



*The Digest: Journal of Jurisprudence and Legisprudence* (2021) **2(2)**, 173-196

ISSN Online 2746-0371 ISSN Print 2746-2110

Published by the Faculty of Law, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

Available online at <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/digest/index>

# Political Crisis and The Politics of Religious Divisiveness in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Oluwaseyi Oyetunbi

*Osun State University*

*OSOGBO, NIGERIA*

✉ [oyetunbiseyi2018@gmail.com](mailto:oyetunbiseyi2018@gmail.com)

Olawale Olufemi Akinrinde

*Osun State University*

*OSOGBO, NIGERIA*

✉ [olawale.akinrinde@uniosun.edu.ng](mailto:olawale.akinrinde@uniosun.edu.ng)

## ABSTRACT

The relationship that exists between politics and religion cannot be over-emphasized in Nigeria polity since the evolution of a sustainable democracy which has heightened the relevance of religion in our society. Religion has been identified as one of the factors that have divided the people of Nigeria who are divided already by many phenomena that are of nature. The diversities engineered by cultures, customs, traditions and values are not as potent as religion in dividing the people, ensuing conflict, creating a paradise for favoritism, generating riot and insurgence. Religious leaders have become force to reckon with in the country, many of them become politicians out of the blues because of their influence on the mindset of their members to decide as regard electioneering activities. However, politics needs to be guided by religion ideally, evidently most policies fabricated, go in line with dogmas of either Christianity or Islam before other indexes may follow. People are better divided by religion. This paper focuses on examining the influence of religion on politics in Nigeria's fourth republic using the Boko-haram insurgence as the major yardstick to establishing the impacts of religion on the divisive Nigeria.

**KEYWORDS:** Political Crisis, Politics, Religious Divisiveness, Nigeria's Fourth Republic, Nigeria

## ABSTRAK

Hubungan yang ada antara politik dan agama tidak dapat terlalu ditekankan di pemerintahan Nigeria sejak evolusi demokrasi berkelanjutan yang telah meningkatkan relevansi agama dalam masyarakat kita. Agama telah diidentifikasi sebagai salah satu faktor yang memecah belah masyarakat Nigeria yang sudah terpecah oleh banyak fenomena alam. Keberagaman yang direkayasa oleh budaya, adat, tradisi, dan nilai tidak sekuat agama memecah belah masyarakat, memunculkan konflik, menciptakan surga bagi pilih kasih, menimbulkan kerusuhan dan pemberontakan. Para pemuka agama telah menjadi kekuatan yang harus diperhitungkan di negara ini, banyak dari mereka menjadi politisi tiba-tiba karena pengaruhnya terhadap pola pikir anggotanya untuk memutuskan kegiatan pemilihan. Namun, politik perlu dipandu oleh agama idealnya, ternyata sebagian besar kebijakan dibuat-buat, sejalan dengan dogma Kristen atau Islam sebelum indeks lain mengikuti. Orang-orang lebih baik dipisahkan oleh agama. Makalah ini berfokus pada mengkaji pengaruh agama terhadap politik di republik keempat Nigeria dengan menggunakan pemberontakan Boko-haram sebagai tolok ukur utama untuk menetapkan dampak agama di Nigeria yang memecah belah.

**KATA KUNCI:** Krisis Politik, Politik, Perpecahan Agama, Republik Keempat Nigeria, Nigeria

## I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between politics and religion is intimate as they both make synergy to have a well-organized state. More so, the relationship is complex because of the intricacies inherent in the politicization of religion. Having Nigeria as a case to study and to x-ray the relationship of both concepts, today, they are two major religious groups in Nigeria, Muslims and Christians. Islam and Christianity are not recognized here to the trivialization of the position of traditional animism; that they take the centre stage in this work is deliberate because of the impact of both on the Nigerian government and politics. The impact profoundly reinforces regional and ethnic differences and makes stability more difficult. More

recently, insecurity has been the most challenging issue confronting Nigeria as a nation, but it has received analysis and criticism by some concerned religious leaders and other populace who no longer see it as one of those imminent national issues but as a religious fight. The identification of the problem ignited this book, to unravel some causes and effects of political crisis anchored on religion in Nigerian fourth's republic, which has been one of the contending challenges faced by the country. Vices like: insecurity, secession, militancy, corruption, injustice and nepotism are all directly or otherwise, rooted around religious divisiveness in Nigeria. Nigeria as a clear heterogeneous state, by amalgamation is abundantly diversified.

Religion and politics have been interconnected throughout history. For every ancient political entity for which we have records, religion was intimately connected to politics. This is true of ancient Egypt and Greece as well as the Mesopotamian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. This practice continued in the feudal states which followed the fall of the Roman Empire. This is true even of pre-history. The Old Testament records a time when separation of religion and state was unheard of. Each city or nation had its own god or gods. People sought the approval of their gods when they went to war and brought these gods, or symbols representing their gods, with them. When one side was victorious their national religion was often imposed upon the vanquished. The political leaders of some states, such as the pharaohs of Egypt and pre-Christian emperors of Rome, were themselves considered gods. However, even in the countries described in the Bible, theocracies were rare, and while political and religious power were usually interconnected, they were embodied in separate entities. That is, the political class and the priestly class were strongly dependent upon each other and significantly influenced the other's decisions, but they were usually separate classes. The religious authorities would support the legitimacy of the temporal authorities and the temporal authorities would support the religion both financially and through enforcing the religion's dogma with the power of the state. In a number of ways things have not changed.

Many states still support official religions but, in most cases, the state and religious institutions are separate entities. Wars are fought over religion, though in recent decades most of them have been civil wars or wars taking place in failed states rather than international wars. While with the possible exception of North Korea, leaders no longer demand to be worshiped, some do claim to be the representatives of their god on earth. Also, the clergy and religious institutions are often involved in politics, at least at the level of lobbying governments to influence political decisions. While separation of religion and state and freedom of religion are prominent in much of the world as an ideology, these interrelated ideologies are arguably more often expressed as an ideal than practiced, even in the Western liberal democracies where the concepts of separation of religion and state and religious freedom originated. Wars between states are also less often overtly about religion, though religious language is still used to justify war.

Nigeria is the most populous African country, with a population of about 180,000,000. It became a British colony in 1901, and the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorate was actualized in 1914, which expanded the territories and harmonized the populace. In spite of the diversity in all facets, and as such it witnessed different epochs that have characterized it with political crisis and the divisiveness birthed by religion in the polis. Colonization lasted until 1960, when an independence movement succeeded in achieving Nigeria her independence by some nationalists in Nigeria and supports received by the former Organisation of Africa Union (OAU).

The independence of Nigeria signified a new dawn for all Nigerians. Nigeria first became a republic in 1963, but succumbed to military rule three years later after a bloody coup d'état. A separatist movement later formed the Republic of Biafra in 1967, leading to three-year Nigerian gruesome civil war that left Nigerians with lifelong agony. Nigeria became a republic once again after a new constitution was written in 1979. However, the republic was short-

lived, when the military seized power again four years later. A new republic was planned to be established in August 1993. The then head of states, General Ibrahim Babangida formed two parties, SDP and NRC in a bid to re-establish a democratic government. This led to the June 12 election which is today regarded as the most free and fair election in the history of Nigeria. The result of the election was annulled by the head of state General Ibrahim Babangida and later initiated an interim national government which was headed by chief Earnest Shonekan. The interim national government lasted for three months when another coup led by General Sanni Abacha surfaced. Sanni Abacha died in 1998 and a fourth republic was later established the following year, which ended three decades of intermittent military rule.

In recent decades, religion has become an important factor both in public debate and as a means of political mobilization. However, the rise of religion has not happened in and for itself: it is closely linked to wider material and ideological developments that have affected global politics. One of these trends is the decline and collapse of state socialism, which served important ideological and political functions outside the socialist world, including the offer of an ideological and political alternative. This alternative included the provision of an alternative moral and political vision of the world, and on the whole, a consensus by ruling elites that social inequality needed to be limited. Since the 1980s, global and national politics have increasingly been dominated by ideological and practical responses to the ostensible victory of liberal capitalism. Reflecting a growing skepticism of alternative visions of the world, idealistic thinking has frequently been perceived as outdated and positive visions for the future of humanity have been limited to the functioning of the market and its institutions. Whether as a direct or an indirect result of this, global inequality has increased dramatically since the 1980s; both in the global North and in the South (cf. Cornia and Court, 2001). In many contexts, increasing reliance on the market and the lack of consensus on limiting social inequality and poverty

meant that moral principles and hopes for humankind were demoted to the private realm of personal ethics or faith. While even during this era religion has often informed and influenced politics, both in predominantly secular Europe and beyond, the recent intensification of religious debates has had important political and developmental consequences, because it reflects or intersects with existing and – due to increasing inequality – growing social divisions. Thus, the ideological distance between Islam on the one hand and Christianity and the (Western) secularism derived primarily from Christian traditions on the other has contributed to a growing political distance between Muslim and Christian communities. Because large parts of its population are either Christians or Muslims, often within the same countries, Africa is located at the centre of the contestations associated with this political and ideological struggle. Today, Muslim and Christian communities and organizations in many African countries are publicly questioning the legitimacy of the secular post-colonial state, while at the same time extending their activities in areas of social provision closely associated with the state, but which the state is no longer able to guarantee, such as education and health (Corten and Marshall-Fratani, 2001; Soares and Otayek, 2007). Religious politics do not affect the state in a coherent or uniform way, instead having a complex and even contradictory impact on state institutions. On the one hand, the political engagement of religious groups and their provision of services in areas where the state has failed to deliver present an ideological and practical challenge to the state (Love, 2006). On the other hand, such activities support and supplement state activities in important sectors, and can even be understood as supporting the state. Nevertheless, even formal collaboration between state and religious actors can be perceived as undemocratic and threatening by excluded groups, creating further ground for political – and religious – contestation (cf. Philpott, 2007; for a perspective aimed at reducing contestation see Deneulin with Bano, 2009).

## II. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

### A. RELIGION

Over-time, many scholars have attempted to define religion based on their horizon of what they view religion to be. Therefore, religion has no single or generally accepted definition because of its nature as an ambiguous and controversial phenomenon. However, some definitions have provided us with an in-depth understanding of what religion is and what it represents in the society.

*"Religion is the human attitude towards a sacred order that includes within it all being—human or otherwise—i.e., belief in a cosmos, the meaning of which both includes and transcends man." ~ Peter Berger*

**Religion**, as seen by human is the relationship to that which they regard as holy, sacred, absolute, spiritual, divine, or worthy of special reverence. It is also commonly regarded as consisting of the way people deal with ultimate concerns about their lives and their fate after death. In many traditions, this relation and these concerns are expressed in terms of one's relationship with or attitude toward gods or spirits; in more humanistic or naturalistic forms of religion, they are expressed in terms of one's relationship with or attitudes toward the broader human community or the natural world.

In many religions, texts are deemed to have scriptural status, and people are esteemed to be invested with spiritual or moral authority. Believers and worshippers participate in and are often enjoined to perform devotional or contemplative practices such as prayer, meditation, or particular rituals. Worship, moral conduct, right belief, and participation in religious institutions are among the constituent elements of the religious life. Scholars of religion like Imo (1986: 1-5) do not agree on a single definition of the word 'religion' because religion is a combination of two things: the profane and the supernatural. Therefore, a good definition has to take the two into consideration. Some approach its definition with prejudice while some scholars of religion do not practice one so they lack the

experience. A good definition, Imo emphasizes should feature specificity and inclusiveness. He advances that religion is the varied, symbolic expression of, and appropriate response to that, which people deliberately affirm as being of unrestricted value for them.

McGee (1980:362-365) posits that the religious communities of human beings are often distinguished by reference to their central object of worship. Around this sacred object, person or concept, belied patterns, ritual practices, ethical system and social organization take form. He defines religion as “a set of activities organized around the sacred- that non-empirical source of power, transcendence, mystery and awe.” The basic dimensions of religion include the belief patterns which accommodate the sacred reality people experience through revelation, reflection or divine illumination; ritual practices which are prescribed for believers as appropriate human responses in the relationship to the ultimate source of being or value; ethical codes which are behaviour directed towards other person; and cultic organization.

## **B. POLITICS**

As ambiguous as religion is, so is politics too. Politics doesn't have a straight-jacketed conceptualization. Aristotle, began his famous work “the politics” by describing human as a political animal, meaning that all human are naturally depending on one another for survival as nobody can adopt individualism in his or her existence. The word ‘politics’ is derived from polis, meaning ‘city-state’. Ancient Greek society was divided into a collection of independent city-states, each of which possessed its own system of government. The largest and most influential of these city-states was Athens, often referred as the cradle of democratic government. In this light, politics can be understood to refer to the affairs of the polis – in effect, ‘what concerns the polis.’ The modern form of this definition is therefore ‘what concerns the state’ this view of politics is clearly evident in the everyday use of the term: people are said to be ‘in politics’ when they hold public office, or to be ‘entering politics’ when they seek to do so.



It is also a definition that academic political science has helped to perpetuate. In many ways, the notion that politics amounts to 'what concerns the state' is the traditional view of the discipline, reflected in the tendency for academic study to focus on the personnel and machinery of government. To study politics is, in essence, to study government, or, more broadly, to study the exercise of authority. This view is advanced in the writings of the influential US political scientist David Easton (1979, 1981), who defined politics as the 'authoritative allocation of values'. By this, he meant that politics encompasses the various processes through which government responds to pressures from the larger society, in particular by allocating benefits, rewards or penalties. 'Authoritative values' are therefore those that are widely accepted in society, and are considered binding by the mass of citizens. In this view, politics is associated with 'policy': that is, with formal or authoritative decisions that establish a plan of action for the community.

However, what is striking about this definition is that it offers a highly restricted view of politics. Politics is what takes place within a polity, a system of social organization centered on the machinery of government. Politics is therefore practiced in cabinet rooms, legislative chambers, government departments and the like; and it is engaged in by a limited and specific group of people, notably politicians, civil servants and lobbyists. This means that most people, most institutions and most social activities can be regarded as being 'outside' politics. Businesses, schools and other educational institutions, community groups, families and so on are in this sense 'non-political', because they are not engaged in 'running the country'.

By the same token, to portray politics as an essentially state-bound activity is to ignore the increasingly important international or global influences on modern life. This definition can, however, be narrowed still further. This is evident in the tendency to treat politics as the equivalent of party politics. In other words, the realm of 'the political' is restricted to those state actors who are consciously motivated by ideological beliefs, and who seek to advance them

through membership of a formal organization such as a political party. This is the sense in which politicians are described as 'political', whereas civil servants are seen as 'non-political', as long as, of course, they act in a neutral and professional fashion. Similarly, judges are taken to be 'non-political' figures while they interpret the law impartially and in accordance with the available evidence, but they may be accused of being 'political' if their judgement is influenced by personal preferences or some other form of bias.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

This paper is firmly rooted within the field of comparative politics and places a heavy emphasis on state religion policy. This has two implications. First, the focus is on the actual role religion plays in politics rather than the role it ought to play. For example, political philosophers such as Rawls and de Tocqueville, among many others, discuss the role they believe religion should play in democracy. These philosophies are certainly relevant to questions of how religion influences politics, both because they influence those who practice politics as well as because they help us theorize about how religion does influence politics. However, the question of how religion ought to influence politics is addressed here only in the context of how these theories can help us understand the actual role of religion in politics. Secondly, religion's influence on politics manifests through multiple and sometimes overlapping agencies. These include how governments address religion, the political activities of all sorts of religious groups and organizations, and religion's influence on society in general. While this paper addresses all of these, the major comparative focus is on state religion policy. This is not intended to imply that these other influences are less important. Rather, no book can include all possible examples. This simply reflects the author's choice of focus. There are two possible approaches to the comparative study of religion and politics. The first is to focus on theories and trends—that is the general ways in which religion can influence politics. This approach is intended to provide a theoretical toolbox

that will give a student of religion and politics the means to analyze religion's intersection with politics in any setting. The second is to examine the facts on the ground and explore the connection between religion and politics in particular places. This volume combines both approaches.

**A SOCIAL SCIENCE APPROACH TO RELIGION:** There are many possible perspectives that can be applied to the academic study of religion. It is a topic studied by political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, psychologists, philosophers, and theologians, among others. Each of these disciplines has its own particular set of approaches to understanding the topic of religion, and a particular set of questions around which most research and inquiry revolves. Many of these approaches are not compatible or reconcilable with each other. When studying religion, one must select from them. This book uses a social science approach, relying most heavily on the methodologies of comparative political science and sociology and the questions asked particularly by political scientists, though the insights and queries of other disciplines can also be found in these pages. What does this mean? Basically, we begin with the assumption that religion is a social institution or phenomenon which strongly influences human behavior. The primary goal of a social scientist is to understand human behavior. Political scientists and sociologists focus on the behavior of groups, with political scientists emphasizing political behavior and sociologists emphasizing social behavior. While the central goal of this book is to understand religion's influence on political behavior in Nigeria's fourth republic, often this is not possible without an understanding of the role of religion in influencing social behavior. In addition, as is seen especially in at the introductory phase, the insights of political scientists into religion are essential to understanding its political role because of the interconnections between the social and political. Furthermore, sociological theory on religion is considerably more developed than that of political science. Be that as it may, the central

question asked in this section is how religion intersects with and influences the political. This approach has some important implications. The first and foremost is that the truth of religious claims is not a question we address. Whether or not a particular religion or belief is true is an important question to theologians, some philosophers, and billions of believers. In contrast, for a political scientist, as long as a belief influences behaviour, the truth of the belief is unimportant. That is, political scientists are not equipped to judge which religion is the true religion, and the answer to this question, assuming a definitive answer is even possible in this world, does little to answer the questions we wish to ask. Rather, we limit my inquiry in this paper to the question of how religions influence the state through behaviour. For the purposes of answering this question, whether or not a religion is in some existential or epistemological sense the one true religion does not matter as long as a person or group believes that it is. It is this belief which influences their behaviour, not the truth or untruth of this belief. Thus, for the purposes of the exercise of applying a social science perspective to understand religion's influence on politics, we must set whatever beliefs we have regarding religion aside. It is not important whether we believe in a religion or believe all religions are no more than social constructions that have no truth to them. That is, one can believe that one's religion is the one true religion or that all religions are false. However, these beliefs are not relevant to social science inquiry. Rather, we must objectively examine how religion influences political behavior without allowing any of these preconceptions to colour the analysis. As noted above, this approach is markedly different from that of political philosophy in that it focuses on the observed influences of religion in politics rather than the role many believe it ought to play. Some of the implications of this perspective can be seen in how political scientists examine religion. For example, let us examine four definitions of religion discussed in Brian Turner's (1991) classic book *Religion and Social Theory*: 1. Emile Durkheim's definition: "A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to

sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.” 2. Clifford Geertz’s definition: “[1] a system of symbols which acts to [2] establish powerful, persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by [3] formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and [4] clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that [5] the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” 3. Daniel Bell’s definition: “Religion is a set of coherent answers to the core existential questions that confront every human group, the codification of these answers into a creedal form that has significance for its adherents, the celebration of rites which provide an emotional bond for those who participate, and the establishment of an institutional body to bring into congregation those who share the creed and celebration, and provide for the continuity of these rights from generation to generation.” 4. Peter Berger’s definition: “Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established. Put differently, religion is solmization in the sacred mode. By sacred is meant here a quality of mysterious and awesome power, other than man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience . . . The sacred cosmos is confronted by man as an immensely powerful reality other than himself. Yet this reality addresses itself to him and locates his life in an ultimately meaningful order.” What do all of these definitions have in common? They focus on how religion interacts with human behavior. Durkheim focuses on how beliefs and rituals unite people into a community. He also emphasizes in his works how religious practices are the key to maintaining religion and to understanding its role in society. Geertz focuses on how religion influences man’s behavior, beliefs, and understanding of the world. Bell’s definition includes religion’s role in answering existential questions for man, religion’s influence on groups’ bonds, and the role of institutions in preserving religion. Berger uses a definition of religion which addresses the sacred without actually taking a stand on the truth of any particular

conception of the sacred. All of these definitions also avoid theological questions such as whether there exists a deity or deities and what these deities, should they exist, want of man. They also do not address the truth of any religion nor do they address whether religion is good and moral. As sociological definitions, they take no position on these kinds of questions and rather focus on how religion exists as a social phenomenon or institution that influences human behavior. If they did take a stand on the issue of whether a deity or deities exist, they would likely have to exclude religions like Buddhism and Confucianism—which do not include any gods in their theologies—from being considered religions. If they took a position on morality, they would be engaging in questions of whether a behaviour is good or bad rather than trying to understand the causes and consequences of that behaviour. By focusing on how religion influences human behaviour, we can safely set this and other theological–philosophical controversies aside and focus on the questions that are more central to how religion and the politics interact. Political science definitions of religion are rare. Most political scientists who address the issue simply state one of the existing sociological or philosophical definitions at the beginning of their books or articles, and then proceed with their discussions of religion and politics in a manner that does not appear to be heavily influenced by the definitions they have quoted. Yet, based on the principles discussed so far, it is not difficult to construct one. For the purposes of this book, we define religion as follows: Religion seeks to understand the origins and nature of reality using a set of answers that include the supernatural. Religion is also a social phenomenon and institution which influences the behavior of human beings both as individuals and in groups. These influences on behavior manifest through the influences of religious identity, religious institutions, religious legitimacy, religious beliefs, and the codification of these beliefs into authoritative dogma, among other avenues of influence. We recognize that religion is more than this and that a complete definition of religion would include many of its social functions and

influences, as described by the sociological definitions cited above, as well as a theological element describing in more detail the nature of religion's source, be it a monotheistic God, a pantheon of deities, nature, or some other supernatural phenomenon or entity. Yet taking a stand on these issues, especially their existential, epistemological, and theological aspects, would be to enter debates that have continued for millennia without adding significantly to the completion of the task of this paper—to understand how religion influences political behavior. Accordingly, this definition should be taken as a definition of religion's political role rather than a comprehensive definition of religion. Yet there is a need to differentiate religion from other ideologies which influence behaviour such as nationalism, Marxism, and other political ideologies. For this reason, it became expedient to include the first sentence of the definition. It is possible to claim that other political ideologies are the functional equivalent of religion, and to an extent there is truth in this claim. However, religion is something that is different and distinct. Political ideologies are openly attributed to man—that is no one questions that man created them. Accordingly, man is equipped to reject or revise these ideologies. Religions are attributed to a direct supernatural source such as God. In the minds of believers, this creates an ideology which is not open to question. In addition, most political ideologies do not address a number of the existential issues most religions address. All of this makes religion distinct.

### **III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **A. Religion and Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

The influence of religion upon politics and the interactions that happen between politics and religion cannot be played down. Overtime, they have been several political thinkers who at the same time were religious leaders like St. Augustine, St. Aquinas, Ibn Arabi, Ibn sabin and many others who posited that politics and religion are necessarily interrelated because of the huge influence religious

leaders have on the society. In order to establish this as a fact, in the creation of the state, there is a specific theory called "Devine theory" that explains the establishment of the state as a divine phenomenon having so much strings with spirituality, therefore imposing some charismatic people as religious leader and the head of government who have a total control of the affairs of the populace with unreasonable little human right which could just be limited to right to life. Karl Marx, in 1843, the German philosopher, economist and historian, wrote that latter became his famous dictum: "Religion is the opium of the people." Yakubu Mohammed opined, which was later published in *The Guardian Newspaper* (August 14, 2019) that Karl Marx might not have said his popular dictum to denigrate religion. As an addiction, he saw during the era in which espoused this dictum, the hold organized religion had on people. Faith, to summarize the German philosopher, was something that people, the hoi polloi of the time, conjured for themselves as a source of "phony happiness to which they turned to help numb the pain of reality." They took to religion as people take to anti-depressant or sleep-inducing drugs to temporarily forget some sorrow or pain or, as some are wanting to do, take or drinking to drown their sorrow.

Religion was seen then, as it is seen even now, as the most powerful force in any society. Admittedly this influence is beginning to wane seriously in some advanced civilizations of Europe and the Americas where the youths have begun to desert the church in droves in favour of some alternate opiate. Despite the threats of such alternative opiate like football, the allure of drugs and the craze for money and even the social media (face-book in particular) with their instantaneous reach across the borders and their unlimited capacity to connect people, despite all these threats, religion has not ceased to have major influence as a unifier or an elixir.

Certainly not in Nigeria where and mosques continue to sprout like mushrooms in every nook and cranny of the major cities. Religion, when put to good and productive use, it serves as a potent unifying factor. But in many unfortunate circumstances, it must be



admitted; it has also proved over the years, to be a pernicious conflict inducer. A country like Nigeria which is grappling with the problems of deep-rooted suspicion fueled by the numerous ethno-religious, social and political – religion can actually play the role of unifier, an agent to promote understanding and love and amity in the society.

But this can only happen in the hands of leadership adept at playing such unifying role. President Muhammadu Buhari puts his finger on what could have turned out to be an elixir of sorts in this respect when he bemoaned Nigeria's loss the other day with the death of Chief M.K.O Abiola, the presumed winner of the June 12 presidential election in 1993. The president lamented the fact that if Abiola had emerged president, the recurring issue of ethno-religious crisis in the country would have been laid to rest.

This may sound to some people as an exercise in counterfactual indulgence. But the facts tend to support Buhari's position. Chief Abiola was coasting home to victory with an unprecedented political innovation – a Muslim-Muslim ticket in a country polarized by egregious religious divide. But that was not even the genesis of what turned out to be the winning formula. What it did, aside from the contribution of this politically savvy running mate, Ambassador Babangana Kingibe, was Abiola's own larger-than-life multi-dimensional personality, his love giving and his sense of empathy among other factors. He was trusted by people whose lives he had touched. He could give hope and he could inspire people to believe in their innate capacity for self-actualization. Though being a Muslim, he did not discriminate against other people. He was at home with Christians as he was with Muslims. He contributed to the church as he contributed to the mosque. A good mixer, he would dine with the king and dance with the pauper; and he had an incredible knack for doing this binary exercise with seamless ease that came with natural inclination as opposed to a politician's productivity for showmanship and pretense. Instead of playing one against the other, he could easily have used religion to unify the country. I guess this is the point Buhari was making. But there must be something he can do to get more

Nigerians of means to emulate the late M.K.O Abiola. Some of the examples that he praised to the high heavens must not be interred with his bones. Though Abiola was a difficult act to follow, but some of his humanitarian gestures could be institutionalized. Using religion, Karl Marx's opium of the people, even the average Nigerian man or woman, especially the youth, has all it takes to be a bridge builder, an agent of nation building. See what they do during religious festivities of Christmas and Eid festivals. There is a reasonable outpouring of goodwill from Christians to Muslims on Eid days like the one recently celebrated. At Christmas and the New Year, there is equal camaraderie from many Muslims to their Christian counterpart. This show of goodwill messages from the leaders. The sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar III, governors and even party leaders as well as the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Rev. Samson Ayokunle have all preached peace and unity during the Eid celebration. And when it is Christmas time, the same messages of peace and unity would rent the air. If we are so committed to our religion and we genuinely believe that it is the foundation of peace and unity, why do we take delight in tearing ourselves apart and condemn one another on the basis of religious difference? Why can't we say no to those who use religion to sow seeds of discord among us?

If truly we are addicted to our various faiths as we are addicted to sports, especially football, why can't we turn this opium into cause cerebra, something to promote national unity instead of pulling the country down? With so much religiosity preaching against the evil effects of sin of murder and coveting your neighbour's property, why do we celebrate killings and mass murder based on hate and bigotry. Why has the country elevated the heinous crime of robbery and kidnapping to the level of religion with its priests and nuns and imams and alfas using their AK 47 instead of their rosary?

As a multi-ethnic, multi-religious country, Nigeria's broad religious geography reflects the historical exposure of its northern communities to Islam through the trans-Saharan trade and the

success of Christian missionary enterprise in many of its southern parts. However, while historical alliances and shared ethnicity are closely associated with the adoption of these two world religions, religious and ethno-regional identity are cross-cutting, often reinforcing each other. Thus, while Islam had been entrenched in the pre-colonial Hausa cities for centuries, many other northern groups converted to Islam in the wake of the nineteenth century Islamic jihad under Uthman dan Fodio (1754-1817), during which the greater part of northern and central Nigeria was incorporated into a new Caliphate, albeit with the exception of the existing, and much older, Islamic kingdom of Borno, which remains the most important rival to Sokoto's claims to represent all of northern Nigeria. Other Muslim groups with a tradition independent of the Uthmanian Caliphate include the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria, where people initially converted to Islam as a result of links to Malian trading communities (cf. Peel, 1996, p.610), and Nigeria's middle belt, where large-scale conversion to Islam has continued throughout the post-colonial period.

Nigerian Christianity dates back to the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the early nineteenth century, which was followed by the emergence of literate African elite, consisting of liberated and returned slaves as well as local converts, in coastal cities such as Lagos. Because Christianity is much younger than Islam in the local context, it is not associated with pre-colonial relations of power. And because its growth in Nigeria was accompanied by the spread of mission education, Nigeria's professional elite was, for a long time, dominated by Christians. Like Islam, Nigerian Christianity is heterogeneous. Roman Catholicism has long been the religion of the Igbo-speaking south-east. In other parts of the country's south, Protestant denominations – including Pentecostal groups – are dominant in the Christian community, but the Yoruba-speaking south-west is almost equally divided between Christianity and Islam. Moreover, there are important Christian groups in the north, which include both Hausa converts and smaller local groups determined to

assert their difference from the Hausa-speaking majority or from relations of power associated with the Caliphate (cf. Kastfelt, 2003). Moreover, just as there are Muslim migrants from northern Nigeria in many southern cities, there are Christian communities of migrants, or descendants of migrants, from the south in almost all northern Nigerian cities. Apart from Christianity and Islam, Nigerians also belong to a range of other religious groups. The largest of these is comprised of followers of traditional religious practice, here referred to as African Traditional Religion (ATR), with the proviso that local belief systems and practices differ widely, and that their subsumption under one term mainly reflects the fact that these practices do not (yet) hold the status of world religions. However, many ATR groups share the conviction that the worldly and the sacred are closely interwoven, and that all human relations – including those involving the state and its

Representatives – reflect both secular and spiritual forces. It is believed that insight into these forces can be gained through divination and revelation, and that they can be influenced through sacrifice, prayer and incantation. Because traditional practices have influenced Christians and Muslims and vice versa, debates about their validity form an important and ongoing part of inter- and intra-religious struggles in Nigeria (Amherd and Nolte, 2005). Beyond the engagement with local traditions, Christianity and Islam have expressed a high degree of political competitiveness with each other at least since the 1970s. Nigeria's colonial and post-colonial rulers have managed the differences associated with different religious constituencies, and especially Islam and Christianity, in various ways. For most of the colonial period, almost all parts of northern Nigeria – the areas belonging to the Uthmanian Caliphate and the kingdom of Borno – were under indirect rule, i.e. administered through the structures of the Caliphate, albeit under British guidance. While secular concerns guided important aspects of the local administration, it was thus officially presided over by traditional authorities sanctioned by tradition and Islam, and Islam also

constituted the basis for local government. Shari'a courts,<sup>4</sup> which had existed before colonial rule, were integrated into the colonial state, and most people turned to shari'a law for the mediation and resolution of personal conflicts. Only in the run-up to independence in 1960 were criminal laws codified into secular law. The colonial state's reliance on the structures of the Caliphate in turn affected religious and educational politics in northern Nigeria. In many parts of the north, missionary activity was forbidden, preventing the emergence of an educated elite prepared to challenge either the Emirs or local Muslim traditions. As a result, when the colonial presence was dismantled, the established urban (trading) elites and the local aristocracy emerged as the tenants of northern Nigerian politics. While Islam was deeply entrenched in the traditional sphere of the Nigerian state, Christianity was, especially in the south, mainly associated with modernization.

As most missions provided schooling, and later even college training, Christianity was closely associated with the spread of education. The rapid growth of literacy contributed to the emergence of a mostly urban intermediary class of educated men and women who worked as catechists, clerks and teachers. This group soon took up and transformed the local elite's struggles for self-assertion. Directly confronted with racial division in the colonial administration, banking practices and even the mission churches, literate southern Nigerians eventually formed the core of Nigeria's anti-colonial movement. Criticizing both the colonial state and the traditional rulers through which the state had ruled, members of this educated elite considered themselves – rather than the representatives of older elites and especially the aristocracy – the natural heirs and rulers of the colonial state after independence.

Despite the popular slogan "Our religion is politics and politics is our religion", many of our youth take a negative attitude towards politics. What is our view on this? Actually, youth do not run away from politics per se, but rather from politics of a specific nature, or from difficult political situations, or from a political leadership which

has none of the lofty ideals by which the greater political goals may be realized. The activities of many political parties and movements, along with their inner complexities, may be factors that alienate youth from involvement in this environment. We may find that a youth refuses to participate in the political discourse because of his negative conception of the subject, based on what he has perceived in his environment, on his readings or on a negative conclusion such as politics is chicanery, prevarication, hypocrisy, that one should distance himself from it.

It is possible, too, that the issue may stem from a lack of self-confidence or fear of political complexities. We feel that the negative attitude may be the result of one or another of these elements. It is incumbent on those who work in the political arena, on the one hand, to extend the horizons of youths to greater political issues that concern the nation; and, on the other hand, to enhance their outlook on the positive implications of struggle, sacrifice and of drawing closer to Allah, the Most Exalted, such that politics is no longer intimidating or problematic. The problem of the negative attitude is probably occasioned by trickery, cheating, and deception that are part-and-parcel of real politics, and which appear as the very antithesis of morality. In this scenario, politics is reduced to wrangling without any moral guidelines. On the other hand, is the concept of religion, structured on the value of high spirituality which carries at its core, the acceptance of God, and behavior in life according to spiritual, moral, and social values. These values are based on the guidance of God and His ordained Laws. This makes for a great difference in the understanding of the outlines of political function and the guidelines of religion.

The relationship of politics to religion, however, does not correspond to this prevailing understanding of politics. Nor does it correspond to the prevalent understanding of religion, which sees the latter as being restricted to a narrow sphere of worship. This sphere is completely closed to the realities of life connected to the internal dimensions of human existence; they are contradictory to the external

dimensions in individual and social conduct, without entering the arena of life struggles in dealing with any challenges. Certainly, the function of religion is the function of justice, for even the word "justice" summarizes the entire concept of religion. We must, therefore, coexist in a state of justice with ourselves; we should not wrong ourselves through things that bring on self-destruction, whether in this world or in the Hereafter.

Therefore, the person who believes in the Lord and obeys Him, harmonizing his knowledge with his daily life, is just with himself because he has focused his being on attaining the bliss in this life and the Hereafter. In this way, the relationship between a human being and the Lord is one of justice. If the person believes that God is His Lord and Creator, Who sends down His bounty, brings into being all that surrounds him, looks after him, gives him life, is the protector of everything, one will do justice to God, as he regards Him as the sole deity and attributes no partners to Him.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

No nation across the globe is crime-free. Security is a world-wide challenge that must be dealt with outside the space of religion, if achieving an ideal state still remains our cherished desire. However, no religion in Nigeria should be deemed superior or subordinate to the other and none should be state sanctioned or enforced. Obviously, Nigerian political players in the fourth republic have adopted religion as a toolbox to bamboos, create political tension and to divide Nigerians out of their irrational desperation. Nigerians should avoid being divided on the basis of religion like fingers but rather should they be united as fist to combat issues that have emanated out of mal-administration, since the inception of the fourth republic, which has drawn the country so close to a political revolution.

## REFERENCES

- Aberian, G & Masannat, S (1970) *Contemporary Political Systems*
- Adebayo R.I. (eds). *Religion and Modernity. National Association for the Study of Religions and Education (NASRED)*.
- Akinbade, J.A. (2004) *Dictionary of Nigerian Government and Politics*. Lagos: Macak Books
- Ayorinde, S.A. (2007) "Religion and National Unity" in Folorunsho, M.A. Oyeneye, I.O.E Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & Company.
- Halsell, G (1986) *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelist on the Road to Nuclear War*.
- Hank, Eso (2003) "Nigeria: Religion as a Tool of Politics". <http://www.mbukhari.com>
- Ilesanmi, S.O. (2001) "Constitutional Treatment of Religion and the Politics of Human Right in Nigeria".
- Imo, C. (1986) *The Study of Religion*. University of Jos.
- International Journal of Politics and Good Governance Volume VI, No. 6.3 Quarter III 2015 ISSN: 0976 – 1195 12*
- Jawondo, I.A. (2005) "The Role of Islamic Scholars in Ilorin politics: in Saliu, H.A. (ed). Nigeria
- Kukah, M.H (1999) *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Mazrui, A.A. (1996) "Military Intervention in African Politics". In Raph Uweche (ed), Africa
- McGee, R (1980) *Sociology, An Introduction*. New York: Holt, Rinehartand Winston.
- Mukherjee, S & Ramaswamy, S. (2007) *A History of Political Thought. Plato to Marx*. New Plc.
- Kukah, M.H. (1993) *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum. Books
- Today. Third Edition. United Kingdom: Africa Books Limited.
- Under Democratic Rule (1999 – 2003) Volume Two. Ibadan: University Press
- Yakubu Mohammed, *The Guardian Newspaper* (pg: 9, August 14, 2019)