

THEOLOGICAL GROUND FOR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE STATE: TARABA EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The church had been an old institution that sharpened the behaviours of its members in society. The State has also been an old institution that sharpens the behaviours of its members in society, the church is controlled by divine power while the State is controlled by human authority. The study critically examined “the theological ground for the relationship between the church and the state: Taraba experience” which has generated some debates among scholars over the years giving rise to different theological perspectives. The researcher employed a descriptive survey for data collection in the course of this work. The researcher has discovered that the church cannot adequately influence the state without involving in state affairs. It is only when the church has stepped out of her “comfort zone” to begin to interact with the state that she can create a positive impact in society. Therefore, this paper suggested that the church must take her original mandate given by God which involves dominion over the earth seriously and she must caution the government to discharge her civil responsibilities with the consciousness that it is a divine appointment from God. Furthermore, the Church should intensify its efforts in the area of interacting with the state to influence her positively.

Keywords: Church, State, Relationship, Theology, Experience

Introduction

The interconnections between the Government and the Church occupy a distinctive niche in the development of value orientations in any country. The church and state are two different institutions that relate at different levels in the same society. Whereas the church functions as a sacred/ecclesiastical institutional body, the state functions as a secular institution.

Generally speaking, the theological ground for the relationship between the Church and the State is a complex, multifaceted concept that has evolved throughout history. Various theological perspectives and interpretations have been proposed by many scholars which has resulted in different understandings of the concept. The Lord who created the Church and the State has an agenda for their functionality in the world. Therefore, there is a need for each part to carry its required God's given obligation. For proper representation of this divine agenda, there is a

common ground for them which will help in actualizing this purpose. The researcher will explore this ground using theological perspectives to widen his scope. This approach is not in any way an end to itself but rather the means to aid this academic paper to stand the taste of time. It can also enhance the knowledge of the researcher in this field of discipline.

The Concept Of The Church, State, Relationship And Theology

Church: The word church as is known in English, the German and Dutch words kirche and kirk respectively are all derived from the Greek word Kuriakon. According to Umazi (2010), "the idea of Kuriakon was used to represent the structure which shielded the early Christians". This term has a link with Ekklesia which portrays the idea of the gathering of people over and above just a building. Jay (1977) has a different approach to this drawing from Pauline theology of Ekklesia in most of his epistle as he asserted that, "the gathering of Christians in a particular place such as a house; it refers to all the Christians in a particular locality; it refers to all the Christians in a particular city or cities; and it also refers to the whole body of believers". Therefore, the Church is the community of people who are called out by God to profess their faith in Him and to worship Him as believers in Jesus Christ. This community of people also edifies each other as they come together to worship God.

Theology: The word theology according to the English Fast Dictionary is "simply put, the study of the nature of God and religious belief". The word "theology" comes from two Greek words that combined mean "the study of God." <https://www.gotquestions.org>. Theology comes from the word theos, Greek word for "God," and -logy, which is from Greek word logos, meaning "word." In its literal form, the term theology means "words of God." Webster's dictionary defines theology as "the science of God or religion, the science which treats of the existence, character, and attributes of God, His laws and government, the doctrines we are to believe, and the duties we are to practice... the science of Christian faith and life." This may suggest that theology is the study of who God is and His relationship with His creation.

Relationship: Merriam-Webster defined relationship as, "a state of affairs existing between those having relations or dealings". <https://www.merriam-webster.com>>... This state of connection deals with levels of interaction that exist between two different groups of people or more.

State: There is no one general acceptable definition of state however, "one widely used definition comes from the sociologist Max Weber who defined a state as a compulsory political organization with a centralized government that maintains a monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a certain territory." (<https://study.com>>learn>lesson) State according to Scheidel is: a centralized institutions that impose rules, and backs them up by force, a territorially circumscribed population; a distinction between the rulers and the ruled; and an element of autonomy, stability, and differentiation. Sometimes, the state and government are often used as synonyms in common conversation and even academic discourse.

Theological Ground For The Relationship Between The Church And The State

When we are talking about the theological ground for the relationship between church and state, we are talking about the level of their interaction. In other words, to what extent does the Church influence the State? Therefore, we must establish this Biblical concept from the onset. The concept of the "power of the sword and that of the keys" was given to the government and church respectively by God. According to Leeman (2020), "God has given the power of the sword to

governments and the power of the keys to churches, and he intends for them to work separately but cooperatively toward the greater end of worship". Therefore, we can see from God's original intention that both the Church and State are made to serve God. They are instruments intended by God for the realization of His purpose on earth. The church and state interact on the following grounds theologically:

1. The Church is the Conscience of the State.

It has been established from our discussion that power, social or political put together all originated from God. God is the main source of both the Church and State hence; he determines their functionality for a better society. The same God that owns and sustains the church is equally God of the society. This implies that once a state is viewed as demonic - God-free zone, is a distorted idea. In the words of Howard Crosby, he said: "To let politics become a cesspool and therefore avoid it is a double crime." <https://www.whatshouldireadnext.com>.

In one of Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, He told his disciples "You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world". What this means is that Christians are to make life juicy as they interact with the people of the society. Dike (2015), rightly puts it this way, "Light and darkness when used as a moral category, help us to determine what is right and what is wrong." This will create an atmosphere that gives birth to a better society.

The Church should not only talk about the ills of the State but it should insist that measures are also taken to address evils going on in the state. When the government that is meant to address some societal challenges using the available resources within her reach is not doing the needful, it is the responsibility of the church to call her to order. The Church must not remain silent over critical issues that affect the well-being of people in society. She must defend people's rights to enable them to fulfill their purpose on earth.

2. Church and State benefit from each other.

It is the goal of every well-meaning government to create policies that will improve the well-being of its citizens. These citizens include the Church and by extension its members. The Church in her effort to contribute and support the building of new life in the society strife for enhancement of both spiritual and material welfare of people as she reaches out to them. Dike (2015), postulated that "the church organization and the functioning of its institutions have benefited from support by the state, which has shown a broad understanding of the needs and religious aspirations of its believers". There are instances where some natural disasters would affect the Church and the government would have to provide succor through the distribution of relief materials to the victims. The Church on her part is not relenting in her efforts in promoting good morals in the State. She does that by preaching and teaching sound biblical principles that promote such acts of discipline in society. Leeman (2020), maintained that,

In short, governments serve to protect this present age of creation, while churches serve to present and proclaim the age of new creation. And God intends for the institutions of both ages to serve one another, at least until he returns, concludes this present age, and ushers in the fullness of the age to come. At that time, the institutions of this present age will pass away or at least be transformed beyond imagination (see Matt. 17:24-27; 22:30). For now, however, the state exists to provide a platform for the church's work of redemption, while the righteousness and justice of the church serve as a prophetic witness for the state. Insofar as Christians act righteously in either place, they offer non-Christians a model for how they, too, should act in life and government.

The interaction between the Church and the State aims at redemption where the Church is called to act right and just in all ramifications of life to provide an opportunity for the State to emulate her just life.

The Church in Taraba State benefits from the state coffers as she sponsors people for yearly pilgrimage to the holy land. This exercise has some spiritual as well as socio-economic benefits in the lives of pilgrimages. Ngbea (2017), opined that "apart from the spiritual benefits of the exercise, how pilgrimages are conducted in Nigeria leaves ample room to look beyond the spiritual benefits. Pilgrimage in Nigeria enhances the pilgrim's socio-economic and religious standing in the society".

3. The Church and State almost suffer the same calamity.

Whatever harm that will befall the State, the Church may have her share because they live together in the same society. The book of Job 9:22 tells us more on this point. When disaster comes upon a nation its effect cuts across people from all works of life. The current economic situation of our nation illustrates this point better. What we are passing through now in this country has no selection for a great and small, innocent and evil. Everyone virtually has his share portion of the hardship at various degrees. Therefore, the Church must be committed to her ministry to people as she must be actively involved in State affairs since the same fate happens to them all.

There are instances in Taraba State where disasters like wind storms, floods, war, etc ravaged the community. The government as well as the Church do visit the affected community with some relief materials to provide succor to the victims of the disaster. This act of benevolence demonstrated by both institutions makes them outstanding.

4. All citizens are under the domain of the State.

It is the responsibility of the State to maintain law and order in the society as supported by these scriptural verses (Rom. 13:1-7; 1Pet. 2:12-14; Tit. 3:1). Dike (2015), has this to say as he maintained that, "the state is related to the church in that she has responsibility from God to protect the lives and general welfare of all her citizens (believers and unbelievers)". The Church exists in the society and it is therefore expected of her to have the understanding of the realities of happening in the society. Calvin (2017) posited that "unlike most of his contemporaries, furthermore, Calvin included among the proper responsibilities of states not only the maintenance of public order but also a positive concern for the general welfare of society". In other words, the State is duty-bound to the general welfare of society to ensure its survival.

The Church is subject to the legislation of the State irrespective of its outcome. Even though the Church is not involved in the process of formation of the law of the nation, yet is binding on her to comply with it because it is a biblical injunction as stated in the Bible passages above.

5. Both the Church and State are institutions ordained by God.

Some Christian fundamentalists are not comfortable with this assertion reason being that to them secular throne is not sacred but corrupt. Therefore, God cannot establish every throne. These groups of persons are beclouded with the misconception that separates between the secular and divine. God's supremacy as we read in Rom. 13:1-7, and 1Pet. 2:13-14 has proved that God institutes every government in the society for his glory. "Calvin (2017), posited that any form of government could discharge a measure of its divinely-appointed duty". There has never been and will never be any affair of men that is not under God's control which governing authority is not an

exception. It is God who has the power to enthrone or dethrone governing authority when He deems it fit.

Civil government is charged with the responsibility of being a channel of God's paternal care just as the earthly parents protect and nurture the growth of their children. This is the definition of true religion (*vera religio*) as contained in God's law.

It includes the authority to ban idolatry, blasphemy, and slanders against the truth. To be fair, Calvin expects that a proper reflection of God's paternal care would require the civil authorities to execute righteous judgment protect the vulnerable from the oppressor, and defend the poor and needy. Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; rid them out of the hand of the wicked (Psalm 82:3,4; Inst. 4.20.9).

Some Thoughts And The Perceptions Of The Church About The State

Recently, there have been different schools of thought about the church involving itself in State affairs. Scholars are divided over this issue hence; they hold different views over it. This question of whether the church should be involved in politics or shun it and focus on its primary calling of soul-winning remains a debatable question in the history of Christianity. Sometimes to stress the question further, what is the position of individual Christians regarding participation in politics - should individual members be encouraged to do so or not? In an attempt to address these questions above, we will look at different theological perspectives about the relationship between the church and the state which include the separation between the church and state, 'establishmentarianism' or 'state religion' renunciation theory, and religious pluralism.

Separation between the Church and State.

This concept emphasizes that the church is viewed as a sacred institution that is supposed to take care of issues that concern spirituality. When we look at this concept of the church closely, we will be able to see the picture of the church whose primary concern is to concentrate only on spiritual affairs. This perspective advocates for a clear separation between the church and the state emphasizing their distinct roles and functions in the society. The argument here is each institution should operate independently without interference from the other. None should have control over the other. According to Kosomo (2013), By defining the state purely as a "hangman" charged with establishing worldly peace through punishment of crime and considering the church as primarily concerned with spiritual matters unrelated to politics, Luther effectively sundered the secular authority from the ecclesiastical and placed the church under the governance of the state.

This is to say that the Church as an ecclesiastical body should concern herself only with issues that border most on spirituality, and give no attention to political matters. The church is the body of Christ and His representative here on earth. She is ordained by God to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13-16). Therefore, she should strive to influence the state not to be involved in her affairs. This is what is referred to as the doctrine of separation and Ngbea (2017), posited that "the doctrine of the separation of the church and the state has undergone, and is undergoing constant modification". Historically, in the Western world discussion about the Church and the State is the kind that has to do with the relationship between the formal institutions and leadership of the church and officials of the government. Ngbea (2017), asserted that: This dualistic view of religion and politics began with the Jewish nation that was forced to submit to a succession of conquerors, nevertheless, retaining its independent religious identity, separating spirituality from worldly matters. Christianity growing out of Judaism preserved this distinction.

The Judeo-Christian tradition has always involved some separation of sacred and secular authorities.

This kind of perception is widespread among Christians even among the 21st century Christians. The narrative has not yet changed and some Christians still argue that the Church should stay clear of politics.

Dike (2015), maintained that "some scholars feel that the church and state are independent societies that should not identify with each other. This is because one is evil and the other is righteous". This kind of assertion has created a dichotomy that exists between the Church and the State. This is an age-long phenomenon that has affected the relationship between the two institutions. Kore (2006) postulated that this is the "attitude of Isolation or Withdrawal." People who wear this kind of lens always perceive that no any serious-minded Christian should be involved in the affairs of the state especially politics which is termed a dirty game. Kudadjie (2002), opined that "politics in West African society has often come to be described as a place for people with questionable character. People associate politics with evil, saying no good person will accept to go into politics: if such do, they will turn bad." In fact, they further asserted that for a Christian to maintain his spirituality he should not be involved in politics. Consequently, Dike (2015), posited "they maintain that if the church is to entangle with the affairs of the state, it will lose its mandate to evangelize, it will have less time and resources for its chief task". They used a portion of scripture in John's Gospel to support their position. "Then Jesus answered, I am not an earthly king...". On another occasion when Jesus was responding to the Pharisees about whether "if it is lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not" (Matt. 22:17), He gave them precise answer: Give to Caesar that which is to Caesar and to God that which belong to God (Matt. 22:21, Mark 12:17, Luke 20:25). There are two basic ideas from Jesus' response here even though, He was living in a theocratic society. First, He recognized the authority of the Roman Empire whose symbol was the coin on which the emperor's name and image were impressed. Secondly, there is no contradiction between religious duties and the civil duties of Christians. According to Bouwsma (2023), "John Calvin and those following him tried to draw a line between the so-called 'political' and 'spiritual' realms. The trouble with this is, our politics depend upon religious commitments and our religious commitments are never politically indifferent but yield political demands". This has brought misconceptions that the church is battling with up till today. It has failed to take into consideration the sovereignty of God. There is no sphere of life that God has no power over it. Abraham Kyper holds this view that "Jesus is king over all the earth - over every square inch". Therefore, both the church and state are under God's control. He decides how both of them are run for the benefit of his people.

The 'Establishmentarianism' Or 'State Religion'.

This perspective proposed that both the church and state be unified under a single authority- the authority of Christianity. It was based on the idea that both the religious and secular realms were under the sovereign rule of God and that the church should have a significant influence in matters of governance. The church as an institution existing in the society must understand the needs of the society in which she lives to be able to interact with her properly.

Majawa (2023), posited that "The Church-State phenomenon is clouded by many conceptions and misconceptions resulting into conflict - relationship between the two". The church and state exist separately yet, they overlap to fulfil God's mandate over his creation. God's intention for creating both is that they should all function for the benefit of one another and His glory. According to Kasomo (2013): Thomas Aquinas defined the state as the author and executor of human law,

whose charge is the punishment of vice and encouragement of virtue. The church, he held, is the interpreter of divine law through natural law of which human law is an interior part. Hence, for Aquinas, the church properly advises the state on many matters, especially those relating to moral legislation.

In other words, the Church serves as the moral conscience of the State. She always reminds the State of her moral values. The Church must produce piety while the State on the other hand brings about external peace and prevents evil deeds; neither is sufficient in the world without the other. In the words of Ngbea (2017), he captured it this way "Christian political life is an aspect of our singled-hearted life-walk before God... All political action is religion. All political activity is an expression of the faith". The political power falls within the sovereignty and providence of God, and hence Christians should serve God in the political sphere and Christian community. This makes Christian life meaningful and impactful. James (1962) opined that "The Christian can never escape the tension caused by his dual allegiance. He is a citizen of this world which, though fallen and sinful, was created by God for the realization of His Purpose". There are no two ways about this, that the Christian faith is a worldview, affecting all of life. In this sense, since Christ is the king of all, everything should be brought under His Lordship for absolute control.

Ngbea (2017), postulated that "the state provided the "sword" to discipline the sinful man while the Church represented the perfect and eternal "city of God," preserving the divine". Christianity under the reign of Emperor Constantine I became an official state religion where the church fathers affirmed the duality of civil and religious authority as the "two swords" doctrine. Ngbea (2017), asserted that "with the protestant reformation begun by Martin Luther in 1520, the medieval doctrine of two swords was replaced by the doctrine of the sovereign state. The Church was subordinated to secular authority in worldly matters." In some parts of the world, especially the United States, there is no wall that separates religion and politics. He Ngbea (2017), further maintained that, "in Britain, the Anglican Church is the official state religion. Italy's Catholic Church was closely linked to the Christian Democratic Party, once the nation's dominant political party." This kind of practice has made Christianity a state religion.

The Renunciation Theory

This theory advocates for an abandonment of the pursuit of material comforts in the interest of achieving spiritual achievement. They believe that spirituality is measured by a total rejection of the things of the world. Christians must renounce involvement in the things of this world. This concept is rooted in these biblical passages stated below: 1 John 2: 15 "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the father is not in him." Another passage is found in James 1:27; and 4:4 respectively "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." Those who propounded this view adhere strictly to the notion that Christians should distance themselves from the things of this world. To them the things of the world corrupt Christians and make them God's enemy.

Pluralism.

This perspective pluralism is the one that advocates for the Church and State to coexist harmoniously as separate entities each tolerating the religious freedom of its citizens for the common good of the society. This view recognizes and respects the diversity of religious beliefs

within the society. Luther (1523), held this position as he posited that, "we must divide all the children of Adam into two classes, the first belong to the kingdom of God, the second to the kingdom of the world. Those belonging to the kingdom of God are all true believers in Christ and are subject to Christ and the gospel of the kingdom... ". The former look at the world as a place that is not made for them while the latter look at it as their place and therefore, they occupy it to dominate. This mindset places the children of the kingdom of the world on the advantageous side over the children of God as they occupy the economic sector, political sector, educational sector, etc. Their approach to the world is solely to dominate and possess.

The Church must not operate as an island or an independent entity since it lives in the same society as the State. She must seek to influence the state as she interacts with the State thereby providing a guide to her calling on the civil government to discharge her civil duty in a just manner. She is the community of light; therefore, she must shine this light in the dark world to lighten her path. There is no how the Church can dominate without involving herself in the civil government if she must fulfil her God's given mandate.

Challenges Confronting Churches In Nigeria As It Relates With The State

Nigeria is a religiously multi pluralistic state and this gives her a complex nature when we are talking about the theological grounds for the relationship between the Church and the State. Even though the Nigerian state exists in this kind of environment yet, she has given priority to only two dominant religions – Christianity and Islam. The story is different from what is obtainable in most Western European world. To this end, Ngbea (2017), argued that "most Western European countries, though more secular in many ways than United States, have not built walls between religion and politics."

In Nigeria sometimes the issue of the relationship between the Church and State is always greeted with some misconceptions that have to do with the wall that has separated the two on sacred and secular values. This wall of separation has caused some havoc in the relationship between these two institutions.

Recommendations

- The Church must take her original mandate given by God which is dominating the earth seriously, and she must caution the government to discharge her civil responsibilities with the consciousness that it is a divine appointment.
- The Church should intensify its efforts in the area of interacting with the State to create a positive impact.
- The Church should cooperate with the State in promoting the welfare of the citizens and give moral support to the State, especially in areas where the dealings conform with God's standard as being x-rayed in the Holy Bible.
- The Church should not compromise her standard of truthfulness in dealing with the State and frown at the State when she departs from such biblical standard.
- The Church should be praying for the State, its people, and its government for a well-transformed society.
- Since learning is a process that is without an end, the researcher, therefore, recommends that further research should be carried out on this topic to cover other areas that were not covered in this paper.

Conclusion

The researchers discussed the theological ground for the relationship between the Church and the State: Taraba Experience, the concept of the Church, State, relationship, and theology, the theological ground for the relationship between Church and State, some thoughts and perceptions of the Church about the State, the establishmentism or State religion, the renunciation theory, and the challenges confronting Churches in Nigeria as it relates with the State. It is important to note that the theological grounding for the relationship between the church and the state continues to be a subject of debate, influenced by cultural, political, and religious contexts.

Church and State are inseparable entities because they came from the same source - God. God who made both of them has a common purpose for both. They need each other and they live for each other to fulfill this purpose. The church is situated in the society to make it a conducive environment. They both interact together for the benefit of each other. If the church understands her biblical mandate and strive hard to translate that mandate into concrete actions, it makes society a better place. When the Church does that, she has succeeded in fulfilling her ministry here on earth. However, if the Church and the state will work together faithfully as unto the Lord, and lead people to the fear of God, and give to people what belongs to them here on earth, then the world will be heaven on earth.

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