

## RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE AS PARTICULARISTIC FORMS OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: A REVIEW OF CHRISTIAN AND MOSLEM RELATIONS IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This paper is looking into the role and place of religion in the nation building and state building processes in Nigerian societies. It took the course of social change dynamics of religion and ethnicity rivalries to bring the spells of social conflict in Nigeria. It discusses Christian-Muslim relations on the sphere of democracy in Nigeria. In this paper, the findings of the study therefore, support the thesis that there is a strong possibility of change to genuine democratic governance in Nigeria; if only the nation will adopt the principles of Reconstructionist contents of the constitutional review in restructuring the Nigeria's state. The study concluded that the system of good governance could be realized in Nigeria, if there is a genuine restructure of polity in Nigeria. It will lead to a better national integration and democracy in Nigeria. This research does not involve any survey technique and approaches of quantitative method analysis. Rather, it is a historical and analytical research that draws heavily on the various theories on religion and politics in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Religion and Social Change, Christianity, Islam, Political Consciousness

### Introduction

This paper is on religion as particularistic forms of political consciousness in Nigeria, and it tries to extrapolate the realities of the religious class from getting involved into the politicization of religion and religionization of politics in Nigeria. The paper takes a new and radical look at the thorny problems of religious politics in Nigeria in a way that has not been adequately reflected in the socio-political thought of the country. It sees modernity as a glaring problem in the religious crises across the nation. Indeed the political elites were unable to embrace the legacy of modernity, simply because of the sustenance of their old empire, ethnic hegemony and personal interest, instead of the new dimension of enculturation with modernity in African socio-political system. The work is designed in the theoretical framework of analysis in the constructive dimension of this complex process of modernization in Nigerian socio-political system.

Over the years, in early post-colonial period, many African post-colonial states confronted a number of religious and political problems most of which resulted in severe political upheavals and economic dislocations. Noble amongst these countries are Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Uganda, etc. Nigeria, arguably, is the worst affected with religious crises, followed by Egypt which experienced a series on churches and sectarian violence between the Orthodox Christians and radical Islamic Moslem. Ivory Coast that split along Moslem and Christian sub-groupings was embroiled also in some term of religious crises. "In Somalia's case, religious politics has affected the country by turning it into a failed state (Moller, 2006:16)".

On the other hand, Salawu (2010) corroborated this by saying that:

there is an intent desire by Nigerians to live together as a nation. An example is the mutual desire to fight for the unity of the nation during the civil war from (1967-1970). But in spite of all these efforts to live at peace in Nigeria, there is still persistence of religious conflicts in Nigeria and in many aspects continued to be a source of political strife, economic deprivation, bloodshed and death, underscored the point noting: with the emergence of ethnic militias and their deep divides between various ethnic groups, religious intolerance has become more violent and bloody. (p. 345).

For this, observers of the Nigerian political scenarios have noted that religious conflicts are more disruptive than any other problem in the country. The clashes between Christians and Moslems have caused churches and Mosque to become desecrated or destroyed to the manner that it has turn into an ethno-religious conflicts, it has turned into ethnic rivalries in the contemporary Nigeria political spheres. Thus, as Quinn and Quinn (2003:50) put it, “it has become increasingly destabilizing in the political and economic lives of the people; that Christians/Moslems violence of 1980’s and 1990’s claimed about 5000 (five thousand) lives.”Falola (1998:167) also opined that underlying the problem is simply the issue of religious dominance, power and control in the Federal Government.

More so, Okorieh (2005) asserts that:

Religion has played a crucial role in politics in Nigeria. The struggle for power in Nigeria is rooted in the political and religious history of competing world views embodied by chiefs, ethnic leaders and religious leaders. The direct influence of religion on Nigerian politics is, therefore, blunted by the very diversity of religious expression. (p. 113).

Religious and inter-religious violence is very much pronounced in Northern Nigeria where the majority is predominantly Moslems with a sparsely population of Christians. Religion indeed has turned to become another thing in the struggle for political leadership in Nigeria. It has become part of the democratic process in Nigeria’s leadership capital. It is no longer in the domain of spiritual consecration of ethics and ethos of religion. There is no doubt that religious ideas have influenced the government of Nigeria and the society at large. Many argue that the government as it stands today is an institution of individual ethnic and religious patronage, lacking in universal secularism that promotes oneness, growth and structure of genuine development. The states are weakened by over-involvement in religious matters, instead of abiding by the secular nature of their constitutions. More to this, is that in Nigerian, religion also has condone the overzealous, territorially aggressive; ‘power lusting’ ‘religious assertiveness’ of some fanatics has led to the perennial problem of politicization of religion and religionization of politics in Nigeria, whereby individuals or groups use religion as a key source of influence and power in order to build the hegemony of their regimes.

Perhaps, it is a fact that this contradicts the objectives of Nigerian national policy of education.

1. To have a free and democratic society
2. To be just and egalitarian society

3. To be unitedly strong and self-reliance
4. To be great and dynamic economy
5. To be bright and full of opportunities for all citizens

Actually, it is well enshrined in the constitution, even the section 38(1) and (2) and (3) that:

- 1) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
- 2) No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or a religion not approved by his parent or guardian.
- 3) No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination (FRN, 199 Section (1) and (2) and (3)).

So, it is in this trajectory, that religious issues should be spiritually consecrated. It is very nominal to the status of limitation in their religious thought. Religion is based on secular status in Nigeria and it cannot be the affairs of the government to preserve the authenticity of religious worship, but if it is being done so, it will “constitute economic drains on the government and people and they will interfere with the productive capacity and stability of the Nigerian nation state” (Soyinka, 2010:328). For clarity as we understand it, Nigeria is one of the most religiously plural countries in the world and that Christians and Moslems are evenly distributed in Nigeria. The Christians are predominantly in the south, while Moslems are in the north. So, this is the indication of the polarization of the country along the religious line in Nigeria, between the Christians and Moslems.

Quintessentially, the central issues being addressed in the paper are, first, the role of religious ideas in social change in Nigeria. The second is the influence of Christianity and Islam in relation to public policy in Nigeria. Finally, the paper concludes with the ideas of a restructure of the political governance in Nigeria.

### **Religion and Social Change as Particularistic Forms of Political Consciousness: A Review of Christian and Moslem Relations in Nigeria**

Critically, it is at this point that I examine the political nexus of religions in Nigeria. It is aimed at highlighting the nuances and complexities of politics in the country. Here, the study is very interested with religion, rather than doctrinal questions, although the doctrines are psychologically part of the elements of social change that necessitates conflicts in post-colonial administration. However, the underlying assumption here is the realm of faith in its infinite varieties of norms and rules governing humanity's relations of the “divine,” constitute impediments to the development process in Nigeria. It doesn't cultivate the principles of positive peace-building in the country's democracy. So, to this end, since her independence in 1960 Nigeria has been involved in religious politics. The conflation of its constitutional secular structure with modernity and elections with democracy has led to facile analysis and erroneous policy-making with tragic consequences for these caught in the web of ethno-religious crises. The crises have enormous effects on the country's economic development and

undoubtedly reveal the essence of Nigeria's religious politics. In fact, almost every controversial issue in Nigeria has a political or religious undertone to it. The particularistic forms of Nigeria's existential essence and identity are often structured around ethno-religious identities. The ethno-religious conflicts have engulfed every aspect of our national life. It has occurred in many parts of the country in areas like Jos, Kano, Bauchi, Lagos, Taraba, Enugu, Ilorin, Ebonyi state, Maiduguri, Kaduna, Kafanchan, Ibadan, Nassarawa, Aba, Okigwe etc. The politicization of religion and religionization of politics are becoming the model of a political process in the ambiances of the negative culture of political leadership capital in Nigeria. It is disintegrative and destructive to the praxis of the national politics, thereby threatening the peace, stability and security of the Nigerian nation. The identity struggles have been taken to a different dimension and was based on the proportional ethno-political representation, but today the scenario is different, the ethnic politics have been transformed into religious matters.

There is no doubt that the question of religion is a very sensitive matter in Nigeria and often leads into crises of the national problem. Religion has an enormous influence in the life of most Nigerians to the point of thinking along the same line in making and evaluation of public policy. One classic example is the population census which is being interpreted along the part of the religious hegemony. The ethnic demographic statistics of the Nigeria census often lead to conflicts between the Christians and Moslems before and after the census. It often corroborates to the census of conflict in Nigeria. Expectations are usually high prior to census but immediately after the results, conflicts set in. The census reports were supposed to be credible, but in Nigeria, there is suspicion to both Christians and Moslems. In the past, this has resulted in the cancellation of some census result and some specialists blamed the confusing situation on the methodology and anthropological criteria of enumeration.

Apart from the census, another factor of ethno-religious conflict is the political electioneering in Nigeria. This aggravates a lot of conflict to religion in Nigeria. The politicians are very instrumental to this, in the guess to use religion as an instrument of political gain. They advocate that religious identity should be used in determining or sharing of political offices instead of the individual performances. In fact, this calls for the reasons why there is mutual distrust and suspicion over the sharing of national resources. The problem is now very much serious in the just concluded election in Anambra State governorship election, where there was conflict between the Catholic and the Anglican. The issue of religious politics has becoming a serious problem in Nigeria, to the fact that Adogame (2005) expresses it as thus:

Ethno-religious grievances over the distribution of power and privileges remain one basic theme in the agenda of religious politics. The appropriation of religion to secure political offices and the established convention of allocating important political and administrative offices on the basis of religious persuasion has become firmly ingrained in the polity. (p. 133).

In all these, it is an obvious fact that religion is the main factor of polarization of the ethnic divides in Nigeria. It is religion that is the vital element of the socio-economic and political conflict in Nigeria. Religion and politics are bed-fellows throughout Nigeria history. It is on the threshold of transforming the political landscape of Nigeria, since the inception of her independence in 1960, and if there is no any form of national integration or public policy goal of conduct in Nigeria. It may put the country in danger of balkanization in the likes of former Yugoslavia, soviet union,

Ethiopia etc and it is worthy of note that peace and stability of the Nigerian nation is important for economic development of Africa and global peace initiative across the world.

### **The Emergence of Polarized Religious Politics**

Here we are much concerned with the emergence of religious groups in Nigeria politics. It is under this trajectory that we discussed the three concepts of ethno-religious politics and restructuring model of religion in Nigeria. There are two patterns of religious politics in Nigeria.

#### **1. The Ethno-Religious Politics**

To explore here is to examine the influential role religion plays in the contemporary ideological polarization between ethnicity and the state in Nigeria, and the influence of religious factors against these occurrences in the country. It affected a lot of institutional structure to the point of decaying. Political institution, education, social structures, social classification regarding gender related issues, marriages, cultural ethics, and legal systems are among some of the subjects undergoing religious questioning in Nigeria on the ground of paternalism or patrimonial support to the religious interests. This is also to say in another point that, throughout the history of Nigeria, the political elites are always seeking support from ethnic sentiments and religion. They depend on ethnicity and religious groups for building of an electoral coalition. They mobilize people from their communities and religious groups such as; churches and mosques. Conversely, pastors Imams and the community leaders help to disseminate information on political interests. Here, there is a symbiotic mutual relationship between the state political actors and ethnic communities on the one hand, and between the state political actors and the religious groups on the other hand. It promotes stable and mutual partisan ties in Nigeria during the early period of post-colonial administration.

In Nigeria at this period of post-colonial administration, there is legitimacy to this view. Different political parties ascribe to this principle of adjustment to consolidate power in their regions. Komolafe, (2012) in his book titled “Self-Government and political imagination: the appeal of religion”, analyzed this mutual relationship and makes reference to their party formations in Nigeria prior to independence. He went further to state that:

The era leading to an independence Nigeria, for example, was full of aspiring politicians who were concerned with symbols and ideologies that could sway public support and sympathy. Again each party derived political support from one of the three regions in which the colonial government of Nigeria was organized: ObafemiAwolowo’s Action Group (AG) received support from the Yoruba in the West, NnamdiAzikiwe’s (NCNC) received backing from the Igbo in the east, and the Northern region was geographically, religiously and politically divided between the Ahmadu Bello’s (NPC), Aminu Kano (NEPU) and the Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). (p. 15).

However, it is more in the same way they have political parties that they have political voting system towards the ethno-religious politics. The analysis of religious voting has become more complicated in Nigeria. People are voting along religious lines instead





of the person's integrity and personality. It does not matter who you are in the society, what is dominant is religious affiliation and nothing else. Religion and society are connected, even if not synonymous, but the distinction between religion as a private belief and public practice is not clearly distinguished in Nigeria. The manipulation of religion for political control is what is creating problems with the adoption of a liberal democracy model in Nigeria. This process of placing religion in Nigeria's political psyche has "shown some contemporary agitation for Islamization to be a deep seated religious agenda that predates Boko Haram and highlights this as perhaps the most important factor accounting for national disunity, stagnation and corruption of the Nigerian State" (Komolafe, 2012:1). The political dimension of religion in Nigeria has deteriorated a great deal to the point of a political anarchy and war in Nigeria with the Boko Haram. The country that had been partly integrated because of the attainments of political independence in 1960 had completely gone down the drain because of religious politics.

According to Suberu (1996), "although the polarization of religious cleavages in national politics is a relatively recent phenomenon in Nigeria, dating back perhaps to the late 1970's, religious divisions is an important element in Nigeria's complex pluralism, and political arena" (p. 477). In the same way, regarding what is going on in the Nigeria political circle, Skler (1986) observes that, "indeed, in the years before and after independence, party politics in both regions (especially the north) were significantly infused with the rhetoric and emotions inter-religious and intra-religious cleavages" (p. 466).

Obviously, the implication is that Nigeria has been polarized along the two religious ideological lines Christianity and Islam, thereby resulting in an endless political and ideological conflict. The resultant changes in the socio-political and economic sphere come within the line of these two religions and it has resulted to why there is constant religious politics in Nigeria. Thus, as the society changes in the post-colonial states, it implies that religious ideas and practices in African states would change as well, which automatically will influence all the political processes and positions of economic factors in those areas of modernity in Africa. Religion and politics are in constant correlation of cause and effect reaction, which necessarily influences change in any country.

Asaju (1990) states that:

Religion assumes political significance and generates tension due to the country's plurality. This tension has a clear connection with the growth of uncompromising Moslem and Christian activism, which has led to a growing culture of religious violence, particularly in the north. (p. 1121).

The northern part of the country has been the major source of religious conflict due to the resistance to Islam as the predominant religion in the north, and would always want to protect it from the other influences from the southern part of the country, which is predominantly Christians.

## **2. Restructuring Model of Religion in Nigeria**

Despite this inauspicious prelude in the ethno-religious factors, the scenario of cultural affinities has lost some forms of its cultural powers due to system of acculturation and enculturation of African indigenous cultures and contemporary

politics which have established its imprint with modernity in Africa. So, the underlying basis for ethno-religious politics is as a result of the emergence of advent of modernity in African political circle. It is been established in religious configurations along ethno-Christian dialogical ethics and Arabic-Islamic dialogical ethics. Basically, it is under these considerations that we were confronted within the principles of acculturation and enculturation of African values into these two foreign religious traditions.

However, it is in the light of this perspective, that this paper discusses the model of religious restructuring in Nigeria. The imperative of enculturation and acculturation of indigenous culture requires the complete blending or adoption of new traditions into African values. Culture at this trajectory, is an essential aspect of human life, it is the prism through which people view the whole of their experiences. For a religion to thrive in a particular environment, it must acquire some aspect of that culture, or assistance into that culture.

Going by the attachment to Islam and Christianity in Africa, they are two universalistic religions that confronted the nation Nigeria with series of crisis. Besides, both are synonymously based on the same classification of truth about life and death, principles of morality, and the concept of God. Presumably, this suffice to say that, the Islamization of Nigeria colonial and post-colonial state, came with the principles of enculturation and eschatological theory that justifies the use of truth in one's culture. Islam blended with indigenous culture of the northern Nigeria; whereas Christianity, on the other hand, used the principles of acculturation to assimilate the people into the European way of living.

The principle of acculturation has a greater impact on the political development of Nigeria. It has a great amount of impact in southern Nigeria, particularly in the Eastern Nigeria predominantly Igbo tribe. Acculturation is literarily, a kind of Euro-centrism of psychoanalysis on the mental life of the people. Perhaps, this psychological harm has set the pace for the religious confrontations between the Christian south and the Islamic north. Both religions are the matrix of foreign religious cultures in Nigeria and they utilized those policies in colonization of Nigeria state of Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa etc. Despite its association with colonialism, the missionary Christianity had a significant political impact on contemporary Africa. Wherever the missionaries went, they build schools, and that is why a large majority of the first generation of African leaders was educated.

The education of the people of southern Nigeria received from mission schools, and the acculturation of their culture into European culture, gave them a sense of pride to confront an opposing civilization. The Islamization of Nigeria was resisted completely by the Christian south. In this restructuring model of religion in Nigeria, there is also the astrictive affiliation breakdown in the area of the national identity. The Islamic north, during the aftermath of the cold war era, has ventured to seek for Islamic identity, by utilizing the clause in the constitution concerning freedom of the religious space, to introduce 'Sharia' Law as a legal system in Nigeria. The 'Sharia' Law controversies have brought a lot of jurisdictions only on the accepted Moslems, this is still very ambiguous for implementations regarding, who will allow his or her legs to be amputated or chopped off, and how it will be implemented in the midst of Christians living side by side with them.

Time and again, the Sharia Law issue still rears its head in Nigeria politics; it had led to the emergence of Boko Haram, an Islamic sect that rejects western education by declaring that it is sin. This sect has resorted to the use of violence in religious politics. In fact, many people have been killed by this group in states like Maiduguri, Damaturu, Potiskum, Gombe, Abuja and Niger State. The multidimensional approach this group is using to destroy a large proportion of secular existentialism is extremely alarming. It must be stopped by the government, or else it could escalate into a full-blown war. Again, another vital factor for the emergence of polarized religion is the attitude of the politician in Nigeria towards the instrumentalism in the use of religious politics for personal interest. Suffice to this is the statement made by Usman who asserts that “Violent religious mobilizations under both civilian and military regimes in Nigeria, are rooted in the attempts by privileged neo-colonial elites to obscure ideologically and reproduce politically, their dominance” (Usman, 1987:23).

Agbaje (1990) also extols this very concept by saying that:

The post – 1967 transition from a centrifugal regional system, to a centralized federal structure, has crystallized conflict over Islamic law at the federal arena and the absence, under military rule, of constitutional and electoral checks on the discriminatory allocation of resources between competing religious orders.(288)

Perhaps, the above served as a major element of partisan politics, the attachment for power and territorial expansion serve as a blue print for religious conflict in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Conclusively, this work stems on the importance of a positive peace-building in Nigeria post-colonial administration. It adds to the point that, the religious affiliation, religious belief and behaviors are within the ambiances of politicization of religion as particularistic forms of political consciousness in Nigeria. It came up on the modernity’s post-colonial structure, which is inadvertently polarized with ethnic group and religion. The modernity colonial development in Nigeria would have commenced its institutional building with principles of national integration as the first step of national development. In time past, the colonial and post-colonial administration in Africa especially in Nigeria did not do enough to promote peace along the ethnic divides. They would have started with the principles of national integration before nation building. This scenario would have helped in unifying the country and promote the integrity of nationhood along the ethnic and religious divides in Nigeria. The major problem is the lack hybridism as an element of the third dimension of politics of a positive peace-building. Hybridization of pluralism as an element of social change would be the authentic synthesis of unity in post-colonial state of Nigeria. It will become the pivotal structure of government in Nigeria contemporary nation. It will amount to be an enculturation of culture in Nigeria towards the state of nationhood.



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