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Religiosity and Development: A Look at Political Religiosity in Fourth Republic Nigeria and its Effect on the Nation's Development

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Abstract:

As Nigeria successfully concluded another general election in 2015, religion once again played a divisive role in the nation political sphere as a Muslim presidential candidate from the north contested against a Christian presidential candidate from the south, thus separating the people along religious and ethnic lines. Based on this, this article examines the role of political religiosity in fourth republic Nigeria and how this has affected the nation in terms of development. Using the analytical method, this paper scans the pages of Nigerian newspapers in order to bring too light and explain how this political religiosity is another deception resorted to by the political class in order to fleece the nation and its people of its resources for their personal use and gains. Its findings revealed that the public display of religiosity by the political class in the fourth republic has led to a situation in which the people out of religious consideration have allowed politicians to continue the legacy of corruption, fraud, embezzlement and theft of the wealth of the nation passed down from the military era.

Keywords: Religiosity, religion, political, politician, development, Islam, Shari'ah, Christian, Christianity, north, south

1. Introduction

Nigeria is constitutionally a religious nation which recognises the importance of religion in its society as a thriving and driving force among its populace. Since the independence of the nation in 1960, religion plays a very important role in the political shaping of events in the nation and this is apparent in the way the highest political offices in the nation are always shared along religious lines. At inception, in 1960, while the president of the nation was a Christian, the Prime Minister was a Muslim and all other posts were shared in a way in which adherents of these two religions were ably represented. Thus, this becomes a model of religiosity in the political sphere of the nation – and even when the military took over the governance of the nation for quite a long time this arrangement was strictly adhered to.

Likewise, since the inception of the fourth republic in Nigeria, that is the return of political power to civilians by the military in 1999, this power sharing along religious lines was still adhered to by the civilians. However, in this fourth republic, the role of religion in the political sphere has taken a new dimension and religious slogans and campaigns now have a big impact on the political process of the nation. This impact is so much that the religiosity of each and every politician became an issue of campaign. In the same vein, collaboration and interaction of politicians with religious organisations has become an issue of public interest with a very dire consequence as the nation is currently experiencing. The first bitter experience of the nation with this phenomenon was the issue of the implementation of the Shari'ah in the northern part of the nation; the second was the granting of unnecessary waver to a religious organisation with economic losses to the nation and recently, the third, is the resort of another religious organisation to violence over disagreement with the state – specifically the police and arm forces and by extension the political order of the nation.

In view of the above, this paper seeks to take a brief look at the history of political religiosity among the political players in the Nigerian nation, specifically in the fourth republic, and how this has impacted on the nation and the development of the nation. This study is necessary because all the points enumerated above came about as a result of the display of religiosity by the politicians and their need to identify with their religion, for political gains, in order to convince the masses of their seriousness in the religion that they profess and practice.

Thus, in carrying out this research, the paper first explains the key terms used in the research that is religiosity and development. Second, it makes an overall analysis of the public display of religiosity among politicians in Nigeria through newspaper reports and how it has impacted on the nation and its development. Finally, it concluded on the need for remedy to the issue in the nation.

2. Religiosity and Development: A Definition

According to the dictionaries, religiosity has been defined variously as “the quality of being religious, piety and devoutness” (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/religiosity>). Likewise, it is held to be “affected or excessive devotion to religion” (ibid.). Wikipedia, defining the same term, explains it in two senses, its broadest sense and in its narrower sense. In its broadest sense, it says religiosity is “a comprehensive sociological term which used to refer to the numerous aspects of religious activity, dedication, and belief (religious doctrine)” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religiosity>). Defining it in its narrowest sense, it says “religiosity deals more with how religious a person is, and less with how a person is religious (in practicing certain rituals, retelling certain stories, revering certain symbols, or accepting certain doctrines about deities and afterlife)” (ibid.).

In the academics, the term religiosity also has different meanings depending on the field of research or the academic discipline in which it is being used (Holdcroft, 2006: 89). While to the theologian, faith is the cardinal importance in religiosity, the psychologists may choose to focus on devotion, piousness or holiness as the important thing in religiosity (Holdcroft, 2006: 89). Still, religious educators may be concerned primarily with belief and orthodoxy whereas a sociologist may focus his attention on religious attendance, doctrinal knowledge, acceptance of belief and life experience of the believer (Holdcroft, 2006: 89). All this shows that the term religiosity is difficult to define in a particular way as it could encompass many things and meanings and this explains why we have used the term “political religiosity” to define the presence, use and interplay of religiosity in the political sphere of Nigeria which is our focus in this paper.

Moreover, scholars such as Glock and Stark (1965), Fukuyama (1960), Bergan and McConatha (2000), and Allport and Ross (1967) in their works have identified different dimensions of religiosity and how it could relate to different things in human activities. Allport and Ross (1967) for example talks about two dimensions of religiosity – intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. According to them, people who practice intrinsic religiosity live their religion by internalising totally the creed of their religion, finding their motive for life in their religion and harmonising their other needs in life with their religious beliefs. On the other hand, people who practice extrinsic religiosity use their religion for their selfish ends either by selectively shaping and interpreting their religious creeds to fit their own ends or to enhance their status, sociability and to gain an advantage for their personal ends in the society. To summarise intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, in the words of Allport and Ross, “the extrinsically motivated person uses his religion whereas the intrinsically motivated person lives his religion” (Allport & Ross, 1967: 434). Thus, these two dimensions of religiosity, as propounded by Allport and Ross, are important in our attempt to understand “political religiosity” in the Nigerian political sphere. It will help us to know if Nigerian politicians live or use their religions.

Development, like religiosity above, is a word with many dimensions and it can be used in a varieties of ways either as a prefix or suffice to a lot of terms and concepts. In its dictionary sense, development has been defined in various ways such as “the systematic use of scientific and technical knowledge to meet specific objectives or requirements” or “an extension of the theoretical or practical aspects of a concept, design, discovery or invention”. Still more, according to the dictionary, it could mean “the process of economic and social transformation that is based on complex cultural and environmental factors and their interactions.” Furthermore, it is could stand for “the process of adding improvement to a parcel of land, such as grading, subdivisions, drainage, access, roads, utilities” and others (<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/development.html>).

In the same vein, Wikipedia when defining development sees it as encompassing many aspects of human life and human society. In this respect, it talks about development in terms of “land use”, “science and technology”, “social science”, “business and professional” development, “international and regional” development, “cultural” development and others which at times could be subdivisions in what have been mentioned above (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development>). Thus, when we talk about development even in the linguistic sense of the word, we have to be specific as it can refer to a variety of things.

In the academic world, scholars involved in development studies have not agreed on a definite definition of what development is. While there are those who subscribe to structuralism and neoliberalism views, others hold the interventionism view, alternative/people centred view and post development view.

Structuralism is the idea that development is mostly the responsibility of the state. While it aims for a modern industrial society it nonetheless holds that history is the result of political and economic struggles. For this group of scholars, development comes into being by careful and longtime planning by the state through its historical process (Willis, 2005; Tangi, n.d.).

Neoliberalism: it is a capitalist perspective about development. It holds that no development plan or action is needed to be put in place except to have free markets where everyone trades. It believes that the resulting perpetual economic growth will ‘trickle down’ to everyone in the society and so everyone benefits from the economic growth. Neoliberals see history as the result of individual rational actions (Willis, 2005; Tangi, n.d.).

Interventionism: this perspective recognises that there are losers as well as winners of neoliberalists/capitalist progress. Thus, development actions are put in place in order to help the ‘losers’ to also develop in the society through government intervention in the development process. “More recently, a concern of the negative impacts of capitalist growth on the environment has been considered. In some cases, intervention is to remove barriers to modernisation, in others it is to influence the direction of change” (Willis, 2005; Tangi, n.d.).

Alternative/People Centred: This view is based on the idea that, ordinarily, all humans have the ability to reach/achieve their potential. Thus, development simply involves governments and other agencies empowering groups and individuals to make their own choices in order to achieve their potentials. In this sense, individuals and social movements are themselves the agents of change. And development, therefore, is the achievement of individual potentials in the society (Willis, 2005; Tangi, n.d.).

Post development: Those who hold this perspective argues that development is not a good thing as it is being thought. This is because, in their view, “development agencies and governments use ‘doing good’ as an excuse to maintain power and control” over the people and the society.

Thus, from the above, one can see that development has different meanings to different scholars and the thought on what actually is development differ from one scholar to another (Willis, 2005; Tangi, n.d.).

However, considering our focus in this paper, if we are to take the holistic approach to development which includes the spiritual and physical aspects of man, then Kadir H. Din (1996) propositions will be very important to mention here. According to Kadir H. Din (1996), development, if it is seen as “de – velope”, that is to unwrap something or to expose and open a thing, in contrast to “velope” which means to wrap up, will serve as a “process of unfolding and growth of the spiritual seed of humanity, wrapped within the heart of man, opening and exposing itself to the climate divine, for it to grow gradually fuller and better within the context of the greater universe” (Kadir H. Din, 1996: 22). In this sense, although development stresses on the metaphysical and the spiritual, Kadir, affirms that it does not negate physical development, “insofar as the physical and the material are necessary and advantageous to the development [of the] spiritual”, rather, “this view assumes and accepts material development as ‘the significant other’ in the process of achieving the spiritual end” (Kadir H. Din, 1996: 23). In other words, going by what Kadir said above, spiritual development is an important element in material development and vice versa. If this be the case, political religiosity, wherever it forms part and parcel of the political culture as is the case in fourth republic Nigeria, ought to aid and enhance development not debar it. This is because religiosity ought to be a projection of the spiritual outward and since the spiritual is not antagonistic to the physical in terms of development, both ought to aid each other in achieving a better society for mankind. Whether this is true in the case of Nigeria will be apparent in the sections below.

3. Political Religiosity in Fourth Republic Nigeria: Its Genesis and Effect on Development

Since the advent of the fourth republic in Nigeria, the issue of religion has taken a new dimension in the nation as politicians have made it a corner stone of their ascension to political offices. Immediately the northern politicians and military, who had been ruling the nation for quite a long time to the exclusion of other parts of the nation, agreed to cede power to southern politicians, the issue of religion reverberated in the polity as the southerners felt that the northerners who are mostly Muslims have used the slot of the Muslims and a Christian should be allowed to ascend to the highest office in the land. Based on this, two southern Christians were put forward as candidates for the post with one of them, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, declaring himself to be a ‘born again Christian’. This situation gave birth to the mobilization of the masses along religious lines with the churches making a prominent political campaign with the slogan ‘Jesus Christ has overthrow’ the government of the nation.

After the election, which was won by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo the born again Christian (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olusegun_Obasanjo), a lot of religious activities were organized to “thank Jesus” for taking over the nation and the president elect himself was busy paying solidarity visits to churches and meeting men of God for prayers and support for his presidency.

In the northern part of the nation, immediately they realized that the new administration will not dance to their tune and that it has taken steps which they feel is inimical to their interest, politicians started a campaign for the implementation of the Shari ‘ah in the north arguing that this is contained in the constitution of the nation (Obi Akwani). Although this is true, and there were already Shariah courts in many of the states. However, the way this new wave of ‘Shari’ah consciousness’ was directed portray it as a response to the southern Christian president’s ‘born again’ move and the slogan that Christians are now in control and the country is going to be better for it. In other words, the impression is that Muslims, and by extension Islam, has failed the nation and now a Christian, Christianity to be precise, is set to right the wrong(s).

The scenario above resulted in a situation in which many politicians start to see religion as a veritable tool in their quest for political power and a way of reaching out to the masses by appealing to their religious sentiments – since this has become very strong among the masses. Thus, political religiosity became the order of the day in Nigeria political arena as the nation witnesses a situation in which politicians start to display their religiosity in the public sphere.

In the south, politicians start to frequent the well known churches and the overseers of these churches became the anointers of politicians. It soon becomes a frequent phenomenon to open the daily newspaper and see pictures of politicians with these men of God and sometimes kneeling down in front of them for blessing. Even the Muslims among them became frequent visitors to the churches as special guest of honour for final monthly vigil and events (See *Retd. Gen. Buhari visits Adeboye & Pastor Adeboye and the Nigerian State*).

In the north, Shari’ah became a platform of acceptance among the masses. The louder the rhetoric, about the implementation of Shari’ah by a politician, the more the acceptance of the politician by the masses. Some northern politicians even go as far as entering into agreements with some of the Islamic groups on the implementation of the Shari’ah once they are elected into office with their support. This was the case of the Jama’atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda ‘awati Wal-Jihad popular known as Boko Haram which allegedly supported Governor Ali Modu Sheriff with the agreement that he would implement Shari’ah in the state if he won the election with their support (See *Boko Haram*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram).

However, coming to the concept of religiosity, one would have thought that being a born again, this will translate into a situation in which the nation will be govern in a god-like manner which will aid the development of the nation. But, the reverse is the case. In spite of the fact that the civilian administration since 1999 witnessed a phenomenal rise in income as a result of the increase in the price of petroleum products in the international market, the amount of public funds stolen and squandered in uncompleted project is

monumental! From the issue of electrification in which the nation invested a whopping 16 billion dollars without any result, to the issue of privation in which many of the nations' companies and properties went into private hands at a price that is said to be ridiculous and detrimental to the nation's wealth gives one an inkling and a contradiction of the public display of religiosity and non-religious governing of the nation (see *BPE probe*, Daniel Elombah; Kunle Akogun & Shola Oyeyipo).

This same attitude of corruption and mismanagement was replicated at the state levels where most of the governors also came in as a result of their public show of religiosity (see *Ex-Governors on Trial Curious Respite from Justice* & Emmanuel Ogala). In Zamfara state, which was a pioneer in the implementation of Shariah, it was recently revealed by Professor Wole Soyinka in an interview that the governor then, who campaigned on the platform of implementing the Shariah, "... when he was asked why he decided to turn Zamfara into a theocratic state in a secular dispensation. He said... that it was the only weapon he had to snatch power. He said the PDP machinery was so strong that he needed something which would appeal to raw emotions, to mobilise and get the governorship" (*Wole Soyinka: Next Phase of Boko Haram Terrorism*). In other words, he used this as an avenue to achieve his political ambition and not because he really loved the religion (ibid.). To underscore this, he was among the most corrupt governors in the nation and his case is still with the EFCC (see *Ex-Governors on Trial Curious Respite from Justice*).

The above was not restricted to Zamfara state alone. A host of other northern governors used the same Shariah issue to either retain their post or to further their political ambition (see *Controversies about Shariah*). But the ironical part of all this is the present fiasco that is going on in the northern part of the nation in form of religious violence.

The above is a summary of the religiosity brought into the political sphere of the nation during the fourth republic and it is not restricted to these few cases mentioned above only; it cuts across the whole spectrum of the political landscape and involved the two prominent religions in the nation (that is, Islam and Christianity).

The effect of this political religiosity on the nation can be seen in a recent report on the level of poverty in the nation despite the growth in the economic sector and the increase in the income of the nation (See *Nigeria's Poverty Level rises, hits 71.5% - Sokoto, Niger Top List of Poorest States*). According to this report, the northern part of the nation in which the Shariah slogan was at the fore front of the politician campaign recorded the highest level of poverty and this is reflected in the Boko Haram menace that section of the nation is facing (ibid.). Likewise, one of the former governors of Kano State, was reported to have spent a whopping N10 Billion naira, (between 2003 and 2011), in sending pilgrims to Makkah while the average northerner on the street could hardly afford a comfortable meal a day (see *Book Haram: America's Profound Misjudgment*).

The case is not different in the south. While the Niger Delta area of the south received unprecedented amount of allocations in the nation's history between 1999 to the present time, there is nothing to show that this has trickle down to the poor and downtrodden in that area of the nation. Rather, what is witnessed is equally an unprecedented amount of looting of the public treasury by governors from that part of the nation (see Isaac Osuoka).

The case of the Niger Delta is made worse based on the fact that the immediate past president, Goodluck E. Jonathan, is from that part of the nation and under his watch, a whopping amount of five trillion naira was reported stolen in the nation between May 2010 and October 2012 of his presidency "through fraud, embezzlement and theft..." (see Toyosi Ogunseye, Allwell Okpi and Leke Baiyewu). There was another revelation by the former Central Bank Governor of Nigeria, now the Emir of Kano, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, that under the immediate past president's watch, a staggering amount of \$20 billion US dollars has not been accounted for by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and despite his reminder and memo to the President on this, nothing was done about it! However, instead of acting on this, President Goodluck E. Jonathan suspended him, until his tenure runs out, when his letter to the President about the missing money was leaked to the public! Yet, Niger Delta continues to witness oil spills on a large scale with no visible solution in sight and no tangible provision of social amenities for the people! Finally, in addition, recently, the present administration of President Muhammad Buhari has uncovered massive lootings of the treasury during the last days of the previous administration of President Goodluck E. Jonathan which includes the embezzlement of a whopping amount of 2 billion dollars above meant for arms purchase to fight the Boko Haram insurgency in the northern part of the nation. This revelation explains why there was no infrastructural development and deterioration of basic amenities during the period of the last administration.

The South-East and South-West of the nation are no exception to the above. In fact, when the Peoples Democratic Parties governors in the South-East and South-West, except Lagos State, were in power, there was no visible development in these parts of the nation. The governors were busy consolidating their powers and spending public funds on irrelevancies while embezzlement, fraud and theft became the order of the day. This explains why many of them, after they were eased out of power, became guests of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) (See *Ex-Governors on Trial Curious Respite from Justice*). However, despite the change of party in some of the states of the South-East and South-West, the situation has not changed and instead of uplifting the standard of living of the people, corruption, embezzlement and political concerns continue to be the order of the day while development, provision of social amenities and employment for the millions of jobless educated youths of these regions takes a back seat in the agenda of many of the governors of the states of these regions (see Toyosi Ogunseye).

The lack of jobs for the human resources of these two regions in the south has resulted in a situation in which graduates have become truck drivers, okada riders, armed robbers, fraudsters and recently kidnappers (see Perpetua Onuegbu).

All of the above have affected both the human and physical development of the nation in ways that are immeasurable – even expanding to the Diasporas where Nigerians are now mainly identified with drug peddling and internet fraud (See M. Y. Owoyemi et al., 2015). While masses based their support for most of these politicians on their perceived religiosity, they hardly question the deeds of these politicians and each time someone is bold enough to query them, religious and tribal sentiments are appealed to and this

makes the issue of accountability and probity a problem in the nation. This, in turn, has result in impunity and lawlessness which has affected the progress and development of the nation.

Since the issue of political religiosity has come too fore in the fourth republic, one would have thought that this would bring a change in attitude and aid the progress and development of the nation, but, unfortunately, the reverse is the case. There has been no meaningful addition to the nation's infrastructure and social amenities while the ones already in existence are continuously becoming decadent by the day. This is despite the fact that billions are awarded every year for contracts and provision of social amenities. The political class has used the issue of religion to cause division among the people and to divide the nation along religious lines by adding prefixes to the sections of the country describing the north as 'Muslim North' and the south as 'Christian South' which is a fallacy and a deliberate attempt to appeal to religiosity in order to divert attention from the monumental looting of the nation's treasury that is currently ongoing (see Mark Amaza). This description has blurred the real issue that people ought to focus on, especially as it concerns the nation's development, and pitched the people against one another along religious lines. The result is the two-fold issue of poverty and religious violence that is currently bedevilling the nation.

The International Medias are also guilty of the above because their constant dichotomy of Nigeria along religious lines by writing Muslim-North and Christian-Southern has done more damage to the social cohesion of the nation than good. The reality of the Nigerian nation is that there is no uniform Muslim-North or Christian-South as is being peddled in the International Medias. There are as many Christians in the North as there are many Muslims in the South – especially South-West. This religious dichotomy of the nation in the media only serves certain interests which are inimical to the socio-political development of the nation. In fact, to be frank, this is one of the tricks used by politicians to further their political interests using the religious diversity of the nation and the historical antecedents of the caliphate in the North and the firm entrenchment of western education and institutions in the South to divide the nation into Muslim-Christian territories.

4. Conclusion

The discussion above shows that political religiosity is one of the problems that Nigeria is currently facing and this has manifested itself in the form of religious violence and poverty because the appeal to religious sentiments and the public show of religiosity by the political class has polarised the polity and made the people to give their unconditional support to politicians of their religious kind – irrespective of his ability and character to lead. This, in turn, has led to a situation in which there is no serious questioning of some of the actions of the political class especially as it concerns corruption and mismanagement of public fund which have deprived the people of their basic rights and social amenities.

In view of the above, as Allport and Ross posit, religiosity in the political sphere of Nigeria is extrinsic and most politicians in Nigeria use their religions for political gains and do not live it. That is, religion is merely a function among the political class hence this has not resulted in the kind of spiritual and physical development which works in tandem as Kadir posits. Religiosity among the political class in Nigeria is a bane to development and a means employed by the incompetent politicians of questionable character to ascend to the position of leadership where corruption, fraud and embezzlement are covered up in the name of religious affiliations and sentiments. Therefore, the earlier the people realise this mistake of choosing their leaders based on religious persuasion and affiliation, the better for the nation. Likewise, the men of God (leaders of religions) in both Islam and Christianity need to change their attitude towards these politicians who patronise them for political gains. The altar/pulpit is a symbol of truth and therefore, these men of God need to speak truth to these politicians and be courageous enough to let their flocks understand the fact that leadership goes beyond religion and religious affiliation. Most importantly, these men of God need to draw a fine line between their activities with these set of Nigerians and the Will of God and His Message that they are supposed to uphold and pass to the people. A situation where those who looted the national treasury and pauperised the populace become their member all of a sudden without these men of God admonishing them on their wrong doings and even having the temerity to request them to return their loots and repent from their sins is unacceptable by the standard of the religions that they profess to propagate. These men of God also need to look at their own deeds too and see if they really match their worldview. If they could have the courage to go to this length in their relationship with these politicians, that is, publicly disown them when they are found to be corrupt and have mismanaged the resources of the people, and present them for what they are, the nation will witness a great change and the masses who are followers of these men of God will certainly follow suit as they always look up to these men of God for direction. Because, as Kadir posits, spiritual development could incorporate physical development as the former elicits compassion which could result in doing what is right by the people and thus lead to a better society in terms of development.

With this, it is hoped that when these politicians face rejection in their most secured comfort zone, then the looting of the nation's treasury will be reduced, if not stopped, and the nation's wealth/fund will be used for the development of the much needed infrastructure in the nation and this will in turn leads to betterment in the standard of living of the masses.

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