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POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IN THE POLITICS OF NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The aim of this work is to discuss the positive influence of religion in the Nigerian politics and the implications for national development. It is a vivid fact the religion has impacted positively on politics in the Nigeria in many ways. In policy formulation, politicians seek advice from religious leaders in order to ensure good governance. The researchers made use of secondary sources of data collection in their methodology. The findings of this work show that religion has contributed positively to Nigerian politics and that the adherence to religious moral values and observance of the Nigeria constitution has enhanced peace and national development in the Nigerian society. The work recommends that political office holders in the Nigeria should adhere to the positive tenets of their respective faiths which tend to promote the welfare of Nigerians and the entire human race.

Keywords: Positive, Influence, Religion, Politics Nigeria.

Introduction:

Religion has been a dominant factor in Nigerian politics especially in this post-independence era. In whichever way one sees religion, the fact cannot be denied of its influence on politics in Nigeria. The obvious interplay between religion and politics has attracted the reactions of scholars and what seems to be the consensus of such reactions is the uncertain role of religion in the growth, development, and survival of the Nigeria (Kukah, 1993, 1995; Kasfel, 1994; Enwerem, 1995; Kukah&Falola, 1996: Falola, 1998; Loimeier, 2007; Nmah, 2007; Imo 2008;

Marshall, 2009; Adebanwi, 2010; Sodiq; Onapajo, 2012; Obiefuna, 2018). Accordingly, it is not a small question to ask in which way religion involves itself in Ogirisi; (2020) political realm for on this depends to some measure how much value Nigerians attach to their faith. This is to say that the impacts of religion on Nigerian politics could be both positive and negative.

This paper therefore aims at showing the influence of religion on post-independence Nigerian politics and the implications for national development. In this attempt, religion is presented as two sides of a coin, with positive and negative implications for national development. The paper also made recommendations on how religion can be used to improve the political life of the Nigeria as a country.

Clarification of terms

Religion

To have a better grasp of the topic of this paper, some key words need to be clarified through their definitions. Hence terms worthy of clarification are religion, politics and development, religion has been defined by many scholars from different control. Ugwu (2002) defines religion as "faith and practices involving the relationship between mankind and what is regarded as sacred". In a more comprehensive manner, Merriam 91980) sees religion as: the outward existence of God. to whom obedience, service and honour are due, the feeling or expression of human love, fear or awe of some superhuman and over-ruling power, whether by profession of belief, by observance or rites and ceremonies or by the conduct of life. Religion according to Robinson and Davidson 91999; 1173), is a belief in or the worship of a god or gods. Secondly, it is a particular system of belief or worship, such as Christianity or Judaism.

Religion according to Ogueche (2007) the term religion has to do with man's conscious efforts to maintain good relationship with his fellow man and worship what he perceives as superior to him in a specific manner for his own good and the good of his society. For Okwueze (2003) Religion can be understood as a regulated pattern of life of a people in which experience, beliefs and knowledge are reflected in mans conception of himself in relation to others, his social world, the physical as well as the metaphysical world. Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004) define religion as means relationship with God. Man as a dependent being freely and internally acknowledges his dependence of God and expresses this in acts of individual and communal worship. However, the definition of religion by Kukah as put down by Emekwue (2000) which sees religion as a set of rituals by which human being relates with the higher being has been widely accepted. The word religion, etymologically, comes from the Latin word 'religare' to bind.

Politics

Politics according to Ogueche (2007:6) has to do with the activities involved in getting and using power in public life and being able to influence decisions that affect a country, state or local government within a specific period of time. According to Hornby (2000), politics has to do with "the activities involving in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a society'. Etymologically, politics refers to the art of governing a city. Iwe in Nmah (2007) defines politics as the process of adjustment and inter-play of power and interest within the public life and affairs of society on national and multi-national levels. According to dahl in Okafor (2007), politics has to do with who gets what,

when and how. The very decision to support a particular religion or set of principles in a society as opposed to an individual is a political decision. Politics is essentially about good governance and primarily involves the structuring of power for achieving some articulated goals.

Positive influence

Agha (2004) stated that "it should be the responsibility of Nigerians to seek and understand the action of God in everything that is happening and to make every effort to find the solution through making fitting responses". Nnadi in Okwueze (2004) asserted that all religious founders created time in educating their adherents towards their religion. The noted that Islamic education was brought to Hausa land (Northern Nigeria) in the early fourteenth century by traders and scholars. Also, he said that the Islamic religion spread to Yoruba land, the southern part in the eighteenth century. For Nnadi, in Okwueze (2004) wherever this religion spread, the leaders imparted the knowledge of the Hadith and Sharia. Going further, Nnadi(2004) commended Christian Missionaries in their effort in education. According to him, the first Christian missionary school was built in Benin in 1515 AD by Catholic missionaries in the Obas palace but was short-liveddue to slave trade. The second endeavor was the school which was established by Mr. and Mrs. D Graft of the Methodist Mission in Badagry in 1843. This idea by which missionaries imparted knowledge to their adherents as projected by Nnadi was clearly affirmed by other eminent scholar. Agha (1999) noted that: Another important factor that motivated the movement of Christians to West Africa was the desire to educate the people; to introduce advanced technical skills and equipment and improved production techniques. Looking at the motives of the missionaries as projected by Agha, one will not doubt that their impact on education was for the holistic growth of man. This holistic growth of man facilitated the building of the Nigerian democracy. No wonder Madiebo (1998) and Ozigbo (1004) lauded the following denominations for the wise idea of establishing schools. For Madiebo (1998) the followings are outstanding: church Missionary Society established the first grammar school in Lagos in 1859; Methodists established boys' high school Lagos in 1879. The Baptist Church established Boys High School, Lagos in 1883; and Hope Wadell Institute was founded at Calabar in 1895/96 etc. according to Madiebo, these denominations made remarkable impact as regards the building of society at that time. But according to Ozigbo (1994) the first denomination to start secondary education was the Wesleyan mission who opened school at Badagry in September 1845 followed by the Scothish presbyterians the following year. Then the Roman Catholic commenced their own in earnest. However, the first to commence school apostolate is now a debatable matter among scholars. The necessary point is that the Christian missionary influenced Nigerian society so much in the field of education. More importantly, some scholars have praised the missionaries for their holistic view in educating Nigerians. Contrary to the indigenous religious culture of neglecting women in education policy, (which was undemocratic), the missionaries taught Nigeria traditional society the relevance of women education in this regard, scholars like Ezeh (2005), Onwubiko (1985), and Onyeidu (2004) are clearly of the view that early missionaries took women education seriously. For Ezeh, (2005) Bishop Heerey established secondary school for girls in Enugu, port Harcourt, Nsukka, Emekuku, Nguru, Ahiara, Adazi, Okigwe and five teachers training colleges and vocational centers and a network of primary schools for girls under thirteen years; the Church Missionary Society, the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Wesley, and the Baptists. According to Ezejigwu, (2005) it was the missionaries who influenced the government to go into the project of rehabilitating

these underprivileged members of the society. In this case, the writer gives claim to religion for showing the light to government by offering democratic right to the less privileged.

Another important land mark which the Christian Missionaries made was the establishment of schools in Northern Nigerian in spite of the serious inhibition policy (Christians' non interference in the Northern zone) by the colonialists. Obi (1985) and Onotu (1982) were of the view that catholic education which had progressed in the North started at Lokoja around 1964 under Bishop Auguste, the successor of Makozi. From the information, the schools which were established were about fourteen in number. In considering the educational institutions in Nigeria today, one could say without doubt that those educational institutions which are owned by religious bodies are many. Also they are better managed than those institutions owned by the government. Contemporarily, Educational institutions which are managed by religious personnel and religious bodies seem to be waxing very strongly in terms of good administration and management.

Infrastructure and Agricultural Development

For Achunike (2002) the missionaries came with many skills which they imparted to Nigerian society: building, farming, and even importation of cassava. This view was confirmed by Onyeidu (2001) who emphasized that "the missionaries made much impact on Agriculture". According to him, they introduced a variety of food crops and system of mixed farming which enabled the people to feed them. Onyeidu stressed that the cassava plant which is now the queen of crops in Nigeria was introduced by John Christopher Taylor. This is a big credit to the Christian missionaries. In narrating the impact of religion on agriculture, Onwubiko (1973) commented that Islamic religion excelled in this regard. He said that almost all Islamic adherents were traders and farmers. It was the Fulani-Hausa missionaries (Muslims) who controlled the trans-saharan trade. They were nomads, farmers as well as Muslims. This means that the life of Islamic adherents is agriculturally inclined. Again Onwubiko (1973) noted that Christian missionaries contributed in no small way to the building of infrastructure (eg schools). According to him, Christian missionaries introduced the styles of architecture and some fearful areas or forests were turned into educational or church edifices. Reflecting on the efforts of the missionaries (both Christians and Muslims) the researcher commends them for acting as government to build Nigeria as a democratic society.

Social Influence of Religion

Another area where religion has registered very positive impact is in the aspect of social life of Nigerian society. Makozi (1988) and Ugwu (2002) were of the opinion that Christian religion taught democratic values and equality of human life. According to Makozi (1988), the Christian missionaries fought very hard to stamp out slave-trade especially by attacking it at its roots. They succeeded I forcing Africans to drop human trafficking of this nature and human sacrifice in favour of legitimate trade (palm, oil, fruits etc). Makozi also noted that at the close of the nineteenth century, the Church of Scotland mission, the church Missionary society, the Baptist church, the society of African Missions (SMA) and the Methodist Church and others had lodged along the River Niger at Lokoja and Onitsha in the serious mission of preaching and sensitization to the people. Makozi (1998) again highlighted that as Christian religion was stamping out those anti-social cultures in the south, Islamic religion was busy destroying totally African traditional religion called Animism in the North. The Islamic tenet is that if a particular people failed to associate with Islam, the result would be intimidation

and destruction. While Ugwu (2002) commented that contrary to the tenet (ie forceful conversion) of Islamic religion, Christian religion preached and fought against class distinction in the society, curbing of social vices like caste and slavery.

Political Influence of Religion

Politics and religion are inborn in man. According to Arinze (1983), the good Christian must embody his religion in acts of good citizenship. These must be no divorce or false division between religion and daily life activities as a citizen. What Arinze is emphasizing is that a good Christian should be involved in political life or the life of citizen. In this case religion directs politics.

Recommendations

For religion to achieve its expected goal in the sphere of the Nigerian politics, the following points are recommended:

i. The researchers advocate for civic education and ethics in the Nigerian schools both private and government. The courses will start from secondary to tertiary institutions. Government will provide the required and requisite common syllabus and curricula for the course.
ii. Some religious leaders should be encouraged to read law to become lawyers, magistrates and judges. The production of these religiously minded men of the jury will enhance the rule of law and good democracy. It will give sanity to the judiciary for the course of justice.
iii. The researchers encouraged that all religious leaders should live up to the ethics of their religious profession. Let this be the key to the transformation agenda and coexistence in the Nigerian society. The religionists should be real fearless watchdogs in the society. Above all, the leaders should be powerfully emphasizing those positive and common values that unite.
iv. Finally, we recommend that the Nigerian National Assembly (NNA) should start negotiating the process of deregistration of Nigeria from the OIC and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) as this will help to restore the confidence of non-Muslims in Nigerian democracy.

Conclusion

It is an incontrovertible fact that religion has recorded multitude of positive impacts on the Nigerian politics. Religious effect is positive because as earlier identified it is full of good values which are seen through the lives of ardent religious believers who are players in the fields of politics in the country. We affirm that religion is globally credited for the (unified) wholesome formation of human personality. The personalities who brought independence to Nigerian society were the products of religion. Physically and socially, it is not to be argued that religion had helped in the nation building in all facets of development. Religion has recorded functional impacts on the Nigerian politics. There are very glaring prospects which religion has and this should keep Nigerians alive for continued prosperity and unity. This prosperity and unity should be achieved only when all Nigerian citizenry (especially the religionists) are consistently, persistently and effectively committed to the real ethics of their respective religions.

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