

Religious and Regional Crisis in the Nigerian Federalism: Problems, Causes and Remedy

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Abstract:-It is on record that the British Colonial authorities under Lord Lugard amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates and the Colony of Lagos into one country with Federal system of Administration since 1914. The immediate problems that confronted that amalgamation were among others, religious differences; diverse ethnic groups; disparity in the physical sizes of the federating units; and above all, the constituent units were not given the choice by the colonial masters to either remain as sovereign entities or join the union. It is against this background that this paper intends to discuss about the problems, causes and remedy to the Religious and Regional Crisis in Nigeria under the structure of Federalism.

Keywords: Religious, Regional, Nigerian Federalism, Problems, Causes and Remedy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian federalism dates back to 1914 when the British authorities amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates. The diversity of the country later made it necessary to decentralize the administration within the unitary system of government set up. For cultural and religious reasons, the amalgamated areas were administratively regarded separate. The North was Islamic in nature and the South was secular. The establishment of separate administrations for the Western and Eastern Nigeria respectively took place in 1939. The British upon the framework of three regions; the North, the West and the East therefore built Federalism in Nigeria. The smaller ethnic groups were integrated into the Regions.

The Northern Region had almost two thirds of the entire land surface area of the country. It was thus bigger than the Eastern Region and the Western Region put together. Though it is not a necessity that the constituent parts in a federation should be equal in size and population, yet a glaring disequilibrium in the physical size and population of the constituent units could cause internal disharmony in the federation. That initial structure of our federal system became, and even despite structural changes in the constituent parts, a source of endless political friction in the country (Abdullahi, 2005).

Historically, the constituent units of the Nigerian federation did not voluntarily choose to be in-the union. During the national political reform conference of 1954, the South - West made this point clear in their memo. This is one of the reasons why whenever national or sub-national groups in the country are aggrieved, they resort to this historical argument and

suggest that we were forced into the union by the British colonial authorities (Abdullahi, 2005).

It is also important to note that during constitutional conference of 1954, there was disagreement between Northern delegates and their Southern counterparts over the controversial issue of regional self-rule. The Northern delegates were booed in the street of Lagos. This resulted in a reprisal attacks against Southern settlers in the ancient city of Kano. That marked the sowing of the seed of evil strife anchored around ethno -religious and primordial consideration in Nigeria. (I. A., Song, 2004).

The idea of separation of religion from state is also one of the problems that cause religious and regional crisis in the Nigerian federalism. While the Muslims on one hand, see federalism as a Christian ideology and in its stead, want *Shari'ah* to govern their lives, the Christians on the other hand, vehemently oppose the application of *Shari'ah* by any state of the federation since the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria prohibits the adoption of an official religion by Government at all levels.

In view of the above, this paper is intended to explain about the problems, causes and remedy to the on-going religious and regional crisis in the Nigerian federalism.

II. THE DEFINITION OF FEDERALISM

The Definition of federalism as provided by Professor TekenaTarnuno, is:

That form of government where the components Units of a political organization participate in SharingPower and functions in a co-operative manner.....(Abdullahi, 2005).

Raoul Blindenbacher and Ronal L. Watts defined federalism thus:

The basic essence of federalism is the notion of two or more orders of government combining elements of shared rule for some purposes and regional self-Rule for others — based on the objective of combining Unity and diversity i.e. of accommodating, preserving and promoting distinct identities within a larger political Union. (Abdullah, 2005).

In the international Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, federalism and its kindred terms - e.g. "federal" - are most broadly used to describe:

The mode of political organization, which unites, separates polities within an overarching political integrity. Federal systems do this by distributing power among general and constituent governments in a manner designed to protect the existence and authority of all the governments (International Encyclopedia, 1972).

The new Encyclopedia Britanica also defined federalism as the:

Mode of Political organization that unites separate states or other polities within an overarching political system in such a way as to allow each to maintain political integrity. Federal systems do this by requiring that basic policies be made and implemented through negotiation in some form, so that all the members can share in making and executing decisions.

III. THE CONCEPT OF FEDERALISM

Systematically, federalism (International Encyclopedia) has been conceptualized in two different ways. On the one hand, federalism has been conceived as a means to unite a people already linked by bonds of nationality through distribution of political power among the nation's constituent units. In such cases, the polities that constitute the federal system are unalterably parts of the national whole, and federalism invariably leads to the development of a strong national government operating in direct contact with the people it serves, just as the constituent's government do. Federalism on the other hand, has also been conceived as a means to unify diverse people for important but limited purposes, without disrupting their primary ties to the individual polities that constitute the federal system. In such cases the federal government is generally limited in its scope and powers, functioning through constituent governments, which retain their plenary autonomy, and to a substantial degree are dependent upon them.

This conception of federalism which was first formulated in the covenant theories of the Bible (Kaufman 1937 - 1948) was revived by the Bible - centered "federal" theologians of seventeenth - century Britain and new English who in 1645 coined the term "federal" derived from the Latin foedus (covenant) to describe the system of holy and enduring covenants between God and man which lay at the foundation of their world view. The principles of strong national federalism were first applied by the ancient Israelites, beginning in the thirteenth century B.C., to maintain their

national unity through linking their several tribes under a single national constitution and at least quasi- federal political institutions (International Encyclopedia, 1972).

The idea that the concept of federalism was first formulated in the covenant theories of the Bible and that its principles were first applied by the ancient Israelites, made many Muslims to regard the system as un-Islamic. This is one of the reasons why the concept of federalism is yet to be fully accepted by many Nigerian Muslims.

IV. THE PROBLEMS AND CAUSES OF THE RELIGIOUS AND REGIONAL CRISIS IN THE NIGERIAN FEDERALISM

4.1 *Inconsiderate Amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates.*

As earlier mentioned, the constituent units of the Nigerian federation did not voluntarily choose to be in the union. Although Federalism presumes that the federating units give up something to gain something much more in return as members of one large family of a nation, this can only smoothly and successfully operate where a federated state comes into being as a voluntary action of the constituent units willing to cede certain powers, such as defense, currency and external relations to a central body. In such a state, the articles of association guarantee the federating units the right to retain their own languages and culture and practice what they will within the limits of the social contract. The feeling that the membership of the union is voluntary constitutes the major incentive for federating units in this category to unite and to stay united. However, where conquest or the force of arms brings into a federated state by a foreign government, federation becomes an imposition without the necessary ventilation in the system (Abdullahi, 2005).

In contrast to how Nigerian federation came into being, the thirteen American colonies that originally formed the union did so entirely on their own volition. The point here is that the circumstances and the conditions of the birth of a federation determine the degree of its cohesiveness, if not unity. Since the British joined the Northern and Southern Protectorates against their voluntary wish, true federalism is yet to be achieved in Nigeria.

4.2 *Regionalism*

In spite of the fact that the British authorities did not seek the opinion of the people before they founded the Nigerian federalism upon the structure of three Regions; the North, the West and the South, yet, Nigerians lived and worked anywhere in the country as Nigerian citizens and national co-equals before operation of the McPherson Constitution. However, strong ingredients of regionalism introduced in the operation of the McPherson Constitution of 1954 brought forward a number of situations which made Nigerians start to feel they were ethnically different. Thus, since the country's independence in 1960, the seeds of the ethnic problems were

planted in the fertile soil of regionalism. Even the 1959 pre-independence elections showed how clearly the country had been ethnically divided (Tamuno, Ukpabi, 1989).

The military coups of January and July 1966 had clear regional implications just as the massacres of the Igbos in the North in May and September that year were clearly regionally motivated (Tamuno, Ukpabi, 1989).

The brutal civil war of 1967 - 1970, which nearly consumed Nigeria, was regionally inspired. The civil strife supposed to have taught Nigerian citizens a good lesson irrespective of their ethnic or religious affiliations. However, the on-going religious or ethnic crisis in almost all parts of the country showed that the civil war ended by mere accident than mutual understanding or appreciation of the negative effects it had caused (Song, 2004).

Political power struggle based on regionalism or ethnicity is also one of the problems of federalism in Nigeria. This problem started since pre-independence elections. The three major political parties i.e. the NPC (Northern Peoples Congress), the NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons) and the AG (Action Group) respectively won in their three dominant regional groups. The army itself was regionally influenced politically. Both recruitment and appointments were made according to ethnic affiliation. Other appointments in almost all federal sectors have the same problem today.

Militia groups like Odua People's Congress in the West, Bakassi Boys in the South - East and Arewa Youths Congress in the North were formed on regional grounds. Most of these militia groups are able-bodied youths who seem to have deliberately enlisted in the ethnic killer squads (I.A. Song, 2004). A group calling itself the Movement for the Actualization of The Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) even wrote President Olusegun Obasanjo informing him of its intention to secede from Nigeria (Kevin, E.A.). This is an open threat to the unity of this country. The nullification of the June 12, 1992 Presidential elections by Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida further increased hatred and enmity between the North and the South. Some people in the West even started to advocate for the breakup of the Nigerian state.

Disparity in the physical sizes of the federating units in the Nigerian federalism is one of the causes of internal disharmony among the citizenry. Therefore, it has been well demonstrated that the existence of a large polity dominating smaller states with which it is nominally federated on equal terms has often been one of the major reasons for the failure of Federalism (International Encyclopedia, 1972).

Another problem that threatens the Nigerian Federalism is the issue of Resource Control between the North and the South. The hot debate, which occurred between

the Northern and Southern delegates during the National Political Reform Conference that was inaugurated by President Obasanjo in 2005 is a clear testimony to this. The

problem centered round the issue of derivation formula. While the Southern delegates were agitating for 25 per cent from 13 per cent, the Northern delegates favored the adoption of 17 percent only. Dissatisfied with the decision taken by the majority, the then chairman of traditional rulers of Oil Minerals Producing Communities of Nigeria (TROMPCON) King. Charles Ayemi Said:

In a true Federalism, true fiscal federalism, which obtained in other parts of the world. You can go to America, you can go to Canada, you have oil it is yours, you just pay royalties to the federal body, you pay taxes to the federal body but here the federal Government has to control and gives permits irrespective of all the problems that the poor of the oil producing region have to contend with (International Encyclopedia, 1972).

Also enraged with the conference resolution on the derivation formula, the leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Salvation Front, AlhajiMujaheedDakuboAsari has said the dismemberment of Nigeria as it is composed currently, is inevitable. He said Nigeria, right from the amalgamation of 1914, has stood as an illegal entity comparing it with the crushed apartheid region in South Africa. He said he is going to work in conjunction with other Nationalities to ensure its dissolution. However, the proponents of resource control should remember that they do not have a monopoly of Mineral deposit. Other states of the federation are also blessed with one mineral resource or the other (Maitama, 2005). Moreover before the realization of oil in the South, it was agriculture from the North that sustained the Nigerian economy. The agricultural funds were similarly used to exploit the oil resources in Nigeria.

4.3 Separations of State and Religion

One of the Problems facing the Nigerian federalism is the idea of separation of State and Religion. Section 10 of the 1999 Constitution prohibits the adoption of an official religion by Government at all levels. For this reason looking at the context of the complex and diverse structure of Nigeria, the Christians want to ensure a clear separation and Dichotomy between faith and conduct, Faith and Politics cum governance, church and State. In their opinion, the secularity of state should be strengthened by inserting a clause in the Constitution, which will make it a breach of the constitution for any Government to fund or directly participate in religious activity. Such activities will include providing grants for the promotion of religious activities, establishment and funding of welfare Boards for Muslim and Christian pilgrimages, etc. They further argued that the role of Government in matters of religion should be limited to that of ensuring that the conduct of any religious group or the practice of any religion does not violate the fundamental rights of both adherents and non-adherent or that it threatens public order, public safety and public morality (Review of the 1999 Constitution).

The Muslims on the other hand argued that regarding the conception and meaning attached to religion still in the context of a complex and diverse Nigerian social structure, faith can be in harmony with conduct and a State can be governed and administered on sound moral foundations. This Islamic world view which espouses the organic unity of Islam and State claimed that section 38 of the Constitution confers on the individual, among other things, the "freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance". Here there is a selective emphasis on the phrase "in community with others" to justify the adoption by State Government of a legal system whose foundations are rooted in a Religious code - the *Shari'ah*. It was thus argued that, in line with the nature of a plural Federation, States should be entitled to adopt such religions, which appear to be preponderant within their territories. They also argued for this position that the workings of the constitution in several sections also acknowledge Nigeria as a multi - religious Nation, which thus renders absolute secularity impracticable (Review of the 1999 constitution). Furthermore, the idea of separation of State and Religion is not compatible with the Islamic faith. This is because Allah enjoins the Muslims to follow the Glorious Qur'an for their guidance. He says:

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَىٰ شَرِيعَةٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ فَاتَّبِعْهَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (الجاتية: ١٨)

We made for you a law, so follow it and not the fancies of those who have no knowledge. (Qur'an 45:18)

In another verse He says:

مَا قَرَّرْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ (الأنعام: ٣٨)

Nothing have we omitted from the Book (Qur'an 6:38)

This implies that the Muslim's life is being guided by the law of Islam. This is because it covers all aspects concerning his faith, his prayer, his fast, his pilgrimage, his leadership, his trade and commerce, his transactions, his marriage, his food and drinks, his sacrifices, his way of answering the call of nature, etc. This is the reason why the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (SAW) was commanded in the Qur'an to say the following:

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ . لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَبِذَلِكَ أُمِرْتُ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ (الأنعام: ١٦٢-١٦٣)

Say: Truly my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the Cherisher of the worlds. No partner has He. This Am I Commanded and I am the first of those who bow to His will (Qur'an, 6:162-3).

This issue of separation of State and Religion is indeed one of the reasons why constant crisis occur between the adherents of the two faiths - Islam and Christianity. It is in fact a major reason for the failure of true federalism in Nigeria. The same problem is now confronting Iraq, which has been invaded by America in order to enforce democracy to its citizenry. The Sunni Muslims oppose the system of federalism, because too much autonomy is given to both the Shi'ites and the Kurds and also Islam is not given full role in the newly written Constitution. Another area of their disagreement is the issue of distribution of oil resources.

4.4 The Application of Shari'ah by Some of the State Governments

Over the years, the Muslims of this country have been yearning for the full application of *Shari'ah* to govern their lives. The Christians on the other hand would not want that to ever happen in Nigeria since Nigeria is a secular State. Therefore any attempt to introduce the *Shari'ah* will bring disunity and instability in the country.

In March 1987, Nigeria witnessed a sad and unfortunate event, which worsens the relations between the Muslims and the Christians. It was a religious disturbance, which broke in Kafanchan, Kaduna State during the fellowship of Christian Students of Kafanchan College of Education, 'Mission 87.' Many lives were lost leaving several others injured. The crisis eventually spread in almost all parts of the Northern States. This forced both the Muslim and Christian organizations to address the nation through the print media about their stand on the issue (Lawal, 1989). In the New Nigerian Newspaper, the Council of *Ulama'* addressed the nation thus:

The on - going crisis which has been engineered to distract the attention of Muslims from the vital issues in the country, will in no way succeed in its goals. Muslims demand for the full and uninhibited application of the *Shari'ah* remains not only a priority but also a life time objective of the Council of *Ulama'* and of every Muslim in the Country. So also the demand for Islamic education, a just and equitable economic system and an appropriate political dispensation. Muslim total opposition to secularism remains firm and unshakable; the idea of separation of State and religions is universally acknowledged as a Christian concept and is absolutely alien to Islam. Muslims want to live entirely under the guidance of Islam, in obedience to Allah and his Messenger and having nothing whatsoever to do with secularism (Lawal, 1989).

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) on the other hand said:

Since the threats of the Muslim leaders have gone on unabated, such threats that should not be regarded as empty, now that the whole world knows that Muslims have violent tendencies, we demand that Nigeria be divided into two - one for the peace loving Christians and the other for Muslims whose leaders have said categorically that they do not want to live at peace with Christians. The Muslims can have Abuja as their headquarters while Christians have Lagos as their Ecclesiastic headquarters (CAN, 1987).

In 1989, the Federal military Government had to suspend the debate on the *Shari'ah* issue between Muslim and Christian delegates during the constituent assembly sittings. The Christian representatives neither like the *Shari'ah* to remain in the 1979 Constitution, nor agree to the suggestion that they are free to bring in their Christian law to form part of the Constitution in addition to the *Shari'ah*. (Lawal, 1989).

This was the situation of things until in 1999 when the Zamfara State Government formally launched the application of *Shari'ah*. Other states like Kebbi, Sokoto, Bauchi, Katsina, Kano, etc later followed. This measure however invited strong opposition from the non - Muslims both within and outside Nigeria. To the extent that whenever there was any dispute among certain groups of people in the country, they tried to attribute it to the *Shari'ah* as the cause. Several violent demonstrations and clashes were organized by them to show their hatred against the *Shari'ah*. In fact the *Shari'ah* issue is one of the factors threatening the future existence of Nigerian federalism.

V. REMEDY TO THE RELIGIOUS AND REGIONAL CRISIS IN THE NIGERIAN FEDERALISM

To see the end to the Religious and Regional crisis in the Nigerian Federalism, the following suggestions are provided:

- 5.1. The History of the inconsiderate amalgamation between the North and the South should be faithfully forgotten because it had already happened. Any attempt to seek for the disintegration of the federating units is dangerous to all Nigerian citizens.
- 5.2. For cultural and religious reasons, the Northern and Southern provinces were governed separately after their amalgamation as earlier mentioned. In view of this, we suggest that the same policy should be adopted. Consideration should be given to the religion of the majority in each federating unit. However, the fundamental rights of the adherents of other religions should not be tempered with.
- 5.3. To sustain true federalism, the nation and its constituent polities should each have a substantially complete set of governing institutions of their own

with the rights within limits set by the compact - to modify those institutions unilaterally (International Encyclopedia, 1972).

- 5.4. As Nigeria is a multi - religious society, which thus renders absolute secularity impracticable, we suggest that states should be entitled to adopt such religions, which appear to be preponderant within their territories.
- 5.5. Where necessary, all the traces of unitary system of government should be removed from the Nigerian Federalism. The degree of freedom and autonomy consistent with Federalism should be given to the federating units.
- 5.6. The Federal Government should fully exploit the abundant mineral resources found all over the country in order to silence the uproar between proponents and opponents of resource control and higher percentages for derivation (Maitama, 2005).
- 5.7. The gruesome past between the Northerners and Southerners should be buried. All derogatory terms that have ethnic connotation should be frowned at by all and sundry in such a way that it will become unfashionable.
- 5.8. All crises, whether religious or regional should be resolved through dialogue. For dialogue removes elements of ignorance and enable members of the society appreciate each other's positions and actions.
- 5.9. There should be tolerance between the adherents of Islam and Christianity. Both the Qur'an and the Bible preach against violence in the name of religion. Instead, they enjoin people to be peaceful with one another. The Glorious Qur'an says:

وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ
(العنكبوت: ٤٦)

And Dispute ye not with the people of the Book (Jews and Christians), unless it be in (a way) that is better (with good words and in good manner, inviting them to Islamic Monotheism with His Verses) (Quran, 29:46)

In another verse, Allah

says:

لَا يَنْهَاكُمْ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ (الممتحنة: 8)

Allah forbids you not with regards to those who fight you not for your faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them. For Allah loves those who are just (Qur'an, 60:8)

On the other hand, the Bible says:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God (Mathew, 5:9)

Behold, I sent you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves (Mathew, 5:5)

VI. CONCLUSION

From the foregone discussion, this paper tried to explain the problems and causes of Religious and Regional crisis in the Nigerian Federalism. In view of these problems, it is likely that there will be continued tension between the Federal Government and the constituent polities and those different balances between them will develop at different times. The existence of this tension is an integral part of the federal relationship, and its character does much to determine the future of our Federalism. Another point notable here is that Federalism in Nigeria has been applied as a device for sharing political power rather than a way to maintain cultural and religious autonomy.

Therefore, if the remedies provided to these problems are not adhered to, it is doubtful whether the Nigerian Federalism will continue to sustain.

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