

A Historical Perspective in the Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria since 1914

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria since 1914. In achieving the objective in this paper, Historical approach is adopted. It gives a historical survey of the evolution of Nigeria and the attitude of colonial administration to religious propaganda. The method of conversion adopted by Islam and Christianity in pre-independence is discussed. The independence and republican constitution provision for religious freedom is pointed out. The role of military Government on religious development and interaction is identified. 1978 Nigeria constituent Assembly debate on Sharia court of appeal and 1979 constitution on Religious affairs are discussed. New dimension in Religious propaganda, fanaticism, fundamentalism, and Religious Politics since 1980 is discussed. The 1999 constitution and Sharia law in the civilian dispensation is identified. Religious terrorism as practised by maitasine and Boko Haram sects is discussed. It is discovered that various factors contributed and affected Christian-Muslim relationship in Nigeria. The paper concludes with suggestions and solutions to the problems affecting Christian-Muslim relations.

Keywords: Historica-Perspective, Christian-Muslim, Relations Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria is described as a conglomeration of Nation-states. As a pluralistic society, "it is diverse in culture, language, and ethnic background" (Adamolekun199:68). There are many religions in the Country thus making Nigeria a pluralistic and multi-religious State with most Nigerians being Muslim, Christian, or adherents of traditional religion (Oluponna1991:265).

Nigeria as a modern nation came into existence as a result of the "British amalgamation of the North and Southern Protectorates in 1914 by sir Fredric Lord Lugard (Michael Crowther 1962; 1978:191; Rex Akpofure1966:90). The British colonial government under the leadership of lord Lugard did not seek the opinion of Nigeria before amalgamating Northern and southern Nigeria in 1914. (Tamonu1980:395). Lugard therefore introduced the system of "Indirect rule" (Ajayi and crowther 1974:456; Obaro Ikime1980:395; Michael Crowther 1968:166; Webster and Boahen 1968:166).

It is observed that Islam and Christianity co-existed in Nigeria before the birth of modern Nigeria in 1914. They both competed for conversion of people from traditional religion in a cut-throat competition. The competition between the two religions was slow and peaceful since both of them could tolerate each other believing that family solidarity (especially in the south) was much more important than religious solidarity.

The main objective of this paper is to discuss Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria since 1914. To achieve this goal, we will give a historical survey of the evolution of Nigeria and the attitude of Colonial Administration to religious propaganda. The methods of conversation adopted by Islam and Christianity in pre-independence Islamic and Christian religion where they existed. Lugard administration protected the Christian missionaries in the South against traditional religion and "Islam in the North" (Balogun S.A in Ikime1980:210) against Christian missionaries. There was no open confrontation of Islam against Christianity during the colonial administration due to protection given to them in their different areas of influence.

Evolution of Modern Nigeria and the Attitude of Colonial Administration to Religious Propaganda

The year 1906 is described as the real beginning of administration throughout Nigeria (Akapofure 1966:185). In that year the North was finally occupied. The Colony of Lagos and the Southern Nigeria protectorate were merged with the Southern Nigeria and a legislative Council set up to advise the Government in its Administration of the enlarged protectorate. In January 1914, the Protectorate of Northern and Southern Nigeria was amalgamated; the primary aim of government for amalgamation was economic expediency. Lugard introduced indirect rule system to Nigeria for administrative convenience. This was a system based on the authority of the Native Chiefs.

The policy of the Government was that "Those chiefs should govern their people, not as independent but as dependent Rulers (Crowther 1978:191). The indirect system did not tamper with religion. The system gave protection to Islamic and Christian Religion where they existed. Lugard Administration protected the Christian Missionaries in the South against Traditional Religion and "Islam in the North" (Balogun in Ikime 1980:210) against Christian Missionaries. There was no open confrontation of Islam against Christianity during the colonial Administration due to Protection given to them in their different areas of influence.

The Method Adopted by Islam and Christianity for Conversion Before 1960

There was Islam and Christianity in Nigeria before colonial administration. These religions adopted different methods for conversion. There was no serious friction between Islam and Christianity. They both competed to win converts into the faith. Islam appealed to the Africans as some of its activities were in line with traditional African culture, for example the use of amulets and polygamous marriage. Christianity did not appeal so much to Africans as the missionaries advocated for one man one wife and condemned some aspects of African culture as fetish and barbaric.

In Islam, strategies used for conversion include using "traders as agents of propagating Islam" (Omolola 1982:102) the wandering Muslims and itinerant traders combined herbal medicine and fortune telling; they preached peacefully along with trading. Islam expanded fast in urban centres and major trade centres became Muslim towns. Organised missionary endeavour was another method used. They used open air preaching and the Mallams interpreted the Quran to hearers. They built Mosque and Arabic school, and used learned scholars or Mallams as teacher and preachers. After Nigerian independence, they built secondary schools and Arabic Teacher's Colleges. The Muslim students in Colleges and Universities formed Muslim students' fellowship and use this medium as a means of propagating Islam. With the introduction of Modern Technology, they used electrical gadgets such as Radio and Television, Loudspeakers to propagate Islam. Pilgrimage, one of the pillars of Islam was used as a means of propaganda "some adherents were enticed by the Title Alhaji and Alhaja, the mode of dressing, and other attractions (Adamolekun 2002:61). Jihad and "threat was also used by Izala and maitasine groups as means of propagating Islam" (Gofwen 2004:641; Adamolekun 2002:61). Such was the case in 1980s in Kano, Kaduna, and other Northern States where maitasine and Izala Religious Fanatics resulted into armed struggle to propagate Islam as a result of intolerance of other religion in a pluralistic and multi-religious community.

The Christian missionaries adopted different method in propagating their Religion. Education and health was a major method used. The missionaries established mission schools and organised adult literacy classes in addition to building hospital and medical centres (Ayandele 1965; Ajayi 1965). The philosophy of catch them young was adopted as primary and secondary schools were established; conversion made through teaching and preaching in schools, Hospital, and medical centres were established and chaplains or preachers appointed as minister to the sick people. Full time missionaries and preachers were appointed who established churches, and organised open air crusade, revival, and teaching to win unbelievers and hearers to their religion. Traders propagated the religion alongside their trading activities, so also government workers, civil servants, artisan, and adherents propagate their religion in their places of work using any opportunity available to them for witnessing.

Later developments after independence were the method of making use of religious tracts and literature books in their propagation. Radio, television, Sponsored radio programme and other electronic and mass media organs were used as means of evangelism.

It is noted that tolerance existed in Islam and Christianity in the course of expanding their religion in Nigeria before 1960. This was because many Muslims and Christians came from the same family and family solidarity was much more important to them especially among the Yoruba in the South West but in the North, the reverse was to be the case as member of the some family were not allowed to hold opposite religious views or affiliation.

Independence and Republican Constitution Provision on Religion Freedom and Fundamental Human Rights 1960-1963

The Independence Constitutional Conference of 1958 maintained Lugard's stand on religious toleration and non-interference. Each religion was allowed to operate in its area. The religions were propagated by traders, missionaries, and adherents in a peaceful way. There was an element of tolerance in the Southwest. Government honour Islam and Christian major religious festivals by granting public holidays for its observance.

The 1963 Republican Constitution incorporated Fundamental Human Rights and guaranteed freedom of religion in Nigeria. No attempt was made to impose one religion on the other. The Muslim controlled or dominated areas were allowed to practice Islamic legal system, while native laws and customs were recognised by the establishment of Native Authority Courts.

The 1963 Republican constitution sections 10 stipulate that:

“The government of the Federation or of a state shall not adopt any Religion”

Section 35 of the some constitution declared that: Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom ... to manifest and belief in worship, teaching, Practice and observation.

The Republican constitution therefore gives room for peaceful and conducive atmosphere for practising one's religion, good human relationship, and interaction. There was no cause for extremism and religious intolerance.

The Role of Military Government on Religious Development and Interaction 1966-1979

The Nigerian Army took over the administration of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on January 15, 1966 after a “bloody coup de tar” (Ojiako 1981:222-226). It therefore ruled by decrees. Coups, counter coups and civil war occurred within the period of the army rule between 1966 and 1979. After the war, the military government embarked on “reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction and then ruled until 1979.

The Military government did not engage in religious propaganda and the spread of religion but certain policies were undertaken which were capable of causing religious crisis. The foreign policy of the government favoured on religion. Nigeria foreign policy in the opinion of Alli was influenced by “religious politics” (Alli 1993:115). For example, the issue of Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986, Nigeria's relation with Israel and the management of religious pilgrimage were issues clouded by religion. Nigeria had association or bilateral relations with Arab countries but severed relationship with Israel because of 1967 Arab –Israel war that made Israel to occupy part of Arab territories. The Christians did not like this; the issue of Nigeria becoming a full member of the Islamic conference generated heated debate and opposition from the Christians. The government did not make any categorical statement as regards her full membership of oic therefore the Christians opposed the purported membership on the basis that Nigeria is a secular State as guaranteed by 1979 constitution Thus Nigeria should not be turned to Islamic State. The issue of pilgrimage and government involvement was a concern to the Christians. They argued that government sponsored Muslim pilgrims morally and financially to Saudi Arabia with government money and neglected the Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem.

This pilgrimage issue was a hot debate and of great concern for Christians until the Federal government set up Pilgrims Welfare Board for both Muslims and Christian Pilgrims before the hot argument on Pilgrimage was put to rest. The Christians accused the Federal Military Government of favouring a particular religion in appointment to Government key posts (Adamolekun 2002:63) All these sensitive Government policies were capable of causing

bad blood among the Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Alongside favouritism in political appointment was that each head of State embraced his religion by building a mosque and Church in the Presidency. The role of the Military and religious issues led to keen competition between Islam and Christianity .This affected mutual relation and interaction.

1978 Constituent Assembly Debate on Sharia Court of Appeal and 1979 Constitution

The Federal Military Government set up fifty-member Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) in 1977 to draw a new constitution for Nigeria. The committee submitted the report to the Federal Government after which a constituent assembly was set up to debate the draft constitution in 1978.

The 1978 Constituent Assembly was set up to debate the draft constitution in preparation for civilian administration in 1979. There was a heated debate as regards the establishment of the Federal Shariah Court of Appeal. At the end," (the) New Constitution made provision for Shariah Court of Appeal at the State level not on Federal level (Adamolekun1999:70). It provided for Fundamental Human Rights, and guaranteed freedom of religion in the Constitution.

In the 1979 Constitution, Nigeria are free to practice the religion of their choice and no religious groups are favoured or discriminated against, although "membership of secret societies is prohibited"(Olupona and Falola 1991:265;Adamolekun 2002:65).

The Muslims seems not to be contented with the Constitution with regards to the Shariah Court of Appeal granted at State level and not at federal level. The next line of action was the development of Religious Fundamentalism and fanaticism in Nigeria in the 1980s and the issue of Nigeria becoming a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) that followed. Nigeria experienced disorder, chaos, and instability at this period especially in the North where religious intolerance and persecution was the order of the day.

New Trends in Religious Propaganda: Fanaticism and Fundamentalism 1980-2000

Fundamentalism is the practice of following religious laws very strictly while fanaticism means extreme political or religious beliefs.(Longman Dictionary 1995).Fundamentalism according to Horby (1963:404)is the maintenance of traditional beliefs of a religion in opposition to more modern teachings(e.g. such as accuracy of everything in Christian Bible or Muslim Quran). Fundamentalism is peculiar to both Islam and Christianity. In the early 1980, barely a year after the constitution for Nigeria, Militant Islamic fundamentalism developed in Nigeria.

The atrocities perpetrated in the North by the militant groups were destabilising .Such occurrence include among others the maitasine uprising in Kano city in December 1980, the Bulunkutu uprising in Maiduguri in October 1982, the various religious riots in Kaduna in October 1982, Jimeta, Yola riots1984, Katsina riot, Gombe riot1985, the Kafanchan riots Tafawa Balewa, Zango Kafa and the violent demonstrations in sabon-Gari Kano by the Muslim Students Society (MSS) in October 1992. (Kukah 1993:S184-207;Gofwen 2004). Similarly, This can be seen in the provocative utterances of an Islamic scholar and Preacher, Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky in zaria . All these series of riots were characterised as religious crises or conflict aimed at purifying religion, they were capable of straining or undermining relations among Religious faiths. Oshintelu(1999:90), commenting on Religious fundamentalism in Nigeria said :

(Destruction) forces seem to have been loose among men of extreme religiosity; each making absolute claims for his or her Religion. In these days of widely available arms of mass destruction, this is very dangerous and threat to peaceful co-existence of believers of all faiths

To Oshintelu, it is political awareness more than anything else that has given rise to Islamic Fundamentalism in Nigeria.

We shall at this point discuss the crises in Kanfanchan, Kaduna State as an illustration or case study in narrating the cause of religious conflicts as an example of strain relations among living faiths in Nigeria.

Kafanchan crisis: The religious riots which occurred in parts of Kaduna State according to Kirkah (1993:184-207) demonstrate a turning point in inter communal relations. On 6th march, 1987, what started as a minor internal mis- understanding among the Muslim and Christian Students of College of Education in Kafanchan, Kaduna state, finally sent sparks of fire whose destruction went beyond Kafanchan to other parts of the state and threatened the stability of the entire Country (Kukah 1993:185). It took nearly two weeks to bring the situation under control. The immediate cause of the riots according to kukah relates to the plan by the Federation of Christian Students (FCS) at the college of Education, Kafanchan to hold a week of religious activities marking the end of its annual week of Christian activities. As part of its initial preparations for the occasion, the FCS posted a banner in front of the college which read "welcome to Jesus campus" (kukah 1993). Some Muslim members of the Muslims Students Society (MSS) took offence on this and protested to the school authorities. The FCS leaders were told to remove the banner and they acted accordingly. The fellowship of Christian Students (FCS) had invited a certain Rev. Abubakar Bako, a Muslim convert to Christianity, as the guest speaker for the occasion. It was in the course of his lecture at the gathering that the said Rev. Bako was alleged to have made certain points in his sermon. This sparked off reactions among the members of the Muslim Students Society (MSS), and the fracas that followed set in motion other events that soon went beyond the campus and the students themselves. The attempt by the college authorities to manage the crisis were frustrated by the intransigence of some of the Muslim Students who erected a barricade around the school and terrorised many passers-by. The end result of the crisis despite the immediate closure of the college was that violence broke out in Kafanchan town which extended to other areas of Kaduna state with many lives lost.

It is to be noted here that the Religious atmosphere in Nigeria was very tense and charged as fanaticism and fundamentalism developed and were practised among the Christian and Muslim adherents. Each religion at this period was making frantic attempt at creating some reforms concerning the restoration of orthodoxy of their religion. Both Muslims and Christians were very aggressive in their preaching. Violent Student religious clashes occurred at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, University of Ibadan and Advanced Teachers College, Kafanchan which claimed lives. Mass media, radio, television, and electronic gadgets aided the religious revivals, crusades and Jihadists propaganda of the extremists. All these riots and violence were laid to rest through the force of arms and public preaching was banned. It is the opinion of this writer that it was Nigeria secularity as provided in the constitution that gave birth to religious fundamentalism and fanaticism. The Muslim probably nursed the idea of raising the issue of Sharia Court of Appeal on Federal level in the future.

1999 Constitution and Sharia Law

As Nigeria was preparing for another return to civilian rule in 1999, the 1979 constitution was reviewed. Abacha military administration in Nigeria that reviewed the 1979 constitution did not subject it to public debate like the previous one. The type of publicity given to the new constitution drafted under Abacha's draconian rule was different from what existed in 1979. The constitution was not passed into law until after the death of Abacha. Abubakar who replaced Abacha also did not allow the debate of the 1999 constitution publicly. The constitution reviewed the issue of religion, retained the provision for religious freedom and fundamental human rights but allowed the operation of Sharia law, in each state. The constitution makes provision for the sharia court of Appeal of the Federal Capital territory Abuja and a sharia court of Appeal of a state.

This have given room for each Muslim State in Northern Nigeria to impose sharia law as a total legal system for their states to cover civil and criminal matters; so also personal law that deal with marriage and divorce.

Presently, Zamfara and Kano States are teaching the full operation of Sharia Legal System in their States in Nigeria. This state's operating full Sharia law in civilian administration argued that it is in line with the principle of federalism in multi- religious and pluralistic State.

This state of affairs will definitely curtail the expansion and propagation of other faiths. It will curtail the fundamental human rights of other religious adherents. Christian- Muslim relation and interaction will be reduced and freedom of worship curtailed or restricted.

Two major Muslims sects that applied terrorism in demanding for full operation of sharia legal system in Nigeria are Maitasine sect led by Mohammed Marwa in 1980s, and Boko Haram sect led by Mohammed Yusuf Alli from

2002 to date. (Awoniyi Sunday 2012:6; Nation 2012 Jan6:43). The maitatsine sect had as its rallying point the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria, while Boko Haram opposes Western education and insists on upholding and imposing sharia legal system (Kukah2010:14). We shall lay more emphasis here on the activities of Boko Haram on religious terrorism. The expression Boko Haram has become popular name for the sect also known unofficially as the 'Yusufiya' 'Boko' is the Hausa word for western system of Education while 'Haram' means 'forbidden'. That is to say, the group is opposing Western Education for Muslim children. The sects went about to express their resentment over what perceived as negative elements being propagated through western education and thought

Boko Haram began in 2001 as a peaceful Islamic splinter group. They were preaching and going about within the North propagating their own ideals within the state wearing their palms and kinds of uniforms. The politicians exploited it for electoral purpose. But it was not until 2009 that Boko Haram turned to violence, especially after its leader, a young Muslim cleric named Mohammed Yusuf's was killed while in police custody (TheNation,2012January6:43Jean Herskovits). Video footage of Mohammed Yusuf's interrogation soon went viral but no one was tried and punished for the crime.(Jean Herskovits 2012) seeking revenge, Boko Haram targeted the police, the military, and Local politicians all of them Muslims. At the beginning, the Boko Haram's war was against Muslims who were not considered by the group to be orthodox enough, those that were found in or near ear parlours. Later, the war was taken to government institutions and International organisations such as Police Headquarter or the United Nations Office in Abuja (Ropo Sekoni, the Nation 2012 Jan8:14). In its present state, Boko Haram direct their violence at Christians, and shoot their words of war or threat of elimination at Nigerians from the South that are resident in the North.(The Nation 2012 Jan8:14)

The methods adopted for its activities are laying of mines and explosives at strategic places burning of churches, killing of clergymen, Murder and assassination, intimidation and suicide bombing(Anyawu2010:39;Awoniyi2012:6;The Nation 2012:1&5).All the fanaticism ,fundamentalism and terrorist activities pointed out above will definitely strain Christian-Muslim.

Solution or Way out and Conclusion

Attempts have been made thus far to discuss the Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria since 1914 to date. The attitude of Colonial administration to religious propaganda has been pointed out, the method adopted by Islam and Christianity for conversion has been identified, the provision of Nigerian constitutions and the military government policy as it affects religious affairs has been pointed out, new dimension in religious propaganda and Sharia law has been discussed, Kanfanchan riot is cited as example of religious fanaticism and fundamentalism, religious terrorism as practiced by matasine and Boko Haram sects are identified . It is therefore established here that different factors have contributed and affected Christians-Muslim relations in Nigeria. We shall now discuss the way out and draw our conclusion.

Nigeria is undoubtedly a "multi-religious society". This in the opinion of Mala Babs (1984) has several implications. First, Nigerians do not live in a religiously monolithic society ,that is, Nigeria cannot claim to be a purely Islamic, Christian, or traditional Country. Secondly, Nigerians live as peoples with different cultural background and coupled with a multiplicity of patterns of behaviour and life style which are often diametrically opposed to one another. Thirdly, as a people, share a lot in common viz common concern, common aspirations, and a common hope for a just society.

The presence of different religions with their diverse interpretations is a potential source of inter- and intra religious rivalry in Nigeria. The way some Muslims and christians preach, teach and practice their religions betray the intolerance of the various religious adherents. Their inability to accommodate other religious views, their false devotion to religious founder and their seemingly zealous but fanatically uncompromising practices are contrary to the fundamental claims of their religious and religious founders"(Mala babs1984)

An extreme example of religious fanaticism and fundamentalism is the upsurge of the maitasine sect in December 1980 and October 1982 in Nigeria; Religious fanaticism in Nigeria's higher institution of learning like ABU Zaria, At Kafanchan, University of Ibadan and other riots as mentioned elsewhere in this work.

The deep rooted religious difference Prejudices and rivalries which followed these fanaticisms often resulted in open confrontation and abuse of inter-religious freedom. Mala Babs has suggested inter-religious dialogue as the best option for a religiously pluralistic society, as he behoves that this can assist the adherents of different faiths in Nigeria to have a healthy relationship with them. Onaiyekan (2011:13) agreed with Mala Babs when he said that the type of dialogue needed should be seen as gentle listening to each other so as to discover those things which we hold in common challenges that are before us and address them, armed with the common spiritual and address them, armed with the common spiritual and moral resources that our different faiths provide.

Since Colonial times, Muslim and Christian communities dominated the various sphere of life in the Country. While the Muslims had always called attention to their numerical strength, which some Christians have always challenged, the Christians on their part point to the all-pervading influence of Christianity in Nigeria, and their claim that Jesus, as lord and saviour of the world should rule the country.

The Muslims believe that Nigeria's problems will be solved if the classical concept of the Islamic State and its principles are rightly adhered to, pointing out that there are adequate provision for non Muslims in that concept.

In conclusion, having discussed the Christian-Muslim relation since the inception of the British colonial administration in Nigeria to date, It is the opinion of this paper that Nigeria needs Tolerance, Mutual Religious Understanding, Dialogue, Practicing the tenets of religious beliefs, that is orthopraxis rather than orthodoxy in our relations together. There is a need to respect and uphold the secular status of Nigerian constitution and the provision for Fundamental Human Rights and Religious freedom in the spirit of true federalism in each State of the Federation

The government should not favour any religion at the expense of the other. Government should be fair to all religions, in dealing with religious affairs. Example is non-partisanship in declaration of public holidays for religious festivals. Government should establish council or ministry of religious affairs to dialogue on or deal with pilgrimage affairs. The role of the government on religious affairs should be in an advising capacity.

There is a need for new socio-religious, political orientation and philosophy that will bring the people of Nigeria much closer together as "one individual members of a united, peaceful and strong nation under God" (Adamolekun1999:87). The concept of live and let live among inter-religious council (NIREC) established in September 1999 under Obasanjo administration(Oniyekan2011:14-20) and upheld since Yaradua administration should be made to function effectively in sustaining mutual understanding, good relation among faiths, and serve as watchdog on religious affairs. In this way, fanaticism, fundamentalism, and terrorism can be reduced or eliminated in our society.

It is possible for people with different religions to coexist in the society just as it is possible for people with different names to coexist in a family. Therefore, Christians-Muslim relations should be practiced with mutual trust, understanding, tolerance and dialogue.

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