

MANIPULATION OF RELIGION AND TASK BEFORE THE NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

Since independence in Nigeria, attempts to entrench democratic relationship have been truncated prematurely over the years. The reasons for this are not farfetched. The attitudes of political class have hindered our nascent democracy and political process to thrive as it is in advanced democracies of the world. The misapplication of democratic rule, leading to manipulation of religion in the political circle make many asks several unanswerable questions concerning the role of religion in national development. This paper attempts to discuss how religion is being manipulated in the political circle in contemporary Nigeria. It treats the role of Christian's leaders in the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. Furthermore, the paper examines the development of manipulation of religion and its consequences on nation-building in Nigeria. The study adopts an inter-disciplinary approach in gathering of information. The findings from the study revealed that manipulation of religion has affected Nigeria as a nation positively and negatively. The study recommends among others, that Christian leaders should assist the government in separating religion from politics to allow democracy to flower in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Politics and Manipulation of Religion

INTRODUCTION

Manipulation of religion is a phenomenon which is as old as the history of mankind himself. It is defined by Brown as "the art of twisting, or bending by force a religion to achieve a desire political goal". Ilesanmi (1997) describes it as "the art of using religion as a tool for cheating to achieve one's personal ambition. The researches carried out by many political scientists have shown that manipulation of religion is a miniature. The political climate of Nigeria has a tremendous impact on the people in such a way that the religious and political well-being of the people is threatened. The current destruction of innocent lives and properties, all in the name of religion and politics are all unfortunate experience in Nigerian history of democratization process that must be corrected and kept behind if the nation must achieve national peace and development. Manipulation of religion as a natural outcome of multi-religious phenomenon has conditions which give rise to violence in the society. This is not because religion and politics have exclusive ideological world outlook whose members may never adhered to nor respect the normal process. The abuse of these processes could result to permanent instability and bloody rivalries in the nation (Akubor, 2009).

Ojo (1999) observes that in many African countries, manipulation of religion has recorded cases of intra-religious disputes in which sufferings and bloodshed are consequences. In Nigeria, for example, manipulation of religion is caused as result of factional rivalries for power, doctorial supremacy and democracy. Adamu (1994) listed other factors of manipulation of religion to include: parochial and emotional socialization, political compellation with the adherents of other religions, long-standing history of ethno-political antagonisms and religious intolerance.

These rival ideologies could further give rise to combination of several factors which include: (i) when there are two or more religious groups with memorial strengths that can significantly affect the outcome and direction of a

democratic political process, (ii) when religion is a legitimizing tool of hegemony and the existing leadership fed the status quo is under threat, (iii) when there is an ascendant radical thinking within a politically significant religious group capable of upstaging hegemony; (iv) when the society is characterized by political, social and economic hardship that can trigger off the messianic tendencies of the major religions (Bella, 1988). These conditions and other related ones could throw a nation into anarchy and disrupt the channels of interaction among members in the nation at it the case with Nigeria as the moment.

A SURVEY OF RELIGIOUS POLITICS IN NIGERIA

Religion is a term which means different things to different people. North-Cote (1969) asserts that religion permeates every facet of people's life, including beliefs, values and traditions. Pratt (1947) describes religion as:

The attitude of self focus towards an object in which the self genuinely believes what is true; a serious and social attitude of individuals or communities towards the power(s) which they conceive as having ultimate control over their interests and destinies. This attitude is mechanical, coldly intellectual, or faint touch of social quality which we fed in our relations towards anything that can make response to us.

In the context of this study therefore, religion simply refers to "a system which relates man to ultimate value epitomized in God and embodying worship or communion (Adegbesan, 1987).

POLITICS

The term politics on the other hand lends itself to a more definite and precise explanation. Its original Greek roots are "polis" (city) and "techno" (art, skill or method). Politics thus means "the art of governing a city" (Adegbesan, 1987). Political scientists believed that political life as an organized mode of living started in the city and spread to the neighborhood. In this classical sense, politics is held to be "the art of organizing men in a society to live and interact with one another for full realization of social structures such as the establishment of legal and governmental systems to facilitate this interaction (Atando, 1989). In the above sense, religious politics could be refers to as "the attitude of mind which prepared people to express their motives, beliefs with the sole aim of achieving their religious and political goals in life" (Ushe, 2007). Religious politics has a long history in Nigeria that is broadly divided into three phrases: the pre-colonial period, colonial period and the post-Independence period.

Manipulation of Religion

The word manipulation of religion according to Brown (1957) is "the all art of twisting something for personal gain". In the context of this paper, manipulation of religion refers to the art of maneuvering, cheating or bending by force a system or something to achieve a desired goal. It is also described as the process of using religious principles to change a political game by political lords to suit their set goals and objectives.

Religion and Politics in Nigerian Society

Religion and politics occupy the center stage in Nigerian society. Before independence in Nigeria, religion and political authority were inter-independence. Religion and state were inseparable and the only religion in Nigeria was African traditional religion (Kukah, 1999). But after independence in 1960, the advent of Islam and Christianity has intensified sudden changes that resulted into religious politics, with ethics crisis and bigotry. In spite of de facto religious pluralism and the checks and balances guaranteeing a federal separation of religion and politics, there has been continued conflict in religion and state relations. The Nigerian state continuously reaffirms the secular nature of the Republic,

guaranteeing religious pluralism (Kukah, 1999). The increasing realization by the Nigerian government that religion has both disintegrative and integrative functions, has in principle been a most decisive factor in its recent positions and attitudes towards issues of religion and the state. The growing sensitivity to the differing needs of various groups and a disposition to accommodate these needs, have led the government to reaffirm the pluralistic nature of the state and the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom. Essentially, the state declares her neutrality in religious affairs, respecting the separation of religion and state, but paradoxically there appears to be a significant distinction between the ideal of government acceptance of the religiously plural nature of the Federation and the actual implementation of the constitutional guarantees (Kukah, 2007).

The halting dialectic of religion and politics in the last decades has led to significant consequences for religion and state relations. The increasing state of religious conflicts in the country as a result of increasing government involvement in, and regulation of religious affairs has affected the nation positively and negatively (Kukah, 2007). Religion which has been a cohesive force in many societies has proved extremely divisive and disintegrative in Nigeria. In their search for national unity, Nigerians have fallen back on prejudice, bigotry and parochial antagonism that only promote chaos and anarchy.

Thus, taking undue advantage of the situation, some politicians who are sadists have so permeated all the fabrics of national life with the religious sentiment that it now forms the basis of political cleavages, placement on the key posts in government, service, award of contracts and disbursement of economic benefits. This attitude has dampened people's sense of patriotism and commitment that no ordinary Nigeria is ready to die for this country. The level at which religion is being manipulated in the religious and political circle by politicians has greater impacts on the nation than excellence or competence that would determine their rewards.

The Historical Development of Religious Politics in Nigeria

Religious politics in Nigeria has a long history. This history is broadly divided into three phases, namely: the pre-colonial period, colonial period and post-colonial period. For the purpose of clarity, we shall treat each of the period one after another.

Pre-Colonial Period

Historical studies of pre-Islamic and Christian era indicate that before both religions took roots in what constitute Nigeria, the indigenous religion had served as tool for national integration. Religious politics at that time was not pronounced. Politics was regarded as communitarian affairs which involved the whole members of the society. No religious and political affiliations were attached to the game. Important state functions like installation of a new king or celebration of worship of the earth goddess involved priests and priestesses of similar deities in all territories. Religious specialists from neighboring tribes were invited to perform functions which either aimed at purifying the land and people, wade off impending powers of evil or perform rituals for bountiful harvest. Afigbo (1981) who wrote on the religious and political roles in Nigeria using the experiences of Tiv, Benin, Yukon, Igala, Ife and Igbo states that:

Tiv village heads used to visit wukari for ceremonies and rituals connected with their institutions... many priests-chiefs of the Ogoja area similarly went to wukari as part of their installation ceremonies... The Nil ritual specialists of Northern Igbo land used to officiate at some critical stage in the coronation ceremonies of the Oba of Benin and the Attah of Igala... It is also known that the Oba of Benin on ascension used to send to the Ogane (whoever he was and wherever he was located) for a "staff," a cap of shining brass and a cross like that of Malta as the insignia of royalty.

This aspect of traditional religious politics was accepted as the ideal virtue lacking in our major religions today with all their teachings. The establishment of the two religions (Islam and Christianity) had reversed the case, as the peaceful co-existence which led to the development of communities became disrupted. From the early 1980's up till date, Nigeria has experienced various crises and riots which are almost threatening her corporate existence. Each of these conflicts has had devastating effects on the unity, peace and tranquility of Nigeria as a nation. The nature and dimension of these crises vary from one part of the country to another.

Colonial Period

The advent of Islamic and Christian religions as earlier stated has introduced religious politics in Nigeria. Instead of strengthening the unity which the people fought for at independence, religious politics started when Muslims efforts to frustrate Christian Evangelical missionaries in Northern part of Nigeria by the emirate councils. And with the appointment of Lord Lugard as governor of Northern protectorate the situation was heightened. The emir of Sokoto complained to Lord Lugard who promised that British government and the missionaries would not interfere with Islamic religion. The same promise was made to Labidoh of Adamawa. This situation became noticeable with the employment of emirate system of administration in Northern Nigeria, which led to the emergence of Muslim politicians as political heavy weight, thereby, making a sudden shift from domination of Christian politicians on Nigerian political scene. However, this situation change during the colonial period when Nigerian politicians were dominated by Christians as shown below in the table modified by Uche (1989) from the time of independence in 1960.

MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES AROUND 1960

Name	Leader	Religious Learning
Action Group	Chief Obafemi Awolowo	Christian
Borno Youth movement	M. Abba Gana	Muslim
Dynamic part	Dr. Chike Obi	Christian
Midwest Democratic Party	Apostle John Edokpolor	Christian
Mobolaje Grand Alliance	Alhaji Adegoke Aadelabu	Muslim
National council of Nigeria citizens	Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe	Christian
Niger Delta Congress	Harold Biriye	Christian
Northern elements progressive union	Alhaji Aminu Kano	Muslim
Nigerian National Democratic Party	Chief Samuel Akintola	Christian
Northern people's Congress	Sir Ahmadu Bello	Muslim
Otu Edo	Chief Omo-Osagic	Christian
Socialist Workers and Farmers party	Dr. Tunji Otegbeye	Christian
United Middle Belt Congress	Joseph Parka	Christian

From the accompanying table, it is clearly seen that most of the political development in Nigeria during colonial period had bold stamp of the Christian political factor. The Muslim politicians later came on the scene in post-independent period when manipulation of religion and monetization of politics have become the order of the day. This speedy unfolding of political events in rather unpredictable manner in Nigeria made Chief Anthony Enahoro, who watched sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa collected the constitutional intendment to lament thus:

...the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 by the British colonizers was a great mistake for the rest of the country, for Dr. Azikiwe should have been there, chief Awolowo should have been there, but they were spectators” (Gambaric, 1980).

Enahoro's lamentation points to the fact that religion has been employed by politicians in contemporary Nigeria in

particular, and Africa in general for political benefits. It started from religious affiliation and degenerated into ethnicity and finally wore a coat of regionalization in the pioneer parties such as NPC, AG and NCNC, among others. In the campaign of both parties, religious politics was employed for winning people. Thus, the NPC supporters were considered as Islamic members because the party leaders were Muslims. They distributed clothes, beads, books and Sallaya to traditional and Christian worshippers to win their votes. While Christians who opted for AG and NCNC were in most parts of Nigeria arrested and imprisoned. The same campaign strategy was used in 1978 by the party leaders of NPN and UPN. Falola (1998) explains that it was the year that Sheikh Abubakar Mamud Gumi in a nation broadcast employed Muslims not to vote a non-Muslim into power. That announcement made religious politics in Nigeria to take a new dimension from 1977 to date. Since then, religious politics has become a tool for manipulation, violence and disasters of all forms.

Post-Independent Period

Religious politics in post-colonial period is dominated by Muslim politicians as earlier stated and it is often characterized with intolerance, riots, violence, destruction of lives and properties (arson), thuggery, sycophancy and molestation of innocent citizens. For example, in the southern and western parts of Nigeria, the problem has been between the Christian communities and the indigenous African religious worshippers. The problem in this case is the Christian adherents who have come to see the indigenous African religion as something that should be done away with. The Christians have often described traditionalists as barbaric and as such have often embarked on the destruction of their ritual objects such as shrines, sacred vessels, sacred persons and places, while erecting new structures on the ruins of the ones destroyed. For example, from 1977 to 1980's, there was uprising by some group of Christian against the institution of Okuku Onyxes Uwa, connected with the traditional belief in the reincarnation in Waa, Anambra state.

This group of people believed that by their virtue of accepting Christianity, the institution which had existed from time immemorial was no longer relevant and as such everything that signifies it should be destroyed (Idowu, 1973). From 1989 to 1991, some Christian youths and their clergies could no longer contain or tolerate the traditional masquerade institution and this generated conflict in Northern Igbo, especially, Aku town. In Nsukka and its environs, it was the Omaba, Akatakpa and Aliakpa masquerade that have been the bone of contention up till date. The year 1993 to 1996, witnessed the tumult concerning traditional burial rites and customs associated with them, as Christian communities in Nsukka and its environs wanted the practice totally abolished. In July 1999, Owerri witnessed crises as some Christians uprooted the Ikenga statue which had been in the community for long and erected in its place a white cross. The group also attacked and destroyed the Ofo nay Ogu (the traditional symbols of justice and innocence) mounted at the cherubim junction Wetherill Road, Owerri, and replaced it with symbol of the Naira (Hackett, 1989).

Also in 2000, Ogden, in Idemili Local Government Area of Anambra state boiled as Christian youths went on destruction of traditional shrines damaging their valuable sacred symbols and images. In February, 2002, Neke community in Enugu was in disarray as youths attacked the shrine of a group they alleged were consuming human beings (Isiche, 1983). All these crises were instigated by the teachings of some clergy men, who had blamed the poverty, unemployment and lack of progress in the communities on the existence of these traditional shrines and symbols (Kaur, 2002). Ironically, till date things have not changed for most of these communities and their youths, rather the wave of crime, injustice poverty, and unemployment still persists. In Northern Nigeria, the situation has been open and destructive confrontations between the Christians and the Muslims. The list of crises witnessed in Nigeria (with specific reference to Northern Nigeria), since 1980 includes the following: The Kasuar Magahi conflict, Kaduna state, in 1980:

The Maitatsine uprising, Kano city, in December, 1980

The Maitatsine uprising of Kano, Kaduna, and Maiduguri in October, 1982 The Maitatsine uprising, of Yoda, February, 1984

The Maitatsine uprising, Gombe, April, 1985

The conflict in Kafanchan, Kaduna, Zaria and other parts of Kaduna state in March, 1987

The conflict in Tarawa Below and other parts of Bauchi state in 1991, and 2000-2001

The conflict in Zing Kayla and other parts of Kaduna state in February and May, 1992

The conflict in Kano state in 1999-2000

Kano “Anti-American war in Afghanistan” Riots, September-October, 2001

The conflict in Jos metropolis and environs in 2001-2002 and 2010

The conflict on the Mambila Plateau in 2001-2002

The conflict in Gamut, Kaduna state, in 2001

The Anti-miss world conflict in Kaduna state, 2002-2003

The Jos crises of November, 2008-2010

The Boko Haram uprising in Maiduguri and Bauchi, 2009

These various crises and riots are indications of the extent to which the various religious bodies have reached in lack of mutual respect, trust and understanding for one another. Besides, they also show lack of respect for lives and property, including places of worship of the other. Not even the government could restore the loss of confidence, trust and credibility being suffered by the injured people (as the governments have most often been accused of fuelling some of the crises). Both Christians and Muslims suspect whatever moves that is being made towards understanding and respect for one another (Akubor, 2009). A typical example of this is Somaria, which suffered religious violence that claimed thousand of lives and destroyed properties because of religious politics. While some Christians regard dialogue as a betrayal of the apostolic mandate and a watering down of their cherished religious belief, some Muslims regard dialogue as a new means employed by Christians to convert them. Thus, they approach each other with preconceived notions. They share a whole cluster of ready-made ideas and images, inherited from the fore bearers or received from their community. These include arbitrary judgments and persistent prejudices that need to be corrected if the meeting with others and cooperation with them are to take place according to truth and charity (Borman, 1981).

Manipulation of Religion in the Political Circle

Many would agree that the Nigerian political scene is not dominated by religion but still very much influenced by it (Atanda 1989; Ilesanmi 1997). Nigeria, like many other African nation-states that have emerged under the cloak of colonialism, has sought to negotiate equitably its extensive ethnic and religious pluralism, and channel such diversity into national integration. Nigerian Christians, for their part, still harbor fears of political domination by the northern Muslim Hausa-Fulani peoples. They remember the jihad movements of the nineteenth century that promoted a new exclusive, intolerant and militant Islamic orientation (An-Na'im, 1997; Isichei 1983). Nor have they forgotten the Islamization policy of “One North, One Islam” of northern Muslim leaders during the First Republic of the early 1960s (Ohadike, 1992). The majority of the country’s political leaders have been from the North (although not always Muslim).

While successive governments have employed various quota strategies to try to reflect the “federal character,” Nigerians have every reason to be doubtful of the concept of fair play, with nepotism and corruption rife at so many levels. According to former Ambassador Jolly Tanku Yusuf, an outspoken Christian leader from the northern part of Nigeria, Christians have been denied access to electronic media in 16 Northern states, while Islam monopolizes 24 hours for its broadcast in the same area (Danmole 1999). Agents of the devil compound the misery, using the media to intensify religious manipulation by heaping insults on the Christians. Every hour the Muslims broadcast provocative statements about Christianity. It means nothing, they proclaim, that people attend church on Sunday only to dance and to listen to songs! Authorities merely wink (Yusuf, 1995). The overall (conspiracy) theory of Muslim is to take over Nigeria and turn it into a Muslim state.

It is unfortunate that at the center of religious political crises in Nigeria are political leaders, eminent people whom are looked up to by people as those in possession of the truth (Kukah, 1996). Some of these highly placed individuals through their actions and utterances, especially on religious matters work towards destabilizing the nation (Kukah, 1999). A typical example of such utterances was by Sheikh Abubakar Gumi, a radical, anti-Sufi Muslim leader, who rose to become the most influential Muslim in northern Nigeria in the 1970s. He founded the powerful “return to source” group known as Izala, which was active in proselytizing through the use of campaigns and recorded cassettes (Kukah 1996). In responding to the broadcast by the British Broadcasting Co-operation and the voice of America concerning the chairmanship of Sultan, the spiritual head of the Muslims which consisted of low percentage of 40% population to head traditional rulers in Nigeria, he said that 80% of the populations were supposed to be Muslims (Gumi, 1992).

In early 1986, he also repeated that Nigeria was 80% Muslims, 5% Christians and 15% others (Gumi, 1992). When Gumi received the king Faisal Priz in 1987, he claimed 70% Muslims population for the country. This position maintained by this eminent scholar caused ripples in the political circle as some began to see it as one of the attempts at Islamizing Nigeria (Kukah, 1996). In the 1960’s and 1990’s, the Christian communities in Nigeria had argued that the various administrations were partial in matters of pilgrimage. According to this argument, Nigeria sent 120,000 pilgrims on the hajj. Such a massive number on pilgrimage (they argued) had been possible due to government subsidies and use of government financed pilgrim Board (Kukah, 1993). In 1981, the hajj cost the government just under N119 million (N118, 800,000) and Christian objections to such governmental spending were met with a proposal for limited government financing of Christian pilgrimages and the reaction of Christian pilgrim Board. As a way of correcting this anomalies the government in 1985, sponsored 20,000 Muslims to perform the hajj and 1,986 Christians were provided with similar facilities (Usman, 1987).

The issue of government setting up Board for Religious Affairs was at a particular time seen as one issue which had religious undertone. For example, when president Shagari tried to establish an Islamic Affairs Board to governmentally regulate Islamic affairs, Cardinal Dominic Ekandem, on behalf of the catholic Bishops, objected it by pointing to the constitutional provision for keeping the government out of the internal affairs on religious groups. Shagari backed down and the Board was not developed (Ojo, 1999).

At a particular time in the history of this country, there was fear from the Christian quarters that there was a deliberate attempt by General Ibrahim Banbangida to make Nigeria an Islamic state. This raised bias on the following reasons: First in the year 1986, Gen Ibrahim Banbangida was said to have surreptitiously and single-handedly gagged Nigeria into the membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference, a purely Islamic organization. This was argued to be later complimented by the administration of General Sani Abacha, which in 1997 registered Nigeria as member of D8

another Islamic Organization of eight countries comprising of Egypt, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Usman, 1987).

According to the communiqué of the Bishops conference, in 1997, by this act Nigeria not only became a member of O.I.C, but also the headquarters of Islam in Africa. It was also argued that the administration had tilted administrative positions in favor of one religion (Ojo, 1999). In another development Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N), Northern Zone, in its enlightenment series No. 1: "Leadership in Nigeria" observed that since the Babangida Administration came into power, it has unashamedly and in utter contempt for national unity, manifested discriminatory religious posture through overt acts of patronage and preference for Islamic religion (Uche, 1989). One is therefore left with no alternative but to conclude that the Banbangida administration is the principal agent for the Islamization of Nigeria". The list of the cabinet was given thus:

Name	Post	Religion
1. Gen. I.B Banbangida	Head of state and commander-in chief, Armed Force Minister of Defense	Muslim
2. Lt. Gen. Abacha	Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff	Muslim
3. Rear Adm. Nyako	Chief of Naval staff	Muslim
4. Air Mar. N.O. Yusuf	Chief of Air staff	Muslim
5. Alh. Aliyu Atta	Inspector Gen. of police	Muslim
(N.B. All the Service Chiefs were Muslims)		
6. Maj. Gen. Aliyu Moh'd	G.O.C. 2 nd Div	Muslim
7. Oladipo Diya	G.O.C. 3 rd Div	Muslim
8. Abubakar T	G.O.C. 82 nd Div	Muslim
9. Justice M. Bello	Chief Judge	Muslim
10. Alb. Aliyu Mop's	Secretary to Fed. Gov	Muslim
11. Col. A. Akilu	Director, Military intelligence	Muslim
12. Alh. Moh'd, B.	Nat. security Adviser	Muslim
13. Alh. Bola Ajibola	Att. Gen. & Min. of Justice	Muslim
14. Alh. Lukuman	Min. of External Affairs	Muslim
15. Alh. Jubril Aminu	Min. of petroleum & Nat. Ros	Muslim
16. Prof. Aliyu Fafunwa	Min. of Education	Muslim
17. Alh. Samaila Mamman	Min. of Agriculture	Muslim
18. Alh. Abubakar Alh	Min. of Budget & Planning	Muslim
19. Alh. Bunu Sharif	Min. of Water Resources	Muslim
20. Alh. A. Ahmed	Governor Central Bank	Muslim
21. Maj. Gen. Basko	Min. for Abuja	Muslim
22. Maj. Gen. M. Kontagora	Min. of Works	Muslim
23. Col. David Mark	Min. of communications	Christian
24. Dr. O.R Kuti	Min. of Health	Christian
25. Alh. Abubakar Umar	Min. Labour & Productivity	Muslim
26. Lt. Gen. Akinrinade (Rtd)	Min. Transport	Christian
27. Prince Tony Momoh	Min. Information	Christian
28. T.O. Graham Douglas	Min. Social Development	Christian
29. Air Vice-M. Nura Imam	Min. Mines & Power	Muslim

It has been argued that under the leadership of General Gowon, majority of the members of supreme Military Council and Governors were Christians (North-cote, 1969). The allocation of Land for religious purpose in Abuja, when it was been developed also became one issue that had religious undertone. An Advertiser's Announcement in early March, 1998, had it that in the plan for Abuja, 66 plots had been allocated for religious purposes, and out of these, 18 had been approved and allocated-10 to Christians and 8 to Muslims (all recipients named). 48 were still available, and that they intended to give 24 to CAN and 24 to JNI, to be allocated as both organizations saw fit. However, the Christian community later accused the government of allocating to the National Mosque 55 hectares of land (Gambaric, 1980). The National

Ecumenical Centre to Christian total 29 hectares of land. Immediately after the 1999 election that brought Obasanjo into power and his subsequent appointment of members of his cabinet, the Muslim community also accused him of marginalization and what they described as “religious Lopsidedness” against the interest of Islam in the appointment of Ministers (Adamu, 1994).

This was contained in a statement signed by Alhaji Ishaq Kunle Sani and the secretary of the Council of Muslim Youths of Nigeria. This allegation of marginalization of Muslims in ministerial appointment was later supported in an advertorial by the Jama’atu Naril Islam. In the statement, they not only allege the taking over of Aso Villa by “Jesus”, they complained that with this take over, Muslim are fast becoming an “endangered species” because of the rate at which this “Christian Agenda” is being pursued. In their presentation they argued thus:

In a country in which Muslims are in the majority, it is most uncharitable, unjust, ill-conceived and ill-motivated and a move towards anarchy to have a cabinet in which out of 42 ministers there are only 16 Muslims but not a single Muslim from the south or southwest. There are 60 Special Advisers, Personal Assistants, Special Assistants and Aides only 13 are Muslims and out of these 13, none is from the South or Southwest. Apart from the above, the group complained of the appointment of an Ifa Priest as adviser on culture from Oyo, thus presenting the Yoruba culture as “predicted on paganism”(Adamu, 1994)

The faulting of a qualified Nigerian, who was accused of being an Ifa Priest as an adviser on culture, is an indication that the indigenous African religion has been marked out for possible elimination and extinction. In the same vein the administration was accused of promoting Christianity above Islam through the use of the National Television Authority to broadcast Aso Villa Chapel Service conducted every Sunday, describing it as a “mischievous political manipulation of religion” unprecedented in Nigeria’s history (Falola, 1998). The national television station was also accused of being bias as it only broadcast clips from the Friday Tafsir of the chief Imam from Abuja mosque, only to spend hours on Sunday relaying the church service from the presidential Villa Chapel and later reports from various churches around Abuja as the only worthy news items (Adamu, 1994). In 2003 the government of the people’s Democratic Party was accused of wiping up religious sentiments in the south and South-Eastern Nigeria to discredit the candidacy of Buhari and the entire All Nigerian peoples; party ANPP) and Muslims through displaying posters which read “Vote ANPP the only Muslim party in Nigeria”, It was reported in one of the national news magazines that the Islamic World raised the sum of one billion US Dollars for Buhari Presidency and 400 million had already been received (Kukah, 1993).

Consequences of Manipulation of Religion on the Development of Nigeria

In Africa, especially Nigeria the above stated situation coupled with the high level of corruption, neglect of public institutions, and unemployment, led to mistrust and suspicion on both sides, such that issues are being debated not for national development but on the basis of its benefit to religion. Thus from the 1980’s, the conflict generated by the phenomenon had taken on the character of the conflict between Muslims and Christians. One area that has been affected by this manipulation is the academia, especially when religion and its philosophy are being taught.

This is because religious issues have become so sacred that critical issues/matters in religious studies are left us taught for fear of causing uprising. The result is that at the end of the day, we only succeed in producing students that are not critically minded (Ushe, 2007). Secondly, the manipulation of religion has led to fierce debates waged between the leaders of both communities over the idea of the secular state (as opposed to that calling for the fusion of state and religion).

The import of shari'a law for Africa as a multi-religious society has ignored the constitutional provisions for the freedom of religion, thoughts, conscience, and associations which involve the state government in the building of mosques, churches, mission based schools and colleges, as well as financing pilgrimages to Mecca, Jerusalem and Rome.

Thirdly, the enrollment of Nigeria into membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the question of its representation has aggregated the Christian demand for pilgrimage board to make the government share money between the two members of religions (Falola, 1998). Fourthly, the recruitment of people in top positions of state and national levels, particularly bureaucracy, judicial, military and police often times does not reflect national character but rather based it is on the decisions of "Wise politicians" who have been able to manipulate religion to perpetuate their office.

Many African scholars are of the view that the call for state religion by some governors and the introduction of religious laws to surpass the constitution in the north is a diversionary tactics to cover up for the mismanagement of the resources plundered over the years (Kukah, 1996). Fifthly, even at the level of programmes that aimed at cementing national unity, the religious difference has become even more pronounced. It is therefore not surprising that while some institutions have places of worship for the both religions, some tertiary institution have done it in favor of one religion. At the National Youth Service Corps level, religious umbrellas like National Association of Catholic Corps-Members, Muslim Corps-Members Association of Anglican Corps-Members, and National Association of Christian Corps-Members among others exist. In the late 1970's Usman (1987) identified similar groups even at the Universities and Political Parties, and he wrote:

Recently some of you students, here in the campuses became active agents of this pattern of manipulation. This is through the way you have defined issues in your elections. It might appear to you that joining in this manipulation is doing something new, avant-garde and profoundly political...(he concluded)...it has all been done before, here in this continent and it bankruptcy became blatant... this is over twenty years ago... they did not get anywhere, except into confusion.

As a result of the above situation in Nigeria, there exist throughout the country deeply entrenched culture of violence and general insecurity. Available statistics shows that from independence to date the country have lost properties worth trillions of dollars and death toll alarming (Hackett, 1989). According to Human Right record quoted by Hackett (1989), just between 1999 and 2007, more than 11,000 Nigerians were killed in outbreaks of religious crises. The latest is the Boko Haram crises, which claimed over 1000 lives. It is unfortunate that more than five hundred years after Christianity and Islam have set their feets on the soil of Nigeria, we have not been able to throw off the yoke of religious crises. The nation is noted to have the greatest number of churches and mosques in the world, as well as the greatest number of clergy men yet, it has recorded the highest number of religious turmoil in contemporary times as a result of religious manipulation for both political and religious self interests. It is total disappointment with this situation that Kukah (2007) wrote

Yesterday, we blamed our condition on a conference that was designed for scramble for Africa in far away Germany in 1884. Today in the name of evangelization, we have a scramble for the Traditional churches. We now divide ourselves into us and them. Christians have on their own admission decided that some of us have shallower life than others. Some are more redeemed than others. Some of us are being called idol worshippers.

Kukah (1993), in another Instance Wrote

Whether it is the most visible manifestation of the North versus South, whether it is the alignment between Arabs

and Europe themselves (cast as ethnic tussle), and the essence is the same... on the religious plane, there is the conflict that results from the breakdown of trust among the various faiths. Within Christianity and Islam we have the tensions between adherents themselves. These tensions do exist and they occasionally manifest themselves when very minor issues tend to lead to very serious and grievous crises that go beyond the immediate causes (Kukah 1993).

In the view of Kukah, this has only resulted in a situation whereby adherents of the religions have turned to prey on one another on the pretext of trying to proclaim the gospel of their religions. The underlining factors behind the success of the manipulation of religion in Nigeria are poverty and unemployment among the youths. Statistics shows that there has been a systematic increase in the number of the poor and unemployed in the country. In 1960 about 15% of the population was said to be poor, by 1980, the percentage had jumped to 28% by 1996; the incidence of poverty in Nigeria was 66% that is 76.6 million Nigerians wallowing in poverty. By 1998, the percentage of those living below poverty level had risen to 66 and 70% (Nigosian, 1975; Fafunwa, 1974). The distribution of income has adversely affected the poorest in Nigerian society throwing them into deeper poverty (Kaur, 2002). It is estimated that over 70% of youths in the country are unemployed, years after graduating from higher institutions, while those who would have been self-employed lacks the capital to establish themselves (Salim, 2002). All of them become ready-made tools for both religious bigots and their political allies to destabilize the nation.

The Inter-faith Mediation Centre in Kaduna and the Catholic Justice Development and Peace Commission are championing inter-faith dialogue but there is need for other bodies to get involved. In her new attitude to non-Christians, the Vatican II Council encourages Christian adherents to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with other religions. The Christian adherents while witnessing to their own faith and way of life should acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truth found among other religious adherents as well as their social life and culture (Nigosian, 1975). This will help in solving the problem of intolerance among religious adherents which prevents them from entering into any form of dialogue. The burning and destruction of places of worship as well as properties have often been referred to as barbaric acts which must be avoided by all religious adherents. The religious curriculum for the teaching of religious studies should be created by the government with specific reference to tolerance and freedom of worship in order to enlighten people. Teachers should inculcate in the students ideas of unity and harmonious relationship with others. This can make a radical departure from demonizing African indigenous religion as well as putting a stop to the call of destroying anything associated with it. Summarizing this situation Ekpo (1999) observed that:

It is unfortunate that while Christianity and Islam in Nigeria have studied each other's religious faith, the two have viewed African indigenous religion with contempt, arrogance and the desire to suppress it rather than assimilating the good values of the religion is high. It is important to note here that the destruction of the article of worship of religion denies the historians and further academic world values that will lead to understanding of the society.

Adherents of various religions need to regulate the activities of some of their religious leaders and preachers. They should concentrate on presenting the gospel of their religions in positive manner and leave out the issue of conversion to the individual decision-making. This becomes important considering the fact that most religious crises in the continent are instigated by some careless or reckless statements of preachers.

For instance, it has been reported that September 2000 confrontation between Traditional worshippers and Christian communities in Ogidi, Anambra state in Nigeria was due to the preaching of a clergy man who told his audience that their progress was being hampered by the presence of traditionalists and their gods. He was said to have encouraged

people to destroy all traditional shrines and idols or the gods if they must receive the blessings of God. The same was reported of 1987 Kafanchan Religious manipulation which resulted into crisis that later spilled to Zaria and other parts of Kaduna (Kukah, 1996).

Instead of the two major religions seeing themselves as antagonists when it comes to politics, they should see themselves as those divinely entrusted with the mandate of building a better society through production of God fearing and focused leaders. This can only be achieved by through credible elections, and monitoring. Thus, the gesture was also followed by the Federation of Muslim Women of Nigeria (FOMWAN) who also got involved with election Monitoring (Adamu, 1994). If we must have peaceful society which we claim our religions preach, we must, like Moses in the Holy Books, be willing to take off our shoes before other religions. This is because many of our Pastor and Imams used religion as a tool of manipulation in political and religion matter they have so narrowed down the frontiers of evangelization that they treat religions and their adherents are treated with contempt. Respect and tolerance must remain the key words in our attempts to bring the message of our religions to others. We must also learn to tolerate African indigenous religion because it has not been so tolerated by Christianity and even Islam. Any meaningful development to be achieved in Nigeria, we cannot ignore or escape religion and politics as observed by Brown (1957):

Religion and politics cannot wisely or safely be ignored or neglected by so many frivolous persons today. According to him, even a defective or obsolete scheme of religion and politics will serve the individual better than none at all. This (he continued) is why so many old fashioned persons possess, in spite of their defective views on some topics, a wholeness and completeness of character which is absent from young ultra-modern structure.

Brown presupposition above pointed out the fact that, without manipulation of religion in the political circle, the attainment of peace, unity and development in Nigeria would be a large success.

The Role of Christian Leaders in Eradicating the Practice of Manipulation of Religion in Nigeria

The term leader refers to “one who offers those under him or her a clear course of action which will gain their commitment and serve their individual objectives as well as the higher objectives of the organization” (Atado, 1991). The word “Christian” on the other hand, means “one who follows the attitudes, behaviors and ways of Christ” (Mamma, 2007). A Christian leader therefore, means “one who offers services following the leadership styl of Christ, the Good shepherd” (Jn. 10:10-11). The responsibilities of the shepherd include: to love and care for his flock, lead them to greener pasture, to guard and protect his flock from danger (Isam 17:34-35; Amos 3:12). Thus, a Christian leader must pattern his leadership on Christ revolutionary idea of a leader as the servant of all, and service to humanity as the hallmark of greatness. In view of our present political landscape, and the fragile nature of our democracy, the role of the Christian leader in eradication religious politics cannot be ignored. One of the major tasks of Christian leader today in the sustenance of democracy is promoting social justice, the rule of law and restoring hope to the vast majority of people who lost hope in democratic process in Nigeria (Mamma, 2007).

We understand democracy as the rule by the people and for the people. This further means that the people have the constitutional right to practice game in the manner that is free and fair. The Christian leader must continually give hope to their people that they are capable of determining the direction in which their country should take. The Christian leadership cuts across tribal, ethnic, political and cultural lines. It is a bridge concerning so many people from different backgrounds and orientations. A Christian leader is also the source of unity for uniting and bringing all these people together and forming a heterogeneous community of believers. So many people, communities and sections of our country are aggrieved and feel hurt because of manipulation of religion in political circle in Nigeria. The process of

democratization has resulted to violence, hatred, destruction of lives and property, betrayal, among others. Awa of the fact of the consequences of manipulation of religion, the Christian leader must continue to insist on the message of transparency of electoral process, reconciliation, forgiveness and peace between individuals, communities and even among different political affiliation for the sustenance of enduring democratic virtues. These virtues are at the heart of Christian spirituality and a bench mark of true Christianity (Mamma, 2007).

It is the role of Christian leader to help his citizens to imbibe these virtues and promote them. The Christian concept of leadership is based on values of love, service, selflessness, sacrifice, honesty and not less the fear of God. These values contradict anti-democratic vices that have infested our polity. The Christian leader should positively, directly and indirectly influence the entrenchment and sustenance of democratic culture that is devoid of religious manipulation in political circle. He must contribute in no small measures in eradicating manipulation of religion through the internalization and realization of these Christian values which cut across religious beliefs and form solid foundation of democracy. The Christian leader must take a leaf from the example of their counter parts in other parts of the world in their involvement and contribution to socio-political transformation of their countries. This according to Nnoli (1980) can perfectly be achieved through provision of national ethos, secularist formula, social mobilization, human basic rights avoidance of military rule, as eradication of one religion being served by the government and national-cake sharing syndrome.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, we have tried to point out that Nigeria has been tagged a failure because much is yet to be achieved in terms of religion and politics. Most nations worldwide have accepted democracy as a system of government including Africa. It is expected that democratic rule should be sustained in Africa but the reverse is the case. Good democracy which has to do with religious moral principles gives attention to all that has to do with the truth of the game and well-being of the people. However, in Nigeria this is not the case, religion is used by the political class and those in authority for political manipulation. The consequence is that Nigeria has been plunged into persistent religious violence, riots and conflicts of all sorts. Rampant cases of killings, destruction of properties and political rankling have become the order of the day. Due to these anomalies we would like to make the following recommendations.

- The Nigerian government should make real their promises by creating jobs opportunities, so as to get the youths engaged and prevent their minds from being the devil's workshop. By doing so, the Youths would grasp the major tenets of their own beliefs and those of the other religions, and will refuse to be used by religious fanatics as tools and easy prey to achieve their selfish motives.
- There is the need to encourage Inter-religious Dialogue by both the government and various religious bodies.
- There should be serious coherent and consistent attempt on both sides of religions to reach out across regional, ethnic and religious lines. This will make very easy for adherents of the three major religions in Nigeria to foster spirit of inter-religious dialogue.
- The government should try to separate religion from politics. This will curtail the level of religious manipulation in political and religious circles in Nigeria.

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