearts of men. This makes keeping the laws of the land not just a matter of outward compliance, but basically of inward obedience to God. Basically, he tended to call the believers' attention to the fact that "they have no need to fear possible punishment by authorities because they are in peace with God."<sup>26</sup> In

<sup>22</sup> Nelson, *The Word in Life Study Bible: Discover the Truths of God's Word for You and Your World*, 564.

<sup>23</sup> Folarin, "The Challenge of Romans 13: 1-7 to Civil Governance in Nigeria", 373.

<sup>24</sup> Amara M. Uzoigwe, *The Nigerian Christian Attitude to Civic Duties: An Exegetical Application of Romans 13:1-7*, "A Master's Degree Dissertation presented to the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for in Religion (New Testament)," (2011), 48.

<sup>25</sup> Amara M. Chukwuma-Ofo, "Civic Duties as Matrix for Nation Building Insight from Romans 13:1-7" *JMEA: Journal of Moral Education in Africa*, 3 (2017), 100.

<sup>26</sup> Andria, *Romans*, 239.

other words, Paul's counsel was that loyalty or submission should not be an issue to the believer because it is part of the natural traits characteristic of anyone who is Christocentric in his attitude to life hence his appeal to the *συνείδησιν* (*suneidēsin* "conscience"), the general sense of right and wrong of the believer as well as the general humanity.

**Vv. 6-7:** Paul brings his exhortation to an end with a bit of advice which one may call two broad counsels namely, "pay taxes," and "pay them their dues." In other words, *this is the conclusion of the matter; endeavour to give them that which is exclusively theirs accordingly* as the details were given subsequently. As the civil government is an order of God, the ministers of state must be at considerable expense in providing for the safety and defence of the community. Those on whose behalf these expenses are incurred must defray that expense, and hence nothing can be more reasonable than impartial and moderate taxation. By means of this the expenses of the state may be defrayed, and the various officers, whether civil or military, who are employed for the service of the public, be adequately remunerated. However, "All this is just and right, but there is no insinuation in the apostle's words on behalf of extravagant and oppressive taxation for the support of unprincipled and unnecessary wars; or the pensioning of corrupt or useless men"<sup>27</sup> as Clarke's opinion here basically summarizes the thrust of this paper. It, indeed, answers the question as to when should the people obey or submit. What characterizes the so-called government's revenues? Do the people not reserve the right to demand accountability for the taxes they pay especially in Nigeria where public office holding is primarily for selfish aggrandizements (for gain and not for service)? When should the people unanimously resist and oppose the government's financial improprieties and excesses in virtually all aspects of its operations? All these questions beg for answers and adequate answers to them will greatly proffer solutions to the avoidable sufferings of the multiplied masses of Nigerian citizens.

Paul, in verse seven, spelt out details of what he meant by giving to everyone what you owe: if what you owe are taxes, pay taxes; if it is revenue, pay revenue; if respect, then give respect; and if honour, then honour those that deserve it. Everyone here refers to all levels of authority, whether local, regional, or central, and of course, to all types of positions in the state. Every one of these represents God in its right. The word, *ὀφειλάς*, (*opheilas*, translated "due" or "debt" or "what you owe") needs a little attention. If taken literally, it expresses the idea of one in debt as in buying something from someone and delaying payment of it, or borrowing money that is not paid. However, the context here is rather that of "one meeting his [or her] obligations in an honourable fashion."<sup>28</sup> It also implies that one does not have to pay whatever authorities may choose to demand, for example in form of bribes but only such that is right according to the law. With respect to Paul's reference to respect, it is a consensus view of scholars that he meant "respect" or "fear" applicable only to God rather than public officials (cf. 1 Pet. 2:17) where the verb *fobeomai phobeomai* ("fear") is used in reference to God, in contrast, to honour paid to supreme earthly rulers whereas "honour" *τιμῆ* (*timē*) is identical in its import and applies to those in public office. This infers that the respect given to immortal God must not be given to fallible human beings whose decisions and conclusions vis-à-vis actions are often marred with unprecedented errors, and such errors call for rebuttal actions.

### **Civil Society and Romans 13:1-7 in Relation to the Nigerian Polity**

Before a word in this segment, one or two questions need to be posed. One needs to ask, how has civil society fared in the Nigerian state since the inception of the nation? In which way do the message of Paul in Romans 13:1-7 and the activities of the civil society meet? Answering the questions from the first, it is nice to start by pointing to the nationalist movement activities in West Africa and Nigeria in particular given the terms of the question. The nationalists were more for civil society activism. Coleman accounts that the movement started "from West African Students Union's (WASU's) demands for immediate internal self-government to the more moderate proposals of the Nigerian

<sup>27</sup> Clarke, "Electronic Database Commentary."

<sup>28</sup> Andria, *Romans*, 240.

Youth Movement (NYM) that educated Nigerians to be given a greater share in the government.”<sup>29</sup> This conglomeration of youths consistently advanced its agitations very strongly against the various constitutions of the British colonial administrations over their policies that were anti-African especially as their various constitutions were “arbitrarily imposed upon them”<sup>30</sup> claiming the same were marred with falsehood. Price further records that the Richards constitution of 1946 was such that eventually brought the nationalists together regardless of their ethnic differences, at least, to view the antics of the colonialists from the same perspective. Put in his words,

Most nationalists, however, agreed that the most important innovation of the constitution was bringing the whole of Nigerians under one legislative authority. In this way, Richards had accomplished his objective, the promotion of unity of Nigeria. Far from intending the break-up Nigeria, he himself has stated that his Constitution was based on the fact that ultimate power resided at the centre.<sup>31</sup>

Although the constitution, kind of, recognised the centrality of power and thus enforced unity among the various regions, the constitution raised other issues among the nationalists. It was clear to them that the so-called assumption that the Constitution had achieved the best none had ever attempted was rather false. The aggrieved nationalists of all regions especially the Western and Eastern “camps” saw it as being marred with “gross inadequacies” as it failed to satisfy any of the nationalists’ simple demands of reasonable assumption of responsibilities by the way of feeling the pulses of their own affairs and welfares (the welfare of their own people). Like Pope St Gregory initiated the civil society movement in Poland already cited earlier in the second segment, the Nigerian Youths Movement initiatives metamorphosed into different political parties that committedly fought for Nigerian independence in 1960. Azikiwe, in particular, launched an aggressive attack on the colonialists otherwise branded the “Zikist Movement” which later came to be known as the “Freedom Movement,” the popular rise of militant nationalism according to Coleman. The detribalised movement as Coleman would put it, had among its intentions, to defend Azikiwe as well as take his vision to a greater height. Coleman writes,

The organisation came into being early in 1946 with the pledge: Nevermore shall we allow this evangelist (Azikiwe) to cry his voice hoarse when millions of youths of Nigeria can take up his whisper and echo it all over the world.... He has lived a life that must live as long as Nigeria lives.<sup>32</sup>

Azikiwe’s *West African Pilot* was the chief organ with which the movement’s political philosophy was published till the whole thing became a pan-African affair. Virtually all then known institutions were involved in this agitation including the Church and labour organisations, especially the Nigerian Labour Congress.<sup>33</sup> Whether the Nigerian Youths Movement (NYM) which operated under the aegis of the National Council of the Cameroons and Nigeria (NCNC), the National Church of Nigeria (NCN), or the Labour Organisations especially the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), etc., Nigeria today eventually had to come into existence through the civil society organisation though such would not have been the nomenclature under which they operated.

Subsequently, the civil society organisations have contributed immensely towards the art of putting Nigeria under the control of its citizenry popularly tagged democratization by allowing them to participate in government or decision-making processes in a free and equal way as well as to ensure sustainable democracy in the country. For instance, labour organizations, student associations, and the

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<sup>29</sup> James S. Coleman, *Nigerian Background to Nationalism*, (California: University of California Press, 1958), 271.

<sup>30</sup> J. C. Price, *Political Institutions of West Africa* (3rd ed.), (London: Hutchinson and Co (Publishers) Ltd., 1977), 59.

<sup>31</sup> Price, *Political Institutions of West Africa* (3rd ed.), 60.

<sup>32</sup> Coleman, *Nigerian Background to Nationalism*, 298.

<sup>33</sup> Coleman, *Nigerian Background to Nationalism*, 302- 304.

media provided strong leadership and organized protests against unpopular policies during the first civilian administration from 1960 to 1966.<sup>34</sup> In other words, civil society actors in Nigeria have been in the vanguard of the democratic struggle, especially immediately after Independence in 1960. As already seen earlier, prior to independence, civil society actors emanating from political change and ending colonial rule, were already in place; however tenuous in Nigeria. In the ethos of the early civil society groups of the pre-independence era, so many civil society organizations emerged in the 1990s as democratic activists. Such mobilised all within their reach to wrestle the then unfortunate protracted military rule to a halt. Omede and Bakare further relate that,

CSOs have played vital roles in the enthronement of democracy as well as, the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Many of these groups like the Campaign for Democracy (CD), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) and Civil Liberties Organisations (CLO) were instrumental in the restoration of civil rule. It would be recalled, that between 1993 and 1999, in collaboration with the Nigeria Labour Congress, which is another civil society organisation, these groups fought the Nigerian military to a standstill. They mobilised students and workers for civil disobedience, strikes and protest marches across the country.<sup>35</sup>

Even after a democratically elected government had been achieved, the civil societies have consistently played the role of politico-social watchdogs to control the government's excesses. For example, a decision was taken by the Nigerian government to halt a hefty fuel subsidy on January 1, 2012, which prompted one of the largest and most coordinated protests in Nigeria's history. The removal of the fuel subsidy with the claim that the Government was spending more than 25% of its annual budget on the fuel subsidy and disregarding the negotiations with the labour unions and civil society erupted in a national commotion witnessed by an immediate increase in the price of fuel, transportation and food. The abrupt nature of the removal of the subsidy which was seen by some as an act of insensitivity by a government that is out of touch with the economic struggles of the majority of the Nigerian people was welcomed by tens of thousands of Nigerians with protests against the removal of the subsidy. Even before the removal of the subsidy, activists like Femi Falana, Olisa Agbakoba, Festus Okoye and several other activists, held a meeting with President Jonathan and his aides, and resoundingly rejected the planned removal of the fuel subsidy on Saturday 10th December 2011,<sup>36</sup> which eventually led to the protest. This protest brought the already executed agenda of the government to increase the suffering of the Nigerian people to a halt. Thanks to the organized civil society protests.

This is where this author has some serious questions. If in history civil organisations have committedly fought and brought about stability to the Nigerian polity as regards civility, why would the incumbent governments (especially the present Nigerian government) devote their energies to destroying the activities of the civil societies? This is either as no government organisation or pressure groups which dedicate themselves to ensuring good governance, best practices in the society, equity and fair play in the polity. This question will be duly attended to later in this work.

A critical question that needs to be posed at this point of the study is in what way do the functions of the civil society organisations intertwine with the exhortation of Paul to the Roman Christians in

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<sup>34</sup> Adedoyin J. Omede and Adebola R. Bakare, "The Impact of Civil Society Organizations on Sustainable Development in Developing Countries: The Nigerian Experience" retrieved from the net on 2nd of May, 2020,

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v8i1.14> , *An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*, 8 (1), no. 32, (2014): 213.

<sup>35</sup> Omede and Bakare, "The Impact of Civil Society Organizations on Sustainable Development in Developing Countries: The Nigerian Experience", 213.

<sup>36</sup> Sahara Reporters, "Civil Society Activists Reject Jonathan's Pitch to Withdraw Fuel Subsidies" retrieved from the net on 2nd of May, 2020, <http://saharareporters.com/news-page/civil-society-activists-reject-jonathan%E2%80%99s-pitch-withdraw-fuel-subsidies> (2011).



Romans 13:1-7? Attempting an answer to this question, a Pastoral rule of Pope St Gregory cited by Kukah in one of his numerous works will be of immense assistance:

A religious leader should be careful in deciding when to remain silent and be sure when to say something useful when deciding to speak. In this way, he will avoid saying things that would better not be said, or leaving unsaid things that need to be said ... ill-advised silence can leave people in error when they could have been shown where they were wrong. Negligent religious leaders are often afraid to speak freely and say what needs to be said for fear of losing favour with people ... they are acting like hirelings, because behind the wall of silence is like taking flight at the approach of the wolf. ... If a religious leader is afraid to say what is right, what else can his silence mean but that he has taken flight? Whereas if he stands firm in defence of his flock, he is building up a wall for the house against its enemies. Anyone entering the priesthood accepts the office of herald and must by his words, prepare the way for the terrible judgement of one who follows. That is why the Holy Spirit settled on the first religious leaders in form of tongues because those whom he fills, he fills with his own eloquence.<sup>37</sup>

The senior clergy's position in the quote above sounds so much like most of the assertions in the exegesis section above. If the exegesis is well understood, it would be clear to the reader that Paul stylishly struck a balance in his exhortation to the Romans. This is very noticeable in the words, "For rulers are not a terror to good conduct ... Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good" (Romans 13:3-4a). The quick reaction here is what if the rulers unspeakably turned to terrors, to good works, indulging in the art and act of vilifying saints and canonising criminals? Then, the ruler has fallen short of his divine mandate as well as his constitutional duties;<sup>38</sup> and such goes contrary to the thinking of Paul as he wrote to the Romans. This, of course, is most certainly the converse of Paul's exhortation. The rule of Pope St Gregory, therefore, comes to the fore. The religious leaders and the concerned men of stature in the society have to vehemently come to the rescue of the voiceless masses.

### **The Nigerian Government and Civil Societies in the Recent Times**

As already disclosed so far in virtually all the segments, especially in relation to the Nigerian state, the civil society organisations have several times contributed optimally to the actualisation of any administration in the nation. This was seen in the colonial era, post-independence period, and post-civil wartime which led to the actualisation of civil rule in 1979. Even during the unpopular military rules that commenced with the very unfortunate coup d'état of December 31, 1983, led by General Muhammadu Buhari, civil society organisations of all kinds have been keen to see a democratically elected government in Nigeria. Although governments all over the globe try in some regard to resist the activities of civil society organisations, especially where they perceive some dangers to society, that of the Nigerian government, particularly since the inception of this democracy in May 1999 is very hostile to the civil society organizations. In the case of Nigeria, the scheme has been that of utterly destroying the civil society organisations in their bid to strengthen the democracy which they fought tirelessly to ensure the restoration of the country.

Beginning with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, in his eight-year term of office (1999-2007), he is reported to have consistently boasted of having "broken the backbones"<sup>39</sup> of one civil society

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<sup>37</sup> Michael Kennedy & Maurice Simpson, "Church and Nation in Socialist Poland," in Peter Markel and Ninian Smart (eds.): *Religion and Politics in the Modern World* (New York: University Press, 1983), p. 117, (A reference to the Pastoral Rule of Pope Gregory, The Divine Office, *Book Two*, Vatican City 3, (1974): 609.

<sup>38</sup> The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chapter II, Subsection 17, paragraphs a-h (As Amended) with the National Industrial Court signed (4th March, 2011), 21.

<sup>39</sup> It was a common statement of Olusegun Obasanjo in his 8 years as Nigerian president that he had succeeded in destroying one civil society organization or the others even where it was the same civil society organizations who believe in democracy that brought him to office.

organisation or the other including Nigerian Labour Congress that was on the front line in the fight against the regrettable protracted military rule (1983-1999) and for resisting most of the excesses of his administration. Obasanjo's disposition to "break the backbone" of anything was borne out of many factors: a) the myriad of oppositions that persistently engaged anything to undermine his administration under the guise of civil society organisation, b) his military background made his adaptation to the notion of rule of law which is the bedrock to democracy very difficult. However, he had listening ears. At least, he usually had monthly interactive sections with the society which he tagged "Nigeria let's talk". During those sessions, the masses aired their views on serious nagging matters in the nation to which he duly responded. The assessment of him regarding his relationship with the society would hardly be 0% and could not be 100%. A fair rating of him in this respect can hardly be below 50%. The same cannot be said of Mr Umaru Musa Yar'adua in this regard because he was often sick throughout his brief time in office and eventually died. However, the majority of the Nigerian population including this author admired his style of governance and terribly regret his untimely death. His fair disposition to the rule of law, however, suffices to conclude that his relationship with the civil society organisations was cordial. This is particularly evident in his decision to resolve the youth's restiveness in the Niger Delta region. His successor, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GEJ), was equally fair in his relationship with the civil societies according to A. G. Alamu.<sup>40</sup>

The most opposed among all that have ruled Nigeria, he stuck to the rule of law following the example of his "Boss."<sup>41</sup> Even when his administration attempted to remove fuel subsidy, his quick acceding to the voice of the masses was acclaimed by the general society even among some of his political enemies. Amidst the overwhelming criticism of him on the media either television, radio, print, or social media, etc. he was very accommodating and he did not brand such as "hate speeches" as has been the case in recent years. His cordial relationship with the masses or the civil society organisation could be seen as being epitomised when he willingly conceded the seeming defeat to the opposition party in the 2015 general election. In his speech, he made his classical statement, "No one's ambition is worth the blood of any Nigerian citizen." Thus, he declined to use his power of incumbency to fight his opponent to surrender. Analysts of all kinds, political, social, religious, etc. commend him greatly for this gesture of his and wish that other African rulers could follow his example. As a matter of fact, none among all that the author consulted across the nation (elites and scholars in politics and international relations) said anything other than the fact that Jonathan (GEJ) is a model with respect to his cordial relationship with the citizens and the civil society organisations.

What has the situation been like since 2015 when the current administration took office? Just as the case of the event of August 1985 (when General Ibrahim Babangida overthrew General Buhari in a coup d'état, whose administration was received by Nigerians with great ovations and eventually turned into a regime that the nation highly regretted in its history), so is this administration. All that Nigeria tried to escape from and thus overwhelmingly turned out in masses, as it were, to vote in this administration into power has not turned out well for the masses. On the 29th of May, 2020, to be precise, a radio show on Nigerian Info 99.3 FM had an open programme where Nigerians were called to rate this current administration, and none of the callers rated it up to 20% in any aspect of its agenda, viz. security, fight against corruption, job and wealth creation, provision of enabling environment for free flow in peaceful co-existence, among others. One young man from Abeokuta, the capital of Ogun State by the name of Kayode called and apologised to Nigerians for being at the forefront during the campaign to bring this administration to power in 2015. By the way, it will be nice if one disallows any of these to distract him from the subject matter of this article and the very point of departure here.

How has this administration related to the Nigerian people? What has its relationship with the civil society organisations been? One of the respondents, Dr A. G. Alamu does not mince words as he traced the government's relationship with the masses to the very month in office when a seeming decree

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<sup>40</sup> Excerpts of a telephone interview with Akiti G. Alamu, (A Professor of Comparative Religion in the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin) Saturday, May 30, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Goodluck E. Jonathan often referred to the Umaru Musa Yar'adua as his Boss.

against public opinions regarding the administration was made hence any such was branded “hate speeches”<sup>42</sup> which the national assembly had to deliberate upon throughout the first five years in office. Amaku has a similar rating of President Muhammadu Buhari’s administration. In his words, “He does not regard civil societies. He is not cordial and is positively dismissive and completely unattached. He regards them with disdain and even an unengaged hostility.”<sup>43</sup> These two elites represent a myriad of Nigerian enlightened citizens with good possession of knowledge on the issue under deliberation, and the consensus view is that President Buhari and his team are indifferent to the voice of the Nigerian people. The worst of this all is the ploy to enrol the federal academic staff of universities in Nigeria into its Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS) just like the staff of other Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). This has been an issue since October 31, 2019. According to the leadership of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the scheme is to clamp down the activities of the union hence continually making the association unable to fight for its right and by extension, the rights of the general Nigerian citizens.

### **Possible Role of the Church in the National Polity**

Apart from their sacerdotal responsibilities, the clergies, whether Christian or Islam (though the activities of the Islamic clergies may not be discussed here for lack of time and space), need to intervene in the affairs of the land where they are based (Jer. 29:7). For instance, the contributions of Pope John Paul II is quite instrumental to the transformation of his country.<sup>44</sup> In the words of Kukah, “Polish priests were very active in the liberation struggles and Catholicism came to have a special place in the newly independent Poland ... the Catholic hierarchy was quite involved in the Polish resistance movement.”<sup>45</sup> Judging from the background of Pope John Paul II, there is no excuse for the Nigerian clergy especially the renowned ones as to why they cannot intervene in the transformation of their country. The quote above makes it clear. The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, came from a background of struggle as is evident in Nigeria today. The visit of the Pontiff to his homeland in 1979 catalysed the Polish political transformation movements in the sense that “the organisation of the visit added impetus and confidence to the struggle within civil society in Poland.”<sup>46</sup> For instance, Polish workers became more confident in the righteousness of their cause especially as it had become obvious that they could count on the almost total support of the Church hierarchy.

The role of the clergy and the church in the emancipation of South Africa from the apartheid regime is another example to note. Prominent among those who fought for the liberation of black Africans in South Africa was Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu. He was to South Africans what Pope John Paul was to the Polish people. Put in the words of Kukah,

In his way, Archbishop Tutu was able to do for the black people South Africa what the Pope had done for his people in Poland, though in a smaller but no less complex way too. Unlike the Pope, Archbishop Tutu may not have had a Vatican platform to stand on, but he lived with his people!<sup>47</sup>

Tutu’s stance on South Africa’s freedom was a phenomenal deed. Upon the killing of Steve Biko in 1977 because of his anti-apartheid programme by the South African government, the Christian community in the country got forced to address the question of the real role and place of the churches in the liberation of their people. Events which propelled and shaped the thinking of the black community greatly centred on the personality of Archbishop Tutu. According to Kukah, “It was clear

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<sup>42</sup> Excerpts of a telephone interview with Akiti G. Alamu, Saturday, May 30, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Portions of a whatsapp conversation with Kinsley Amaku, Senior Legal Adviser to the 8th Senate President on May 30, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society*, 178.

<sup>45</sup> Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society*, 179.

<sup>46</sup> Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society*, 180.

<sup>47</sup> Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society*, 189.

that someone had to capture and colonise the moral high ground in order to secure some place for civil activities of sorts in confronting apartheid”<sup>48</sup> which Tutu aptly procured.

The question then is, are there no clergies of the status of Archbishop Tutu in Nigeria today who can influence liberation programmes that can emancipate the country from the bad and oppressive governance of the political class in Nigeria? The answer is an emphatic yes! There are so many of such in Nigeria. Pastors W. F. Kumuyi and E. O. Adebayo, for instance, stand the chance and even more to salvage the situation of things in Nigeria today if they desire.

## CONCLUSION

This study looked at the synergetic programme where religious groups would join forces with civil society organisations in ensuring a healthy and equitable society. Such was appraised as the combined efforts of the duo were examined regarding the experiences in Poland, South Africa, and the West African nations, particularly Nigeria. As a study in Christian studies in the sphere of Biblical Studies, the epistolary counsel of Paul to the Roman Church in the first seven verses of Romans 13 was exegeted. The ideal ethos of those in government as regards their representative status under God was addressed and the appropriate position was taken.

The study reveals that none of the Nigerian governments, whether past or present ever enjoyed the input of civil society organisations. Even in the first republic, independence was achieved through the immense confrontational resistant activities of the civil society organizations against ravaging colonialists and their irresponsive government. Although not easy in some instances, the relationship between the civil societies organization in Nigeria has been reasonably fair. But the present administration of Mr Muhammadu Buhari has been odiously unfair to the masses and highly unduly biased against academics with whom past administrations had cordially worked. The position of this paper, therefore, is that the Church along with other religious groups needs to team up with civil society organisations and address such ungodly rulership.

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<sup>48</sup> Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society*, 190.

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