Is Nigeria A Religiously Pluralistic Society? A critical View

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ABSTRACT
Religious pluralism has been in existence since at least the seventeenth century, the concept has become more popular since the latter half of the twentieth century in Western Europe and North America. Specifically, the idea of religious ecumenism (religions working together as one) and the recently popularized interfaith movement have led to the increased acceptance of religious pluralism in popular culture. The Nigerian society as it stands today is religiously pluralized and this significantly influences political decisions and socio-economic policies of the nation. On the other hand, there are people who hold the strong opinion that this relationship should not be stressed and that religion and politics should be allowed to operate separately without one interfering with the other. Pluralism is a framework of interaction in which groups show sufficient respect and tolerance of each other and they fruitfully co-exist and interact without conflict or assimilation. The crisis of religious violence that has engulfed Nigeria indicates that religion, as it is currently expressed, puts individuals, communities, and the nation in bondage. But, paradoxically, religion is also crucial in fighting such bondage. In its functional form, it can help promote peaceful coexistence, the alleviation of poverty, transparency and a lack of corruption, and the pursuit of human happiness through social welfare programs. The debate about whether it is religion or politics that triggers the frequent violence in Nigeria underestimates religion's powerful function in molding cultures and societies everywhere.
Keywords: Pluralistic, religious, beliefs, society

INTRODUCTION
Religious pluralism generally refers to the belief in two or more religious worldviews as being equally valid or acceptable. More than mere tolerance, religious pluralism accepts multiple paths to God or gods as a possibility and is usually contrasted with "exclusivism" - the idea that there is only one true religion or way to know God. While religious pluralism has been in existence since at least the seventeenth century, the concept has become more popular since the latter half of the twentieth century in Western Europe and North America. Specifically, the idea of religious ecumenism (religions working together as one) and the recently popularized interfaith movement have led to the increased acceptance of religious pluralism in popular culture.
Studies by the Barna Group and others have noted the growth of ideas related to religious pluralism in American culture in recent years (Imo, 2005). In many cases, even significant numbers of people identified as Christians believe there is more than one way to heaven. Pluralism is more than the sharing of certain values or agreement on some social issues. Buddhists and Christians both agree that helping the poor is important, but such limited concord

is not pluralism. Pluralism has to do with lending credence to competing truth claims and accepting diverse beliefs regarding God and salvation.

The Nigerian society as it stands today is religiously pluralized and this significantly influences political decisions and socio-economic policies of the nation. On the other hand, there are people who hold the strong opinion that this relationship should not be stressed and that religion and politics should be allowed to operate separately without one interfering with the other. Those who hold this view argued essentially from the position that religion mixed politics is mostly like to imbibe various vices associated with politics. The three dominant religions in Nigeria are traditional religion, Islam and Christianity. One of the basic questions concerning religious pluralism in the Nigerian society is whether it has a reinforcing or an undermining effect on religiosity of individuals and groups. The two contradicting hypotheses are on the one hand the 'market theory' on the other hand the 'secularization theory'. According to the 'market theory' a vast supply of religions in society also increases the demand for it and thus reinforces the religious vitality (Beneke, 2006). The 'secularization theory' states that individual religiosity is weakened by a plurality of religions in society (Beneke, 2006). The aim of this paper therefore is to re-emphasize the view that Nigeria is a religiously pluralistic state.

Definition of Terms
For a better appreciation of the objectives of this paper, it is perhaps good to attempt definitions of some terms such as religion and pluralism.
Religion
The task of giving a definition to religion has been very herculean. However, for operational reasons, it is imperative that we attempt a definition here. For the purpose of this paper, we shall adopt Emile Durkheim's definition of religion, which is sociologically based. He defines it as: A unified system of beliefs and practices which unite into one moral community called a church all those who adhere to them (see Aderibigbe and Aiyegboyin, 1997). This definition gives a sociological interpretation to religion and its practice in human society. It is from this premise that Durkheim draws his popular dictum of relationship between the sacred and the profane. To him, even though, there should be communication between the sacred and the profane, in the psyche of human, the difference between them is clear. But as Aderibigbe and Aiyegboyin (1997) pointed out, the definition has the potential of admitting into the religious phenomenon all matters that constitute an obsession to a society and to adorn the garb of religiosity. Further, the definition is a clear reference to organized religion to the exclusion of the primal or oriental religious ideologies. It also suggests a religious origin to socio-political associations with their set of rules and regulations. However, it tends to indicate that religion cannot relate with other institutions in the society since it is a mere "moral community" which might restrict its adherents to its tenets thereby limit their socio-political interaction.
Pluralism
Pluralism is a belief in difference – a philosophy supporting diversity, religious tolerance, and multiculturalism. Pluralism has always been controversial, as nearly all societies experience a tension between diversity and homogeneity, which can both give benefits and create problems for a society. Most time when people talk about pluralism they are talking about religious pluralism or the idea of different religions thriving alongside one another in a single society. This is not the only form of pluralism, just the most common usage of the word. We tend to imagine that pluralism is a new phenomenon – that the past was a place of intolerance and cultural isolation, in which religious and ethnic minorities were violently persecuted. Then, the story goes, modern ideas of rationality kicked in and globalization made the world ever more interconnected so that now we've become more pluralistic and syncretic than ever.

Pluralism was also dominant in many times and places in the Ottoman Empire, an Islamic state that ruled the Middle East and lasted from 1299 all the way to 1923. Of course, in all those centuries there were some times that were less tolerant than others, but on the whole the Ottoman

Empire was remarkably pluralistic and allowed all sorts of ethnicities and religions to coexist under a single flag and a loose imperial alliance (Hutchison, 2003). Given all this history of pluralism in the pre-modern world, some scholars have been led to wonder whether our era is one of the least pluralistic in human history! Of course, scholars disagree on whether that is true, and these things are always hard to prove; at the very least, we can say that pluralism is a far from new idea and we should not act as though we moderns invented it.

Pluralism suggests divergent views. Meister (2010) defines it as: the existence in one society of a number of groups that belong to different race or have different political or religious beliefs and the principle that these different groups can live together in peace in one society. This definition, suggests that pluralism points to the existence of many groups of people, whether tribal, ethnic, political or religious. Therefore, a religious pluralistic society will refer to an environment where there are many religious beliefs, concepts or ideologies. This perhaps is comparable to a society with multiplicity of religious thoughts and ideologies. This sets the tone of the main preoccupation of this work, which is the appraisal of relationship between religion and politics in an environment that is pluralistic (Isichei, 1980). That is, if we agree that there is a relationship between religion and politics, then what kind of relationship should exist in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria, or should we say in view of these divergent religious views, in Nigeria, there should not be any interaction between religion and politics?

The Study Area: Nigeria

Nigeria is a republic in Western Africa, with a coast along the Atlantic Ocean on the Gulf of Guinea. Most of Nigeria consists of a low plateau cut by rivers, especially the Niger and its largest tributary, the Benue. The country takes its name from its chief river. Until 1991, the capital was the largest city, Lagos, on the southwestern coast; at that time, the city of Abuja, in the country's interior, became capital. Nigeria is by far the most populated of Africa's countries, with more than one-seventh of the continent's people. The people belong to many different ethnic groups. These groups give the country a rich culture, but they also pose major challenges to nation building. Ethnic strife has plagued Nigeria since it gained independence in 1960.

The area that is now Nigeria was home to ethnically based kingdoms and tribal communities before it became a European colony. In spite of European contact that began in the 16th century, these kingdoms and communities maintained their autonomy until the 19th century. The colonial era began in earnest in the late 19th century, when Britain consolidated its rule over Nigeria. In 1914 the British merged their northern and southern protectorates into a single state called the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria (Asaju, 1990). Nigeria became independent of British rule in 1960. After independence Nigeria experienced frequent coups and long periods of autocratic military rule between 1966 and 1999, when a democratic civilian government was established.

Adherence to Islam, Christianity, or indigenous African religions is central to how Nigerians identify themselves. Religious affiliation estimates vary, however, due to the lack of census data and the fact that many of Nigeria's Muslims and Christians adhere to beliefs and practices associated with indigenous religions. Recent estimates suggest that 50 percent are Muslims, 40 percent are Christians, and 10 percent adhere to traditional religions (Hutchison, 2003).

The Concepts of Pluralistic Society and Religious Pluralism

Pluralism is a framework of interaction in which groups show sufficient respect and tolerance of each other and they fruitfully co-exist and interact without conflict or assimilation. It is undoubtedly one of the most important features of modern societies and social groups, and may be a key driver of progress in science, society and economic development. In a lecture of 15th May 2005 on Religion and the Pluralistic Society delivered by Imo (2005), pluralism is the result of social transformation which gives rise to people of different beliefs, values and customs being brought together by the force of history in social relationship. This is why Thomas Mason tries to differentiate between the pre-modern society as ideologically homogenized within itself and a

new cultural world as a world of increasing variety becoming in important respects a more unified, constricted and congested world in the making (Thomas, 1989). The pluralistic society also means a certain diversity of value and interests, which might even be stepping on each other because of the competing number of worldviews available to individuals or group of individuals which has generated lots of problem among adherents especially the two exclusivist religions, Christianity and Islam whose claim to absolute truth cannot be compromised. It is important to examine religious pluralism so as to have a good background and deeper understanding of this issue.

Religious pluralism refers to a situation where there exists a different religious persuasion within a given institutional frame. In effect, a religious pluralistic society is a multi-religious society, where the different religious groups have different doctrines of salvation and world views which eventually condition the style of life, values and ultimate goal of each group (Beneke, 2006). However, there can be no religious pluralism where there is no freedom of religion. This implies that the only platform for religious pluralism is freedom of religious expressions and practices. Different religion must then acknowledge the fact that they need each other and that is why dialogue is very crucial in a religiously pluralistic society. For us to reach a situation where we can respect ourselves and the values highly honored by others without having to give up our values, which we respect in a religiously pluralistic society, dialogue is therefore indispensable. Dialogue is part of the living relationship between people of different faiths and ideologies as they share in the life of the community. According to Mukti (2002):

> A kind of Religious pluralism existed in the Indian subcontinent when the Hindu Veddas was established around 2500 BC. Other faiths were later established such as Shramana, Jainism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Islam and Christianity. In Japan, Buddhism and Shintoism had coexisted before the emergence of Christianity. Christianity came because of the coming of the British colonialist regime which lasted until 1947 and increased conversions to Christianity among the low caste Hindus (p.271).

The rise of religious pluralism in the modern West is closely associated with reformation and enlightenment. Religions like Judaism and Islam had existed alongside Christianity in many parts of Europe, but they were not allowed the same freedom as granted to the orthodox denominations. New forms of Christianity were suppressed by force. Early forms of Protestantism attempted to acquire the same privileges as those previously claimed by Roman Catholicism in protestant England, Scotland and the Ireland. There were severe legal and social restrictions on Jews and Roman Catholics until the passing of Catholic Emancipation Act which was a statute of the British Parliament in 1829 granting full political and civil liberties to Roman Catholics in Great Britain and Ireland Similar restrictions on small protestant sects who disagreed with the national churches in these countries prompted such groups as the Pilgrim Fathers to seek freedom in North America, although many historians have noted that when these groups became the majority they sometimes sought to deny this freedom to Jews and Roman Catholics. However, protestant and free thinking philosophers like John Locke and Thomas Paine, who argued for tolerance and moderation in religion, were strongly influential on the founding fathers. The modern religious freedom and equality underlying religious pluralism in the United States are guaranteed by First Amendment to the United States constitution, which states; "Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof... in the united states. The state also guarantees the freedom of those who choose not to belong to any religion (Hutchison, 2003). This America's model is not different from Section 10 of Nigeria's constitution which states that the government of the federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion (Ostien and Gamaliel 2004).

Religious pluralism therefore, is an attitude or policy regarding the diversity of religious belief systems co-existing in society. It can indicate one or more of the following:

i. As the name of the worldview according to which one's own religion is not held to be the sole and exclusive source of truth, and thus the acknowledgement that at least some truths and true values exist in other religions.

ii. As acceptance of the concept that two or more religions with mutually exclusive truth claims are equally valid, this may be considered a form of either tolerance (a concept that arose as a result of the European wars of religion) or moral relativism.

iii. The understanding that the exclusive claims of different religions turn out, upon closer examination, to be variations of universal truths that have been taught since time immemorial. This is called Perennialism.

iv. Sometimes as a synonym for ecumenism, i.e., the promotion of some level of unity, co-operation, and improved understanding between different religions or different denominations within a single religion.

v. As a term for the condition of harmonious co-existence between adherents of different religions or religious denominations.

vi. As a social norm and not merely a synonym for religious diversity.

Therefore, Religious Pluralism can be said to be overseen by the secular state, which guarantees equality under law between different religions, whether these religions have a handful of adherents or many millions.

Nigeria as a Religiously Pluralistic Society

Nigeria, the most populous African country (with a population of over 200 million is nearly equally divided between Christianity and Islam, though the exact ratio is uncertain. Majority of Nigerian Muslims are Sunis and are concentrated in the northern region of the country, while Christians dominate in the south. Most of Nigeria's Christians are Protestants though about a quarter are Catholic. From the 1990s to the 2000s, there was significant growth in Protestant churches. These churches have spilled over into adjacent and southern areas of the middle belt.

Nigeria has the largest Muslim population in sub-Saharan Africa. Islam dominates the north and has a number of supporters in the South Western, Yoruba part of the country. In terms of Nigeria's major ethnic groups' religious affiliations, the Hausa ethnic group in the North is mostly Muslim, the West which is the Yoruba tribe is divided among mainly Christianity, Islam and traditional religions, while the Igbos of the East and the Ijaw in the South are predominantly Christians (Catholics) and some practitioners of traditional religions (Kane, 2003). The middle belt of Nigeria contains the largest number of minority ethnic groups in Nigeria and they are mostly Christians and members of traditional religions with few Muslim converts. The vast majority of Muslims in Nigeria are Sunni, belonging to Maliki School of jurisprudence; however, a sizeable minority also belongs to Shafi madhhab. A large number of Sunni Muslims are members of Sufi brotherhoods. Most Sufis follow the Qadiniyya, Tijanyyah or Mouride movement. A significant Shia minority exists. Some northern states have incorporated Sharia law into their previously secular legal systems, which has brought about some controversy. According to a 2001 report from The World factbook by CIA, about 50% of Nigeria's population is Muslim, 40% are Christians and 10% adhere to local religions (Paden, 2008). But in some recent report, the Christian population is now slightly lesser than the Muslim population. An 18 December 2012 report on religion and public life by the Research Pew Center stated that in 2010, 48.3 percent of Nigeria's population was 'projected' Christian, 48.9 percent was 'estimated' Muslim, and 2.8 percent were followers of indigenous and other religions, or unaffiliated (Paden, 2005). Additionally, the 2010s census of Association of Religion Data Archives has reported that 47.5 percent of the total population is Christian, slightly bigger than the Muslim population of 45.5 percent, and that 7.0 percent are members of other religious groups (see Ray, 1993). The Pew Forum in a 2010 report compared reports from several sources. The 1963 Nigerian census found that 38% of the population was

Muslim, 36% Christian, and 26% other; the 2008 MEASURE Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) found 53% Muslim, 45% Christian, and 2% other; the 2008 Afrobarometer poll found 50% Christian, 49% Muslim, and 1% other; Pew's own survey found 52% Muslim, 46% Christian, and 1% other (Thomas, 1989).

Evidences and Implications of Religious Pluralism in Nigeria
Three concepts guided my analysis of religion in Nigeria: bonds, boundaries, and bondage. First "bonds." The phrase "bonds of faith," describing the spiritual and religious ties or agreements that form religious communities, points to the essential and existential meaning and functions of religion as it is expressed in its Latin root, *religare*, "to bind." In Latin, this word denotes that which unites individuals, people, communities, and nations to each other via the ultimate reality, be it God, Allah, or another sacred symbol. No matter how an article or subject of a faith is defined - *Allah*, Jesus, *Osanobua*, or *Chineke* - the transcendent, numinous, providential being provides a sacred point of reference around which communities are created. These bonds of faith are performed and maintained at locations sacred to those communities that are united together: the ummah, the church, the temples, the shrines, the assembly halls of Jehovah's Witnesses, or the invisible and imagined spaces of what the Yoruba call the sacred mothers (*awon iya*). Out of these various communities, religious and cultural heroes arise: special individuals and groups who cultivate the religious ties, strengthen the community, and whose calling it is to move the faith beyond its space of origin to other places, both inside and outside Nigeria. At the same time, emergent transnationalism, a result of both slave-trade forces and voluntary emigration, has expanded these bonds of faith around the world, to Europe, Asia, the Americas, Brazil, and the Caribbean. In recent years there has been an explosion in the transnational, trans-regional, and global spread of Nigerian religions, including Nigerian indigenous traditions, Islam, and evangelical Pentecostalism.
We should not forget the unknown ancestors who took Nigerian indigenous religion to the New World during the slave trade from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and through whom the expansion of West African indigenous traditions in the West occurred. Transnational *Orisha* and the Cuban *Abakua* (derived from the enslaved Efik nations of Cross River State) have now become conversion faiths among African diasporic people. Nigeria's indigenous faith, labeled as idolatry and rejected by Nigerian believers, has become the cornerstone of a new faith tradition that boasts millions of adherents in the Americas. Moreover, the new Nigerian religious traditions, particularly the Pentecostal movement, are binding together faith communities transnationally. Religious transnationalism recognizes the bonds between home and the diaspora, the creation of multiple centers of faith, and the impact of cultural globalization on local and trans-local religious traditions.
The second conceptual and theoretical concern is with the "boundaries" of Nigerian faith traditions, by which we mean the doctrinal and ritual demarcations of the people, groups, agents, and structures that define both local Nigerian faith traditions and "outsider" traditions. Our understanding assumes that while faith traditions often endeavor to strictly demarcate themselves, in reality the boundaries of faith are very porous, and faiths intersect and dovetail in surprising ways. The boundaries of faith traditions determine how people define their identities, and religion plays a strong role in individual and communal definitions, for example, Christian or Muslim, Protestant or Catholic. The boundaries of faith that were the dominant paradigm in the pre-colonial and colonial periods have been expanded, broken, and transformed into transnational and global formations that are no longer understandable if seen only through the Nigerian prism. Nigeria has created and reengineered faith traditions, and, in doing so, has broken old boundaries, conquered hearts, and expanded into new lands in ways that neither official Nigerian diplomatic relations nor the governmental policies of other nations have done.
Boundaries identify liminal stages, but they can cut in different ways. In spite of ethnic skirmishes, Nigerian faith traditions in the 1960s added color to our humanness, defined our truly

plural society, and made us one another's keepers. Increasingly, however, Nigeria's religious actors erect boundaries that divide communities and that set up stumbling blocks to the kinds of religious interaction that bonded us as a people and a nation. The nature of religious society in Nigeria today suggests clear boundaries and demarcations between denominations and faith traditions. The consequence is fierce competition, both within and between traditions. This competition is inimical to nation building, because it makes the public sphere more volatile and at times results in the tragic deaths of civilians. When these issues overlay national affairs, they take a devastating toll on governance, creating civil boundaries and compromising impartiality in the democratic process.

Thirdly, religion in its current Nigerian practices and manifestations has become a major source of national bondage, so much so that it threatens human knowledge and cultural values. Sadly, religious demarcations have become more striking across class lines. Religion and religious fervor now provide a haven where poor and underprivileged Nigerians can find refuge from deplorable living conditions. Meanwhile, religious zeal has become an avenue for the superrich to display their wealth, interpreted as signs of God's beneficence, and to justify their continued exploitation of the suffering souls who, by the logic of material salvation, are "the cursed masses." Modern religions have produced countless misplaced revolts and protests, such as those staged by Maitatsine and Boko Haram. In other words, religion in Nigeria has led to the subjugation of the people, the very opposite of what religion—a bond—was meant to be.

Religion can be a functional force, helping to promote civil society, community values, and education, but it can also become a dysfunctional influence, stifling rational discourse and promoting the belief that only faith and devotional life will solve our myriad national problems. While we believe in prayer and am convinced that a praying people triumphs in times of national crisis, we risk turning God into a magician who, against all odds, can perform miracles to rescue us from our human-created crises. Those who hold such beliefs may be unaware of another dimension of religion, that of a force or phenomenon that frees us from ignorance and requires us to hold our leaders accountable for their moral failures and their reckless disregard for the sufferings of the millions of Nigerian citizens under their care. The crisis of religious violence that has engulfed Nigeria indicates that religion, as it is currently expressed, puts individuals, communities, and the nation in bondage. But, paradoxically, religion is also crucial in fighting such bondage. In its functional form, it can help promote peaceful coexistence, the alleviation of poverty, transparency and a lack of corruption, and the pursuit of human happiness through social welfare programs. The debate about whether it is religion or politics that triggers the frequent violence in Nigeria underestimates religion's powerful function in molding cultures and societies everywhere. Throughout the world, religion plays a key role in the identity construction of individuals and groups, including ethnic and national identities.

In northern Nigeria, the current spate of violence is not purely religious; it may also be social, economic, and political. Religion too often becomes a rallying point around which to articulate political views. The discourse of salvation in evangelical Christianity and jihad in Muslim rhetoric has been used to justify each group's clarion call to aggression. Any time a new leader emerges in our nation, he tends to build a religious castle to ensure his own survival, further aggravating religious sensibilities. A cursory look at events in the past few decades indicates that such religious interventionism happens widely—from the importation of Muslim Marabouts from neighboring countries, as we witnessed during General Sani Abacha's dictatorship, to the upsurge of evangelical Christian proselytization for personal survival among government dignitaries in high places. While there is nothing wrong with southern Christian communities holding on to their faith traditions as minorities in many Muslim regions, Christian evangelical aggression and triumphalist displays of faith may be counterproductive and detrimental to the nation's religious climate. The way that some revival meetings are publicized on billboards - particularly those that portray the faces of foreign evangelists—may have the effect of suggesting to Muslims and other non-Christians that Christians seek to conquer their territory.

The deeper dilemma is that, since only Islam and Christianity remain as the principal expressions of religious identity in Nigeria, the two traditions are confronting each other in the public sphere and competing for the soul of the country. This current bipolar situation stimulates an intolerance of African values and increasingly encourages conversion and violence. Moreover, the religious struggle between these two faiths has resulted in a new cold war between global Islam and the international evangelical Christian communities, with Americans and Europeans beginning to finance, construct, and promote the growth of Christian institutional influences within Nigeria, while the Gulf States finance Islamic movements and institutions.

At the dawn of Nigeria's independence, there was widespread recognition of the nation's trifurcate religious heritage: Islam, Christianity, and indigenous traditions. This recognition permeated the political, social, and cultural institutions established after independence. Most state events incorporated invocations of God, based on the assumption that civilians considered God the common denominator among the three traditions. "God talk" became the most significant bond among Nigeria's 350 ethnic groups. Although there were skirmishes among traditions during this era, they did not lead to sustained conflicts like those seen in Nigeria in recent decades. The independence era also espoused a central national ideology whereby Nigerian leaders encouraged the promotion of values and culture, recognizing their significance to social development. Scholars in the humanities and social sciences were motivated to research arts, culture, indigenous education, and medicine.[12]The early nation builders recognized that modernization does not equate with Westernization and, indeed, that African cultures, including religions, could develop their own forms of modernity. During the landmark 1977 Festival of Arts and Culture FESTAC), large gatherings of African diasporans assembled in Lagos under General Olusegun Obasanjo to reaffirm the authenticity of African traditions, promote these values in national development, and ensure that national objectives included cultural components. This proved to be a turning point in our national life.

Before that moment, indigenous faiths constituted a more active part in Nigeria's collective identity. Indigenous religions conveyed local values and worldviews. Relationships among ethnic cultures, anchored in African myths, rituals, and symbols, reminded all Nigerians that Christianity and Islam were nonindigenous missionary faiths, which had arrived either via trade routes or with the Europeans and which needed to become Africanized in order to achieve legitimacy. This shared understanding encouraged more tolerant strains of Islam and Christianity. In a sense, the indigenous component of Nigeria's cultural memory served as a buffer between Islam and Christianity. The Nigerian faith hearth had three legs, like my grandmother's three-legged cooking hearth, which never allowed her cooking pot to fall off. But in the late 1970s, many Nigerians began to perceive indigenous culture as an enemy preventing the nation's progress into the modern world. This marked a critical juncture in Nigeria's religious history, when the country began its spiral into chaos. As Nigeria embarked upon nation building under various military rulers, particularly in the post–civil war era, we began to witness the erosion of indigenous values and the undermining of the virtues of religious tolerance and mutual engagement. The state failed to understand that the decades of peaceful religious tolerance in the land were the fruits of previous efforts toward modernity and secularism, properly understood.

The 1980s witnessed significant shifts in the Nigerian religious landscape. Indigenous Christianity began to lose its influence for two reasons. First, global Pentecostal charismatic Christianity denigrated native Christian traditions and promoted foreign cultural values in the guise of religion. Second, the rise of this movement coincided with the economic downturn in Nigeria, during which the currency tumbled and the International Monetary Fund and World Bank forced the state to take an IMF loan with a structural adjustment policy that created wrenching poverty. Pentecostalism became increasingly attractive to the disadvantaged not only because it promised prosperity, but because it also provided social services that catered to the poor, leading citizens to see faith in instrumental terms. Indigenous Pentecostalism also struck familiar chords in the local cultural repertoire. Indigenous traditions taught that good health,

prosperity, and a long life lay at religion's core - the same teaching Pentecostalism offered, though Pentecostalism no longer defined worldly salvation as the exclusive preserve of the gods, but as earthly prosperity and otherworldly bliss. Unfortunately, these religious institutions failed to address the underlying economic problems that caused such poverty. I do not mean to imply that Nigeria's religious institutions were entirely complacent. Some religious leaders fired prophetic warning shots and used their pulpits to call the attention of our leaders to the declining state of our nation.

By the beginning of the new dispensation and re-democratization era that began in 1999, Nigeria had reached a crossroads. Under a series of leaders, we went through new phases of religio-political crisis and saw protests over the implementation of Sharia, the Miss World Pageant, and Islamic banking. Things are at the point now where virtually any crisis in the core Muslim world sends ripples of anxiety through Nigeria. In Nigeria the relationship between religion and politics has been given various interpretations. In fact, D.F Asaju suggests a politicization of religion in the body polity of the state. He relied heavily on the opinion of Theophilus Danjuma, which suggests that "religious fanaticism and favouritism have also been politically employed to polarize the people and sustain unhealthy tension of Nigeria" (Asaju, 1990 p.172). This situation points directly to the fact that religion has negatively affected politics. However, it should be noted that politics has equally affected religious thoughts, practices and beliefs in the country. It is not impossible these days to see the clergy and the laity engage in politics even within the church. In fact, in some cases the conclusion of Karl Marx that "religion is the opium of the masses holds true. It has been used as a tool of political jogging and manipulation of the oppressed. This was the case in the reoccurring Maitatsine riot in Kano State and the recent religious clash in Sagamu between the traditional worshippers and the Hausa Muslims in the area. Therefore, the opinion of Yusuf Bala Usman is apposite in this regard. He opines that the elite have used religion as a tool of exploitation to achieve selfish socio-economic ends. However, inspite of the negative uses to which politics and religion have been subjected to in Nigeria. It is possible for these two phenomena to interact positively to the benefit of the state and her citizens. The three dominant religions in Nigeria are traditional religion, Islam and Christianity. All these religious ideologies allow for interaction between religion and politics.

Traditional religion of the people is a systematic reflection of their socio-cultural orientation, history and legacies on elemental forces, which in turn produces a belief in supreme cosmic power who created heaven and earth. To this power belong, all things in their social psyche. Thus traditional politics of the people has a strong linkage to the belief in theocracy. To Yorubas, Oba (king), the political leader of the people, is only holding office in trust for Olodumare (The Supreme Being). More so, before an Oba is selected or appointed, as the case may be, the Ifa oracle must be adequately consulted for spiritual approval. Therefore, politics and religion in traditional society are intertwined and have direct influence on each other. This is still the situation even at the close of the 20th century. Islam as a way of life dictates and governs the totality of life of Muslims from cradle to grave. Consequently, his political interest, economic considerations, social values and interaction are often given Islamic interpretations based on the Holy Quran, prophetic practices and other sources of law recognized in Islam. These virtues are expected to permeate the sociopolitical structure of any Islamic state. In fact, Prophet Muhammed was the spiritual as well as the political leader of his people during his lifetime. After his death, the caliphs emerged and still held on to the same principles. Regardless of the nature of the society, Islam encourages Muslims to hold on to its principles by allowing the Holy Quran and the Sunnah to be his/her guide. We can conclude here that Islam allows for a spiritual relationship between religion and politics. Christians in Nigeria would rather not get involved in politics but the fact remains that Jesus Christ did not discourage political participation for the faithful. Therefore, religious pluralism in the country may not retard sociopolitical development and economic growth. The divergent religious beliefs could be a pivot for effective policies provided adherents of these religions lives according to the ethics and disciplines of these groups. It is not

surprising that the nation did not adopt any religion as state religion, but allow freedom of religious affiliation in the face of religious pluralism. The adoption of one religion at the expense of the others could lead to resentment, which in turn could lead to civil unrest that could culminate into a religious war. The direct effect of this situation is the secularization of political policies, parties and values. Although, some of these policies have religious undertones, they are not pronounced. For example, every year, the federal government declares minimum of eleven days as religious holidays. Political parties, while jostling for power, often picked their governorship and presidential candidates' vis-à-vis their running mates, for elections, with religious undertone. Where a Christian is the candidate, the running mate will be a Muslim and vice-versa. We can safely conclude that the distinction often proclaimed between religion and politics in a mirage as the two institutions in Nigeria seems inseparable. These intertwined factors have affected political, sociocultural as well as economic policies of the state. The same could be said of implementation of such policies. However, successive governments in the country have only based their policies on the doctrines, precepts and ethics of Islam and Christianity, to the detriment of traditional religion. This situation is a clear pointer to the fact that traditional religion is not popular among the citizens of this country. In spite of the attempts by government in Nigeria to give religious meaning and interpretation to politics and policies, the country has witnessed political instability, corruption, economic downturn, moral laxity which have plunged her into economic doldrums. This is fundamental because the rulers have often neglected the ethics of their religions while in office, thereby adopting a secular ethics, which has no respect of the divine and supernatural forces.

CONCLUDING REMARKS
The country needs to embark on a rigorous educational programme in which Nigerian youth will be exposed to the country's many religious traditions, not for the purpose of conversion or indoctrination, but to acquaint them with the traditions that constitute the core of Nigerian religious and cultural inheritance. This paper recommends maintaining a line between private and public expressions of faith. The custodians of communal traditions and culture and must avoid combining personal evangelical espousal of fundamentalist Islam and Christianity with their public faith discourse. Civil leaders should recognize that by virtue of their position, they preside over a diverse community of believers, and they should offer a sacred canopy under which these eclectic traditions can exist.
We must establish and nurture interfaith dialogue. Nigeria is finally making significant progress in intra- and interfaith conversation, and many groups exist that could respond to the need for a viable, ongoing conversation. Yet, meeting only in response to a crisis seems counterproductive; the conversation gets stuck. Moreover, the state sponsors most interfaith dialogues, rendering it difficult to maintain the required neutrality during such conversations. In other countries, robust interfaith initiatives have been sponsored by nongovernmental agents, even in times of peace. And, the test of a successful interfaith endeavor is in praxis, not in its theory of interfaith dialogue. Placing Nigeria within regional and global discourses on issues of social and economic development, it is clear that religion must assume a productive role in our society.
As a nation, we must reinforce our society's secularity and our religious pluralism, which, as we have argued, are not necessarily in conflict. Rather than decreeing modernity and secularism, we need to spell out the appropriate ingredients for our modernity and their constitutive relationship with a democratic state that is culturally pluralistic and that takes seriously the varieties of Nigerians' religious values and cultures. Consequently, my fifth and final recommendation is that the state establishes a well-funded research institute where critical thinking about religion and nation building can take place. Because of the complex issues surrounding religion, it has become the most unregulated sphere of our nation's life.

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