RELIGION IN NIGERIA'S THIRD REPUBLIC: AN ESSAY IN HISTORICAL PROJECTION

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Statement of the Problem

The great task facing Nigerians is to forge a truly stable and United Nation where people can live and work in happiness, peace, harmony and contentment. These basic values undergird Nigeria's National aspirations.[1] The National Anthem, the National Pledge and the National Youth Service portray the Nation's aspirations too.

Religion, if properly harnessed, can become a potent instrument of nation-building. Religion seeks to explain and interpret reality. It furnishes man with an ultimate vision of himself and the world. It is at its best in the field of metaphysics and the non-empirical. It may well be "a daughter of hope and fear, explaining to ignorance the nature of the unknowable", as Ambrose Bierce cynically portrayed it.[2] Religion can be personal (it is essentially and primarily that) or social. It can be natural or divine. A divine or revealed religion claims special revelations from God as the basis of its faith. A natural religion is founded on human knowledge and experience. African Traditional Religion, like all primary religions the world over, does not claim any special revelations from God.

Nation-building (national development) is a multidimensional process that assimilates and synthesizes the political, economic, social, psychological, philosophical and religious aspects of the life of the citizenry. A multiplicity of inter-connected factors are involved.[3] Experience has painfully shown that the path to true national development is studded with thorny problems of which, religion is not the least. Politicians are quick to exploit the power of religion. Human emotion and religious belief can make or mar a national programme. True national development has to reckon seriously with the people's attitudes and religious culture. Even Karl Marx had to hang his economic and political prescriptions for society on a carefully elaborated philosophy that, in practice, functions as a religion, albeit atheistic and materialistic.[4] Religion

has to do with faith. Faith is the moving force of a nation and promoter of virtuous ideals. The "British dream" and the American faith in "manifest destiny" readily come to mind.[5]

Religion has been an important factor in Nigeria's national life. It was active in her colonial history. It was prominent during the first and second Republics and the intervening military regimes. From current events, religion seems poised to assume an even larger profile in the forthcoming Third Republic. The present essay seeks to examine the role of religion in Nigeria's history and, in the light of that, offer some suggestions as to what the place of religion should be in Nigeria's Third Republic.

The Bane of Organised Religion

Any keen observer of the social scene would admit that religion has a formidable capacity for trouble-making. Nonetheless, the real trouble-shooter is not religion as such but the myriads of "organised" (group) religions that now litter the universe. When one quarrels with religion, one often contends against some aspect or feature of this or that religion. The trouble is not with religion, strictly speaking, but with group-religion. The dynamics of social organisation tends to stress and exaggerate the secondary and accidental aspects of religion. Consequently, group-religion places emphasis on externals - numbers, social status and influence, economic power, doctrines (dogmas), rituals and institutions. Often its clergy loom unduly large as spokesmen and mediators. These emphases constitute fertile grounds for strife within and between the religions. The conflicts often centre on highly emotive political and social issues.

Man is naturally religious (homo religious). Contrary assertions notwithstanding, there is no person or people without religion. Everyone lives by faith - natural or/and supernatural. One may not profess this or that or any group-religion. That is perfectly possible and legitimate. One may even find "God", as taught in Judeo-Christianity or Islam, objectionable[6]. But, in doing so, one necessarily bases one's objection on some philosophy or "ultimate vision" that appears to make better sense. That ultimate vision or philosophy is, in fact, the religion by which the confessed atheist lives. One may be an atheist or non-church goer, but one cannot be religion-less.

He must have, implicitly or explicitly, an overall vision of reality that gives meaning or lack of meaning to his existence.

Philosophical musing on the necessity of religion may not give much comfort to Nigerians eager to forge a happy and stable Nation. Many Nigerians believe that one of the most disturbing aspects of Nigeria's national life today is Religion - organised or group religion. In Nigeria, such religions defy numerical count. There is the traditional or customary religion in all its shades and permutations. There is Christianity and its brood of denominations and factions. There is Islam and its schisms and sects.[7]

Each of Nigeria's 350 ethnicities has its brand of the Traditional Religion which students of Religion now popularly style "African Traditional Religion" (ATR)[8]. This traditional religion in Nigeria may appear to some observers to be dormant or dying. It may have been badly battered by the joint forces of Islam, Christianity and Westernism (Western culture, science and technology) but stark realities in our villages and cities confirm that the traditional religion is not in its death-throes. It is very much alive. Unlike the imported religions, it cultivates tolerance, friendliness, hospitality and peace.

Christianity and Islam are both intrusive religions in Nigeria. They are, in many ways, also un-Nigerian in their life-style[9]. They are certainly old enough in the country to qualify as traditional religions of Nigeria but they have all along preferred to leave their hearts in Europe and Arab lands. Nigerian Islam cherishes the Arabic language and islamic culture and civilization brewed and nursed in the fertile crescent a thousand years ago more than Nigerian languages, tradition or history. Even today, Nigerian muslims take their cues from Saudi Arabia, North Africa and Pakistan. Islam inflicts Arabic on Nigerian muslims as if God understands only the language of the Arabs. Nigerian christianity, in its turn, has been in a largely unfree love-encounter with Europe. In fact, it relates to Europe more as a handmaid than a concubine. Christianity, despite its numerical strength and the increasing Africanization of its local leaders in Africa, has been reluctant to identify with Africa.

Islam has been in Nigeria for almost a thousand years. Some

scholars even claim it arrived in the Chad basin as early as the 8th century AD[10]. There is incontrovertible evidence that there were muslims in Kanem-Borno by the 10th century. Four hundred years later, Islam invaded Hausaland. By the 19th century, thanks to the Jihad championed by its ulama, it had captured a large part of Nigeria, north of the rivers Niger and Benue[11]. By the 1830's, northern Yorubaland and the Middle and upper Benue region had also been won for Islam[12]. The British colonial conquest and rule threw the entire country open to the votaries and missionaries of Islam.

As for Christianity, Roman Catholicism made several bids for the Edo and the Itshekiri between the 15th and 17th century of the christian era[13]. For reasons many and weighty, it was unable to draw and keep Benin and Warri Kingdoms into its fold[14]. By the middle of the 19th century, Western Christianity, divided and proud of its culture, staged a come-back to Nigeria. Its missions vied and scrambled for spheres of influence. In parts of Southern Nigeria (Lagos, Yorubaland, Calabar, etc), they became the pathfinders of British imperialism. After the 1880's, however, the christian cross generally followed the British flag[15]. The marriage of the cross and the flag was largely one of convenience and expediency. Christian Britain often played hide and seek with Christianity. Her colonial administrations and the christian missions played calculated games of mutual exploitation and deceit. When and where their interests rhymed, they hugged and embraced each other. Where their interests differed or collided, the administrators ditched the missionaries. South of the Niger and the Benue, the British administrator and the christian missions fairly collaborated. In the extreme north of the country, the administration preferred to fraternize with the muslim leadership and occasionally posed as watch-dog of Islam[16].

During the first half of the present century, numerous christian sects, mostly of American and British derivation, "invaded" the country. A number of them were extremely uncompromising and fundamentalist. Since the 1920's too, several Nigeria-made churches joined the christian ranks. The most prominent among them are the Cherubim and Seraphim, the Church of the Lord (Aladura) and the Celestial Church of Christ. The

African Churches had begun to break away from the European mission Churches as early as the 1880's[17]. The 1960's and 70's witnessed an explosion of faith-healing prophetic churches in Nigeria[18]. Since the 1960's too, a number of philosophic and theosophic religions (Ekankar, Grail Message, Hare Krishna Movement etc) have infiltrated the country. Nigerians are incurably religious. There is no church that will not hold attraction for them.

The Nigerian religious scene has, as a result, become over-crowded and tumultuous. The situation is causing the Nation much apprehension. Christianity and Islam are probably the two most belligerent religions today. Each claims to be the only "true" religion and, curiously enough, both of them are very ridden with factions and schisms.

Islam is seemingly at the cross-roads in Nigeria. There is much bickering within its rank and file. The vast majority of muslims in the country are Sunnis[19]. They are shariah-minded and advocate a return to common islamic life based on the Quran and the hadith. There are fundamentalists among them who are of Saudi Arabian Wahhabi persuasion. Shaikh Abubakar Gumi, a recipient of the King Faisal Award and one time grand qadi of northern Nigeria, is a highly respected Sunni Scholar. The Kungiyar Izalatul Bidi'a (the group's popular movement) believes the only answer to the muslim problem today is a return to the Shariah legal system. The Nigerian sufis are often opposed to the fundamentalists. The Kingiyar Fityanul Islam (a Tijaniyya Youth Movement) Champions the Sufi opposition. The Sunnis reject the Ahmadiyya and treat the Ahmadis as non-muslims. The Ahmadiyya itself has split into three factions in Nigeria - the Ansarud-Deen Society of Nigeria (1923), the Jama'at al-Islamiyya of Nigeria (1924) and the Ahmadiyya movement in Islam (1916)[20].

There are also rivalry and opposition among the sufis themselves. The two main sufi orders in the country are Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya. There are two versions of the Qadiriyya with their main centres in Kano and Sokoto/Kaduna. There are also two brands of the Tijaniyya - the traditional and the reformed. The traditional Tijaniyya prevails in Zaria and Katsina while the reformed Tijaniyya of Ibrahim Nias of Senegal is found in Kano, Gusau, Yauri and Hausa diaspora throughout Nigeria[21]. Kano Emirate is the

bedrock of Tijaniyya tariqa in Nigeria. The Mahdist faction of Islam in Nigeria was represented by Muhammadu Marwa (alia Maitatsine) and his followers. They regarded and treated other muslims as Kafirs (unbelievers).

Diagnosis of Nigeria's Religious Malaise

A diagnosis of Nigeria's religious malaise is immensely rewarding. It is important to find out why religion, which ought to be the midwife and handmaid of peace and harmony among men, often becomes the harbinger of social distress and national disequilibrium? The reasons are indeed, many and varied. Some are theological and historical; others are psychological and cultural. In the present discussion, emphasis will be placed on the theological and historical factors. The focus of attention will also be on Christianity and Islam.

It has earlier been suggested that religion is natural to man and is, as a consequence (at least at the personal level), as old as mankind. Man has ever marvelled in awe at the immense majesty and mystery of the universe. His feeling of utter dependence, impotence and nothingness before the yawning mystery has been described by Rudolf Otto as "mind-boggling and tremendous" (mysterium tremendum ac fascinans)[22]. At this personal and primordial level of religion, no one ever quarrels with his neighbour.

It was much later in human history, that groups of people began to socialize their religion. The exact date of this "socialized religion" remains unknown. Similarly, the historical origins of Nigeria's traditional religion defy dating. Nigerian history regarding the beginnings of Nigeria's ethnic groups is largely conjectural and mythical[23]. That this is so is no cause for wonder. The same is true of most peoples of the world.

Historians regard the period 800-200 BC as the axial age on account of the enormous cultural thrusts that were made at the time. The period saw the emergency of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras in Greece; Confucius and Lao-tze in China; Upanishads and Buddha in India; Zarathushtra in Iran and Jewish prophets in Palestine. Many of the so-called "world religions" arose during the period particularly Judaism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. Christianity sprang from Judaism and Islam inherited Zoroastrianism,

Christianity and Judaism[24].

The chief characteristic of these great religions is that they are prophetic and confessional. Each is the child of a prophet. Each regards itself as the only true religion and all the others as false - their founders being false, cheats and liars. No religion which claims divine origin is ready to concede the same claim to another religion. Could God not inspire several religions? Islam, at least, admits that much. Yet, the greatest offenders among these self-assertive religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Christianity affirms that "Christ is the way, the truth and the life" and that none can go to God except through Him. To Christ's name every knee must bow and every tongue confess. It claims that there is no other way by which man can be saved; that "outside the Christian Church there can be no salvation". However, it now reluctantly admits that salvation is possible outside the Church.

Islam maintains that salvation is through her but she concedes the possibility of salvation to Jews, Sabeans and Christians. However, Muslims are "the best community ever raised up for mankind" (Quran 3:110). Muslims treat Christians as "infidels" (unbelievers). Christians also regard muslims as infidels and heretics.

These affirmations of uniqueness and exclusiveness constitute the bedrock of religious intolerance and bigotry among Christians and muslims. They are at the root of Nigeria's religious malaise. Islam and Christianity seem to ignore the fact that religion, by its nature and definition, is an inner personal experience and not a set of doctrines or juridical structures and institutions. The irony of the unhealthy muslim-Christian relations is that the two religions have so much in common. Their religious world-views and truths are not as divergent and conflicting as their votaries believe. A close look at the christian and islamic dogmatics is most revealing. The seven Islamic articles of faith (Allah, Angels, Sacred Books, Prophets and Messengers, Day of Judgement, divine retribution for good and evil in paradise and hell and final resurrection) are all basically christian[25].

A closer scrutiny of the historical evolution of these two religions reveals historical sets of religious barriers, notably in the areas of dogma,

canon law, Shariah and institutions. All these were carefully built up through the centuries. The dogmas and legal constructions exacerbate intra and inter religious relations. They have bred schisms, denominations and sects within Christianity and Islam. Christian denominations and sects now run into many tens of thousands. Their actual number is anyone's guess[26]. Most of the 99,000 autonomous communities in Nigeria, especially south of the Niger and the Benue, sport several christian denominations and sects each. This riot of numbers is largely the by-product of religious dogmatism and legalism. Christianity and Islam have, indeed, become houses divided against themselves.

The religion and history of Islam reveal many weaknesses of the religion. The Schisms, sects and party spirit of the tariqas stem from inadequate appreciation of the limitedness of human understanding and knowledge as regards divine realities. The reconstruction of the Sunna/hadith and the emergence of the Shariah and its Schools of law portray the same insensitivity to the finiteness and contingency of human knowledge and expressions in respect of the divine[27]. The inhumanities, wasted energies and undue rivalries that reign among muslims; the altercations between the Sunnis and Shiites, the Shariah-minded ulama and the Sufis are unfortunate episodes in Islam.

If Christianity and Islam are so divided within themselves, would it not be foolery to expect perfect amity and concord between them? Certainly nemo dat quod non habet - no one can give to another what he himself does not have! Seeing that the two religious giants in the country have hitherto been driving the Nation hypertensive, what place and role should the Nation concede them in the Third Republic? It is impossible for a leopard to change its spots. It is equally unlikely that Christianity and Islam will mend their ways, unless they are constrained within certain limits, in theirs and the Nation's interests. The principles and ideals of Islam and Christianity collide too often. It is reasonable to believe that conflicts and competitive tension will ever characterize their relations. Religious protests, riots and intolerance threaten Nigeria's unity and stability.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Section 10 of the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of

Nigeria prohibits the Nation to adopt any religion as state religion. The State professes God but is affiliated to no religion (Preamble to the Constitution). It is this freedom from religion that makes Nigeria a secular state but this secularism does not make the State irreligious. Furthermore, section 35 entrenches religious freedom as part of the fundamental rights of Nigerian citizens.

In a pluralistic society like Nigeria, where "tribes", tongues and religions differ, religion is best left as a private and group concern. Excepting Islam whose founder (Muhammad) had to take to arms and politics, under heavy pressures from Mecca and the Jews, public business was originally no concern of any religion. Christ pleaded that that Caesar should be left alone to do his business. It was Emperor Constantine (+337 AD) that messed christianity up, three hundred years after it had lived and thrived without state patronage. Having tasted the sweet milk of state power and largesse, Christianity has, in the last fifteen hundred years, hankered after state support. Spacious arguments have been advanced to uphold the Vatican as a full-fledged State, despite the examples of the life and practice of Christ or Peter. The historical concessions of King Pepin (+768 AD) and Emperor Charlemagne (768-814) have, since the 8th century, been regarded as theological religious necessities for Christianity[28]. Christianity has consequently, become secularised and materialistic. It is right for the Christian Church to be in the world but it is wrong for the world to be in the Church. As Lindsell aptly remarked, a boat on water is good but water in the boat may cause it to sink.[29]

In principle, Islam claims to be both a religion and a political community. It frowns on separation of religion and politics - the mosque and the State. Consequently, the secularity of the Nigerian State does not make much sense to Nigerian Muslims. Muslims would wish to make Islam a total way of life for all Nigerians. From the way they have been pressing their views in recent years, non-Muslims fear that the wish is the muslims' ultimate goal. Islamic doctrine and history confirm the fear of non-Muslims. Many muslim jurists of Gumi's persuasion still view Nigeria as partly Dar al-Harb and partly Dar al-Islam.[30] The Holy Quran (2:190-93, 4:76, 8:39, 9:5, 9:29 and 9:123) counsels that, under pressure from

non-muslims, a perpetual war should be waged on Dar al-Harb until it becomes Dar al-Islam. In the past, when muslims had their way, a turbulent non-muslim had three options from Islam - to convert to Islam, to pay poll tax (jizyah) and be protected (dhimmi), to refuse payment and die by the sword[31].

Some Nigerian muslims do not seem to be interested in religious dialogue[32]. The official paper submitted by the Nigeria Muslim Council at the National Conference on Religious Tolerance and Peaceful Co-existence, (Lagos October, 1988) further confirms the claim[33]. The uneasy relations between muslims and christians in Nigeria have led to frequent discussions, acrimonies, rancour and bloody skirmishes. The rhetoric and polemics over the Shariah, in 1978 and 1988, were venomous. The 1978 Shariah discord was in fact, the turning point in muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria. After that, the religious Crises and controversies became endemic. They are being refueled by the furtive admission of Nigeria into the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in January 1986. Since then, religious riots and disturbances have occurred in Ilorin (March 1986) and Kafanchan (March 1987). Earlier, there had been muslim riots fomented by Muhammad Marwa (Maitatsine) and his men at Kano (Dec. 1980), Bulumkutu (1982), Jimeta (1984) and Ibadan (May 1985)[34].

The writer has, in an earlier conference paper, advanced a series of proposals for curbing the excesses of Islam and Christianity in the country[35]. A number of the suggestions and recommendations are repeated here.

The inability of the Federal and State governments of Nigeria to distance themselves from purely religious issues has immensely helped to exacerbate religious rivalry and politics in the country. It is regrettable that many muslims in the corridors of power have not been able to rise above the narrow interests of religion to view the larger goals and objectives of the Nation. It is equally unfortunate that the 567 members of the just concluded Constituent Assembly were so blinded by the Shariah question that they lost the opportunity to put the turbulent religious hound under strong national leash. Government (federal and state) should have been prohibited to give direct public support to any religion. Each religion,

within the provisions of the national constitution, should take full responsibility for itself. That was precisely what the founding fathers of the Federal Republic of the United States of America did in 1787.

The first settlers (Puritans, quakers, Roman Catholics, non-conformists etc) had left Europe and taken refuge in America to evade the religious inquisitions, tests, persecutions and wars that tore the States and citizens of Europe apart[36]. During their first 180 years in America, (1607-1787), they tinkered with several unsuccessful political experiments in their bid to prevent religion from poisoning their political stream. Eventually, they resolved to rule religion out of public combat, by forbidding their governments to have anything to do officially with religion. Nigerians seem to admire the political culture of the United States of America. The troubles already brought on the Nigerian nation by religion are many, weighty and sufficient to legislate religion out of state and public platform. It was Europe's sad experiences with religion that forced the French revolutionaries (1789) to draw a wedge between Church and state, religion and politics as the best prescription for social harmony in a pluralistic society.

Justice and fairplay to all citizens and religions in the land demand that governments should not affiliate themselves or accord preferential treatment to any religion. Nigeria's Federal Constitution, in fact, demands that. Many concerned citizens have often in the past urged the Federal and State Governments to stand strictly by the Constitution. There is urgent need to put an end to the state sponsorship of religion in the midst of worsening Christian-Muslim relations. Given the diversity of religions, Churches, sects and factions in the country, the secularity of the State is the surest guarantee for peace and harmony in the body politic. Government should be neutral in matters of religion. Our governments have not learned to do so. They recognise and single out only Islam and Christianity for special treatment. They organise, through state-sponsored boards, and supplement the costs of annual pilgrimages for both religions. Government officials and public funds are deployed to the service of the two religions whose festivals are also observed as national feasts and holidays. It is, therefore, no surprise that Islam and Christianity behave like spoilt children

to the utter consternation of the Nation. Those who steer our ship of state need to cultivate restraint and statesmanship. Discriminations breed grievances and distrust which, in their turn, generate disharmony and anarchy.

No government should sponsor any religion, church or mosque, from public funds. Christianity and Islam have hitherto been over-sponsored and patronised by the State. Britain colonised and put together the geographical expression that is Nigeria. Britain sought to exploit, not to build up, Nigeria as a Nation. She used, cajoled and aided Christianity to maintain the peace and facilitate the milking of the country. Her partnership in colonial education, the moral support and material aids were not made to Christianity out of love, but out of convenience. Though the British monarchy was the head of the Anglican Church, it did not show any affection to the agents of Anglicanism in Nigeria. The Nigerian national governments that have, since 1960, inherited the spirit and style of the British colonial administration, should do a deeper soul-searching. As long as they continue the way they have hitherto been doing, the much trumpeted nation-building will ever elude them.

It should be noted too that Britain did not befriend the Muslim leaders of the North out of love, but out of expediency. The Lugardian promises to them were meretricious. The British colonial administration did not hesitate to maim and kill the muslims or to ditch any particular Emir or tamper with the Shariah. When the administration barred the christian missionaries from the Emirates, it was not to shield Islam but to safeguard British interests. The muslim leaders allowed the British to do what they did with both the country and Islam. They acquiesced in the British enthronement of the new political order in which the Islamic political ethos was radically undermined.

In the new political order, the European concept of nation-state (which was also successfully implanted in the entire Arab and Muslim world by the forces of European imperialism) reigned supreme. That concept hit the islamic political ideology of the Umma and jamaa at its very roots. Islam had been largely an international religion. The test of membership was simply the profession of the islamic faith. Every muslim

was a brother to each other without any distinction of race or colour. All that has now changed.

In the Islamic political ideology, politics and religion were not distinguished. The community of Islam was both "Church" and state in one. Its titular head was the Caliph, Sultan or Emir. Islam did not differentiate between the spiritual and temporal, the lay and ecclesiastical, the Church and State. These western categories had no equivalents or meaning in Islam. The Shariah was the law of the Islamic community. Understandably, Muslims today find it difficult to reconcile themselves to the historical loss of the ideal islamic order. That thought, in fact, fuels the anger, radicalism and the new nationalism of the Arab and muslim world against the Europeans and their world imperialism. Muslims refuse to accept that the new order brought about by the European colonial rule is permanent. Where the muslims have an islamic state as in Egypt, Libya or Pakistan, it is easy for them to re-engineer their State along fully islamic lines. In non-muslim States like Nigeria, their problems are really weighty and many. A good muslim has absolute faith in the Quran which is Islam's ultimate criterion. All things are judged according to its teaching. Nevertheless, improved human knowledge has been of immense help in interpreting the Holy Scriptures - the Jewish Torah, the Christian Bible and the Muslim Quran.

In such situations, history or linguistics comes to the aid of faith to enable muslims come to terms with the new political order. Muslims would need to take a hard and close look at the historical roots of their religion in Arabia. In its first 12 years (610-622 AD) when the holy prophet proclaimed Islam in Mecca, he and his followers did not enjoy any political power. It was in Medina during the next 10 years (622-632 AD), that the prophet formally constituted the Umma. Several historical factors went into the making of the Umma. The insecurity of the muslims and the physical threats from Mecca and the Jewish clans of Medina to the very survival of Islam influenced the texture of the Umma that emerged. The muslims had to take their fate in their own hands. Furthermore, in the Arabian communities of the time, religion was expressed and organised politically. As B. Lewis noted, religion alone could provide the cement for a State

among Arabs to whom the whole concept of political authority was foreign[37].

In the Nigerian Nation-state that has been fed and nurtured on a totally new ethos and political culture for the past 80 years, neither theocracy nor the Shariah (in its fullness) can have a place. The present effort of some of the Nigerian Muslims to re-instate the Shariah or to get the Sunday rest abrogated is apparently labour lost. They would be sewing an old piece on to a new cloth. The centre no longer holds. Realism would be the best hatch to hold on to. The new political order is truly neither christian nor islamic. It was fashioned in christian Europe but it was a result of a revolution against christianity. The secularity of the State was a vote of no confidence passed on the concept of christendom. Contrary to what Nigerian Muslims believe, Nigeria's national laws, courts of law, the civil service, the Armed Forces etc., are as distant from Christianity as they are to Islam.

Since no muslim can now wish away the secular and pluralistic federal Republic of Nigeria, the Muslim bid, since 1960, to revive and re-enthrone the Shariah to its pre-1903 status in northern Nigeria has little hope of success. Another Constituent Assembly may prove even less rewarding for Islam than those of 1978 and 1988. As long as the Federal Republic of Nigeria exists with its diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures, the fortunes of the Shariah may not advance beyond personal law. Any perceptive muslim can easily see that. Nigerian muslims should reconcile themselves to the present political order of the country.

Both Christianity and Islam should seek ways and means of building bridges of understanding and co-operation between them. Nigerian christians and muslims have no other country they can call their own. It is in their interest, irrespective of their religious histories and loyalties, to build a peaceful and happy Home for themselves. Experiences should now convince them that religion is better separated from politics. Given the riot of religions that clot Nigeria's social scene, it is too late in the day to advocate a theocracy, christian or islamic. Christian Europe had tried it (9th-15th centuries AD). It failed. Islamic theocracy is possible only in an islamic State. It cannot work in Nigeria because of its pluralism. Lebanon,

Sudan and India are clear reminders of what indiscretion and religious fanaticism can bring. In 1959, 1963, 1979 and 1989, Nigerians freely opted for a secular state. Muslims and christians should seek to understand each other's religion better. Ignorance often breeds misunderstanding, prejudice and over-rigid attitudes and stances. The current polemics and bricks-throwing between muslims and christians largely stem from ignorance. Christians would sympathize more with the muslims' historic position, if they understood better the islamic injunctions and demands on muslims. Muslims also need to educate themselves better on Christian beliefs, traditions and history. Muslim scholars (Ulama, Mallams) should take a hard look at the histories and developments of the Quran, the hadith and the Shariah. Every true religion must continuously look at itself. Time and the human condition have their way of corrupting the practice of religion. There is need to update islamic education in the country by expanding its horizon.

Since the Shariah appears to be the main bone of contention in the muslim-christian relations in Nigeria, it is proper to dwell a bit on it. The British restricted the application of the criminal sanctions of the Shariah in 1902-1903. In its place, the English common law was introduced. Till the end of the colonial rule, the Shariah was limited to personal law - a tiny portion of the whole corpus of the Shariah law.

In 1956, a muslim court of appeal was established in Kaduna. In 1959, Sir Ahmadu Bello (the Premier of Northern Nigeria), set up a commission to review the penal laws and the courts of the Northern Region of Nigeria. In 1960, the Shariah Court of Appeal and upper area courts were established. When new States were created in 1967, each northern State had its own Shariah Court of Appeal. This is largely the situation today in the Northern States of Nigeria. No Shariah courts of Appeal exist in other parts of the country. The muslims are demanding that such courts be created in every state in the country. They also want Federal Shariah Courts of Appeal, that would take appeals from the State Shariah Courts[38].

If the writer understands the issues in question, it appears to him that there has been much ado about nothing. In the first place, Nigerian muslims are not requesting that the entire corpus of the Shariah law be reintroduced in

Nigeria. They are satisfied that the criminal section of the Shariah which Lord Lugard abrogated (1902-1903) should remain abrogated. Secondly, up to 1956/1960, Nigerian muslims lived and practised Islam without any Shariah appeal court. As part of the indirect Rule System prevailing in Northern Nigeria, the Emirs fully dispensed the Shariah (personal law) within their respective emirates. This was all the more possible because the British administration barred the Christian missions from operating in the emirates. That ban was lifted by Governor Cameron in the 1930's. Today, the Emirs remain but the emirates no longer exist (since the introduction of the Local Government Area system throughout the country in 1976). Christians and other non-muslims freely mingle together in every State and local government area in the States of the northern sector of the country.

Whereas the Shariah courts (of first instance) and state appeal courts exist in the Northern States to cater for the personal law of muslims, they should be allowed to stay. Muslims are fully entitled to them, just as the christians take care of their personal laws (if they so desire) through their canonical and church legal systems. Seeing that christians sometimes voluntarily submit to state-laws on such personal issues as marriage, and inheritance (they are not bound to - there are customary laws and church laws to take care of them), Nigerian christians should, for the sake of peace, allow the status quo, as stipulated in the 1979 constitution to remain. Ideally, the Nigerian State should withdraw completely from the administration of the Shariah personal law. The muslims should be allowed to take full responsibility for that. In all cases where public peace and order are threatened, the state laws should prevail, irrespective of any religion involved (Christianity or Islam). In all the States, where the Shariah personal law applies without the intervention or support of the State, the situation should remain unchanged. Since no state-sponsored Shariah courts or appeal courts exist outside the Northern States, the state should not get itself involved there. Muslims should be allowed to continue to organise and apply the Shariah personal law on their own. Any northern State, especially those of the Middle Belt whose majority of citizens are not muslims, should feel free to withdraw from any involvement with the organisation and application of the Shariah personal law. The criminal

section of the Shariah law remains abrogated throughout the Nation.

Muslim leaders (scholars and politicians) should stop exploiting Islam for non-religious interests. Islamic teachings and traditions are flung on unsuspecting muslims and ill-informed non-muslim citizens. The dispute regarding the Shariah is unwanted. The Nigeria Muslim Council's submission on 20th October 1988 at the Nareto Conference (Arts Theatre, Lagos) reads: "Let it be said categorically that the Shariah (literally 'way') is Islam and Islam is the Shariah"[39]. If the above claim is right, the muslims in Nigeria have been living and practising counterfeit Islam since 1902 when a greater part of the Shariah was abrogated by the British. It would be equally amazing that the official organ and mouth-piece of Islam in Nigeria has not asked for the total re-instatement of the Shariah. It is satisfied to allow the greater part of the Shariah to remain abrogated while wasting its energies on the Federal Shariah court of appeal for personal law only. The Nigerian Muslim Council is, obviously, not fighting in defence of Allah or the Shariah but for other mundane interests. Such deceptive statements abound among christians too.

The truth is that the Shariah, as a legal system, is a man-made product. It was slowly built up by muslim scholars and jurists (8-9th C. AD) by drawing from several sources, the most important of which were: the Quran, the Sunna/hadith, Ijma (consensus of the jamaa especially as represented by the ulama) and qiyas (application of old decisions to new problems by way of analogy)[40]. Consequently, the Shariah did not drop down from heaven, nor was it (as a system) revealed by Allah. It is misleading, without due qualification, to claim that the Shariah is the law of God and, therefore, unchangeable. The Shariah has been changing and will continue to change as a man-made legal system.

Conclusion

The paper has sought to show that religion is a tool offered to man to make his earthly sojourn meaningful and satisfying. Through history, society (groups) turned and twisted religion to serve other personal and societal interests. The paper argued that the trouble is not with religion as such but with group (organised) religions. It surveyed the numerous religions in the country and isolated Islam and Christianity for a more

detailed treatment of their basic teachings, practices and histories. It exposed Christianity and Islam as being the two most conceited and intolerant religions. It submitted that, given the secularity and plurality of the Nigerian State, the two religions should not be allowed to take the Nation for a ride. Adequate provisions should and have been made for christians and muslims to live and practise their faiths. The exigencies of social peace and harmony, given the Nigerian experience, demand that the State should be as little involved as possible in the religious concerns of all the religions in Nigeria. It is in the best interest of the religions to strive to live in peace and harmony.

Notes

1. Chapter Two of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979) spells out the fundamental objectives and directive principles of the country's state policy.
2. Newswatch, October 24, 1988, p. 8. "Voltaire may well have opined that religion is fruit of superstition and ignorance. Why not? Who really understands himself or the universe?"
3. J.L. Finkle & R. Gable (eds), Political Development and Social Change (1971), P.C. Lloyd, Africa in Social Change (1967), I. Oxaal, T. Bennett & D. Booth (eds), Beyond the Sociology of Development (1975); K. Post & M. Vickers, Structure and Conflict in Nigeria 1960-66 (1973).
4. Religion is not necessarily based on a divinity or "God" but rather on an "Ultimate Reality" which various peoples have variously named and described. Hinduism and Taoism, for example, are not founded on a "God".
5. The British dream is its sense of justice and fairplay. It is the collective philosophy of the British society which ensures that the individual's rights, independence and liberties should transcend all class barriers. The "American dream is one of a better, richer and happier life for every American".
6. John A.T. Robinson, Honest to God (London, 1978). There is also the debate on "God is dead" theory on which an abundant literature exists. Feurebachian anthropology dismisses God as an exaggerated

form of man! Aristotle and Aquinas have been accused of creating a static conception of God (unmoved mover, uncaused cause, pure Act etc). Atheism and agnosticism are generally responses to the gods and sufferings in a world arguably under the dominion of an omniscient and just God. Professor D.I. Nwoga believes that the Igbo had no conception of Supreme God. See his book, The Supreme God as Stranger in Igbo Religious Thought (Ekwereazu, 1984).

7. I.R.A. Ozigboh, "Organised Religion in Nigeria: the Indigenous, Islamic and Christian Syndrome", Seminar Paper, Assembly of World's Religions, MC Afee, N.J., USA, Nov. 15-21, 1985.
8. J. Maquet, Africanity: The Cultural Unity of Black Africa (London, OUP, 1972); E.B. Idowu, African Traditional Religion, A definition (London, SCM 1973); J.S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion (London, 1975).
9. Some christian theologians have unconvincingly claimed that Christianity and Islam now qualify as traditional and authentic African Religions. See G. Parrinder, Religion in Africa (Penguin books, 1969); J.S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion (London, Heinemann, 1975); R. Hickey, "Authentic African Religion", AFER, Vol. 27, No. 4, Aug. 1985, 216-224; Calvin Kieber, Christianity as an African Religion, in N.S. Booth (ed), African Religions: A Symposium (N.Y., Nok Publishers, 1977).
10. Ikenga R.A. Ozigboh, An Introduction to the religion and History of Islam (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1988), p. 133. J.S. Trimingham, A History of Islam in West Africa (London, OUP, 1962), pp. 14-115.
11. The literature on the Jihad in Hausaland is too numerous to list here. A few samples will suffice: D.M. Last, The Sokoto Caliphate (London, 1967); H.A.S. Johnston, The Fulani Empire of Sokoto (London, OUP, 1967); R.A. Adeleye, Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria 1804-1906 (London, 1971).
12. T.G.O. Gbadamosi, The Growth of Islam Among the Yoruba 1841-1908 (London, 1978); Sa'ad Abubakar, The Emirate of

Fombina 1809-1903 (Ph.D., ABU, 1970); M.Z. Njeuma, "The Rise and Fall of Fulani Rule in Adamawa 1801-1901" (Ph.D. London Univ. 1969).

13. The claim that Christianity was introduced into Northern Nigeria before the 19th century is unconvincing. Refer, V.C. Chukwulozie, "Traces of Early Christianity in Northern Nigeria", Nigerian Dialogue, Vol.2, July 1977, pp. 57-58. R. Gray, "Christian traces a Franciscan Mission in the central Sudan, 1700-1711", Journal of African History, VIII, 1967, 383-393. R. Hickey, "The First Visit by a Catholic Priest to Borno in 1850", Savanna, Vol.l, 1976, 45-54.
14. AFC Ryder, "The Benin Mission" JHSN, Vol. II, No.2, 1961, 231-259; "Missionary Activities in the Kingdom of Warri to the Early 19th C", JHSN, Vol.II, No. 1, 1960, 1-20.
15. M.J.Bane, Catholic Pioneers in West Africa (Dublin, 1956). Ijebuland after the Magbon war of 1892 and Igboland after the Aro Expedition of 1901-1902 are typical examples.
16. High Commissioner Lugard had promised that he would not interfere with the practice of Islam, except where British canons of justice and decency dictated otherwise. The Shariah, for example, was restricted to personal law. See also, G.O. Olusanya, "Sabon Gari System in Northern Nigeria".
17. There is growing literature on these churches. J.B. Webster, The African Churches Among the Yoruba 1888-1922 (Oxford, 1964); J.A. Omoyajowo, Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church (N.Y., Nok Publishers, 1982); J.D.Y. Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba (Oxford, 1968); H.W. Turner, African Independent Church 2 Vols (Oxford 1967).
18. Refer, the proliferation of Christian churches (denominations) in Ijebuland (3 local government areas in Ogun State) where Ijebu-Ode sports 20 churches, Ijebu-Igbo 18 and Shagamu 22. E.A. Odumuyiwa, "Proliferation of Churches in Ijebuland: A historical and social Analysis", (Paper Presented at the 2nd Annual Seminar on Religious Tolerance and Peaceful Co-existence, Lagos, 18-22nd Oct.

1988). The Nigeria-made Churches now outnumber the mission churches and sects.

19. The two main islamic sects are Sunnism and Shiism. Others are the Kharijites, Kadarites, Ibadites, Mutazilites, Murjites, Ahmadiyya. Traditional Islam has two marked characteristics, viz: the Shariah, concern for proper outward and social behaviour and the sufi emphasis on inward and mystical experience.
20. Humphrey J. Fisher, Ahmadiyya: A Study in contemporary Islam on the West African Coast (London, OUP 1963). See also, Seminar Paper submitted by "Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, Nigeria at NARETO Conference, Lagos, Oct 18-22, 1988. The Ahmadiyya was a messianic movement that eventually settled down as a sufi order. A.I. Doi, Islam in Nigeria (Zaria, 1984), p. 116.
21. J. Hinds, "Sufism in Northern Nigeria", Nigerian Dialogue, Vol.4, No.4, Sept. 1982, pp. 17-20.
22. Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy (London, OUP. 1958).
23. Refer Professor Afigbo's "Ropes of Sand" (1985) for the Igbo. The Eri, Oduduwa and Bayajida mythologies, among others, are household knowledge.
24. Marshall E.S. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam Vol.l, (Chicago, 1974), 111-128.
25. A. Rahman I. Doi, The Cardinal Principles of Islam (Zaria, 1981), pp. 17-26.
26. African Independent, Prophet and faith-healing churches have been put at about 6000 a decade or so ago. See, G.C. Oosthuizen, Post-Christianity in Africa (London, 1968), F.B. Welbourn, East African Rebels (London, SCM, 1956).
27. I.R.A. Ozigboh, Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha connection 1967-1984 (Onitsha, African-Fep. Publishers, 1985) pp. 81-88.
28. When the Lombards invaded Rome, the Pope appealed to Pepin (the King of the Franks) for help. The Franks beat back the Lombards and handed over the conquered lands of central Italy to the Pope, thereby creating the Papal States and, for the first time ever, making the Pope de Jure head of state. On Christmas Day 800AD, the Pope

crowned charlemagne emperor of the Latin West and protector and defender of the catholic latin church of which the Pope was the head.
29. H. Lindsell, The World, The Flesh and the Devil (Minneapolis, Minnesota, World Wide Publications, 1973).
30. M.O. Opoloye, "The Quranic Guidelines on Inter-Religious Relations", Seminar Paper, National Conference on Religious Tolerance and Peaceful Co-Existence (Nareto), Lagos, October, 1988.
31. M. Khadduri, War and Peace in the Law of Islam (John Hopkins Press, 1952), pp. 16-17.
32. V.C. Chukwulozie, Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Nigeria (Ibadan, Day Star Press, 1986).
33. The paper was read by Alhaji R.A. Oyekan, the Nigeria Muslim Council General Secretary. The Secretary and his team walked out of the Conference hall as soon as their paper was delivered.
34. The Reconcilia Magazine, Enugu, December 1987, No. 6. Newswatch, February 2, 1986 pp. 20-21.
35. I.R.A. Ozigboh, "Religious Co-Existence in Nigeria: An inquiry and Suggestions", Presented at National Conference on Religious Tolerance and Peaceful Co-Existence, Lagos, October, 1988.
36. Davis R.B., Ross et al (eds.), The Structure of American History, Vol.l: "Colonial America 1607-1763, Vol. II:" Forging the Nation 1763-1828, (N.Y., Thom. Y. Crowell, 1970).
37. B. Lewis, The Arabs in History (London, 1968), p. 44.
38. A.R.I. Doi, Islam in Nigeria (Zaria, 1984), p. 211.
39. See Section 1.3, sub-section 3.2 on "the Shariah". Its official 15-page paper read by its General Secretary, Alhaji R.A. Oyekan.
40. A.R.I. Doi, The Cardinal Principles of Islam (Zaria, 1981) pp. 3-7.