THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF AN ETHICIST

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ABSTRACT
The relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria over the years can be considered as a marriage of perceptual harmony and disharmony. Religion and politics in Nigeria and Africa as a whole are like siamese twins that are very difficult to separate and which in a way are themselves connected to the particular historical and developmental trajectories of individual societies and nations around the world. Religion has generally had a considerable impact on politics in many regions of the world, not just in Africa. There is no doubt that religious beliefs and practices reinforced political power in the same waypoliticalapprehensionspermeated to the heart of the religious domain. Both religious leaders and political leaders are people whose well-being was closely linked to their people's health and welfare. Existing literature on the interplay between religion and politics have engaged the narratives from the standpoint of the influence of ethnic affiliation on politics, psychology of politics, politics and national development with little attention paid to the interconnectivity between religion and politics and the position of an ethicist in the discourse. The dearth of research in this regard gave rise to this study. For instance, religious beliefs or solidarity in most cases form the main context for political action and political concerns with religious notions determine the nature of a particular group's collective response. Politics is about power, and due to prevalent religious modes of thinking about the world, this power is widely perceived to be spiritual in nature. Qualitative methodwhich has to do with the use of materials relevant to the study will be employed. Recommendations will be made where necessary to all the stakeholders in religious and political matters.

Introduction

The synergetic relationship between religion and politics in Africa stems from the age-long wider African religio-cultural structure where religion and politics are closely and deeply intertwined as it were. Politics is all about power and how such power could be used for the citizenry and for national development[45]. Power is defined as the ability of a person to

[45]Obaji M.A. and Ignatius Swart (2015). Religion and Social Transformation in Africa: A Critical and Appreciative Perspective. Scriptura Vol.114. http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2305-445X2015000100010

induce other to act in a way which he or she requires. In human affairs, power is a social attribute that is derived from the way in which individual combine with one another individually or collectively[46]. Religion has been playing significant roles in the appointment and selection of political leaders from time immemorial. Due to the prevailing arguments and thinking as to power and its usage, power is widely perceived to have a divine connection with what RudoffOttor refer to as the numinous (Holy of holy)[47]. In spite of the clamour around the world for the separation between religion and politics, such nations continue to be entangled and enmeshed by the reality of the futility of such venture[48].Recognising and deciding therefore where religion ends and politics begins becomes complex. There is no doubt that religious leaders over the years either intentionally or inadvertently have found themselves being entangled in political cobweb through their contributions to the development of democratic systems and culture, not only in Nigeria but Africa at large[49]. One can hardly find any notable boundary between religion and politics as religious leaders and their followers, are more than never before playing active roles in political matters. In fact, the contemporary religious groups and their leaders in Nigeria, as we have in other countries of the world are more politically conscious and have caused a religious revolution with profound political consequences which has sharpened the democratic direction of the country[50].

Before the coming of imported religions to Africa, (Christianity and Islam) countries in Africa had a well-structured political system and well-grounded religious institutions[51]. Africansbelieved in the existence of a divine being and that both political and religious leaders were the representatives of such being[52]. This is why they are referred to *AlaseekejiOrisa* (representatives of God. That is, their powers to govern were derived from a supreme being. Africa is marked by a high degree of political and religious heterogeneity which makes the study of the two concepts a difficult task.[53] Islam through a gradual process made its way to Africa thousands of years ago and spread to other countries including Nigeria.[54] Christianity came to Africa through the colonization drive of Europeans and France in the 19th century[55]. Longbefore the advent of Christianity and Islam into the shores of Africa, the continent had a strong institution. It is to be noted that Christianity and Islam did not teach Africans how to eat, drink, cultivate, sleep and bear children, the idea about the existence of a divine being is rooted in African Traditional Religion[56]. The political institutions introduced by those that colonized Africansto the existing structure were little, if anything more than the instrument of domination which was

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[47]Ruddof Otto on the concept of the Numinoushttps://www.academia.edu/29063598/Rudolf_Otto_and_the_Concept_of_the_Numinous. Retrieved on the 6/06/2023.

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administratively grafted into the rich socio-cultural structure of Africa.[57]In fact, it was a well-orchestrated ploy to use religion as a weapon in the pursuit of their political agenda and dominance.

Religion as Lubricant to Political Wheels in Nigeria

The fact that has remained constant in the political history of Nigeria and Africa at large, is the failure and the lack of political will by successive civilian administrationsto put in place structures for the development of the nation.[58]The breakdown of moral behaviour among the youths that constitutes the majority,worsening economic situation, political instability, conflict and violence that has become a household name, kidnapping for ransom, insecurity of lives and property, killing for ritual purposes are all frequently linked to the consistent and the persistent government failure in the country to push through implementable policies, consolidate appropriate programmes for the social improvements and well- being of the people.[59] People turn to religious leaders for answer to the political conundrums in the country. Organizedlabour unions who are to be mouthpiece of the masses as we had in the past, become toothlessdogs that can only bark, but cannot bite. -bite.[60]Most of the organized protests by the public today are led or include religious leaders who feel that something is fundamentally wrong with our political system. Religious leaders were frequently well represented in the coordination of such protests.[61]

As a result of the insensitivity of political gladiators in the country couple with the stack reality that the masses that constitute the majority are suffering in a country blessed with abundant human and natural resources, religious leaders have begun to engage political stakeholders on matter of national interest.[62] They have continued to be involved in the demands for democracy and its dividends to the people. The unwavering efforts of religious leaders that are politically conscious and tenaciousand who are not afraid of speaking the truth to those in authority has brought the little stride in the country's democratization success. What makes religion and politics to be very difficult to separate is because, the same set of people that are in various religious groups, are also the same set of people we find in the society. Religion cannot be practiced in isolation. No human being, no religion. Its set of belief systems have moral and social effects on the citizens as a result of their activities as political animals. The holy matrimony between religion and politics in Nigeria is due to the multi-religious nature of the country where there is freedom of religion which gives individuals room to align with any religious group he likes without any intimidation. In fact, it will be tantamount to an error of contradiction to say that Nigeria is a secular state. Ever since Nigeria gained her independence from the colonial administration, religion has been a potent factor in deciding political matters.

Manifestations of Religion in Politics in Nigeria.

As discussed earlier, religion has become a weapon used by politicians for their selfishaggrandizement. Issues that should not have anything to do with religion have been introduced into politics to get support of the electorates. It is therefore important to trace the handwriting of religion in political matter in this section of the work.

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Prayers at Religious Gatherings

Oneperceptible thing in the political trajectory of Nigeria, is the important role religion has over the years played in bringing about stability in political discourse[63].Religion performs the key function of providing social solidarity in a society. The rituals, the worship of icons, and the belief in supernatural beings "excite, maintain or recreate certain mental states[64].Religion is an important phenomenon in contemporaryNigeria. It is ever popular and has captured the attention of many Nigerians.[65] For example, traces of religion is foundin political gatherings, campaigns, political meetings, political rallies, workshops, conferences and so on. Prayers are always offered before the commencement of such political meetings with emphasis on the religious affiliation of the people. Prayers are always said in a Christian and Muslim ways in order to avoid conflict that may generate into violence. On many occasions as it were, traditional religion is always sidelined.

Pilgrimage to Holy Lands

Sponsorship of pilgrims to Mecca and Jerusalem has become a weapon in the hands of politicians for political patronage. This is common at both the state and the Federal levels[66]. The political office holders know the importance and the positive effect that such will have on theirpolitical venture and government generally. Though, we must not ignore the fact that the state money is being spent to achieve this, they use this as a way of rewarding their supporters who have given them their mandate during election and for their continue support[67].Government sponsorship was done in most cases for political and not for religious reasonsparse[68]. In spite of agitations and clamour for the withdrawal of such sponsorship because of the current economic reality in Nigeria, many politicians still carry out such sponsorship at the detriment of the masses.[69] State resources that should be used for the interest of all are being spent on their supporters. The actions of politicians could be considered as a misplaced priority. What the citizens need more now, than never before is the provision of basic amenities to better the lots of the electorates.

On Appointment and Promotion

One other area where religion has made an indelible impact on politics is in political appointment. When appointment is to be made by politicians, the issue of religion and due process is brought to the front burner[70]. Serious consideration is given to religion and if peradventure, either by way of error of omission or commission, a particular religion is not well represented or it is chaotically handled, it can lead to violence of unimaginable proportion. Over the years, appointments into various political offices both at the state and national levels have religious undertones. There have been cases of people changing from Christianity to Islam and vis-à-vis for the very purpose of appointment or promotion in their places of work. A case in hand was the one

[63]Fajar, S. 2017. Politicization of Religion: Religion in Political discourse. Walisongo Journal PenelitianSosial Kegamaan.https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324972151_Politicization_of_Religion_Religion_in_Political_Discourse. Accessed 12/6/2023.

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[67]Orosanye Report: Nigerian Government insists on sponsoring Pilgrims to Mecca, Jerusalem.https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/158349-orosanye-report-nigerian-government-insists-sponsoring-pilgrims-mecca-jerusalem.html?tztc=1

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[69] Abolish state sponsorship of pilgrimages to holy lands. https://saharareporters.com/2010/02/01. Retrieved on 10/08/2023.

[70] 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom. Office of International Religious Freedom. 2 June, 2022. https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nigeria/. Accessed on 12/6/2023.

reported years ago, where a prominent member of a particular religion was reported to be converting people to a religion with a promise of appointment in government. One chief was promised a governorshipticket. He changed to the religion but, was never appointed to the promised position. Also, many Christian students applying to certain schools, especially in Kaduna, adopt Muslim names in order to improve their chances.

Building of Churches and Mosques in the Government Houses

It is very difficult to see any government house in the states across the country that will not have both Mosque and Church. One begins to wonder the presence of places of worship in government houses. The reasons advanced by politicians is for bothMuslims and Christians in the Government House to have a befitting place of worship. This was corroborated by the Governor Rotimi Akeredolu of Ondo State, when he noticed the absence of a Mosque at the government house and promised to construct a befitting mosque inside the Government House, He expressed surprise about the absence of a mosque within the compound but said a place of worship would be constructed inside the official residence of the governor, just like a chapel was built within the premises for Christians. Akeredolu restated his commitment to giving equal treatment to all residents of the state, irrespective of religion, ethnicity or political affiliations and promised to leave no stone unturned in the bid to give all residents a sense of belonging in the scheme of things. He noted that the people of the South West had been living together peacefully, regardless of the religion or political leaning. Most of the times, religious leaders and organisations are randomly invited to the government house for prayers and praise. The wife to the former governor of Oyo state, Mrs. Florence Ajimobi on a monthly basis organized praise night at the government house to pray for the government of Oyo state and Nigeria at large. Clerics of both religions are selected at intervals to conduct services at the government house.

Religious Consideration in Election Process

Furthermore, religious considerations are put forward during electoral process in Nigeria. In fact, in Nigeria, since independence, religion has been a very strong factor in the choice of political party flag bearer. For any party to win an election, such a party must be able to galvanize support of the major religions[71]. Though, there are states in the country, where majority are Christians, in such states, it is evidently clear that the choice of a flag bearer may not be a problem But, most of the states in Nigeria, put religious consideration at the fore front in the scheme of things in their various states to win the support of the electorates. There is usually a Muslim/Christian or Christian/Muslim ticket in order to win the hearts of electorates during elections. Thus in 1979, the National Party of Nigeria (N.P.N) adopted a Muslim/Christian ticket while the Unity Party of Nigeria (U.P.N) did not take religion into consideration, as the party adopted a Christian/Christian ticket. In fact, this was said to have been responsible for the party's loss at that election.

Despite the fact that military administration is considered an aberration in governance, they also give recognition to the efficacy of religion in governance. This is the more reason, why Abacha and Abubakar as the former heads of heads of state considered religion in the choice of their deputies. They picked Diya and Akhigbe (Christians) as their second in command respectively. Successive civilian regimes have maintained the status quo as we haveObasanjo/Atiku (Christian/Muslim), Yar'dua/Jonathan (Muslim/Christian), Jonathan/Sambo(Christian/Muslim), Buhari/Osibanjo(Muslim/Christian). Though, the current president- elect. Asiwaju Ahmed Bola Tinubu, a Muslim picked a Muslim from the North East for both political and religious reason. If he had picked a Christian from the North as his running mate, he would have lost the election[72]. This is because of the voting population of the region at elections.

[71] I.L.Umeanolue.2020. Religious Influences on Politics in Nigeria: Implications for National Development. Origirisi: A new Journal of African Studies. Vol. 15.

[72]Muslim-Muslim or Christian- Christian Ticket.https://the nationonlineng.net/muslim-muslim or Christian-christian Ticket. Retrieved on 12/08/2023.

Campaign in Churches and Mosques

The fact that is constant in the political history of the country in the recent times, is the fact that religious places of worship have become campaign platforms. Religious institutions and places of worship have played a pivotal role in this direction. Both religions (Christianity and Islam) are guilty of this. Religious platforms that are meant to reach out to the adherents and to preach the undiluted words of God, have become a political campaign podium where religious leaders openly pray and convince members to vote for a particular candidate. Many religious leaders as a result of fear of being attacked, do indirect campaign for their favourite candidate. Names are not mentioned, but the description of the candidate is clear to the members. Since politics is all about struggle for power, resource control and representation at different levels while political mobilization refers to the processes of preparation and organization of people for political participation such as voting, lobbying, convincing others to vote and so on. Politics is about "who gets what, when and how" Politicians make use of any method and any platform to get support which include places of worship. This is used copiously in furtherance of their political agenda.

In Nigeria today, with the current religious rhetoric adopted by politicians especially during campaigns, religion has been and continues to be, a vital ingredient of political mobilization during elections. Political office seekers make use of religion as a tool, in as much as they know that Nigerians are notoriously religious. This is also supported by the Pew Research Centre, BBC and Forbes that Nigerians are amongst the most religious people in the world. Religion has long served as a political resource in Nigeria, with Muslims and Christians alike appealing to the sentiment of the faithful, and decrying each other to get the desired support of the electorates and to win elections. In an attempt to make sure that religious institutions are not used for political campaign, the former President of the country, MuhammaduBuhari signed the new electoral bill into Electoral Act 2022, on February 25, 2023 to repeal the Electoral Act 2010. For example, Sections 92, 93, 94, 95 and 96 of the new Electoral Act have prohibitions with penal consequences for campaigns in places of worship, palaces, and places with public offices. In fact, Section 92(3) says specifically that, "Places designated for religious worship, police stations and public offices shall not be used for political campaigns, rallies and processions; or to promote, propagate or attack political parties, candidates or their programmes or ideologies." Politicians still go to various religious gatherings to ask for the mandate of religious adherents.

Ethical Issues in Religion and Politics

Without mincing words, ethics is concerned with human actions. That is, a critical scrutiny of human actions to see if they are right or wrong, good or bad, commendable or condemnable. Any action performed by an individual can be either beneficial or detrimental to the people around and the society at large[73]. Since, both political and religious leaders are members of the same society, their actions are subject to ethical consideration. Electorates and politicians are born with ethical qualities in their personalities. This means that they have freedom of action. Religious leaders as members of the society are under the ethical searchlight to know if their actions are in line with their ministerial ethics and the norms of the society. The society expects its members to act in a way and not to act in another way. Ethics is made up of voluntary actions, actions performed under the normal conditions of man's capacities. It therefore suggests that actions of political gladiators and religious leaders, who have become political contractors in recent time for their own selfish interest need to be examined to see the compatibility of their actions with what the society expect.[74] The claims in some quarters are that actions of political leaders are for the benefits of the members of the public. But, in reality, they contest at election for their own selfish interest; abandoning the members of thepublic who voted them to continue to wallop in abject poverty[75]. This has been the bane of political narratives of Nigeria since independence.

Concluding Remarks

It is very clear that religious leaders are the eyes and the mouths of God. They are the representatives of God on earth, it is then

[73] J.I.Omoregbe.1993. ETHICS: A Systematic and Historical Study. Lagos. Joja Educational Research and publishers Limited.
[74]G.E.Moore. 2004. The Subject Matter of Ethics In J.P.Sterba. Contemporary Ethics: Selected Readings.
[75] K. Bjorvatn et.al. 2021. Election and Selfishness. Electoral Studoes. Vol.69

incumbent upon them to be above board in the discharge of their duty. They should hold tenaciously to their calling, knowing full well that their actions will be accounted for here on earth and hereafter. Both religious and political leaders are expected to be responsible for their actions. Responsibility means accountability. That is, to answer or account for one's conduct. Heavy responsibility means heavy duty. Religion should continue to lubricate the wheels of politicsfor the betterment and progress of the society and not for self-aggrandizement.

Recommendation

Religion and politics have been with us since time immemorial and separating the two phenomena is like shaking an Iroko tree to make a dew fall. We therefore recommend the following to stakeholders in religious and political matters in the nation.

i. Religious leaders in the nation must exhibit virtues of honesty and accountability in their day to day activities. As the representatives of God, they must as much as possible shun any act that will bring the name of God into disrepute. Holiness as a virtue should be exemplified not only in words but also in deed.

ii. Religious leaders should also lead by example. This is important because, many of their members see them as role models. Therefore, they should not be involved in politics at the detriment of their call which is to lead members back to God through an undiluted teaching of the word of God.

iii. Political leaders should try as much as possible to draw a line of demarcation between them and religious leaders. They are fond of using religious leaders as tools for their political ambition.

iv. Citizens and followers too must be able to call both political and religious leaders to order when they are doing contrary to the dictate of theircallings. The challenge in the recent times among the followers is that, they sing praises of political leaders as long as they have a share of the national cake. Speaking the truth to those in government becomes a difficult task.

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