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RESTRUCTURING AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CHRISTIANS PERSPECTIVES AND ASPIRATIONS IN TARABA STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

The question concerning restructuring has already metamorphosed from whether Nigeria should be restructured to when it should take place. With that in mind this paper argued, restructuring that might treat religious views and aspirations as insignificant factors of Nigeria's problems could be equated to applying opium to dull a symptom as the disease continues to rage unabated. Religious credentials are enough to afford special recognition for its adherents in most national discus. But in a pluralistic society as Nigeria, what are the demands of the various religions? One may ask. To this end, this paper focused on Christian's perspectives and aspirations on restructuring in Taraba State. To have a proper grasp of the variables in the research topic books, journals, dailies and online materials were sorted out for secondary data. Focused group interviews provided primary data for the research. The data collated from adherents of Christianity in Taraba State revealed among other things: gross inadequate level of awareness regarding the importance and implication of restructuring, high level of discontentment relating to government relationship with Christian block at the federal level and divided opinions on the subject 'the impact of current structure on Christians'. The findings suggest that most Christians could be vulnerable to the whims of political actors on the subject of restructuring Nigeria. It is therefore expedient for government and stake-holders to be proactive towards educating religious adherents on the implication of restructuring on national development.

Keywords:
Aspiration, Christian, National Development, Restructuring, Taraba State

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Introduction

From the amalgamation of Southern and Northern protectorates to form Nigeria to her independence, sixty-one years down the lane, media captions, public utterances from various stakeholders and the general mood of the polity suggest that Nigeria is anything but the country of our dreams. Few would argue against the assertion that Nigeria is in a predicament, especially in regards to national unity. Perhaps this situation is responsible for the seemingly incessant calls often tinted with religious and ethnic sentiments for restructuring. Saraki the Chairman of the 8th Nigeria National Assembly asserts that restructuring is necessary for Nigeria to move forward (Ekpimah 2018). Demands for resource control, review of revenue sharing formula, devolution of power, return to regional federal system of government based on six geopolitical zones, return to parliamentary system of government, removal of immunity clause from the constitution, creation of state policing and the role of traditional rulers could be easily noticed in most of the agitations (Abbas and Wakili, 2018).

The pressure for restructuring appears not to be unnoticed. Government at the centre is gradually caving in on the weight from the pressure for restructuring. The 2014 Nigeria National Conference and the collation of data by federal lawmakers with a view to amend the constitution are indications that significant change on the current structure is not far away. In fact, 'the question should no longer be whether Nigeria should restructure its constitutional foundation, but when would it take positive and practical steps to restructure? (Babalola, 2023). However, by virtue of religious credentials, one may be tempted to ask whether restructuring that treats religious views and aspirations as insignificant factors of the problem would not be synonymous to applying opium to dull a symptom as the disease continues to rage unabated? Obasanjo the former president of Nigeria, in 1987 cautioned that;

> By act of commission, we have raised the religious issues to a high pedestal we can neither sweep it under the carpet nor ignore it…We will do well to reflect on our religious plurality (Imo).

Bruce (2000) also asserts that,

> Religion is not just a convenient sign of differences (like the contrasting colour shirts of opposing football teams), it is often also deeply embedded in the ethnic or national identity, it provides each side with a justification for seeing itself as superior (We obey God) and the enemy as inferior (They are the infidel).

Marjomaa (2006) is more specific when he draws our attention to the fact that influences of CAN, NSCIA and JNI to National politics have since found niches in places of authorities in the country.

Be that as it may, if religions were to be given important position in the negotiation concerning restructuring the country; with the numerous religious beliefs and scores of

blocks within the same belief system, who decides for a particular religion? And with the cacophony of religious sounds and scuffling on restructuring of the nation filled with religious ecstasy that seems to drown out any opposing position however reasonable, how then can we arrive at what is most appropriate religious positions regarding restructuring? How can we identify and reconcile between loudest voices, popular ones, passionate calls and those that are laden with reasons? Perhaps investigation and analysis of the questions raised above would lead to relevant religious perspectives and aspirations aimed at concrete negotiation for our continue existence as a people.

To this end, this work will examine Christian religious perspectives and aspirations in Taraba State and how the information could be harnessed and use in the negotiation for restructuring of the nation. The information would also shade more light on policies on religious issues within the state and the nation at large. This focus is borne out of the fact that Taraba State, a microcosm of the Nation (in character and composition) has a fair share of some of these frontiers: features of a pluralistic society such as existence of different religions, tribes and ethnic groups, fair share of representation of Christianity and Islam and sporadic religious influenced crisis. However, one may not rule out the possibilities of certain peculiarities especially in the demands of Christianity and Islam in the state concerning restructuring.

Research Methodology

This study is based on ethnography, in-depth interviews, focused group discussions, and Questionnaires aimed at understanding restructuring and how restructuring is being done in Nigeria to pave way for system to function efficiently in Nigeria. The insights and perspectives of these groups interviewed together with the writings of scholars will be corroborated in descriptive, historical and comparative approaches. Also, a survey will be conducted in the three Senatorial zones in Taraba State. 6,000 questionnaires will be randomly administered. In selecting sample size, the researchers shall use purposive sampling technique involving 100 stake holders across the three Senatorial zones. Descriptive and analytic technique will also be employed to interpret and analyse data through the use of contextual and simple data tabulation.

Clarification of the Abstraction 'Restructuring'

What does it mean to "restructure"? One may wonder. Restructuring according Unya (2011), is to effect a fundamental change in an organization or system. Bello (2017), also explains that restructuring is the process of increasing or decreasing the number of component parts that make up a system and re-defining the interrelationship between them in such a way that the entire system performs more efficiently. However, the word 'restructure' could be better understood if the prefix 're' which simply means 'again' or 'repeat' is kept aside and the word 'structure' is studied from its root. Etymologically, 'structure' is from the Latin word *structur* which means 'fitting together' or 'building'. It

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is synonymous with words like 'formation' 'composition', 'anatomy', 'organization', 'constitution', 'system', and 'configuration'. With this in mind, 'structure' could be viewed as a complex system or organization that is made up of different parts. Structure could also be seen as the composition of, as well as relations between parts or elements of something complex.

But since our focus is societal base, we would look at structure in relation to social institutions. According to Parsons, social structure is a term applied to a particular arrangement regarding the interrelations of institutions within a defined social structure (Haralambos and Holborn 2008). Yinger (1957) explains that society is not a collection of unrelated parts, but a complex system. Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857), Herbert Spencer (1820 – 1905) Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917), Talcott Parsons (1902 – 79) and other structural functionalists also see society as a complex system whose parts with their various unique features work together. To this end, society is likened to an organism that is evolving with its various parts functioning as a unit (Haralambos and Holborn 2008).

Restructure could be deduced from the submissions above to mean the rearrangement of certain social institutions which could alter current general configuration and simultaneously affect social actions. In other words, restructure might also imply the significant alteration of social structure and cultural patterns, which might reflect on an individual or collective value system. Still, it could be seen the alteration of mechanisms within the social structure, characterized by changes upon some collective elements such as constitution, social institutions and morality. It follows therefore that demand for restructure connotes dissatisfaction of the current order, hence soliciting for rearrangement or inclusion of some elements in the polity to accommodate certain needs which their absence is believed to affect the system.

A Brief History of Restructuring in Nigeria

The attempt at clarification of the term 'restructure' above suggests that to better understand socially based restructuring, it is important to first of all understand the structure of the system in question. In line with this trajectory, this study takes a look at the formation of Nigeria especially the system established by the pass leaders, and how the various systems thrived or struggled in order to shade light on why the various demands for restructuring. It is believed that from our historical past we could appreciate the different perspectives and views that become front burners for the agitations for restructuring in many quarters.

Bello (2017) explained that since the independence deliberately or otherwise, most Heads of State or governments in Nigeria had implemented one form of restructuring or the other during their reign. Therefore, capturing a historical perspective of restructuring could be as cumbersome as pining down the numerous aspirations for restructuring. One maybe grappling with themes such as: state creation, revenue sharing, system of government and administrative styles. Be that as it may, whatever the type of

restructuring we are talking about in Nigeria religious influence may either be present or whatever is restructured would have impact on religion. This work shall focus on themes with direct or remote bearing to religion such as constitutional restructuring and state creation. However, pining the beginning of Nigeria based on historical events can be as challenging as fixing human activities to a few explanation.

In 1874, the Gold coast and Lagos were formed into a separate colony. And 12 years later, Lagos became a separate political entity with its own Governor, executive and legislative councils. In 1906, the protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the colony of Lagos were amalgamated and called the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria. On the opposite side of the pole, in 1903, the British Empire conquered the Sokoto Caliphate after seven years of intermittent fighting. Most of present-day northern Nigeria was by this victory brought under British domination. However, lacking the resources to efficiently control such a huge territory, the British colonial regime sought to enlist the vanquished local aristocracy, mostly the emirs, the *ulama* (Muslim scholars) to become middlemen. By this arrangement, Shari'a law became an integral part of the legal system in this territory. This principle was known as "indirect rule" (Kuka, 1993). This could be viewed as first political structure of Southern and Northern Nigeria under the colonial administration. However, on January 1, 1914, Lord Fredrick Lugard, the governor of both the Northern Nigeria Protectorate and the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, signed a document consolidating the Northern and Southern Nigeria, and the forced union is referred to as the Colony and protectorate of Nigeria.

From this point, Nigeria's structure as one entity is significantly described by various constitutional provisions. This claim is made in line with Aristotle's view which states that, "constitution is the way of life the state has chosen for itself" (Mahajan, 2008). To this end, some of the features, merits and demerits from various constitutions of Nigeria as deduced from sources such as the London Gazzete (1923), Stop Learn (2022) and Olamide (2016) will be outlined. To this end, the first political structure of Nigeria is defined by the 1922 constitution. This constitution derived its name from Sir Hugh Clifford who took over the leadership of Nigeria territory from the former governor, Lord Lugard. Hence, the constitution is popularly known as the Clifford constitution. Some of the hallmark of the Clifford constitution are: elective principle was introduced in Lagos and Calabar only, the Legislative council was increased to 46 and the East and the West all had representatives, however, North was the only region that lacked representatives and continued to be ruled by proclamations from the Governor. After Hugh Clifford, there were two other governors namely, Cameroon and Bernard Boudillion. They did little or nothing in terms of constitutional development. However, Boudilion divided Nigeria into East, West and North for administrative purposes. This further increased the regional, ethnic and religious lines of divide.

The general mood among the local elites after the Clifford Constitution was that the constitution did not represent the indigenous population as it should. And they mounted

pressure on Sir Arthur Richards, the then governor, who in 1944 introduced another constitution which provided for a new legislative council comprised of the governor, 16 official members, and 28 unofficial members. The North had 11 members in the legislative council; the West had 8 members while the East had 6 members.

Macpherson became Governor of Nigeria in 1948. The weaknesses of the Richard constitution such as limited franchise generated criticism, anti-colonial activities and de-mystification of white superiority and subsequently led to the introduction of a new constitution. The governor, Sir John Macpherson, included Nigerians in the constitutional making process. The constitution provided for a federal legislature called the House of Representatives. It had 136 elected representatives, 6 ex-officio members and 6 nominated by the governor. 68 members were from the North, 34 from the West and 34 from the East. It also provided for regional legislatures that could make laws for their regions. The legislatures in the West and North were bi-cameral, each having a house of chiefs alongside the regional legislature. In the East, it was a unicameral legislature. It was also from the regional legislatures that members were nominated to the legislative council. However, notably among the weaknesses of the constitution especially from Nigerians perspective was that the constitution vested too many powers on the governor and it failed to grant political independence to Nigeria as demanded by the Nationalists.

Macpherson constitution collapsed largely due to the following factors: eastern region crisis in 1953, motion for self-government, championed by Anthony Enahoro in 1953, rejection of self-government motion by Northerners, threat of Northern secession and Kano riot of 1953. These problems led to the Lyttleton Constitution prioritized greater autonomy to the regions. The constitution was able to establish what could be termed as first Nigeria's federation. Yet, there were still some loopholes in the constitution such as the lack of provisions for office of the Prime Minister at the centre; veto power was still with the Governor General and fear of domination of minorities was exposed. These weaknesses led to agitation for more regions and independence.

On 1st October 1960, Nigeria became independent and the country is guided by the so called 'Independence constitution'. The constitution has the following features: it retained the federal structure initially adopted by the Lyttleton's Constitution of 1954, it adopted the parliamentary system of government, there was a bicameral legislature for the federal and regional House of Assemblies, executive power was granted to the prime minister and it adopted a right approach to constitutional amendments. However, the constitution still retained the Queen of England as the ceremonial head of state represented by the Governor-General. It was largely a foreign designed constitution supervised by the retreating British colonialist, and did not capture all the main aspirations of Nigerians hence, the 1963 Republican constitution.

The republican constitution was passed into law by the federal House of Representatives on September 19, 1963 it came into force on 1st October 1963.One of the main features was that the queen of England ceased to be the head of state. The head of state was the

president who was to be chosen by secret ballot of a joint session of both houses of the national assembly. Despite all these changes in the constitution, there still some criticisms leveled against it. First was that the president was elected by the national assembly instead of the electorates. The national assembly consisted of just a few people in comparison with the whole electorates.

However, on January 15 1966, a coup d'etat interrupted the first civilian rule and brought about military rule until 1979.1st, October 1979 ushered in the first constitution under the military regime, during the then military President of General Olusegun Obasanjo. The constitution jettisoned the parliamentary system of government and replaced it with a presidential system. Whoever emerged as president become both head of state and head of government, as well as commander in chief of the armed forces. The president was chosen by the electorates in a general election. There was also an executive governor for each state who was the chief executive of the state. The legislature was bicameral which consisted of senate and House of Representatives. The states, on the other hand had a unicameral legislature. However, the constitution was modified by General Abdusalam Abubakar the de facto President of Nigeria from 1998 – 1999 modified the 1979, notably in the removal of local government autonomy through joint account with the state government.

However, apart from restructuring through constitutional provisions, there are other forms of restructuring i.e. government policies and executive fiat. We shall briefly look at some of the restructuring that fall under such classes, starting from 1960 to 2022: 1960-1965 during the regime of Tafawa Balewa and Nnamdi Azikwe; creation of Mid-Western Region from the then Western Region. General Aguiyi Ironsi 1966; abolished the federating regions hence, started unitary government with a strong center and weaker regions. General Yakubu Gowon from 1966-1975. Gowon created 12 states to replace four regions which were earlier created by Tafawa Balew. General Murtala Mohammed 1975-1976, started the process of drafting a new constitution for Nigeria and created additional states. General Olusegun Obasanjo (1st reign)**;** changed the system of government from British parliamentary system to American Presidential system. Shehu Shagari (1979-1983); established Federal Character Principle in federal appointments. Major-General Muhamadu Buhari1983-1985; operated a Supreme Military Council. General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993); created Federal Revenue Mobilization and Fiscal Commission (administrative restructuring) and attempted to enforce 2-party system for Nigeria (it failed). Ernest Shonenkan (1993), spent 3 months in office, hence no notable restructure. General Sani Abacha. (1993-1998); created 6 additional states and additional local governments. General Abdulsalam (1998-1999); drafted a new constitution for Nigeria by modifying the 1979 constitution and removed local government autonomy through joint account with state government. General Olsegun Obasanjo - as a civilian president (1999-2007); **c**reated Ministry of Niger Delta. Umaru Musa Yar'adua (2007-2010); **h**is reign did not allow him to implement any major restructure. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (2010-2015);

Treasury Single Account to fight corruption in the country and he also convened a national conference.

Underpinnings of Demands for Restructuring in Nigeria

In the preceding subtopic, an attempt was made to explain the early structure of Nigeria and few of the various restructuring that took place in Nigeria. However, meaning of political restructuring in Nigeria appears to be as varied as the demands for restructuring. El-Rufai the former governor of Kaduna State observed that Nigerians prefer to use other words such as true federalism, devolution of power, resource control, regionalism, self-determination and other related terms instead of the word "restructuring" (Unya, 2022). To underscore this position, the governor of Sokoto State Aminu Tambuwal and Solomon Lalong the governor of Plateau State explain that "Nigerians from all parts of the country desire true federalism (Ajijah, 2017).

A pan-Yoruba social cultural group known as Yoruba Koya movement also see the current 1999 constitution as "martial law in civilian garb", hence the federal government should revert to the regional system of government that was in operation before the coup d'etal of 1966 (Ajayi et al, 2017). Professor Kingsley Moghalu argues that the root cause of agitation of restructuring of Nigeria is marginalization of some group especially the Igbo people. He suggests a model for restructuring in which the current thirty-six states are replaced by six geopolitical zones. The central government will retain core functions such as defence, foreign affairs, and central bank. But the federating units would "look after themselves" without the "feeding bottle" of the central government (Cambell, 2017).

However, Atiku Abubakar focus on the highly depleted oil revenue, hence advocates for economic restructuring (Olowoopejo and Olawale 2018). But, the leader of the Northern elders' forum, Professor Ango Abdullahi has declared that the region will resist any attempt to restructure the country (Orude, 2018).

List of perspectives indicating what restructuring mean to Nigerians could go on and on. However, Abbas and Wakili (2018) summarized the major focal points of the agitation for restructuring to include: resource control, review of revenue sharing formula, devolution of power, return to regional federal system of government based on six geopolitical zones, return to parliamentary system of government, removal of immunity clause from the constitution, creation of state police and role of traditional rulers. In the same vein the APC Committee on 'True Federalism' reduced the various submissions on the debates concerning restructuring to the following twelve contentious issues:

i. Creation or merger of states and the framework and guidelines for achieving that
ii. Derivation principle, bordering on what percentage of federal collectible revenues from mining should be given back to the sub-nationals from which the commodities are extracted
iii. Devolution of powers: what items on the exclusive legislative list should be

transferred to the recurrent list, especially state and community police, prisons, etc.

iv. Federating units: should Nigeria be based on regions or zones or retain the 36 state structure?
v. Fiscal federalism and revenue allocation
vi. Form of government – (parliamentary or presidential?)
vii. Independent candidacy
viii. Land tenure system
ix. Local government autonomy
x. Power sharing and rotation of political offices
xi. Resource control

(El-Rufai, 2017).

Be that as it may, the various submissions above either from Abbas and Wakili's summary, report of APC Committee on 'True Federalism', Atiku Abubakar's stand and the rest of the submissions above reference to religion is conspicuously absent. Perhaps, it was a deliberate omission to avoid introduction of something volatile to an already charged society. However, palliative measures or applying opium on an injury could only provide a temporary consolation. Religion would most likely be a major key player overtly or covertly in whatever restructuring or implementation that would take place as long as the state/religion relationship remains. This position implies that religion is a major factor directly or indirectly in the agitation for restructuring. Paying more attention to restructuring religion would go a long way in solving other demands that rely on religious favor for their impetus. For example, some of the agitations for state creation or devolution of powers maybe largely predicated on systematic religious dominance by one group over the rest which seems to be supported by the state.

Assessment of structures which define state relationship with religion in Nigeria

On the task of assessing structures that defines the relationship between state and religion, this study shall rely on policies, constitutional provisions and land mark events to sketch a structure that guides the relationship between the state and religion(s). It would be in the realm of reason to accept that policies and constitutional provisions on religion are largely enacted against the backdrop of interactions between the state and religions. The relationship between the state and religion has a long history in Nigeria. Ludwig (2008) explains that, religious matters for a long time continued to be a persistent and critical issue even after Nigeria attained independence in 1960. He opined that the problem largely stems out of the fact that Nigerian Christians have been worried about being marginalized by Muslims. And on the other hand, Nigerian Muslims have worried about being dominated and undermined by the West. It would not be out of place to opine that this problem shaped the relationship between religion and the Nigerian state.

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The controversy between secularity of Nigeria and the Shari'ah law dilemma as well as the unresolved issue concerning Shari'ah law during the constitutional debate of 1977/1978 add credence to the preceding assertion.

Religious tussle for dominance between adherents of Christianity and Islam, often championed by political office holders continue to influence successive government over the years. Evidences could be seen from interventions on religious matters such as: giving of support to religious groups, the integration of the Sharia into the national legal system as well as paying all those that work in the Sharia courts and the funding of Muslims and Christian chaplaincies in the armed forces; Nigeria's membership of the organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in January 1986; the establishment of pilgrim's welfare board for pilgrimage for Muslims and Christians; both Christianity and Islam have enjoyed government holidays on the days of their religious festivities and the referencing to God in documents such as the national pledge, the national Anthem, and the preamble of the 1970 constitution. The presence of Mosque for Muslims and Chapel for Christians in Aso Rock Villa further symbolized the state relationship with religions in Nigeria. Suffice it to say that the historical facts above suggest that the state has adopted Christianity and Islam as state religions.

The facts above represent an aspect of the state relationship with religion. However, formal or official position such as constitutional position would add credence to the impression created. A constitution is the fundamental law according to which relationship of individuals or moral persons to a particular community are determined (Charles Borgeaud in Mahajan, 2008).

In other words, one of the main purposes of a constitution is to provide a framework in which the relationship between citizens, institutions and a state is determine. To this end, Section 38 (1) of the constitution states: every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance. And Chapter 4 Section 38 (1) stets that 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 .And Section 10 of the constitution states that: "The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion." However, the uncertainty introduced by the 1999 constitutional regarding state relationship with religion i.e. the secularity of Nigeria created a major lacuna that attracts diverse interpretation mostly according to sectional or individual interest. Kuka (1993) supports this view thus;

> Government and people stake their claims for neutrality on section 10 of the constitution which simply states that: "The government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as the State Religion". But exactly what this means remains part of the political

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> problem right from the days of Constitution Drafting Committee in 1976.

Gotan adds credence to the position above when he says that "in Nigeria, instead of the government to steer totally clear of religion, the government participates in both religions. That is not secularism in any way but essentially a theocracy in disguise" (Ngbea, 2012). Oyerinde (2011) also collaborated to the submissions above when he asserts that whatever we do as a nation we always put Islam and Christianity first. For this reason, there is nothing secular about Nigeria.

Suffice to say that one in search of existing structure that would provide direction regarding the relationship between religion and the state from the perspectives of constitution and government policies would be more confused by the juxtaposition of constitutional position on religion and the favorite disposition of government towards Islam and Christianity. It is easy to allege that the ambiguity created by the1999 constitution on religion caused the perennial struggle for power between the two religious gladiators in Nigeria i.e. Islam and Christianity. Part of the consequences of the epic struggle between the two religions include array of religious crisis especially in the Northern part of Nigeria as well as the politicization of religion. Femi Gbajabiamila the Honorable Speaker of the 8th House of Representative of the Federal Republic of Nigeria attests to the confusion caused by the constitutional position on religion and policies of the government on religious matters thus;

> I have heard legislators express divergent views on provisions for Sharia court in our constitutions, and for instance, use of Arabic text on the naira note hence, the legislative proposal to, as well include creation of Ecclesiastical court, a court of law guided by ideals of Christianity into our constitution. I have also heard of Nigerian Muslims disagree with the marriage Act, that favours Christianity. In fact, many Muslims do not subject their marriages to this law (Ngbea 2017).

Perspectives and Aspirations of Christians in Taraba State on Restructuring

Perhaps, 'Federation' being a conglomeration of different diversity could adapt better through periodic renewal of covenant of union, which if possible, should be made in wide consultation with diverse sectional groups in the union. Unfortunately, one could only remember 2014 National Conference which until date was not implemented as the only evidence of such consultations in recent times. However, if the pressure for restructuring is put in context alongside some activities of government such as 2014 National Conference and the APC Committee on 'True Federalism' it is very probable that in a no distant future the government would implement at least one out of the aforementioned demands. As agued above, reorganizing state/religion relationship is one of the most

important restructuring that would foster unity among adherents of various religions and the state as well. Be that as it may, whichever item in the forgoing list that may be implemented, religion would likely either influence the process or be influenced by it. And for the fact that history has proven how volatile religion in Nigeria could be, any change might lead to a backlash.

It is important therefore to understand demands and aspirations of religions in order to at least ameliorate any shock on religious institutions as a result of whatever restructuring that might take place.

Some literatures on 'religion and the state' such as Imo (2007) and Ngbea (2017) attest that most Christians in the past advocated for a secular state on the basis of the statement made by Jesus when he was questioned on the payment of the poll-tax which all male adults in the Roman Empire were expected to pay. In response to the question, Jesus said "Give unto Caesar what are his and give to God what are His". On the basis of this passage, many Christians in Nigeria took the position that there should be a separation between state and religion. However, Dopamu (1984), Imo (1995) and Ngbea (2017) observed that a contrary view is gaining popularity in Nigeria. Other Christians feel that, no matter how conventional the statement above might sound, it should not be the basis for advocating the separation of religion from the state. To this group, Caesar and God are not in opposition to each other. Instead, God is the source of the authority of Caesar. To strengthen their position, they assert that just as in the Bible, God's ideal view of a state is theocratic nation. Consequently, unitary view of the state is consonant with biblical teachings.

However, the preceding position is largely to encourage Christians that feel that God opposes politics based on the statement in Matthew 22:22 to recedes their position and embrace the understanding that, it is in fact good for Christians to be involved in politics. Bishop Onaiyakan puts it aptly when he says:

> We can no longer avoid the question of the relationship between our Christian Faith and politics. We must evolve a suitable popular theology of political engagement in the country. Never again should good Christians run away from politics as a dirty job to be left for crooks and rogues. Political leadership as a form of Christian worship whose reward is great in heaven must now become a main feature of our Christian teaching and exhortation to the faithful. We should even go further to identify and encourage good gifted Christian to vie for public office, so as to ensure a good Christian component in the leadership crops of our country … the aim would not be to achieve Christian domination of the nation, but rather to ensure a valid Christian contribution towards good and just government (Imo, 1995).

When the positions above are closely studied, it would be noticed that there are two perspectives that are of most importance to Christians in Nigeria as well as in Taraba state.

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The later of the two perspectives being Christians' participation in political affairs such as contesting in political offices, political campaigns and voting during election periods, while the former is on the relationship between government as a political institution and Christianity as an institution, which takes note of the question of restructuring from religious perspectives. At this juncture, the former perspective is more important to this study i.e. the state relationship with Christianity as a social block. To this end, focus group interviews to gain insight into the aspirations and perspectives of Christians concerning the question of Christianity and restructuring of Nigeria were conducted. And the following were gathered from participants: about 10% of the respondents did not have good understanding of political restructuring. About 80% attests to the fact that they are unaware of constitutional position regarding state/religion relationship, nor state's policies concerning religion. However, they opined that political leaders at the federal level have been promoting Islamic agenda to the detriment of political and economic growth of Christians and adherents of other religions in Nigeria. Some of the points of references they gave bordered around the introduction of Nigeria into Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), systematic promotion of Sharia law and issue of religious freedom in certain Northern states. The remaining percent felt that the government is fair on her on part of the relationship. However, about 40 percent believe that the current political structure is good except the problem of implementation.

Only few preferred Christian politicians that are experienced in political governance to represent the Christian block. However, more felt that Christian's fate will be better handled by Christian technocrats. When the question on the position that religion should occupy if a new structure is to be introduced was put forward, most of the respondents wish that the two dominant religions i.e. Christianity and Islam should be formally recognized as state religions with equal status and should be treated equally. Some of the participants quipped that restructuring should correct the obvious marginalization against Christians especially in political appointments and civil service appointments especially at the federal level.

Some of the responses from the participants did not come as surprise, considering the rate of information (though some are unsubstantiated) available to support a few of the fears expressed. The theory that gained prominence during the interview was a grant plan to introduce Sharia law in all the northern states in Nigeria using the federal government might to facilitate the purported agenda. To strengthen their agitations, some interviewees outlined historical events such as: the implementation of Sharia law by some northern governors and the type of treatments Christians and Christian's institutions such as Churches and schools received especially in the Northern part of Nigeria.

One would dear opine that if government relationship with Muslims is used as yardstick to measure the relationship between government and Christians in Nigeria, then Christians in Nigeria are with historical justification concerning the alleged privileged status giving to Muslims, especially at the national level. This fact appeared to have greatly influenced some perspectives concerning the issues around restructuring. Perhaps, that

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was why most Christians that were interviewed mentioned the skewed appointments especially of the Service Chiefs during the eight year reign of President Muhammadu Buhari and the so called Muslim-Muslim ticket for the office of President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria introduced by the ruling political party during the 2023 general elections. This position finds credence in Ndujihe (2018) article in Vanguard news paper titled "Military aiding herdsmen against us, Taraba residents allege". Ndujihe wrote on the killings of indigenous Christians and their conviction that the military is colluding with herdsmen to sack them from their lands.

Conclusion

The cliché that peaceful coexistence is sacrosanct to national development dote speeches of most leaders in Nigeria. However, the seemingly incessant religious and ethnic ideological squabbles in the pages of print and audio media and the seemingly endless outright confrontations that often climaxed as full-fledged crisis between communities beg for more proactive measures. Most academics and commentators pin the root cause of the problem to the current structure, hence the persistent clarion calls for restructuring. To this end, this paper argued that religious credential in Nigeria has merited an exalted position in the permutation towards restructuring. With this in mind, this paper takes a close look at perspectives and aspirations of Christians in Taraba state. This task reveals among other things that there is an inadequate level of awareness regarding the importance and implication of restructuring among Christians. The paper also highlighted the level of discontentment from Christians' perspectives concerning government relationship with Christian block at the federal level. However, opinions were divided regarding the current structure. Some believe that the current structure accommodates significant percent of needs from religious quarters giving the fact that Nigeria is a religiously pluralistic society. Others felt the current structure should be changed and Christianity and Islam be formally recognized.

With the information above, it is important for various stake holders to create more awareness concerning implication of restructuring to religious institutions and religious adherents as well. As discussed in the early part of the work, restructuring could take place not necessarily through national conference or constitutional amendment, policies, policy implementation, political appointments etc. could alter the structure of the nation. It is encumbrance on leaders, Christian politicians and Christians in general therefore to be conscious of the subtle forms of restructuring that might have huge impact on Christian block. In other words, all hands must be put on deck towards the incessant negotiation for survival in the adverse condition the state Nigeria has wittingly or unwittingly created for a more robust national development as against a lopsided one.

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