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**THE CANONICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OF FAITH, DOCTRINE,  
AND GOVERNANCE ON STAFF POLICIES IN NIGERIAN CATHOLIC  
INSTITUTIONS**

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**Abstract**

*This study examines the canonical and theological underpinnings of governance policies in Nigerian Catholic institutions, focusing on the interplay of faith, doctrine, and administrative principles. Using a hermeneutical methodology, the research interprets key canonical texts, including Canons 810, 750, and 752, to elucidate governance frameworks for faculty recruitment, evaluation, and dismissal. The analysis integrates civil legal provisions, such as Nigeria's constitutional labor statutes, to address the intersection of ecclesiastical mandates with statutory obligations. Canon 810 is highlighted as a pivotal directive that underscores faculty qualifications in terms of scientific and pedagogical competence, doctrinal integrity, and moral probity, while ensuring procedural fairness. This canon also delineates the supervisory roles of ecclesiastical authorities in safeguarding institutional identity. The study articulates a dual framework that respects institutional autonomy and ecclesiastical oversight by aligning canonical principles with civil governance requirements. The research further explores the balance between academic freedom and Catholic identity, emphasizing the necessity of doctrinal fidelity within a context of intellectual inquiry. Challenges such as ambiguous interpretations of "doctrinal integrity" and "probity of life" are addressed through recommendations for clear institutional policies, transparent governance processes, and faculty training programs. Through promotion of alignment with canonical, theological, and civil expectations, the study provides a comprehensive governance model that supports the mission of Catholic universities as centers of academic and spiritual excellence.*

**Keywords:** Catholic Institutions, Governance, Theology, Canon Law, Staff, Policies



## **Introduction**

The governance of Catholic institutions, particularly in the educational sector, embodies a unique interplay between canonical directives, theological principles, and civil regulations. This complexity is especially evident in Nigerian Catholic universities, where the dual imperatives of academic excellence and doctrinal fidelity intersect with the demands of civil labor laws and cultural dynamics. As centers of intellectual inquiry and spiritual formation, these institutions are tasked with maintaining their Catholic identity while navigating the expectations of a pluralistic society. This study explores the canonical and theological frameworks that underpin staff policies in Nigerian Catholic universities, with particular emphasis on the principles articulated in Canon 810 of the Code of Canon Law (Catholic Church, 1983). The canon provides detailed guidance on faculty recruitment, evaluation, and dismissal, emphasizing the importance of scientific competence, pedagogical suitability, doctrinal integrity, and moral probity. These standards are integral to safeguarding the Catholic mission and academic credibility of the universities (Coriden, 2004). However, the implementation of these principles is often challenged by the need to harmonize ecclesiastical oversight with the constitutional guarantees of academic freedom and labor rights in Nigeria.

This research therefore, employs a hermeneutical methodology to analyse key canonical texts and their application within the Nigerian context. It also investigates the intersection of these principles with statutory labor frameworks, addressing areas of tension and convergence. The study aims to offer a governance model that upholds the Catholic identity of these institutions while ensuring compliance with civil obligations and nurturing an environment conducive to intellectual and spiritual growth. Through this comprehensive approach, the research contributes to the broader discourse on the integration of faith, reason, and governance in Catholic higher education (D'Souza, 2018).

## **1. Methodology**

The methodology of the study, as described, adopts a hermeneutical approach. This method centers on interpreting canonical texts, particularly the Code of Canon Law, to extract principles that are applicable to the governance of Catholic institutions. Hermeneutics, as a methodology, is particularly fitting for this study because it allows a nuanced engagement with the text, aligning theological perspectives with practical governance principles. Key texts from the Code of Canon Law, including Canon 810, Canon 750, and Canon 752, serve as primary sources (Code of Canon Law, 1983). These canons articulate the responsibilities of Catholic universities to uphold doctrinal integrity, pedagogical competence, and moral probity among their faculty. The analysis of these texts highlights their application in institutional governance, particularly concerning recruitment,



evaluation, and dismissal of academic staff. For instance, Canon 810 underscores the need for Catholic universities to appoint teachers who are exceptional in their scientific and pedagogical qualifications, doctrinal fidelity, and moral conduct, while also ensuring due process in cases of dismissal. This canon is critical in balancing institutional autonomy and ecclesiastical oversight.

The methodology also integrates provisions from civil law, such as the Nigerian Constitution and labor statutes, to juxtapose Church teachings with secular legal frameworks. This comparative approach underscores the intersection between ecclesiastical mandates and statutory requirements in governance. For example, the constitutional provisions on academic freedom and labor rights in Nigeria provide a broader context for interpreting Canon 810. Such a framework ensures that Catholic institutions align their governance policies with both canonical requirements and civil obligations, while promoting a holistic compliance structure. Furthermore, the study employs hermeneutics to address the interpretative challenges posed by terms like “integrity of doctrine” and “probity of life” in Canon 810. These phrases are explored in light of Canons 750 and 752, which elaborate on the Magisterium’s teaching authority and the levels of assent required for doctrinal adherence. Hermeneutics facilitates a deeper understanding of these terms by drawing parallels with other canonical and theological texts, thereby providing a robust interpretative foundation.

In practice, the integration of hermeneutical insights with statutory frameworks underscores the study’s dual focus on maintaining the Catholic identity of universities while respecting broader academic and legal norms. This dual focus is especially pertinent in Nigeria, where Catholic universities operate within a complex interplay of religious, cultural, and legal dynamics. The methodology thus reflects an interdisciplinary orientation, bridging theological, canonical, and legal perspectives to address governance challenges in Catholic institutions. Overall, the hermeneutical methodology provides a structured approach to examining the governance of Catholic institutions. Therefore, the study offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the intricacies of faculty recruitment, evaluation, and dismissal, interpreting canonical texts and aligning their principles with civil law. This methodological rigor ensures that the study’s findings are both theologically sound and legally robust, contributing meaningfully to scholarly discourse on Catholic institutional governance.

## **2. Canonical Provisions for Staff Appointment and Removal**

### ***2.1. The Role of Canon 810***

Canon 810 serves as a cornerstone for governance in Catholic universities, particularly in matters relating to the appointment and retention of staff. Paragraph 1 of this canon establishes the essential criteria for faculty members, emphasizing scientific and pedagogical qualifications, doctrinal integrity, and probity of life. These standards underscore the dual mission of Catholic universities:



to pursue academic excellence and to uphold their distinct Catholic identity. This insistence for faculty to excel in their respective disciplines while adhering to the moral and doctrinal tenets of the Church, shows how Canon 810 seeks to ensure that Catholic institutions contribute meaningfully to both intellectual and spiritual formation. The canon recognizes that the identity of Catholic universities is intrinsically tied to the character and conduct of their staff. Faculty members are expected not only to demonstrate expertise in their academic fields but also to embody the values and teachings of the Church in their personal and professional lives. This dual expectation reflects the Church's vision of higher education as a means of integrating faith and reason, promoting a holistic development of students that aligns with Catholic principles (Wagner, 2017).

Paragraph 2 of Canon 810 assigns a supervisory role to Episcopal Conferences and Diocesan Bishops. These ecclesiastical authorities are charged with ensuring that Catholic universities remain faithful to Church doctrine, especially in the recruitment and governance of their teaching staff. This oversight is not intended to infringe on the autonomy of academic institutions but to safeguard their Catholic character. By exercising vigilance, bishops ensure that universities maintain a balance between academic freedom and fidelity to the Magisterium, thereby reinforcing their identity as centers of Catholic learning. Another critical aspect of Canon 810 is its provision for the removal of staff members who fail to meet the established criteria. Faculty who lack scientific competence, pedagogical skill, doctrinal integrity, or probity of life jeopardize the mission of Catholic universities and their credibility within the broader academic community. The canon requires that institutional statutes outline clear and fair procedures for the dismissal of such individuals. This ensures adherence to the principle of due process, protecting the rights of staff members while preserving the integrity of the institution (Usman, & Paul, 2024; Onukwuba et al., 2023) The emphasis on procedural fairness reflects both canonical principles and the broader legal norms that govern labor relations, highlighting the Church's commitment to justice in administrative matters.

Through this defining of standards for faculty appointments and delineating the responsibilities of ecclesiastical authorities, Canon 810 provides a framework for upholding the Catholic identity of universities. It addresses the complex interplay between academic excellence, moral accountability, and institutional governance, making it a vital reference point for administrators and ecclesiastical authorities alike. This canon not only reinforces the Church's commitment to education but also ensures that Catholic universities serve as exemplary models of integration between faith and reason in the global academic landscape.

## **2.2. *Competent Authorities and Institutional Statutes***

Canon 810 recognizes the importance of institutional autonomy in Catholic universities while ensuring alignment with overarching ecclesiastical oversight (Coriden, 2004). The delegation of



authority to institutional statutes for determining competent authorities in faculty appointments and removals reflects the Church's respect for the governance structures of individual universities. Through doing so, Canon 810 allows institutions to develop procedures that are contextually appropriate to their unique operational frameworks while remaining faithful to the broader principles of Catholic education. The competence to appoint and, when necessary, remove faculty is granted to authorities defined within the statutes of each Catholic university (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, 1990). This internal delegation ensures that those most familiar with the institution's mission and needs are responsible for maintaining its academic and spiritual integrity. For instance, university administrators, academic committees, or boards of trustees, as designated by the statutes, are typically tasked with evaluating candidates' qualifications and ensuring their adherence to the Church's doctrinal and ethical standards. However, this autonomy is not absolute. Paragraph 2 of Canon 810 underscores the role of Episcopal Conferences and Diocesan Bishops in overseeing adherence to Catholic doctrine within these institutions. While the internal authorities have primary responsibility for governance, bishops act as stewards of the Church's teachings, ensuring that the institution remains firmly rooted in its Catholic identity. This dual structure promotes a collaborative relationship between institutional governance and ecclesiastical oversight, emphasizing mutual accountability (Russo & Gregory, 2007).

The requirement for institutional statutes to outline clear procedures for faculty appointments and removals further reinforces the commitment to both autonomy and accountability. These statutes must articulate the roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes of competent authorities, ensuring that they operate transparently and justly. For example, statutes typically include provisions for reviewing the scientific, pedagogical, and doctrinal qualifications of potential hires and for addressing cases where faculty fail to meet these standards. The inclusion of due process safeguards in these procedures ensures fairness while upholding the institution's mission and values. Through balancing of delegated authority with ecclesiastical oversight, Canon 810 provides a governance framework that respects the individuality of Catholic universities while safeguarding their Catholic identity. This structure allows institutions to navigate the complex demands of academic freedom, legal compliance, and doctrinal fidelity, ensuring that they remain effective agents of the Church's educational mission (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, 1990).

### **2.3. Integrity of Doctrine and Probity of Life**

The concepts of "integrity of doctrine" and "probity of life," as articulated in Canon 810, represent critical criteria for the selection and retention of faculty in Catholic universities. These standards are not merely aspirational but are foundational to maintaining the Catholic identity and mission of these institutions. Together with "pedagogical suitability," these requirements form a triad of qualifications that ensure faculty members contribute effectively to the university's dual mission of academic excellence and fidelity to the teachings of the Church. "Integrity of doctrine" refers





to a faculty member's alignment with the teachings of the Church as defined by the Magisterium. This entails not only a theoretical understanding of Catholic doctrine but also an unwavering commitment to teaching and exemplifying these principles in their professional roles (Hesburgh, 1994). The requirement underscores the Church's expectation that faculty members, as educators and mentors, actively support and propagate its theological and moral teachings. This fidelity is vital to preserving the Catholic character of the institution and nurturing an environment that promotes the holistic development of students in accordance with Church values.

"Probity of life," on the other hand, encompasses the moral conduct and personal integrity of faculty members. This criterion ensures that educators serve as role models for students, embodying the virtues and ethical standards expected of individuals in Catholic higher education. Probity of life implies a lived commitment to Catholic values, extending beyond the classroom to encompass all aspects of a faculty member's professional and personal life. Through prioritizing this quality, institutions reinforce the importance of moral leadership and authentic witness to faith within their academic communities. Complementing these spiritual and moral standards is "pedagogical suitability," which emphasizes academic qualifications and teaching excellence (Gallin, 2001). Faculty members must demonstrate expertise in their respective fields and an ability to convey complex ideas effectively to students. This requirement ensures that Catholic universities maintain high academic standards while also fulfilling their mission to integrate faith and reason. Pedagogical suitability is essential not only for promoting intellectual growth but also for equipping students with the knowledge and skills to engage with society in a manner consistent with Catholic values.

Catholic universities employ rigorous processes to assess candidates and ensure they meet these criteria. Peer reviews, recommendations, and performance evaluations are standard tools used to evaluate a candidate's qualifications and adherence to the standards of integrity of doctrine, probity of life, and pedagogical suitability. Recommendations from ecclesiastical authorities, as well as evaluations from previous academic or professional engagements, are often considered to ascertain a candidate's doctrinal fidelity and moral character. Additionally, ongoing performance evaluations and peer assessments ensure that faculty members continue to meet these high standards throughout their tenure. This comprehensive approach to faculty evaluation reinforces the Catholic university's commitment to academic excellence, moral integrity, and doctrinal fidelity. It also ensures that the institution remains a vibrant community of faith and learning, capable of addressing contemporary challenges while remaining steadfast in its mission (Pilani, 2023). Indeed, Catholic universities not only preserve their unique identity but also contribute to the broader intellectual and moral formation of society by holding faculty members to these rigorous standards, (MacIntyre, 1994).

### **3. Governance Principles in Nigerian Catholic Universities**



Institutional autonomy is a cornerstone of Catholic universities, enabling them to pursue truth and fulfill their mission in education, research, and community service. This autonomy ensures that these institutions can operate effectively, guided by their distinctive Catholic identity while adhering to both canonical directives and broader academic standards. Autonomy in governance allows Catholic universities to shape their administrative structures, define academic programs, and establish policies that reflect their mission and values. At the same time, they are expected to maintain rigorous academic standards and meet the expectations of their broader scholarly and societal obligations. The principle of institutional autonomy allows Catholic universities to remain free from undue external influence, whether from civil authorities, donors, or other entities, while enabling them to define their governance and operational frameworks. This freedom is critical for nurturing an environment where academic inquiry can thrive, unhindered by constraints that could compromise the integrity of research or education (Adaboh, 2012). The concept aligns with the Church's vision of education as a means of integrating faith and reason, ensuring that academic pursuits are conducted within a framework that respects both scientific rigour and theological principles.

Despite this autonomy, ecclesiastical authorities play an essential role in maintaining the Catholic identity of these institutions. Canonical oversight, particularly through provisions like Canon 810, entrusts Episcopal Conferences and Diocesan Bishops with the responsibility of doctrinal vigilance. This oversight ensures that the university's teaching and governance align with the Magisterium and that faculty members adhere to standards of doctrinal integrity and probity of life. Such vigilance does not undermine institutional autonomy but instead acts as a safeguard, reinforcing the university's commitment to its Catholic mission amidst the complexities of contemporary academic and social landscapes (Pilani, 2023). The balance between autonomy and ecclesiastical oversight is integral to the unique character of Catholic universities (Coriden, 2004). While they exercise freedom in internal governance, the presence of doctrinal vigilance underscores their accountability to the Church and its teachings. This dual structure promotes a symbiotic relationship in which the university's academic independence is preserved while its Catholic identity remains robust and visible. Institutional autonomy in Catholic universities thus reflects a nuanced approach to governance, one that respects the complexities of modern academia while remaining faithful to ecclesiastical principles. This balance enables Catholic universities to thrive as centers of intellectual and moral excellence, contributing to the broader society while preserving their unique identity and mission (MacIntyre, 2009).

### **3.1. Academic Freedom**

Academic freedom in Catholic universities represents a delicate yet essential balance between intellectual inquiry and the institution's Catholic mission. This principle allows faculty to explore, teach, and publish without undue interference, and thus nurturing a vibrant academic environment



(Hesburgh, 1994). However, in Catholic universities, academic freedom is uniquely framed by the need to align intellectual pursuits with the faith principles and moral teachings of the Church. Faculty members are encouraged to engage with a wide range of ideas and disciplines but are expected to do so within the boundaries established by Catholic doctrine, ensuring that their work contributes to the university's mission of integrating faith and reason. This coexistence of academic freedom and Catholic mission does not impose restrictions that undermine intellectual rigor. Instead, it provides a framework within which academic exploration is guided by ethical considerations and a commitment to truth as understood through both faith and reason. Faculty members, while free to investigate and debate, are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring their work supports rather than contradicts the principles of Catholic theology and morality (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, 1990). Such an approach reinforces the distinctive identity of Catholic universities, which strive to be spaces where faith and scholarship mutually enrich one another.

In the Nigerian context, academic freedom is also a constitutional right, recognized as fundamental to the nation's democratic principles. The Nigerian judiciary has upheld academic freedom as essential for the development of an informed and innovative society (Kanu & Paul, 2024). Courts have emphasized that academic freedom protects the rights of faculty to engage in open inquiry and critical thought, provided such activities do not disrupt institutional operations or societal harmony. This recognition underscores the vital role of higher education in encouraging intellectual growth and societal progress. Within Catholic universities in Nigeria, this legal framework intersects with ecclesiastical expectations (Okebukola, 2015). While the courts safeguard academic freedom as a civic right, the Church emphasizes its alignment with the Magisterium to prevent doctrinal deviation. This dual perspective highlights the importance of balancing the rights of individual faculty members with the institution's responsibility to maintain its Catholic identity.

Through this promotion of an environment where academic freedom is exercised responsibly and in alignment with Church teachings, Catholic universities can navigate the complex interplay between secular legal standards and ecclesiastical oversight. The coexistence of academic freedom and Catholic mission in Nigerian Catholic universities demonstrates a model of governance that respects both individual and institutional rights (Kanu et al., 2024). It allows universities to contribute to national and global academic discourse while remaining steadfast in their commitment to faith-based education. This balance ensures that Catholic universities can function as both intellectual and spiritual beacons, shaping students and society through the integration of knowledge and values.

### ***3.2. Interaction of Canonical and Civil Legislation***

The interaction of canonical and civil legislation in the governance of Catholic universities highlights the necessity of harmonizing ecclesiastical principles with national labor and academic





statutes. Catholic institutions operate within dual frameworks: the canonical laws that safeguard their religious identity and mission, and the civil laws that govern their existence as entities within a secular legal system (Russo & Gregory, 2007). This overlap requires a nuanced approach to institutional governance, one that respects both the Church's expectations and the legal obligations imposed by the state. Canonical laws, such as those outlined in **Canon 810**, establish the fundamental principles for faculty appointments, emphasizing doctrinal integrity, probity of life, and pedagogical competence. These criteria reflect the Church's intent to ensure that Catholic universities uphold their identity and mission in every aspect of their operations. However, these canonical provisions must coexist with national labor laws, academic policies, and constitutional guarantees of rights, such as freedom of speech and academic freedom (Orsy, 2009). For instance, labor statutes in Nigeria, grounded in constitutional principles, mandate due process in employment matters and protect individuals against arbitrary dismissal, thus aligning with the canonical emphasis on procedural fairness.

The reconciliation of these frameworks is particularly evident in the area of faculty governance. While canonical laws stress adherence to Catholic doctrine, civil laws safeguard individual rights, such as freedom of expression and equal employment opportunities. For example, courts in Nigeria have consistently recognized academic freedom as an essential component of a democratic society. Judicial decisions underscore the right of educators to explore and share ideas freely, provided their activities do not undermine institutional objectives or disrupt public order (Ekanem & Ekefre, 2013). This emphasis on freedom aligns with the Church's acknowledgment of intellectual inquiry as a pathway to truth, but within the context of faith and moral values. Case law in Nigeria also demonstrates the judiciary's role in resolving conflicts between civil rights and institutional autonomy. Courts have upheld the rights of Catholic universities to maintain their religious identity and governance structures, while also ensuring that constitutional protections are not violated. For instance, rulings have affirmed the legitimacy of faith-based requirements for employment in religious institutions, provided these are clearly defined and communicated in institutional statutes (Akinwalere, 2023; Paul et al., 2023). Such decisions illustrate the balance that courts seek to achieve, allowing Catholic universities to maintain their canonical commitments while respecting the legal rights of employees and other stakeholders.

This interaction underscores the importance of well-defined institutional statutes that bridge the expectations of both canonical and civil laws. These statutes should articulate the procedures for appointments, evaluations, and dismissals, ensuring transparency and fairness. They must also align with labor laws and constitutional principles, thereby reducing the potential for legal disputes. In doing this, Catholic universities can navigate the complexities of dual legal obligations, nurturing environments that honor both their religious identity and their civic responsibilities. The interplay of canonical and civil legislation in Catholic university governance reflects a broader dialogue between faith and law. It ensures that these institutions can operate as spaces of intellectual and spiritual formation while adhering to the rule of law. This balance is



critical for sustaining the credibility and mission of Catholic universities in a pluralistic legal and cultural context (Russo & Gregory, 2007).

#### **4. Accreditation and Identity Maintenance**

The accreditation of Catholic universities is a vital process that ensures they maintain academic credibility while safeguarding their distinctive religious mission and principles. Accreditation serves as a mechanism for evaluating institutions against established quality benchmarks, validating their academic programs, governance structures, and overall operational effectiveness. For Catholic universities, this process also offers an opportunity to reinforce their dual commitment to academic excellence and the spiritual mission rooted in their Catholic identity. Aligning with accreditation standards requires Catholic universities to demonstrate that they meet rigorous academic criteria comparable to their secular counterparts. These include faculty qualifications, curriculum development, research output, and administrative effectiveness. Compliance with these standards ensures that Catholic institutions remain competitive and recognized within the global academic community, which encourages trust among students, parents, and stakeholders (Ekanem & Ekefre, 2013).

However, the pursuit of accreditation must not come at the expense of Catholic universities' foundational principles. These institutions are entrusted with a unique mission: to integrate faith and reason in their educational and research endeavors. Accreditation processes must therefore accommodate the religious identity of Catholic universities, recognizing their commitment to uphold doctrinal integrity and provide education informed by Catholic values. This dual expectation underscores the importance of collaboration between accrediting bodies and Catholic institutions, ensuring that quality assurance measures are both rigorous and respectful of institutional autonomy and faith-based objectives. In practice, Catholic universities can maintain their identity within the accreditation framework by clearly articulating their mission in institutional documents and ensuring it permeates all aspects of their operations. Policies governing faculty recruitment, curriculum design, and student life should reflect Catholic values, while also meeting accreditation requirements for inclusivity, academic freedom, and ethical governance (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, 1990). By embedding their mission into institutional structures, Catholic universities can navigate the complexities of accreditation without diluting their religious identity.

Moreover, the accreditation process often enhances the Catholic character of these institutions by encouraging self-assessment and continuous improvement. Regular reviews provide opportunities to evaluate how effectively the university integrates its spiritual and academic goals, identifying areas for growth while affirming its commitment to Catholic education. This process not only reinforces the institution's credibility but also strengthens its capacity to contribute meaningfully to the Church's mission in education. For Catholic universities in Nigeria, navigating the



intersection of accreditation standards and their religious mission is particularly significant. As these institutions operate within a diverse and pluralistic society, accreditation provides a platform to demonstrate their relevance and contributions to national development while affirming their unique identity (Okebukola, 2015). Indeed, Catholic universities can serve as models of excellence that embody the Church's vision of education as a pathway to holistic human development, by aligning with both national and ecclesiastical expectations,. Through careful alignment with accreditation processes, Catholic universities can achieve a balance between maintaining academic rigor and preserving their Catholic mission. This dual focus ensures they remain credible participants in the global academic arena while staying true to their identity as institutions of faith and learning.

## **5. Challenges**

Catholic universities face several challenges in their mission to uphold both academic excellence and their distinctive religious identity (Morey & Piderit, 2006). Among these are the ambiguities in interpreting and operationalizing key concepts like “doctrinal integrity” and “probity of life.” These terms, while central to the governance of Catholic institutions, often lack precise definitions, leading to inconsistencies in application (Coriden, 2004). Additionally, the need to balance academic freedom – a cornerstone of higher education – with fidelity to Catholic teachings further complicates institutional governance. Striking this balance requires careful navigation of ecclesiastical expectations, civil legal frameworks, and the practical realities of academic administration. The lack of clarity in defining “doctrinal integrity” and “probity of life” poses a significant challenge. These concepts are fundamental to the recruitment, evaluation, and retention of faculty in Catholic universities, as emphasized in Canon 810 (Gallin, 2001). However, their broad and somewhat subjective nature can lead to differing interpretations, potentially resulting in disputes or misapplications. For instance, while doctrinal integrity involves alignment with Church teachings, the extent to which personal beliefs or public actions reflect this alignment may vary widely in interpretation. Similarly, probity of life, encompassing moral conduct consistent with Catholic values, requires institutions to establish clear standards for assessment without overstepping into personal liberties (Pilani, 2023).

Balancing academic freedom with Catholic identity presents another layer of complexity. While academic freedom is vital for fostering intellectual inquiry and innovation, it must operate within the doctrinal boundaries that define a Catholic university. Faculty members are encouraged to explore and teach freely, yet their work must reflect and respect the moral and theological tenets of the Church. This dual expectation can lead to tensions, particularly when faculty perceive doctrinal oversight as a restriction on their academic independence (Hesburgh, 1994; Ex Corde Ecclesiae, 1990).



## Recommendations

To address these challenges, Catholic universities should develop comprehensive and transparent policies within their institutional statutes. Clear guidelines on the meaning and application of doctrinal integrity and probity of life are essential. These definitions should draw from canonical texts, such as Canons 810, 750, and 752, and be contextualized to reflect the specific mission and values of each institution. Explicit criteria and examples can help mitigate ambiguities and provide a fair and consistent framework for decision-making. Accordingly, the following recommendations are proffered:

- i. ***Transparent hiring and evaluation processes are critical:*** Recruitment protocols should include thorough assessments of candidates' academic qualifications, doctrinal fidelity, and moral conduct, supported by peer reviews, references, and interviews. Similarly, periodic evaluations of faculty performance should incorporate feedback mechanisms and opportunities for professional development. These processes not only uphold institutional standards but also enhance trust and accountability within the university community.
- ii. ***Faculty training on Catholic doctrine and mission is another essential recommendation:*** Regular workshops, seminars, and orientation programs can help faculty members understand and embrace the university's Catholic identity. Such initiatives foster a shared commitment to the institution's values while equipping faculty to navigate the intersection of faith and scholarship effectively.
- iii. ***Regular Policy Reviews:*** Regular policy reviews are necessary to maintain relevance and alignment with evolving societal and legal contexts. These reviews provide an opportunity to identify areas where governance policies can be improved to better sustain institutional identity and academic excellence. universities can ensure their operations remain consistent with their Catholic mission while adapting to external changes by promoting a culture of accountability and continuous improvement.
- iv. ***Strengthening Relationships with Ecclesiastical Authorities:*** Strengthening relationships with ecclesiastical authorities is another vital step. Catholic universities should actively engage with episcopal conferences and diocesan bishops to ensure oversight and support in maintaining doctrinal fidelity and moral integrity. A collaborative framework that addresses governance challenges can help reinforce the university's Catholic identity while promoting operational efficiency.
- v. ***Promoting Research on Catholic University Governance:*** Finally, promoting research on Catholic university governance will contribute significantly to the academic and operational development of these institutions. Interdisciplinary studies exploring the interaction of faith, law, and academic freedom can advance scholarly discourse and generate innovative solutions to emerging challenges. Such research not only enhances understanding of governance practices



but also strengthens the capacity of universities to fulfill their dual mission of academic excellence and doctrinal fidelity.

- vi. **Finally, institutions must ensure compliance with both civil and ecclesiastical requirements:** Adhering to labor laws and constitutional protections, such as academic freedom and non-discrimination, is vital for maintaining credibility and avoiding legal disputes. At the same time, Catholic universities should work closely with ecclesiastical authorities to ensure alignment with canonical expectations, promoting a collaborative relationship that supports their dual identity.

By addressing these challenges through clear guidelines, transparent processes, faculty development, and legal compliance, Catholic universities can effectively navigate the complexities of their mission. These measures not only strengthen their governance but also reaffirm their role as centers of academic and spiritual excellence.

## Conclusion

The governance of Nigerian Catholic universities represents a critical intersection of canonical principles, theological imperatives, and civil legal frameworks. As institutions tasked with nurturing academic excellence and preserving their Catholic identity, these universities operate in a complex environment where faith, reason, and governance must coexist harmoniously. This study has demonstrated that Canon 810, alongside other canonical provisions, provides a robust foundation for guiding faculty recruitment, evaluation, and dismissal. These principles ensure that Catholic universities remain steadfast in their mission to integrate faith and reason while advancing intellectual inquiry by emphasizing doctrinal integrity, moral probity, and pedagogical competence. However, the practical application of these canonical directives is not without challenges. Ambiguities in interpreting terms such as “integrity of doctrine” and “probity of life,” coupled with the need to harmonize ecclesiastical oversight with civil labor statutes, present governance complexities. Furthermore, the balance between academic freedom and fidelity to Catholic teachings remains a delicate endeavor, requiring careful policy articulation and implementation.

This research has underscored the importance of transparent governance processes, including the establishment of clear institutional statutes, structured recruitment protocols, and performance evaluation mechanisms. Equally vital is the development of faculty formation programs that promote an understanding of the Catholic mission and equip faculty members to navigate the intersection of faith and scholarship effectively. Regular policy reviews and strengthened collaboration with ecclesiastical authorities further enhance the capacity of these institutions to adapt to changing societal and legal contexts while maintaining their Catholic ethos. The dual alignment of canonical principles with civil legal frameworks offers a pathway to foster





institutional credibility, ensuring that Catholic universities remain respected participants in the broader academic community. By addressing these governance challenges with clarity, rigour, and a commitment to their mission, Nigerian Catholic universities can continue to serve as exemplary models of intellectual and spiritual formation.

This study contributes to the scholarly discourse on Catholic university governance, highlighting a dual framework that respects both ecclesiastical and civil obligations. Future research could explore comparative governance models in Catholic institutions globally, offering insights into best practices that could further strengthen the identity and governance of Catholic universities in Nigeria.

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