

EFFECTS OF RELIGION AND CULTURE IN AFRICA: A STUDY OF NIGERIAN SOCIETY

By

OJILE, BARNABAS AUDU

Centre For Pre-Degree, Ijmb and Diploma Studies,
Kogi State University, Anyigba
Email: audubarnabas2@gmail.com
Phone: 08039447755 or 07082836004

ABSTRACT

This paper set out to discover the effects of Religion and Cultural belief system play in national development in Nigeria Society: to find the existing gap for a detailed historical research to be conducted and to ascertain what could be done to encourage continuity; reviewing what other scholars have done with the aim of unveiling what area of need to be researched upon to again broader insights of the issues underlying Cultural and Religious belief system. This research is basically quantitative from historical perspective with an exploration research methods, data collections are from secondary sources basically through the review journal articles, books and conference paper and like.

Keywords: Religion, Culture, Nigeria and Africa

INTRODUCTION

All over the country, religion plays an important role in the daily lives of her citizens; the way we interact with one other, our choice of dressing, food, and politics are mostly affected by religion. In other words, religion and politics are intertwined and it empowers man to function in his society by contesting for a political position so as to contribute his ideology. Nigeria's population of over 200 million is divided nearly equally between Christians and Muslims. The importance of this division is well illustrated by the fact that religion, not nationality, is the way in which most Nigerians choose to identify themselves; though not in all cases. Thus, the domains of religion, secularism and politics are becoming increasingly intermingled in both overt and covert ways. Invariably, sectarian politics is inherently problematic (Tar and Shettima). Thus, there is a need to look at the effects of religion on politics in Nigeria since independence. In addition, the study intends to find out how religion can bring sustainable development to our politics. It concludes by agitating for religious tolerance and the hinging of politics on moral codes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Has Religion and Culture influence and impact Nigerian society?

2. Does Religion and Culture create opportunity for performance of politics in Nigeria society?

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS

Religion has been an indispensable phenomenon in Nigeria. It had become an important factor in political discourse (Adigwe and Grau 81). The influence of religion is not only limited to politics but its power influences virtually all other facets of life. Political power affects economic prosperity, social relation, educational advancement, and the psych of the society. There are three dominant religions in Nigeria: African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity. All these religions and their ideologies allow for interaction between religion and politics. The traditional religion of a society is a systematic reflection of their socio-cultural orientation, history and legacies on elemental forces, which in turn produces a belief in a supreme cosmic power that created heaven and earth. To this power belong all things in their social psych. Thus, traditional politics of the people has a strong linkage to belief in theocracy. To the Yorubas, Oba (king), the political leader of the people, is only holding his 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 (Laguda 123-133).

Also, 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 socio-political structure of any Islamic state. In fact, Prophet Mohammed 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 their guide. We can conclude here that Islam allows for a spiritual relationship between religion and politics (Akintola 138).

Similarly, Abubakre (129) writing from an Islamic perspective, suggests that Islam is a way of life, which dictates the political ideology and practice in any Islamic society. He points out that the ideals of Islam are good and are meant to guide political conducts, however, the practices of such ideals are usually influenced by the socio-cultural institutions in the society, including politics. For many Muslims, Islam is a total way of life. It is not correct, according to this viewpoint, to speak of religion and politics but instead religio-politics. Islam is believed to be relevant and integral to politics, law, education, social life, and economy. These are not viewed as secular institutions or areas of life but as aspects of the Afolabi 43 Islamic religion. Thus, religion and society are interrelated.

Laguda (133) argues that 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. However, Laguda's argument is unconvincing due to the fact that there are many Christians who are involved in politics and that have won political seats as governors, senators and honourable. In Judaism, which provided background to Christianity, the God of Israel, Yahweh, is the God of war (Josh. 6:20), economy (Ex. 16), obedience and moral virtues (Num. 21:4-8). Yahweh is all in all in the Judaic traditional thought, religion and politics. In the Apostolic age, the Church witnessed an effective interplay between religion and politics. And where such interaction tends towards negative ends, the Apostles often adopted Christian principles to solve the problem as the church spiritual leaders. Perhaps, the most significant interaction between religion and politics in church history was witnessed during the Constantine and the post-Constantine era, where the emperor used machinery of the state to promote Christianity. Thus, religion became politicized, and politics also marred the progress of the church during this period. Jesus' teachings and Pauline theology encourage political process and respect for those in political offices, since they are representatives of God (Matt. 22:17-20).

Hence, from the outset of the three main religions in Nigeria, politics and religion have effectively complemented each other. As the Divine played the religious role, human played the political role. And the effectiveness of both religion and politics has been based, not only on the involvement of the Divine in the activities of man, but also in following its ethics and principles.

Political scientists believe that man is a political animal. This means that we cannot do without politics as well as religion in our everyday life. Therefore, since we make use of each of them in our daily activities, we tend to politicize religion and religionize politics. Thus, Nigerian politics is characterized chiefly by "politicization of religion and religionization of politics" (Adogame 128). Mixing the two together makes religion to lose its sanctity and politics to become dirtier. This reality is manifested in the nature of Nigeria's postcolonial state system, particularly the capture and control of state power by a self-centred, and divided political class that strategically used religion and politics to divide the people, consolidate and extend its control over resources and power in Nigeria's emerging capitalist formation. For instance, after Nigeria's independence in 1960, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the premier of Northern Nigeria, embarked on an "official" campaign to "Islamize" the north and eventually spread Islam to other regions. This drive generated, particularly among the Christians and adherents of African Traditional Religions (ATRs), the fear of looming religious extinction.

It has been observed that politicians openly espouse religious sectarian sentiments in campaigning for public support. In addition, it was observed that "no one can aspire to, or hold political office in Nigeria without pretending to be religious" (Kukah 31). Invariably, religion goes hand-in-hand with politics, and it will be difficult to hold a public office without hold on religion. Politicians make use of the power entrenched in religion, not only to achieve their

aims, but also to subjugate their opponents and to legitimize their religion. For this reason, the dominant religious groups; Islam and Christianity have been locked in a fierce battle for the political control of the country (Bujra 1).

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Religion

Many scholars have postulated several definitions of religion; however, there is no concise meaning for it because there are problems in defining religion. In fact, Idowu (22) argues that religion is a difficult topic to handle, whether we are considering its connotation, its origin, or its definition. Wali (134) asserts that religion is a people's way of life including both their tradition and social interaction. It is man's integral attitude of life. From the dawn of his creation, man has never been divorced of religion, whatever kind it may be. It is important to note that religion possesses great functional value and, as a dimension of human life, is believed to have been present since time immemorial. Hence, it is glaring that people attached a strong significance to religion. It controls man in its entirety. It shows that man cannot do without religion regardless of what he/she believes in. In addition, religion stimulates man to control his environment by struggling for power, so as to achieve his objective(s). In a nutshell, religion empowers man to pursue political power and other forms of power that can make him to have firm control of his environment. The access to the powers which religion gives to man makes religion inseparable from politics. In survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life from May to June 2006 explained that 76% of Christians say that religion is more important to them than their identity as Africans, Nigerians or members of an ethnic group. Among Muslims, the figure that chose religion as their most important factor stood at 91%. This shows the power inherent in religion and the value people place on it (Ruby and Shah <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/435/nigeria-presidential-election>).

Culture

Culture has been defined as the programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another..... the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group's response to its environment the way of life of the members of a society, the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation (Edewor 195); that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society; and the set of tangible and intangible elements-things like diet, tools, technology, language and values-that gives shape and meaning to everyday lives of a particular group of people (Kanagy and Kraybill 4). The concept of culture consists of the values the members of a given group hold, the norms they follow, and the material goods they create. It refers to the way of life of the individual member of groups within a society; how they dress, their religious ceremonies and leisure pursuit (9-7). From the definitions above it is clear that

culture is a very broad concept that generally encompasses basically every aspect of human life.

EFFECTS OF RELIGION ON POLITICAL SOCIETY OF NIGERIA SYSTEM

The Presidency of Obasanjo in 1999 again brought about the return of religious debate, especially on the Sharia law. His presidency was supposed to be recompense to the north for totally supporting him during the 1999 election. Although according to Kukah (31) it was in 1979 that non-Muslims outside the north appeared to have heard of the Sharia for the first time. During the debate on the draft constitution for the new republic, members of the National Assembly stumbled on a clause in the draft which states as follows:

1. There shall be a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal, which shall be an intermediate Court of Appeal between the States' Sharia Courts of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Nigeria.
2. The Court shall be composed of a Grand Mufti and whatever number of Muftis (not less than three) the National Assembly shall prescribe.
3. In each State of the Federation that so desires there shall be a Sharia Court of Appeal to be established by the Constitution of the State".

With this understanding, Christians in the National Assembly were united in purpose to stand against the endorsement of Shari'a law. Likewise, the Muslim members stood their ground to see it become law. After negotiations, a sub-committee was set up, which finally tabled a draft proposal for the members to consider. This draft was accepted and duly inserted in the proposed constitution. It stated that, instead of having a separate Federal Sharia Court of Appeal, which might appear to be at par with the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court should comprise some members that are learned in Islamic law to hear appeals from State Sharia Courts of Appeal. Though, this proposal was accepted, later events revealed that religion has penetrated into Nigerian politics in a powerful way than ever before. The Muslims on one hand seem to have braced up to pursue the Sharia issue and to implement it in the entire Federation while Christians, on the other hand, were set on the alert and considered ways to foster solidarity among themselves in resistance to feared attempts at the Islamization of Nigeria. Finally, religion became a strong factor that could not be waved aside in policy making.

In addition, the debate on Sharia law led to schism. Many Muslim interpreted the constitutional provisions by focusing on the provision on freedom of religion. Many Christians, in contrast, focused on the provision that no State religion be adopted and feel that the introduction of Shari'a law is unconstitutional, because it affects their religious freedom. With the introduction of Shari'a law, some Christian groups have 'translated' the current Muslim debate into the realm of Christianity and demanded the introduction of (Christian) canon law in predominantly Christian States (Imo 64).

Moreover, the implementation of Sharia law brought about religious unrest, violence and annihilation of Christians, especially in the States that adopted Sharia law. During Obasanjo's tenure, Christian-Muslim tensions deepened. Shortly after he assumed office in 1999, twelve states decided to apply Sharia to criminal cases, provoking considerable hostility from the Christians. At the same time, many Christian denominations stepped up evangelistic and missionary efforts in middle-belt and northern states thus, further heightened tensions. On this, Atubi (253) remarks that:

The anti-Sharia demonstration by Christians on Net J Soc Sci 4621st February, 2000 led to a major conflict between the two groups, resulting in massive killings of people on both sides, the destruction of religious buildings, general arson, and destruction of property. The scale of the massacre and destruction was very high and thousands of people were reported to have been slaughtered like rams. The Kaduna conflict demonstrated the fundamental problem created by the adoption of the Sharia legal system. There was insecurity of life among Christian minority groups in the state. Many people, on both sides, called for partition of Nigeria, rather than adoption and abandonment of the Sharia system. The Kaduna religious crises led to retaliatory killings and burning of Mosques in Abia and Owerri, in which Igbo youth targeted northerners who they accused of killing their kith in the North.

Also, the effect of religion on politics has brought about people voting according to their faith regardless of the capacity of the candidate to lead the country. This was evident in the southeast. For instance, Catholic Priests in Anambra State openly enjoined their members to vote for Peter Obi (former governor) because of his religious inclination. According to him "he always clutched his chaplet tightly in his hands to demonstrate to the Catholic faithful that he was certainly one of them." And they accepted him (Okafor <http://pewresearch.org.pubs435nigeria-presidentialelection>). Also, the former Peoples' Democratic Party's (PDP) senator for Jigawa northwest senatorial district, Dr Danladi Sankara decried an alleged religious undertone in the 2011 presidential election. Sankara, who was also the Jonathan/Sambo returning agent for Jigawa State in the election, indicated that there was connivance among the opposition parties in Jigawa, whereby they indoctrinated the people to vote for Muslims. The defunct Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) candidate, Gen. Muhammodu Buha ri (rtd), scored the highest vote in the 2011 presidential election in Jigawa State, polling 665,994 votes to beat his closest rival, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate, President Goodluck Ebelle Jonathan, who polled 419, 252 votes. During the announcement of the result at the INEC headquarters in Dutse, the presidential election Collation Officer for the state, Prof. Jibrila D. Amin, the Vice Chancellor of the Federal University of Dutse, indicated that the total votes cast were 1,214,7 74, adding that the total valid votes were 1,140,766. According to him, Nigeria is governed by the constitution, not by

any of the holy books, because party politics goes beyond religion and tribal consideration (Furtune News 8).

Although, Islam and Christianity have taken a clear position in the political life of Nigerians, it does not mean that African Traditional Religion is relegated to the background. Even Muslim and Christian politicians, privately and secretly consult the priests of the ATR, especially when it comes to political agreements and business contracts. However, ATR is not a strong factor in the fashioning of state policies and political programs.

The manipulation of religion by some powerful individuals who hide under the guise of religion to pursue selfish interests, and greediness of some religious leaders who patronize corrupt rulers remains part of the negative effects of religion on the polity. Greed has crept into the religious terrain to the extent that some religious leaders now patronize corrupt rulers to meet their lust for money and other material gains. Efforts by Nigerian politicians to gain ascendancy and power have led to situation in which politics have swept away sacred precepts of religion, and in the process, contaminated the hearts of people with bitterness and enmity for the religion of others. Hence, Falana (9) quotes Bala Usman who says that:

the real basis of the manipulation of religion in Nigeria today is the need to obscure from the people of Nigeria, a fundamental aspect of our reality; that is the domination of our political economy by a class of intermediaries who are being increasingly exposed. And this is to enable this class to cover themselves with religious and ethnic disguises in order to further entrench division among our people, slow down their awakening at any cost; even the unity of our country for which so much has been sacrificed.

On the other hand, the positive effect of religion on politics has brought about the reinvigoration of Christian reawakening to politics. In the 1999 elections, Pentecostal Christians openly supported Obasanjo's candidature under the banner of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), viewing him as a symbol of the restoration of Christian control over the government of Nigeria and of the "ending of Muslim political dominance" (Ojo 2). After Obasanjo was elected president, Pentecostal leaders conducted an all-night prayer meeting for him. This gesture was politically endorsed and rewarded with Afolabi the construction of a chapel in the Presidential Villa, the seat of national politics. Obasanjo's victory at the polls and his eventual swearing-in as president on 29th May, 1999 was heavily steeped in Christian Pentecostal symbolism. Adrama that was spectacularly replayed in subsequent elections testifies to this:

To many Christians, Obasanjo's "second coming" was a spiritual metaphor, one that went beyond the ordinary fact of his fortuitous emergence as a beneficiary of political compromise between the country's geo-political power blocs ... For Christians it was a fulfillment of God's promise to liberate his children (Southern Christians) from the yoke of northern (Muslim) leadership. A political exigent "second coming" was therefore invested with a spiritual halo,

and Obasanjo himself became transformed into a virtual 'Messiah' almost overnight (Obadare 969).

After the completion of two four- year terms and the abortive third term by President Olusegun Obasanjo, political leaders began talking of alternating the Presidency between the largely Christian south and predominately Muslim north. After considerable infighting and the disqualification of several would be contenders, all of the country's major political parties chose Muslims as their candidates and after the controversial election, Alhaji Musa Yar'Adua emerged as the President. Though occult practices, cultism and superstitions which serve as a device among politicians to tussle for power becomes paramount.

Eso (163) notes some incontrovertible facts pertinent to our religion-in- politics dilemma. According to him, "religion has a place in the lives of every nation, Nigeria included. Irrespective of the faith or denomination, religion when truly practiced in its truest form and spirit, has been and remains sacred. It plays a vital role in purposeful leadership, community building, social justice, law and order, peacemaking, reconciliation, forgiveness and the healing of wounds, be it political, family or personal". This means that if people truly make use of beliefs, values and attitudes inherent in religion into politics, it will bring about focused and resolute political leaders in the country who will be devoid of sanctimonious hypocritical attitude. It will also help in bringing about fair play into politics.

RELIGION AS A MECHANISM FOR SUSTAINABLE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Adherence to religious tenets by the leaders and followers will greatly enrich political activity. Embedded in each religion are the beliefs, practices and ethics that serve as check for excesses in human behaviour. Thus, values in religion are viable mechanisms for political stability and development. In addition, religion can function as a unifying factor for political development, since religion influences every aspect of human lives and serves as a basis for human existence.

Religion can boost inter - religious dialogue which can ultimately bring about religious tolerance in the society. Inter -religious dialogue is a platform where religious leaders discuss and orientate people about the essence of religion and its efficacy in the society. Hence, it is important for religious leaders to guide against hypocritical teaching that can disrupt peace and political stability. Therefore, exchange of ideas removes ignorance and eliminates religious conflicts.

Also, the observance of the oath of office by the political leaders will sustain political development. Political office holders should allow their religious tenets to guide them continuously. Adeleye (75) asserts that:

Religion breeds an ideal heart in man to be able to be conscious of the need to have a clean heart. By this, he will grow to have a philanthropic or patriotic thought before venturing to lead or represent his people in government of the

state. In another words, religion will prepare the mind of man to be a good politician who will constantly fall back upon his religion to guide him. The teachings or threats of religion are expected to guide him to be able to lead his people aright as a politician with fear of God in him. He will never consider himself first, rather he knows that he is the servant of the electorates (sic) -his people. Religion in an idealistic set up, therefore, serves as oil to lubricate politics. This is to say that religion bears peace and love, both of which are vital ingredients that can sum the interests of societies together for an ideal and a very healthy and purposeful politics.

Therefore, in achieving good governance and political stability, religion should serve as a guiding factor in all political activities that the country engages in. The impact of religion on politics can enhance sustainable development if the impact is positive.

Though the negative effects of religion have continued to endanger the country's existence since independence; Net J Soc Sci 48 starting from the Biafra war to the Boko Haram crisis that has taken religio-political dimension. With the politicization of religion, there is a sense of religious reawakening which is supposed to have a positive impact on the political development of the country but has had a negative effect. However, religion can contribute to national integration, political mobilization, reformation of ethnic identity, nationalism, peaceful co-existence, economic social and political development.

In a nutshell, the effect of religion on politics all over the world is bifocal, in the sense that it is both positive and negative. It is positive in the sense that religion, as earlier identified, is value-driven and it naturally robs off on the polity through the participation of ardent religious believers. The negative effect could be deciphered from the perspective of sectarian tendency; where religious bigots do anything in the name of religion to ensure that positions or offices are gained by their adherents. Such people stand on the position that their ideals and beliefs dominate any environment they find themselves (New York Times 4).

Methodology

The research adopted in this work was empirical investigation and infavour conducted with some patriotic Nigeria's leaders.

The population used in this research are some leaders from three groups in the country such as political analyst, Religious Leaders and Professional Educators who are known persons and are also doing well in their fields.

Summary of Finding

It is important to reiterate that this research work was embarked upon with the main objectives of findings out and evaluating the effects of Religion and Culture in Africa: A Study

of Nigeria Society especially in politics and the military. It was discovered that Religion and Culture has influenced and impact Nigerian society.

Figure 1: Has Religion and Culture influence Nigerian Society

S/NO	Group	Yes	Responses	No	Responses	Total
1.	Political Analyst	12	42.6%	2	7.25%	14
2.	Religious Leaders	6	21.3%	1	3.625%	7
3.	Educators	2	7.1%	5	18.125%	7
	Total	20	71%	8	29%	28

Source: Research Data, 2020

Response in the questionnaire figure 1 above shows that out of the total 28 responses, 20 said “yes” representing 71% of respondent who agreed that religion and culture has influence Nigerian society while 8 that said “no” representing 29%.

Figure 2: Does Religion and culture create opportunity for performance of politics in Nigeria?

S/NO	Group	Yes	Responses	No	Responses	Total
1.	Political Analyst	3	10.71%	10	35.7%	13
2.	Religious Leaders	1	3.57%	5	17.86%	6
3.	Educators	6	21.42%	3	10.72%	9
	Total	10	35.7%	18	64.3%	28

Source: Research Data, 2020

Response to figure 2 shows that 10 representing 35.79% agreed that religion and culture create opportunity for performance of politics in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Religion has been used and is still being used to induce violence and has caused stunted growth to our political stability and sustainable development. The relationship between religion and politics in any society should be mutual, and if properly managed, bring about tranquility and development. On the other hand, if the relationship is not properly managed, it could generate conflict. This is because religion is about personal experience and access to divine powers, while politics is all about gaining political power for personal reasons. Since these are

mutually and exclusively related, there is constant need for symbiotic relationship. Hence, religion can either bring conflict or peace, development or destruction, growth or retardation, stability or instability, security or insecurity. It depends on how it is made use of along with politics. The mixing of both religion and politics is not a problem, but the level of moral standard, patriotism towards the country and proper understanding of religion are the determining factor.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The government should give more power to the National Religious Advisory Board and the Nigeria Inter-religious Council in promoting inter-religious dialogue and religious tolerance through organising seminars and workshops for religious adherents which will help in building sustainable political development. Haynes (68) argues that when interfaith dialogue is skillfully organized and pursued, it can encourage those who have personally involved in conflict to work together towards peace accommodation.
2. The practice of plurality of religion in Nigeria should be geared towards attaining sustainable development and political stability. This is essential in being a developed country. Also, the basis of gaining political power must be based on the ability to perform with good moral standard. It should not be based on religious identity. Religious leaders should act as watchdogs to political office holders by guiding them against unacceptable practices that can jeopardize political development, not meddling with politics.
3. The government should stop using public fund to sponsor people to pilgrimage. Instead, the fund apportion to it should be diverted to create employment for the teeming youth, improve our educational institution and to alleviate poverty in the society. Thus, making use of religion in Nigerian politics should be geared towards ensuring a harmonious and peaceful co-existence (of Christianity and Islam) and political development.

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