

CHRISTIAN SUBMISSION TO CIVIL AUTHORITIES (ROMANS 13:1-7) AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN NIGERIA: A SYMBIOTIC ANALYSIS

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DOI:<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11065218>

Abstract: This paper explores the intricate relationship between Christian teachings on submission to civil authorities, as outlined in Romans 13:1-7, and the quest for freedom of religion in Nigeria. Romans 13:1-7 provides a biblical foundation for the submission of Christians to governing authorities, emphasizing the role of government as an institution established by God. This scriptural mandate intersects with the broader discourse on religious freedom, which is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Nigerian constitution. The study begins by delving into the biblical passage and analyzing the principles of submission, obedience, and the Christian's responsibility toward civil authorities. Special attention is given to the contextual nuances of applying these principles within a diverse and dynamic society such as Nigeria. The historical backdrop of Christian engagement with political power in Nigeria is also examined, highlighting instances of collaboration and tension. Furthermore, this paper examines the constitutional provisions safeguarding freedom of religion in Nigeria, emphasizing the nation's commitment to a secular state that upholds the right of citizens to practice their faith. It scrutinizes the challenges and opportunities that arise when reconciling the biblical call for submission with the demand for religious freedom, particularly in a country marked by religious diversity and occasional interfaith tensions. This research employs a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on biblical exegesis, legal analysis, and sociopolitical insights to unravel the complexities surrounding Christian submission to civil authorities and freedom of religion in Nigeria. This study explores potential areas of conflict and convergence, seeking a balanced perspective that respects both the spiritual convictions of Christians and the constitutional rights of all citizens. In conclusion, this study advocates for a nuanced understanding that promotes peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and constructive engagement between Christian communities and civil authorities in Nigeria. It suggests practical ways in which the principles of submission to authority can be harmonized with the promotion of religious freedom, fostering a society where individuals can express their faith freely while upholding the rule of law.

Keywords: Christian submission, civil authorities, civil disobedience, freedom of religion, democracy, fundamental human rights

Introduction

Religion plays a complex role in modern conflicts, serving as both an inspiration for violence and a powerful force for peace (<https://kroc.nd.edu/research/religion-conflict-peacebuilding/>). In other words, religion can be used or mobilized to promote either conflict or peace-building (<http://www.peacebuildinginitiative.org/indexcd2f.html?pageId=1781>). Religion has constituted a major point of divergence, crises, and misunderstanding; while on the one hand, it has facilitated mutual growth and development between various people groups, families, and ethics, it has, on the other hand, bred dissensions that are characterized by wanton destruction of lives and properties. This has become more prevalent in pluralistic religious settings, where both superiority and inferiority complexes gravitate toward hatred and gruesome loss of life. Such has been the experience in Nigeria, a nation of multi-ethno-religious and social economic diversity (Oladosu & Zubairu, 2023). Religion is a vital instrument of human association and relationship. Nigeria is the most populous country in West Africa and is vested with religious diversity: Christianity, Islam, and the African Traditional Religion (Oladosu & Zubairu, 2023b). Religion plays a highly influential role in the lives of most Nigerians. Eighty-seven percent of Nigerians rank religion as “very important” in their lives. This context of religiosity shapes and influences the religious freedom landscape in the country, particularly as religious institutions often overlap with social and political institutions in Nigeria (Madeline Velluro, 2020).

Sociologically, religion cannot exist in isolation from any human society; hence, democracy and religion are recognized in human society as social things. In most nations of the world, attempts to secure freedom of religion for adherents have resulted in some infringements on the fundamental human rights of other persons. Although Nigeria is constitutionally recognized as a 'secular' state, religion has continued to play vital roles in her governance. The way people or authorities understand the concept of freedom of religion in all its aspects tends to influence its protection by the law of such a society. In Nigeria, for instance, there are vital sources for the protection of freedom of religion in Nigerian law. Nigeria as a nation has in the past evolved diverse strategies to incorporate religious norms and values into the Nigeria Constitution, which includes freedom of conscience and religion. In every modern and civilized society today, religious freedom is undoubtedly the most vital freedom in a democratic setting. The basic assumption here is that the functionality and success of a true democracy are dependent on the full exercise of basic freedom and rights of beliefs and ideologies that are believed to characterize humanity (Ottuh, 2015). However, in the complex intersection of biblical teachings and legal frameworks, the relationship between Christian submission to civil authorities, as delineated in Romans 13:1-7, and the pursuit of freedom of religion in Nigeria emerges as a compelling subject of inquiry. Romans 13:1-7 has long served as a scriptural cornerstone guiding the Christian stance on governance and authority. Embedded within these verses are principles that urge believers to submit to the established civil order, viewing it as an institution ordained by divine authority. This paper embarks on a symbiotic analysis, aiming to unravel the intricate dynamics between Christian adherences to Romans 13:1-7 and the constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion in Nigeria. This juxtaposition of biblical injunctions and legal provisions provides a unique lens through which to explore the complexities, conflicts, and potential synergies that arise when considering matters of faith within the constitutional context of a religiously diverse nation such as Nigeria. Against the backdrop of Nigeria's rich religious tapestry, where adherents of various faiths coexist, this study seeks to navigate the nuanced interplay between spiritual convictions and constitutional rights. The constitutional provisions safeguarding freedom of religion have become a focal point for analysis, offering a contemporary framework that

interacts with the timeless biblical principles of submission to authority. As Nigeria grapples with the challenges of maintaining social harmony in the midst of religious diversity, this symbiotic analysis aims to shed light on the potential points of convergence and divergence, contributing to a broader understanding of how faith and governance intertwine in the pursuit of a pluralistic society that upholds both spiritual values and constitutional rights.

Freedom of Religion in the Nigeria Constitution and Human Rights

What is freedom? Freedom or free will is a natural human characteristic. This natural instinct is considered a gift to all human beings from the Creator, who is called God in religion. Freedom or freewill is a corollary of being responsible; it is pointless to create finite beings without giving them genuine freedom and independence over and against their maker, because that is the only way they can have an authentic personal relationship with him; freedom, in this sense, relates to the direct infinitive status of men as responsible beings. This initiative status of human beings can be known within the human selves during moments of responsible moral choices. Religious freedom (or Freedom of religion), on the other hand, is the notion that people of religion can freely partake of the practices of their religion without opposition. Religious freedom entails the right to adhere to one's conscience and the right to choose what one believes. Freedom of religion in this sense does not only include private devotions but also acts of religious significance within the realm of government or authorities. Furthermore, religious freedom is a principle that supports the freedom of an individual, community, or society in public or private that enables one to manifest his or her religious beliefs, teachings, and worship (Ottuh, 2015:24). Umeanolue (2020) posits that;

Nigeria as a nation is religiously pluralistic. Apart from the three major religions, Christianity, Islam, and Traditional Religion, several others compete for relevance and recognition. Despite this reality, in theory, Nigeria is a secular state. This has been indicated in the constitution since independence. For emphasis, the word, secular, is derived from the Latin word 'Secularis,' which means temporal. It is taken to mean 'of or relating to worldly, as opposed to sacred things or having no particular religious affinities'. Secularism, as a doctrine, rejects religion. It maintains that religion should have no place in civil affairs and that civil rules should have no interest in religion. Thus, a secular state is one in which religious communities play no recognized role in politics and no formal relation to the state. This is different from a theocratic or a religious state where religion determines what happens in the state (142).

The Constitution of Nigeria forbids any adoption of a religion as a Federal or State Religion when it makes it crystal clear that "The Government of the federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion" (Article 10 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution). Awomolo (N.D) opines on the above assertion that;

This means not that the government of the federation or the state shall be Godless in the conduct of its business but that neither the Federal Government nor any State Government shall have the power to promise, patronize, and adopt a particular religious doctrine, law, or precept. Religion, being an emotional, volatile, and sensitive matter, must be divorced from the affairs of the state, hence the secular status of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Similarly, this implies that the state is concerned with the relationship between man and God. Man is not answerable to the State for the variety of his religious views or for the contravention of God's law (10).

Awomolo's comprehensive meaning of the said article is commendable because it has thoroughly defined the meaning of restraint and why such a restraint is inevitably necessary for the Federal Government and State. Therefore, in policy formulation, governance, and other governmental activities, religion should not be an issue. By implication, every citizen has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. As stated in Article

18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, morality and religion; this accurate includes liberty to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or confidential, to manifest his religion or belief in tutoring, practice, worship and observance” (Human Rights, Article 18 & Mepaiyeda). Also enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Section 38 (1), Article 40, 41 (1), 1999:

1. Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance.
2. No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony, or observance relates to a religion other than his own or a religion not approved by his parents or guardian.
3. No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination.
4. Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular, he may form or belong to any political party, labor union, or any other association for the protection of his interests.
5. Every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to move freely throughout Nigeria and to reside in any part thereof, and no citizen of Nigeria shall be expelled from Nigeria for refusing entry thereto or exit therefrom (The Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 Constitution).

The Constitution of Nigeria has not left the issue of religion untouched, as it has been earlier said; there is no doubt that, in a multi-religious society, the conversion of adherents of one religion to another is real. The Constitution has provided for that, which is freedom of religion. Moreover, the Constitution has clearly defined religious freedom as follows:

- a. Freedom of religion is a freedom of choice between the religions that exist in Nigeria.
- b. Freedom of religion is the freedom of every Nigerian citizen to change from one religion or belief to another if the person wishes to do so.
- c. Freedom of religion is the freedom to declare privately or publicly one’s allegiance to his religion and to propagate it in “worship, teaching, practice, and observance.” Although the word “propagate” is not defined by the Constitution, it is an act of promoting one’s religion. This suggests that adherents of one religion have a constitutional right to spread their religion (Abogunrin, 2003).
- d. Freedom to spread one’s religion by implication, in turn presupposes the possibility of the multiplication of adherents. This suggests that every citizen is free to share his or her religious views with his or her co-citizens. It is also reasonable, by parity of thought, to say that people from one faith have the freedom to know or listen to the propagation of other faiths if they so wish. It then follows that conversion from one religion to another is possible.
- e. Freedom of religion is the freedom to associate or assemble with any group he has chosen. This implies his choice to associate or assemble with his fellow religious adherents as well. To be specific, this means that an African Traditional Religionist is free to assemble with his fellow traditional worshipers in worship or to participate with them in the performance of their religious rituals in their gods’ shrine. Similarly, the same freedom applies to Christians; they have the freedom to worship with their brethren in the church, chapel, or any other meeting place. Likewise, Muslims are equally entitled to the freedom to pray with their fellow

Muslims in the mosque. The Nigeria Constitution has established the right of every Nigerian to “assembly or association,” which is inclusive of religious gatherings.

- f. Freedom of Religion is a freedom of movement; every Nigerian is not geographically limited to his or her own locality or state. If Nigeria is a multi-religious country and the adherents have freedom of movement, it follows that each religion can be present wherever its adherent is present in any part of the country. By parity of thought, one can say that there may be no locality or state that can be considered a single religious community.

What we can deduce from the Constitutional freedom of movement of every Nigerian and the restraints on the Federal Government or State from adopting any religion as a State Religion is that such a provision has conferred on every Nigerian citizen the right to practice his religion wherever he goes. Nigeria will therefore lose the meaning of the right of movement if the freedom of religion to choose, practice, and propagate one’s religion wherever one goes in any part of the country does not go with it. Similarly, freedom of religion will become a wishy-washy law if one cannot practice and propagate his religion in any part of the country or assemble with his fellow worshipers wherever he goes (Abogunrin, 2003: 29-31). The right to be religious and to join religious organizations would be meaningless if there is no parallel right not to join any at all. Religious freedom must simultaneously protect both the right to be religious on one hand and the right not to be religious at all on the other (Ottuh, 2015).

The freedom of an individual to choose or change his religion and freedom of movement are not only constitutional rights but also human rights. Why? If a citizen is forcefully restricted to a religion, a religion is imposed on him by force, or he is exposed to the vice of tyranny because of his religion, it is a violation of his human rights. The restriction and imposition can be regarded as unconstitutional, oppressive, and injustice. Submission to a religion should be voluntary and not by compulsion, so human rights demand for the right of each Nigerian to choose or change his religion. This agrees with ‘the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights which guarantees for every human being the right to freely change religion irrespective of his/her religion at birth’ (Abogunrin, 2003:32). Section 34 (1) of the Nigeria Constitution categorically states that “Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person” (Nigeria Constitution, 1999). By implication, we can apply the above provision to religious freedom. Even for a religious reason, no one should be disrespected because the Constitution explains one’s right to dignity that, ‘no person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment’ No one should go through any emotional psychological or physical torture because of an imposition of religion on him or deny him a religion of his choice. Therefore, a derogatory attitude toward a fellow Nigerian for the sake of religion is a human rights violation and is inhuman (Abogunrin, 2003:33).

Freedom of Religion and Democracy in Nigeria

Studies conducted by experts on democracy have shown that defining or conceptualizing the term democracy is not monolithic because there is no single and agreeable definition of what the term entails. However, despite its non-monolithic stance, most of these experts agree that democracy can best be defined and operationalized as a type, form, or system of government in the state and society through which power and authority reside with the people either directly or indirectly through elected representation. Majoritarian governance, guaranteeing the preservation of citizens’ rights, freedoms, and property, equality and egalitarian representation, respect for the rule of law, and political engagement are the characteristics that define democracy. It is also claimed that the majority of democracies guarantee representation, tenure and regular elections, accountable leadership, and the division of powers among the three arms of government and other levels of governance (Jatau & Maza, 2023).

Freedom of religion and democracy in Nigeria represent critical elements in the country's sociopolitical landscape, influencing its development, governance, and societal cohesion. Nigeria, a diverse nation with a significant Muslim and Christian population, recognizes the importance of religious freedom as a fundamental human right. In the context of democracy, the Nigerian Constitution explicitly guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, allowing individuals to practice, change, and propagate their religious beliefs. The democratic principles embedded in Nigeria's governance structure are intended to uphold the rights of all citizens, fostering an environment where diverse religious communities can coexist peacefully. However, challenges arise when these principles intersect with religious diversity, leading to occasional tensions and conflicts. Nigeria has experienced instances of interfaith strife, often fueled by political, economic, and social factors that intersect with religious identities. Balancing the aspirations of a democratic society with the need to protect religious freedoms requires ongoing efforts to promote tolerance, understanding, and respect among different religious groups. Efforts to strengthen the relationship between freedom of religion and democracy in Nigeria involve fostering inclusive governance, ensuring equal representation of diverse religious communities, and promoting interfaith dialog. In addition, the judiciary plays a crucial role in interpreting constitutional provisions related to religious freedom, contributing to the delicate balance between individual rights and societal order. As Nigeria continues to navigate the complex interplay between freedom of religion and democracy, the promotion of human rights, inclusive policies, and civic education becomes essential for building a democratic society that values diversity, respects individual liberties, and upholds the principles of equality and justice for all citizens. Abogunrin (2003) opines that;

In terms of politics, democracy is the freedom of every individual to cast a ballot or, if qualified, to be elected to a position of leadership within the country. Therefore, in a democratic system of government, the people have the freedom to select the political leaders that best serve their needs, wants, and interests. No one's religion should limit their ability to vote, be elected, or share political representation in the nation. The main argument is that a political environment cannot be considered functional for a democracy if a person's faith prevents him from exercising his entitlement to political rights. Thus, it makes sense to argue that religious freedom is a prerequisite for democracy as people can practice their faith and still participate in politics (35)

Freedom of expression and opinion belongs to every citizen in a democratic country. Their religious matters cannot be excluded from this freedom. Therefore, if someone is allowed to voice their opinions, they should also be allowed to discuss matters of their religion. Democracy is a fundamental component of religious freedom; it must free citizens from all forms of servitude, including religious servitude, which is defined as being confined to a single religion, coerced into adopting a new one, or barred from leaving a country for religious reasons. If a system does not safeguard citizens' right to practice their religion, it will be illusory to refer to it as democratic (Abogunrin, 2003:36). Freedom is the fundamental tenet of democracy because citizens can only participate in freedom in a democracy. Since everyone is equal by number rather than quality, there are two fundamental dimensions of freedom in this context: the ability to live as one pleases and the ability to dominate in turn. Liberty is a basic tenet of the democratic form of constitution, meaning that only under a constitution can mankind have liberty, which is declared to be the ultimate goal of all democracies. However, one factor of freedom is to govern and be governed in turn; for the popular principle of justice is to have equality according to number, not worth, and if this is the principle of justice prevailing, the multitude must of necessity be sovereign and the decision of the majority must be final and must constitute justice, for they say that each of the citizens ought to have an equal share; so that it results that in democracies the poor are more powerful than the rich, because there are more of them and whatever is decided by the majority is sovereign. Democracy and freedom can only exist if the most fundamental right, freedom of conscience, exists.

The democratic state must promise and preserve the freedom of religion, which is defined as the freedom of any religion to maintain its religious activity and the freedom of any person to maintain his faith and religion and to fulfill its commandments and rituals. Another right that a democratic state must promise is freedom from religion, which is the freedom of any person not to fulfill the commandments of religion. The private person is not obliged to any religious duty, religious institute, or religious ritual, he is free of any religious restriction, and he has every right of speech, belief, and equality in front of the law (Ottuh, 2015:28-9). Adhiambo (2020) opines that democratic citizens do not infringe on others' rights to freedom of expression and being. In other words, they do not coerce others into agreeing. They are willing to work alongside others without being forced to do so. They communicate their beliefs in a language that is readily understood by other members of the community (73).

Religion Freedom's harmful Effects on Nigeria's Democracy

We cannot allow the numerous examples of religious freedom in Nigeria to blind us to the fact that this right has been infringed upon. Nigeria's environment for religious freedom has got worse recently. Freedom of religion or belief is guaranteed to Nigerian citizens by the Constitution; however, several federal and municipal legislations restrict this freedom. Furthermore, tensions in politics and society have occasionally worsened sectarian divisions and resulted in the targeting of people and groups because of their religious identity:

1. Part of what threatens democracy and peace is religious prejudice and intolerance. This is because Nigeria exhibit diversity, with a sizable Muslim population in the north and a predominantly Christian population in the south. In addition to variations in religious beliefs and practices, the country's northern and southern regions have different cultural values and views. Although it is anticipated that this diversity will significantly advance social cohesion and nation-building, many in Nigeria have blamed the country's lack of diversity management for the prejudice and intolerance against many religions.
2. Additional research also demonstrated the obvious presence of religious prejudice and intolerance in Nigerian politics, which encourages discrimination, polarization, and other harmful prejudices in the country's democratic sphere. The current structure of the Nigerian state does not support and acknowledge the importance of diversity or the sensitive and fragile nature of Nigerian society due to religious intolerance, according to a political researcher and expert on democracy and federalism in Nigeria.
3. Bias and mistrust between Christians and Muslims are feasible in many ways. This has led to the undermining of the values of democracy and peace, which advocate humanity, empathy, equity, fairness, and justice. In another argument, a respondent also maintained that certain religious values and beliefs not only appear to be exclusive but are also intolerant toward other individuals and groups who do not share similar doctrines and values. These forms of religious exclusivity and intolerance not only create a fertile ground for religious and political discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, injustice, and other forms of human rights abuses, which are critical and fundamental to the actualization of peace, but also strengthen democracy (Jatau & Maza, 2023:9).
4. In another argument, a respondent also maintained that certain religious values and beliefs not only appear to be exclusive but are also intolerant toward other individuals and groups who do not share similar doctrines and values. These forms of religious exclusivity and intolerance not only create a fertile ground for religious and political discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, injustice, and other forms of human rights abuses, which are critical and fundamental to the actualization of peace, but also strengthen democracy.
5. Furthermore, religious bigotry and intolerance undermine Nigeria's democracy because they sometimes infringe upon citizens' fundamental liberties and result in violence, attacks, and physical harm. These

instances and scenarios are primarily supported and enabled by religious and political actors. In the case of Usman Buda, a butcher who was killed by crowds for allegedly blaspheming, priestess Ajesikemi Olatunji in Ilorin, Kwara State, was threatened and told to cease her religious advocacy if she wished to survive (Punch News, 2023). Christians who attempt to convert to Islam or those who want to convert to Christianity will be punished until they pass away. One cannot construct new churches or renovate existing ones. Public displays of religion are prohibited, and Christians are not allowed to parade in public. Public preaching and loud playing of Christian music will not be permitted (Adegbola, 2000). These threats and actions speak to several cases and incidents where citizens' rights to congregate, worship, and express their political and religious preferences are being denied with little condemnation and actions taken by religious and political elites. An imposition of an Islamic religious observation on Christian school girls was reported on June 24, 2001, in the Sunday punch caption on page 3: "Compulsory veil (Hijab) for Christian raises dust in Zamfara (Alechenu, 2001). Bloody conflict broke out at Oyun Baptist High School (OBHS), Ijagbo, Kwara State, Nigeria. According to reports, the school allegedly turned back some female Muslim students over their refusal to remove their hijab on Monday, January 17, 2022. This action elicited another rivalry between Muslim society and the leadership of the Kwara State chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Apparently displeased by the turn of events, some parents and their wards decided to go fisticuffs, creating a bizarre scene in which one person was killed and several others injured. The government and police waded in and shut down the school to avoid more casualties (The Guardian, 22). For a country that prides itself as democratic, progressive, multi-ethnic, and religiously diverse, the actions and behaviors of these religious bigots will continue to impede and negatively impact the consolidation of democracy.

6. One thing that threatens democracy and peace in shaky societies and religion democracies in transitional states like Nigeria is the negative instrumentalization and weaponization of religion by political and religious leaders. This is because most self-centered religious and political leaders are aware of how much religion influences people's and organizations' political decisions and leaders. Thus, to further their political goals, these self-serving political and religious leaders frequently distort religious myths, facts, and sentiments.
7. Interreligious strife and political bloodshed are two more things that threaten democracy and peace. Numerous academics (including Adebawo, Onapajo, Akpanika, and Salihu) have contended that Nigeria has seen and endured violence and wars since its independence. There have been claims that violence between Christians and Muslims is fueled by politics, interreligious conflict, and ethnoreligious differences. In addition to distorting harmony, peace, and peaceful cohabitation, these confrontations resulted in the loss of lives and property as well as a complete breakdown of public trust. Not only has this undermined social trust, but it has also sharply divided individuals along religious lines. As a result, the disintegration of social trust, conflict, and insecurity not only threatens democracy and peace but also all the values and ideals of these concepts that people wish to uphold. During an interview, a democratic expert contended that political violence and conflict weaken democracy and peace by fostering a hostile political environment marked by harassment, intimidation, fear, dissent, limitations on political choices and freedoms, partiality, and unfair treatment of voters and electorates. Political actors' incitement of religious violence in politics poses a threat to the advancement of peace and democracy, not only in Nigeria but also in other states dealing with comparable issues (Jatau & Maza, 2003).

Freedom of Religion and Christian Submission to Civil Authorities (Romans 13:1-7)

Civil authority refers to the government or governing body that has the power to make and enforce laws within a particular geographic region or jurisdiction. This can include local, state, and federal governments and international organizations that have the authority to govern and regulate certain activities within their jurisdiction. Civil authorities are responsible for maintaining order in society and upholding the rule of law within their jurisdiction, and they have the power to enforce laws and regulations through various means, including fines, imprisonment, and other forms of punishment (Brand, 2003). Civil authority is of God, not by any revelation or positive institution, but by the mere fact that God is the Author of Nature, and Nature imperatively requires civil authority to be established and obeyed. Nature cannot tolerate intemperance or anarchy either. And what Nature absolutely requires, or absolutely refuses as incompatible with her well-being, God commands, or God forbids. God then forbids anarchy, and in forbidding anarchy, He enjoins submission to authority. In this sense, God is at the back of every State, binding men in conscience to observe the behests of the State within the sphere of its competence. "Let every soul be subject to higher powers: for there is no power but from God: and those that are, are ordained of God... Wherefore be subject of necessity, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake...For they are the ministers of God..."(Catholic Encyclopedia).

It is New Testament's clear teaching that the Christian has an obligation toward the state (Eckman, 1999). Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, about their relationship with the government. This issue is important because we sometimes tend to think that because we are Christians and therefore belong to the kingdom of God, we have nothing to do with civil authority. The Christians in Rome may have felt the same way; after all, Christ had been crucified by Roman authorities, and believers were often accused and persecuted by civil authorities. Despite this, Paul insists that believers must submit to the governing authorities (Adeyemo, 2006). Rome was the imperial capital and the seat of the empire's civil government. As residents of Rome, Paul's initial readers were aware of both the glory and the shame of that city in the days of Nero, who reigned from AD 54 to 68. However, they were also citizens of Christ's kingdom (Phil. 3:20; Col. 1:13). Appropriately, therefore, Paul discussed a Christian's relationship with his government and civil rulers. Both in its length and specific details, this discussion is the key New Testament passage on the subject (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17) (Walvoord & Zuck, 1983).

Rom 13:1 The apostle's basic exhortation is Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ θεοῦ, αἱ δὲ οὗσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσὶν (Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.). The rationale for this basic exhortation is clear: political authority comes from God. Here Paul enunciates no new principle; on the contrary, it was one that was familiar in Jewish wisdom. More specifically, it was a principle to which prophets and apocalyptists clung when confronted by the overwhelming might of a Nebuchadnezzar faced by Syrian oppression: in Daniel's repeated declaration, "The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will" (Daniel 4:17, 25, 32). Such assertions must have been particularly meaningful for Jews living in the diaspora, as aliens living under a foreign power, and often as slaves and the dispossessed. To be able to affirm that God is one, their God is one, and so also the God of the Gentiles, meant in the logic of the times that all rule and authority must have come from that one God, their God. The comfort of such a belief was not that it made them any less vulnerable to the whims of such ruler; the Maccaben crisis had been enough proof of that. The comfort was rather that such rulers were, by definition, responsible before God, and so were under the constraint of God's final judgment. That particular Jewish belief would, of course, have little impact on the rulers themselves, but at least it gave their

oppressed Jewish subjects the assurance that rulers who flouted their responsibility before God would come under his judgment sooner or later, as Nebuchadnezzar had found to his cost in the Daniel story (4:13-25; 5:20-21). The whole point of the assertion of Wisdom of Solomon that kings receive their dominion from the Lord was to warn them that the Most High would inflict severe judgment on those who “did not rule rightly, nor keep the law, nor walk according to the purpose of God” (6:4) (Dunn, 1988).

Rom 13:2 ὥστε ὁ ἀντιτασσόμενος τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ ἀνθέστηκεν, “So then, he who opposes the authority has resisted the ordinance of God.” The clear implication is of a state of affairs, a structure of society that cannot be changed, so that resistance is not only against God’s order of society, but wasteful of time and energy. οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες ἑαυτοῖς κρίμα λήμψονται. “And they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.” The perfect participle indicates a determined and established policy: “those who have set themselves to resist.” These words are directed more against anarchy than against single-issue protest (Dunn, 1988:762). This submission does not mean that we must blindly obey an order from a state that is evil or goes against Christ’s command to love our neighbors. While the citizen is to obey the authorities, those authorities must obey God. Thus, if they stop rewarding good and punishing evil and instead order the opposite, they lose the moral right to expect obedience (Adeyemo, 2006:1372). Those who believe in Christ give themselves to others in self-sacrificing love. Indeed, this is a new group act of worship that fulfills the old group acts of sacrifice (12:1–21). Believers in Christ are to be obedient to civil authorities (13:1–7), follow the core of the Torah by loving others as themselves (13:8–10), lead moral, upright lives in view of their coming salvation (13:11–14), and refrain from passing judgment or doing things that offend others (14:1–15:6) (Ehrman, 2017).

Rom 13:3-5 οἱ γὰρ ἄρχοντες οὐκ εἰσὶν φόβος τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ ἀλλὰ τῷ κακῷ for rulers are not causes of fear for good behavior, but for evil. θέλεις δὲ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν· do you want to be without fear of the authority? τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἔξεις ἔπαινον ἐξ αὐτῆς· Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; 4. θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν. For it is a minister of God to you for good. ἐὰν δὲ τὸ κακὸν ποιῆς, φοβοῦ· οὐ γὰρ εἰκῆ τὴν μάχαιραν φορεῖ· θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν ἕκδικος εἰς ὀργὴν τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. 5. διὸ ἀνάγκη ὑποτάσσεσθαι, why it is necessary to be in subjection, οὐ μόνον διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν not only because of wrath, but also for conscience ' sake). From the above verses, the logic of this basic statement of Jewish wisdom is pressed home in what might be termed a theology of the orderly state, of good government. The principle is simple and would have commanded wide assent: regularity in nature and orderliness in society is something provided for by nature and commanded by divine reason; a society needs constraints in order to ensure “the good”; and it is one of the chief roles of a ruler that he is responsible for administering such constraints, for commending the “good” and punishing the “bad” (vv 3-4) (Dunn, 771).

In theological terms, the corollary of asserting that God gives dominion to kings and rulers is that he does so for the good of his creatures. In the exercise of political authority, rulers are “servants of God.” Their power is not their own; it comes from God. To resist them, therefore, in the exercise of their God-given responsibility is to resist God and thus incur his judgment and wrath (vv 4-5). Hence, Paul can even say that submission to political authority should be motivated not simply by fear of retribution but by concern for a good conscience—not simply a matter of accepting the harsh realities that cannot be changed, but a matter of theological principle. Such orderliness is part of the creative purpose of God. To cooperate in and submit to its work is all piece with the creature’s acknowledgment of the creator (771). No wonder, Akinwale (2000) postulates that the quest for God

and the quest for the good governance of the state can and should go together (117), as he shared with Edward Schillebeeckx (1991) “Politics without prayer or mysticism quickly becomes grim and barbaric; prayer or mysticism without political love quickly becomes sentimental and irrelevant interiority” (2).

However, it should be noted here that this is not a specific Christian line of reasoning. There is no implication here that Christ has overcome the “authorities” or anything like that. The argument does not depend on the assumption that a new state of affairs exists because of the virtues of Christ’s ministry. These are the conditions under which God’s people have operated for centuries. Indeed, since the theology of good government also applied to the Jewish state during its years of independence (as in 2 Samuel 12:8), it can be said that this is the condition under which the people of God always exist. In other words, the argument is theological, not Christological; it is expressed in terms of the normal circumstances of social order, not in terms of salvation history. Nor is it particularly eschatological, as indicating a state of affairs that is temporary and from which God’s people will soon be delivered. It is always will, but given a crucial theological and moral dimension by repeating the Jewish affirmation that God has ordered it for the good of humankind in society and with the corollary that both ruler and ruled are responsible to God in consequence (Dunn, 772).

Rom 13:6-7 διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ φόρους τελεῖτε, “for that is why you also pay tribute.” This is evidently the climax of the discussion and not just an illustration or a third argument. It was not simply that taxation is the point at which the power of the state rudely impinges on daily life (as then, so now). Nor was it simply that taxes and tax collectors were a constant source of injustice and embitterment. Paul must have been aware that the subject was a particularly sensitive matter in Rome itself. λειτουργοὶ γὰρ θεοῦ εἰσιν εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο προσκαρτεροῦντες, “for they are ministers of God engaged in this very task.” Despite the strong cultic background of the verb λειτουργέω and of the noun λειτουργία in the LXX (both technical terms for the priestly cult), the context here is that of the secular technical usage in Hellenistic society, where λειτουργίην and λειτουργία refer to the rendering of public services to the body politic of the community. With λειτουργός itself the case is even stronger, more or less equivalent to “public servant.” In the present context where the obligations of good citizenship are at the heart of Paul’s parenthesis, this is most naturally the sense that stands at the for-front of Paul’s mind. 7. Ἀπόδοτε πᾶσιν τὰς ὀφειλάς, “render to everyone their dues.” ὀφειλάς occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in Matthew 18:32 and 1 Corinthians 7:3. Such a sweeping injunction indicates not only the moral recognition that obligations should be paid (or repaid) but also the attitude of the social inferior or powerless minority who are only too aware that an obligation not honored can quickly become an occasion for scrutiny or retribution on the part of a suspicious or watchful officialdom. τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον, τῷ τὸ τέλος τὸ τέλος, “tribute to whom tribute is due, tax to whom tax is due.” τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον, τῷ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν τιμὴν, “fear to whom fear is due, respect to whom respect is due.” A distinction between “fear” and (the weaker) “respect, honor” may be intended, as 1 Peter 2:17 (“fear God; honor the emperor”) (Dunn, 766-768).

A Christian’s responsibility to civil authorities involves more than obedience. It also includes support by paying taxes (cf. Matthew 22:21). This is because leaders, as God’s servants (cf. Romans 14:4), are supposed to give their full time to governing and need support through taxes from citizens, Christians included. Therefore, a Christian ought to give everyone what he owes him (repay everyone his due), whether substance (taxes and revenue) or respect and honor (Walvoord & Zuck 490). It is New Testament’s clear teaching that the Christian does have an obligation toward the state. This is the central point of Jesus’ teaching in Mark 12:13–17, where, when questioned about paying taxes to Rome, He answers that we “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,

and to God the things that are God's." We owe obligation obviously to God and His Kingdom but also to the state because He (God) created it and it serves His Purpose (Colson, 1987).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Addressing religious crises in Nigeria requires multifaceted approaches, including promoting interfaith dialogue, strengthening the rule of law, addressing socioeconomic inequalities, and combating extremist ideologies. Government efforts to foster religious tolerance, protect the rights of religious minorities, and ensure accountability for perpetrators of violence are crucial steps toward resolving religious conflicts and building a more inclusive and peaceful society. Additionally, civil society organizations, religious leaders, and grassroots initiatives play vital roles in promoting peace, reconciliation, and mutual understanding among Nigeria's diverse religious communities. Ultimately, sustained efforts to address the root causes of religious crises and promote social justice and unity are essential for realizing Nigeria's potential as a prosperous and harmonious nation.

The reality of freedom of religion must be pursued in Nigeria despite the existing attacks on it. Why? Religion is a spiritual affair; human spiritual encounter with God is an act of "I and Thou" encounter and not an encounter imposed by the Federal or State Government. This abrogates the validity of any attempt to make one religion a state religion or a force on any citizen to accept a religion against his or her wishes (Abogunrin, 2003). It is important to remember that Christians are called to love and respect all people, regardless of their religious beliefs or cultural practices. This includes being sensitive and understanding of the beliefs and practices of others, while also being able to openly express and live out one's own beliefs. Therefore, faith cannot be forced on man; it is an individual and personal responsibility in order not to jeopardize the said "I and Thou" encounter in a true religion. Respective adherents should refrain from the forceful imposition of their religion on each other. The best one can do is to consistently preach and persuade his audience to accept the truth; this should be the practice of all religions in Nigeria.

Bird (2008) opines that the ethics of Christians should benefit the fabric of society (70), and believers should submit themselves to governing authorities. Government authority is appointed by God, preserves order, and thwart lawlessness. For this reason, believers pay their taxes and show respect for political leaders (Brand et' al, 1414). The believers owe obedience to the state, its agents, and its duly enacted laws (Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Romans 13:1-7). The New Testament mandate is neither slavish nor absolute; we see Peter and John defying the Sanhedrin's order to stop preaching; the issue apparently to them was clear: We obey the state until it is a sin to obey the state. Here civil disobedience was not merely permitted by God's Spirit; it was demanded (Acts 4:19ff; 5:29). If the government therefore commands something that God forbids or forbids something that God commands, we must disobey. Disobedience cannot involve violence or vandalism, actions that contradict prudence and civil order (Eckman, 1999).

Thus, disobedience should never be taken lightly or with undue haste. Christians have a higher law than that of the human government. However, God gives human governments in the main His seal of approval, and disobedience to them should be considered with great caution. Eckman, citing Lynn Buzzard (1987), offers seven questions that a believer should ask when facing the possibility of disobedience to the state:

1. How directly and immediately does the opposing government policy contradict an unequivocal biblical teaching?
2. What is the counsel of the Christian community regarding this policy? Where do godly leaders rank it among threats to the faith that must be addressed? What do they say about what a faithful person's response ought to be? To what extent have legal alternative protests been exhausted?

3. What harms to society and order are likely to result from the considered act of civil disobedience and how do these harms compare with the desired benefits?
4. Will the form of civil disobedience be one that will provide evidence of moral consistency and further proper respect for principled law and moral society?
5. To what extent will the “witness” be heard and understood by the public and government authorities?
6. To what extent are these acts central to maintaining my integrity as a person? To what extent do they reflect personal frustration and anger rather than a principled response?
7. To what extent does the idea of the act of civil disobedience issue from a thought-source alien to a biblical worldview? Is it based upon biblical principles about the use of power and coercion, the witness of the cross, and the sovereignty of God, or is it based upon purely naturalistic, humanistic principles? (Eckman cit. Buzzard, 1987: 19-25).

The believer must pray for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1ff). Such praying for civil authorities is an essential part of the debt owed, whether the official is pagan or Christian, religiously indifferent or anti-religious, or just or unjust. God can use praying to affect righteousness in the state’s laws or in bringing an unbelieving governmental official to Jesus Christ. Constructive criticism and calling the state to accountability be balanced with fervent, persevering prayer. Christians walk a careful balance between understanding their Christian obligation toward the state and seeking to influence that state for righteousness and justice. The two spheres of a Christian’s life—the church and the state—must be kept in balance. Each has a divine job to do; neither encroaches upon the responsibility of the other (Eckman, 1999).

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