E-ISSN: 1116 - 2619 P-ISSN: 3026-8524
MPRI-JHLAR | INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES, LITERATURE AND ART RESEARCH
VOL. 13 NO. 6 – JULY, 2026

ANALYTICAL INVESTIGATION OF ROMANS 13:1-7 ON CHURCH-STATE RELATIONSHIP IN MODERN DEMOCRACY: A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.70382/mejhlar.v13i6.0116

Abstract

This research examines Romans 13:1-7 to clarify Christian participation with state power in Nigeria's democracy. By engaging in text analysis, it substantiates Paul's dual call for political submission to rulers as ministers of God and opposition to injustice in cases where human law is inconsistent with higher moral obligations. In exploring this in historical and contemporary Nigeria, from church-state alliances during colonialism and military regimes to the country's secular democracy, it studies laws, institutional engagement (such as CAN and PFN), and challenges from Sharia and regulatory laws' enactments. The insights of the United States and South Africa also shed light on the influence of various church–state models on religious political engagements. The results highlight the need for Nigerian churches to establish guidelines for engagement and for policy-makers to protect religious freedom, encouraging collaboration to promote social justice, accountability and well-being.

Key Words: Church-State, Relationship, Democracy, Investigation and Nigeria

Introduction

Romans 13:1-7 has always been an important biblical text for both theological and political discourse, in relation to the status of Christians and rulers. Apostle Paul's exhortation of Christians to submit to the ruling authorities, premised on the conviction that "there is no authority except from God" has generated a range of views over the years, and in various cultural contexts. For contemporary democracies, it

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is significant for the nature and level of Christian engagement with the state, especially when there is an apparent clash between the state policies and practices, and religious values. This study aims to provide an interpretative insight of Romans 13:1-7 to discern the varied forms and depth of Christian engagement with the state in the particular democratic context in Nigeria.

This research is crucial because of the peculiarities of Nigeria as a country with a multiplicity of religious faiths and a troubled political history. The interpretation and application of Romans 13:1-7 in Nigeria is nuanced, and shaped by Nigeria's history, including colonial and military regimes and the recent democratic transition, which have all contributed to the role of the church in society. There is a tension between politically and socially active churches and those that are emphasising spiritual obedience and are politically passive. This is part of a theological discourse between submission to the "powers that be" and the prophetic voice speaking out against injustice (Ademiluka, 2019; Nwanguma, 2022). So, this research will be important because it will provide a more nuanced understanding of the Christian's role in politics in a situation where churches are often key actors in the political processes. It also examines the tension between theological approaches which emphasise unconditional submission to the state and those that demand critical (and sometimes militant) action against the state in the context of corruption and human rights violation (Malomo, 2022; Gusha, 2020).

In achieving its objective, this Paper will first perform an exegetical study of Romans 13:1-7 which acknowledges that there is a double nature in Paul's call for submission to rulers (as servants of God), but also implies that there should be non-compliance (and sometimes resistance) to human law when it is contrary to the moral law. The study will then contextualise these Pauline commands with the history of church-state relations in Nigeria from co-operating with colonial and military dictatorships, to the current secular state. This study will then consider the present legal and institutional frameworks for church-state relations in Nigeria including the activism of major Christian bodies, such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN). It will also examine the problems posed by issues including the Sharia laws in some northern states, and the impact of regulatory laws, such as the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 2020 on churches. It will also draw some comparative lessons from the relationship between churches and state in the USA and South Africa to highlight the effects of different constitutions on church political engagement. The interdisciplinary approach of this study aims to emphasise the importance of Nigerian churches having political engagement guidelines and the need for governments to respect religious freedoms to enable mutually rewarding collaborations to achieve the goal of justice, accountability and quality of life for all citizens.

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Many authors have adopted an exegetical, theological and socio-political perspective on the interpretation of Romans 13:1-7, church-state relations in democracies and in Nigeria. Exegesis has outlined its context in the Roman empire and its theological history. Political scientists provide models of church-state relations in contemporary societies, with case studies. Similarly, Nigerian historians and lawyers record the status of Christian institutions from protectorates, to a secular republic, post 1999. This allows us to consider the interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 to the church-state relations in modern Nigeria.

EXEGESIS AND ROMANS 13:1-7

Paul's writing of Romans 13:1-7 is in the context of cultic worship of the emperor, and the cultic nature of the world's empire (Moo, 1996). In this context Paul's words "there is no authority except from God" relates to the cultic nature, and the submission as worship and not idolatry (Moo, 1996). Thomas Schreiner notes the early Christians were in a position where they were tempted not to be seditious to Nero, but to obey Christ, and Paul's teaching on submission preserves the states' peace and honours God's rule (Schreiner, 2018). Paul's original, Romans 13:1-7 are all accepted in critical editions. Bernard Lategan's review of literature post-1989 confirms that the variants in the major papyri and codices are not significant, and show the care that scribes took in copying out the words of these verses (Lategan, 2012). The RAIS Conference Proceedings also reveals that the text has not been transmitted in isolation or as an insertion in the manuscripts of early Christians, also implying the authenticity of the text in the autograph (RAIS, 2023).

The historical-grammatical method communicates Paul's message to his 1st century audience. Hafer (2021) proposes that the Greek term ἀρχή (archē, "authority") in Romans 13 can be a reference to any civil office - even the office of the emperor - and is a way of referring to these offices as God's ministers of justice. Further, in his recent book, Theotivity, demonstrates that Paul's ethical theology - God's appointee (vv. 3-7) to practice (vv. 3-7) is consistent with the rhetorical of the Hellenistic world, which promotes the transition of believers from theory to practice (Theotivity 2023). Romans 13:1-7 is a theological conundrum of obedience and conscience. Schreiner argues while Paul's placing rulers as "God's servants" to administer justice legitimates rulers, he implies obedience to rulers is not unconditional - it is incumbent on people to resist rulers if their laws are against God's commandments (Schreiner, 2018). The "prophetic caveat" is due to Paul's awareness all disobedience has human and divine repercussions, making political action more risky (Hafer, 2021).

CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN 21ST CENTURY DEMOCRACIES

The three approaches to church-state relations (established church, separationist and accommodationist) are summarised and its impacts on the rights and obligations of

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religious organisations. Separationism is found in the US in Everson versus Board of Education and Engel versus Vitale which applied the US Constitution's Establishment Clause to state governments (Everson v. Board of Education, 1947) and banned state-authorised school prayers (Engel &. Vitale, 1962). The UK hybrid has establishment of the Church of England with its bishops in the House of Lords, while offering freedom and equality to other religions (House of Commons Library, 2023). This makes it possible to assess the church - state relations in a democracy in Nigeria.

Models of Church - State Relations

The traditional legal models of church - state relations in democracies are:

- **Established Church:** Favouritism for one church in constitution; some subsidies.
- **Separationist:** No establishment of a church and no multiple jobs.
- **Accommodationist/Hybrid:** One church is established, receives formal favour and subsidies, but all religions protected and receive some subsidies (Brathwaite & Bramsen, 2011; International IDEA, 2017).

Political opportunity structure theory helps us understand how these policies affect access by religious actors to the policy and political process: separationist regimes deny government funding and chaplains, accommodationist regimes allow limited funding (e.g., school vouchers for faith-based schools) and hybrid regimes provide establishment benefits and other pluralist protections (Lupu, 1992; Nieuwenhuis, 2012).

United States (Separationist).

Everson v. Board of Education (1947) extended the Establishment clause to state and local governments (Fourteenth Amendment), and found this New Jersey statute that reimbursed parents for the fares for taking their children to private (parochial) schools did not constitute a "wall of separation".Compelled (and even voluntary) school prayer is prohibited under the Establishment Clause, and promotes school separation (Engel & Vitale, 1962).

United Kingdom (Hybrid).

Church of England is the established church: Queen is the Supreme Governor and 26 bishops are automatically members of the House of Lords. Although endowments for worship ceased in the 19th century, the canon laws for appointments are still in place, and there is equal and independent status for other churches (House of Commons Library, 2023). The examples above show how church and state relations are shaped by the political system and we shall keep this in mind as we examine the church-state relations in democratic Nigeria.

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The Nigerian Context

Let's take a quick look at the history of the church and state in Nigeria, which reveals a first church-state co-operation under colonialism, the mixed church-state relations under military regimes and the re-complexity of the church and state under democracy. Nigerian law sets up a secular state where religion is prohibited by the state, but guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Ogbu, 2014). The church is now active in the community, and offers education and health care (often in places where the state is not) (Asadu, 2023) and political advocacy and social change. But freedom of religion has been threatened by religious clashes and the adoption of Sharia in the country's northern states (International IDEA, 2017). The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is an extra-judicial body that is supposed to uphold such rights, but is ineffective in dealing with security and discrimination (National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria). Despite constitutional guarantees to religious freedom, arrests of religious minorities for blasphemy, like atheist Mubarak Bala, violate religious freedom (Associated Press, 2023).

Historical Development of Church - State Relations in Nigeria

During British colonialism, Christian missionaries partnered with the British government to provide public goods (education, health care), moral instruction and were the state's mouthpieces and policy implementers (Asadu, 2023). The churches' schools and hospitals epitomised modernity, but also institutionalised imperialism and western morality and laws (Nengel & Wogu, 2021). After independence (1960), the church has been subservient and victim of various military regimes: being silent when they need religious legitimacy; condemning military atrocities when bishops condemn (Religious Freedom Institute, 2022). This has continued since 1999 when democracy returned: churches have become a political power again by helping voters to cast their vote and calling for electoral reforms and anti-corruption measures (International IDEA, 2017). At the time, Christian organisations have been subservient and defiant like Romans 13:1-7.

Existing Legal And Institutional Framework

The provision which prohibits the establishment of a state religion, provides for "freedom of thought, conscience and religion" and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion is enshrined in Section 10 of the 1999 Constitution (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Freedom of association and assembly and freedom of worship is guaranteed under sections 38 and 40 respectively (Ogbu, 2014). There is also a non-judicial human rights body (National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) established by the National Human Rights Commission Act (NHRC Act) 1995 which promotes and protects human rights including freedom of religion, but is often under-funded and under-politicised (National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria, n.d.). The setting up of Sharia

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courts in 13 of the northern states in the country for both civil and criminal cases has created issues of multiple laws and equal rights for Muslims and non-Muslims (Yesufu, 2016). While the blasphemy laws in some states have seen arrests and a lynch mob against people accused of blasphemy (Associated Press, 2023). But although these challenges have caused problems in the relationship between the churches and the state, the multisectional nature of the law in Nigeria provides a platform for redress in the courts, the NHRC and civil society, which is growing the church-state relationship.

Social Contract Theory and Civil Authority

Social contract theory grounds the legitimacy of civil authority in a tacit contract between individuals to have their natural rights to liberty restricted for the mutual benefit of security and order. The social contract "shows that members of some society have reason to endorse and comply with the fundamental social rules, laws, institutions, and principles of that society" (D' Agostino & Gaus, 2021). Men in the state of nature explicitly contract to surrender natural rights to a sovereign authority that can protect them from violence (Hobbes, 1985). Lockean refinements narrow the scope of sovereign legitimacy, arguing that the role of government is to secure pre-political rights to life, liberty and property, and that civil authority is legitimate only while it remains disinterestedly impartial (Locke, 1821). Rousseau, meanwhile, stresses that political legitimacy is secured when the laws express the "general will" such that, in obeying the law, one exercises one's freedom (Rousseau, 2006). In Nigeria, social contract theory explains why Romans 13:1-7's exhortation to obey political rulers can be interpreted as a theological endorsement of political institutions that protect the common good, as long as the rulers do not contravene the basic rights that are prior to and inherent in the divine-willed order.

Secularisation theory offers a backdrop to understanding the way in which, over time, religious institutions become differentiated from (and often subordinated to) the political and economic. Casanova identifies three features: (1) decline of religious practice; (2) privatisation of religion; and (3) differentiation of social spheres, in which state and economy free themselves from church control (Casanova, 2006). Charles Taylor critiques simplistic "subtraction" theories of secularisation, and demonstrates how, in fact, the Protestant reform movement spurred a disciplinary society which paved the way for a mass, pluralist public sphere (Taylor, 2007). This redefinition supports that secularisation is not merely decline, but a multifaceted reorganisation of religious power, required to understand how Nigerian Christians balance submission to the state in Romans 13 and maintaining religious freedom.

Against reasonable pluralism, liberal political thought develops notions of state neutrality that aim to reconcile differing religious beliefs without privileging them. In Political Liberalism, Rawls re-conceptualises justice as the result of an "overlapping consensus"

among citizens with different comprehensive doctrines, ensuring that public reason is not biased about particular religious truth claims (Rawls, 1993). Moreover, he contends that a political state must not favour any worldview, and must rely on shared procedural norms for legitimacy (Rawls, 1993).

Kymlicka(1995) builds on liberal theory by demonstrating that, although the state can be religiously neutral, it cannot be culturally neutral: majority cultural norms (often linked with majority religious values) inform policy. He also argues that external accommodations (e.g., exemptions from wearing religious symbols) can help redress the injustices faced by minority religious groups without violating liberal neutrality (Kymlicka, 1995). In the context of Nigeria's poly-faith democracy, these models assist in clarifying how the state can respect Romans 13's admonition to honour laws while developing measures to protect Christian minority religious identity and practice.

Development of Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Nigeria gained independence on 1st October 1960, but the early days of its parliamentary democracy were not peaceful. The First Republic (1960-1966) was marred by political violence and military coups, followed by decades of short-lived civilian governments (Second Republic 1979-1983) intermingled with long military rule. A new civilian constitution in 1979 tried to normalise government, but widespread corruption and ethnic violence resulted again in military rule in 1983. As a result, a second military regime took power until May 1999, when General Abdulsalami Abubakar led a democratic transition. On May 29 1999, Nigeria ushered in the Fourth Republic, with a new constitution and elections, beginning "the longest period of uninterrupted democratic government" in Nigerian history. Nigeria has had regular multi-party elections every four years since 1999, with a succession of governments (Obasanjo, 1999-2007; Yar'Adua, 2007-2010; Jonathan, 2010-2015; Buhari, 2015-2023; and the current government). But observers point to ongoing institutional problems. Pundits in the early years of the Fourth Republic lamented that after ten years, there was still no "clear evidence of good governance" with the rule of law "nominate only", elections "subverted" by fraud and violence. More recent perspectives are varied: on one hand, organisations such as Chatham House report that elections have become largely "free and credible"; on the other hand, endemic electoral violence, low voter turnout and ongoing elite manipulation point to ongoing democratisation. Nigeria's Fourth Republic is a significant consolidation of civil rule, although problems of corruption, insecurity and regionalism remain a challenge for democratic governance (Yagboyaju, 2011; Hoffmann, 2022).

Religious Landscape and Denominational Plurality

Muslims and Christians are almost equally represented in Nigeria's population. The north is mostly Muslim, and the south is mostly Christian, but there is no official census

information on religion. Polls estimate that 50% of the population is Muslim and 40-45% Christian, with the remainder (less than 5%) following traditional beliefs. Both religions have multiple sub-faiths. Nigerian Muslims are almost all Sunni (with a small minority of Shia), while Christians include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and other mainline churches, as well as the rapidly-growing Pentecostal and evangelical churches. More recently, particularly charismatic and independent churches have flourished, resulting in highly diverse Christian practice.

This diversity is reflected in regional distributions. The far north (Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri speaking regions) is primarily Islamic but has also had substantial Christian minorities. The Middle Belt (central Nigeria) is a mix of both Muslims and Christians. In the southwest (Yoruba nation), Islam and Christianity are in equal numbers, and many Yoruba combine elements of traditional religion with either faith. In the southeast (Igbo homeland) and the Niger Delta, Christians dominate (often 90% or more), but here too traditional ethnic practices are often integrated with Christianity. In essence, Nigeria is a highly religiously diverse society: Islam and Christianity are in a 50/50 balance across the country, but even these two faiths are diverse and often intertwined with traditional practices in various regions (Flake, 2025).

Legal Framework on Religious Freedom and Regulation

Secularism and freedom of religion are enshrined in the 1999 Constitution. Section 10 of Chapter I defines Nigeria as a secular state, and bars the federal or state government from requiring anyone to practice any particular religion. And Chapter IV (Fundamental Rights) ensures that everyone has "freedom of thought, conscience and religion" and prohibits religious discrimination. This means that Christians and Muslims are treated equally. For example, the constitution promotes inter-religious friendships and marriages as ways to promote national integration (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). There is no national legislation that declares Christianity or Islam to be the state religion - in theory, the Nigerian government must be secular (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; Human Rights Watch, 2004). But the law also makes provision for religious law. Twelve northern states are by constitution entitled to have Sharia courts. The constitution (Sections 275-279) authorises Sharia appellate courts, but purports to restrict them to Muslim personal law (marriage, inheritance). In the early 2000s, a number of northern states controversially reintroduced Sharia criminal laws for Muslims, with sometimes draconian sentences based on Islamic law. This has created legal controversies: some argue that enforcing religious criminal law on a section of the population effectively contravenes Nigeria's constitutional secularism and equality. There have been prominent cases in recent years (such as a Kano Sharia court convicting a man for blasphemy in 2022) that demonstrate the tensions between Sharia law and federal

law. Nonetheless, court law is ultimately superior. Other laws - such as the Penal Code (in the North) and the Criminal Code (in the South) - also have a religious history, but the overarching legal framework protects the freedom of religion for all citizens. In Malaysia, the law on religion is defined by a secular constitution that allows, but also limits, the actions of religious bodies, resulting in a rich church-state relationship (Human Rights Watch, 2004; Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

Organisational Involvement: Church Advocacy

Nigeria's Christian institutions engage in the political process by making public policy statements. For example, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) has staked claims on constitutional issues. During the 2021 constitutional reform process, PFN leaders flatly opposed the amendment of the 1999 Constitution, describing it as "fraudulent" and suggesting a new constitution was needed to solve Nigeria's problems (Olaitan, 2021). These statements reflect the way the Pentecostal movement seeks to shape public opinion on governance issues. Similarly, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which brings together Catholic, mainline Protestant and Pentecostal groups, regularly releases statements on moral and national concerns. CAN leaders have continually stressed their apolitical stance; when there were reports in 2015 that the presidency had made money available for campaigns to pastors, the general secretary of CAN declared no involvement in campaigns. He emphasised that "CAN was not a political party" and claimed that the various members of CAN were members of many parties, so it would be wrong for CAN to campaign for a particular candidate (Tukur, 2015).

Secular laws yield religion-tainted laws The constitution has assured freedom of worship since independence and, on the face of it, prohibited government at any level from adopting a state religion (Chijioke, 2021). However, in practice this has co-existed with other laws. For instance, a 1999 constitutional amendment permitted twelve northern states to introduce Sharia (Islamic) criminal laws, a move resented by non-Muslims as impinging on secular rights (Chijioke, 2021). On the national level, recent reforms have outraged the church. A corporate/NGO law, the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) of 2020, introduced new regulations for the registering and appointing of church trustees. Nigerian bishops and Pentecostal pastors condemned sections of the law as a State interference in the church's affairs. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) accused some of the CAMA provisions of being "Satanic" in nature and would "sniff the life out of the church" if implemented (Duruji, 2023). These responses stem from a sense of mistrust: clergy often perceive government regulations of church governance and doctrine unconstitutional, as they interfere with the intended separation of church and state (Duruji, 2023). Beyond these disputes, routine enforcement affects religious communities, too. There are reportedly cases in the northern states where officials refuse

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to issue building permits for churches or exclude Christians from government employment and enrolment quotas. In one instance, Christian pensioners were required to pay a "tax" for their pensions (Pattison, 2020).

Faith Mobilisations and Electoral Interventions

Faith networks have always emerged as political players during elections. Religious leaders and institutions often call on followers to vote as if "Godly", which equates godly with good government. In 2015, for instance, it was widely reported that Nigeria's religious profile could sway the elections between a Christian southern president and a Muslim northern rival (Ross, 2015). In this context, the leaders of CAN and PFN did make public statements, endorsing freedom of worship but rejecting political bias. For example, the secretary of CAN, Musa Asake, issued a press release to denounce claims of bribery of pastors by the presidency, stressing that, "CAN was not a political party and did not endorse anybody" (Tukur, 2015). Despite this, commentators remain concerned that politics and religion are still a dangerous mix. As one commentator observed, the politicisation of religious fervour is "very dangerous and bad": when different political parties seek to win the favour of the church, this can galvanise feelings and provoke conflict (Ross, 2015).

Legislative Debates on Religious Bills

The Nigerian legislature has frequently broached religion-sensitive issues, prompting church reactions. In 2021, the House of Representatives considered a wide-ranging Religious Discrimination (Prohibition) Bill. Despite being pitched as a bill to protect all religions, CAN officials expressed concern it would effectively "legalise the wearing of hijab in Christian schools" and single out Christian institutions under the banner of religious tolerance (Maina, 2021). There have been Senate initiatives, too. In April 2022, the National Assembly considered a National Religious Harmony Commission bill, which would establish a national agency to foster religious tolerance and respond to hate speech ("National Security", 2022). There have been mixed responses to these efforts. CAN publicly engaged in the debate over the Religious Discrimination bill to ensure any legislation did not adversely affect Christians. Likewise, in response to a bill for a National Centre (or Council) for Christian Education, CAN immediately rejected sensationalist media reports. It disavowed "fake news" that the draft legislation would control preaching in a press release. It explained the real purpose was to establish minimum standards for Christian schools and seminaries. CAN emphasised that the bill was not intended to regulate church doctrine, but legitimise Christian religious education as an academic discipline (Nwosu, 2023).

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Security Challenges and Interfaith Dynamics

Interfaith violence and tensions present significant problems that also impact church-state relations. Islamist insurgencies in northern Nigeria (for instance, Boko Haram/ISWAP) have committed a violent campaign in which Christians are often targeted. Official and NGO reports stress that the insurgents have "instituted a regime of terror" in these areas for Christians, making life risky for them (Chijioke, 2021). Apart from insurgencies, communal tensions remain: many of the violent attacks have communal and religious dimensions. Human rights activists report extensive discrimination against Christians. For instance, Catholic social workers report widespread discrimination: state authorities have confiscated farmlands from Christian farmers, denied registration for new churches and even demanded faith-based "taxes" from retired Christian government officials before releasing their pensions (Pattison, 2020). These interfaith tensions, from billboard battles to violent clashes, have led church actors to engage more in security and peace-building. CAN and other groups have convened interfaith forums and called on the government to declare states of emergency for kidnapping or banditry. Meanwhile, pastors encourage prayer for peace in the country, seeking to harness religious power to resolve the conflict. In all, Nigeria's recent history of terrorism and communal violence emphasises the blurry line between the state and the church: the state has to deal with faith-based grievances and militancy, and the churches are pushed by crises to engage in the public sphere in relation to security and governance.

SyntconstitutionaheSIS OF EXEGETICAL INSIGHTS WITH EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Exegesis reveals Paul portraying all rulers as appointed by God "for the good of the citizens" and to exercise justice (Rom. 13.1–4). But commentators emphasise this general rule assumes a good government; it "does not necessarily preclude exceptions" when leaders behave unjustly and corruptly (Ademiluka, 2019). This poses a problem in Nigeria. Nigerians have rulers whose actions are diametrically opposed to the "good" leader; commentators point out that passive obedience would contradict other biblical calls to fight injustice (Ugochukwu, 2008). This tension is reflected in Nigeria. While some Christian leaders cite Romans 13 to urge obedience and patience, synods and pastors also condemn bad rulers. For instance, the 2009 Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops encouraged African Catholics holding public office to pursue "God's kingdom of justice"; and to be "saintly" rulers who combat corruption (Duruji, 2023). Meanwhile, churches have taken "watchdog" roles by protesting popular and unpopular policies and demanding reforms. Duruji points out that in Nigeria, pastors pray for peace and order, and also call for sinners in authority to repent or resign (Duruji, 2023). To put it simply, Nigerian Christians can see a balance between Romans 13, which suggests obeying

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authority, and a prophetic call for authorities to do justice, blending biblical and democratic principles.

Church-State Tensions and Synergies in Nigeria

Nigeria is constitutionally secular (no state religion), but its diverse population faces church–state tensions. The advent of Sharia in the twelve northern states is an example of this: nominally part of a federal secular republic, these states used Islamic law for civil disputes, which Christians argued infringed on constitutional rights (Ademiluka, 2019). Nigeria's result, according to Offiong and Ekpo, is a "theocratic diarchy" beneath a secular façade (Offiong & Ekpo, 2022). Such measures are at odds with the biblical model of Romans 13, which assumes a unified moral order under God. Conversely, many Nigerians see no compatibility between an explicitly Muslim state and democracy (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010), revealing tension between religious goals and the plural democratic order. Despite these tensions, some complementarities emerge in areas where the church and state intersect. Churches and state share a commitment to the rule of law and social justice, and the church always collaborates with the state on these ends. Duruji explains that in Nigeria churches have "collaborated with the state in promoting peace and security" (educating people's consciences and lobbying for laws that assure human rights and egalitarianism (Duruji, 2023). For instance, grassroots churches advocate for the poor and encourage the state to fight corruption, echoing Romans 13's idea of rulers serving the common good. The Synod even assured moral support for saintly politicians and encouraged Christians to pray for good rulers (Duruji, 2023). So, in Nigeria and beyond, the biblical call to obey authority often overlaps with the church's prophetic mission: both church and state claim authority over the common good, creating synergies despite their separation.

Comparative Reflections on Democratic Practice

Comparative studies suggest Nigeria’s distinct blend of secular governance and religious activism. For instance, in the United States, there is a robust constitutional wall of separation between church and state, and surveys show that Americans are relatively low in "religious nationalism" compared to other countries (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010). Religious identity plays a cultural role in U.S. politics, but not an institutional one, so Romans 13 arguments are typically framed differently, and often debated in moral rather than political terms. By contrast, the 1996 South African Constitution prohibits religious discrimination and protects freedom of religion (Coertzen, 2008). The church was integral to ending apartheid and facilitating reconciliation, so church leaders tend to view the state as a fellow servant of social justice. Nigerian religious diversity and ethnic-religious tensions mean that appeals to Romans 13 must overcome communal suspicions.

In short, all of these democracies invoke biblical ideas of authority and justice, but with different results: in the U.S. and South Africa, strict pluralism prevails, while in Nigeria, formal secularism is tempered by powerful religious forces, leading to a mix of conflict and cooperation between the church and state.

Conclusion

This study of Romans 13:1-7, conducted against the backdrop of contemporary Nigerian democracy, offers results of significant value to the theological debate and the realpolitik of church-state relations. The Paper confirms a sophisticated reading of Pauline exhortations, eschewing over-simplified views of blind submission to the authority of rulers. It draws attention to Paul's enlightened, dual focus on rulers as divinely ordained agents of social stability and the execution of justice, and an implicit recognition that such obedience is qualified by the higher moral imperative to God, and therefore allows for critical analysis and even opposition when human law is palpably at odds with divine mandates or justice. This is particularly important in a country like Nigeria where citizens often find themselves in a political environment that stands in contrast to the Pauline vision of a benevolent, justice-enforcing ruler, and where a blind, unquestioning submission might unwittingly legitimise injustice and corruption, and conflict with other biblical exhortations to uphold justice and protect the oppressed.

The research findings highlight the role that religious institutions, especially the Christian church, can and do play in the emerging democratic system in Nigeria. It has supported the Nigerian churches' twin stance, on the one hand honouring and accepting the order and power of the State and calling for prayer for its leaders, while on the other hand, exercising their prophetic voice against injustice, corruption and human rights abuses. Such a role is not an anomaly, and accords with a theological position where civil authority, while originating from God, gains legitimacy through its role in ensuring the common good and respect for the intrinsic rights that reflect the divine order. This research, therefore, endorses the view that Christian public responsibility in Nigeria is an interplay of scriptural norms relating to order and authority, and the democratic demand for accountability. Moreover, the study highlights the challenges posed by the pluralistic nature of Nigeria's secularism, which co-exists with powerful religious factors and inter-religious tensions, including the introduction of Sharia law in some of the northern states. This often results in a "theocratic diarchy" under the guise of secularism, complicating the unity of the moral order under God's commandment as proclaimed in Romans 13. Therefore, the study confirms the urgent need for Nigerian Christians to articulate, and practise, biblically informed principles and guidelines for their political engagement and advocacy. These principles help navigate the complex legal frameworks, institutional

advocacy (e.g. through the Christian Association of Nigeria - CAN and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria - PFN), and wider social forces.

More generally, this study offers valuable insights into the broader academic and public debate on the place of religion in democracy. In the case of Nigeria, it offers a case study of how a religious community engages its own ancient scriptures in order to inform its current moral responsibilities in relation to justice and good governance. The comparative lessons from different church-state relations, such as the U.S. separationist model and the post-apartheid South African experience, also shed light on the Nigerian experience, where nominal secularism is juxtaposed with deep religious activism and distrust, resulting in both tensions and cooperation between the church and the state. Finally, this study heralds a future where the church and the state in Nigeria, as they embrace their respective roles - the church in principled engagement and prophetic witness, and the state in steadfast protection of religious freedom and just governance - can together promote a more just, accountable, and good society.

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