

When God Says Yes - Who Can Say No?¹

Religion as a Factor in Political Discourse in Nigeria Since the 1960s

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Abstract

This article analyses postcolonial developments in Nigeria and their contribution to the awakening political awareness of Christians, which led to the increased involvement of the Christian laity into politics. It begins with a short flashback into the history of what is today known as Nigeria and into the colonial encounter with the British which led to a substantial loss of authenticity in leadership, especially in the South of the country. While in the North the incorporation of the political-religious Muslim leaders of the Northern oligarchy and the pre-colonial Emirate-system into the colonial administration laid the ground for the supply of authenticity to their political leaders by Islam, the effect of the British administrative system of Indirect Rule in the South was quite different. There in contrast to the North, two sets of political leaders evolved, "colonial chiefs" and neo-political leaders, both of whom, due to the religious plurality existing in the South - Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religions (ATR) - better did not refer to their religious background. This article draws on public discourses referring to the Sharia debate and on examples from the Nigerian press to illustrate the increasing interplay of religion and politics.

¹ Inscription on a Nigerian lorry. Parts of this article were presented at the Conference on „African Christianity in the 21st century“, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden, 29-31 October 2004, under the title: "The interplay of politics and Christian religion in Nigeria since the 1960ies"; a reversed paper ("Religion as a factor in political discourse in Nigeria since the 1960s") was presented at the Afrikanistentag Vienna, Austria, July 23-25, 2007.

Introduction

With the sporadic coming of civilian governments in post-colonial Nigeria, religion as a factor in political discourse increased – and in the past twenty years or so it burst into the open to the extent that it is taken for granted that any influential politician or military leader must have the support of a preacher, a prophet or a prophetess if he/she is to succeed. In some cases, where the person has failed to capture an already existing preacher, he/she would even induce and engage somebody or become himself/herself a preacher, founding his/her own church. Already practising preachers have publicly campaigned and have been elected to government positions – even up to the position of a Governorship of a State. One of the presidential candidates in the 2003 presidential election was a renowned preacher and founder of a church. It is also remarkable that the former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007), has built a chapel in the State House, appointed a Chaplain to the Presidency and was visibly acting as a preacher in the process of the services himself.

Since independence the problem of authentic leadership has plagued the geographical entity called Nigeria. Since then Nigerian leaders have grappled to whatever was accessible to them in order to remain in power: sometimes it was money, at other times it was ethnic affiliation and quite often it was religion.

One of the reasons for the role of Islam in political discourse can be traced to the British colonial administrative system of Indirect Rule. The incorporation of the political-religious Muslim leaders of the Northern oligarchy and the pre-colonial Emirate-system into the colonial administration, laid the ground not only for ethnicity but also for the supply of authenticity to their political leaders by Islam. The effect of Indirect Rule in the Southwest and Southeast was quite different, because there two sets of neo-political leaders evolved: those incorporated into the British administrative system as “native authorities” and those not incorporated, who later became the founders of political pressure groups and parties. Though many of this second set of leaders were educated in Christian mission schools and therefore developing loyalties outside their former religious sphere, to the “God of the Empire” (Kalu 2003: 6), they were in the forefront of creating a political system characterised by a quasi-separation between religion and politics. On the other hand, the so-called traditional

rulers, incorporated into the British system of Indirect Rule, followers of the African Traditional Religion (ATR) or Muslims, a considerable part in the Southwest, or Christians better didn't refer to their religious affiliation, in order not to divide even more the already divided society. The new Christian leaders of political pressure groups were also in a difficult situation: as Anglicans they were at the risk to get brand marked by the people as spies or agents of the British colonisers; as Catholics, the colonial government might have interpreted their political opposition as "inspired" by the Irish Catholic missionaries present in the country; others again, new leaders combining Christian and Socialist ideas, were at the risk of being criticized by the colonial authorities and by the Church. "The teaching [of the Church] was that a good Christian should avoid the political kingdom and seek first the kingdom of God." (Kalu 2003: 6)

The existing religious plurality in the South - with the people's affiliation to Islam, Christianity and ATR, led some of them in their search for authenticity to an identity concept based on ethnicity as rooted in the British colonial policy of Divide-and-Rule.

From the 1960s onwards, post-independence experiences shaped by the Nigerian Crisis, the Civil War (1967-1970), by Muslim leaders from the Northern oligarchy and the so-called Sharia debate, by increasing poverty and corrupt and inefficient governments laid the ground for the increased Christian political consciousness. It also laid the ground for their increased involvement into politics as laity and political leaders, and further led to a polarization of the two universal religions Islam and Christianity in the political sphere (Adigwe 1990a, b). Religion had become an important factor in political discourse, or, according to Kalu (2003: 13), "(...) religion has been given a front seat in the Nigerian public sphere."

The advent of Islam and Christianity

Before the advent of British colonialism in what today is Nigeria, the spectrum of leadership and governance was very divergent – from well-established kingdoms, emirates (states under a Muslim oligarchy) to small independent units under the leadership of a council of elders – and changed considerably over time.

Islam had arrived in Nigeria around 1000 and 1100 A.D., but its progress seems to have been quite slow. Up to the end of the 18th century, Islam

remained primarily an urban phenomenon, with its main foothold in the centres of the former Hausa states and in the Kanuri Empire of Kanem-Borno. From historical sources, both oral and written, the impression of a peaceful coexistence between Islam and ATR prevails.

The most rapid and extensive advance of Islam took place between 1804 and 1810, when Uthman dan Fodio and his followers aimed at bringing the Hausa states and neighbouring societies “to the purity of Islamic religiosity in accordance with the Qadiriyya version of Muslim faith.” (Enwerem 1995: 21) The so-called “Fulani-jihad” was victorious over a large territory, constituting a great part of what is now known as the Northern states of Nigeria and the Cameroon. It was fought not only with the support of Muslims but also of allied non-Muslim Hausa- and Ful-speaking people who had experienced oppression, exploitation and injustice in some of the former Hausa states. But the territorial success was not absolute. Large Hausa communities remained faithful to their traditional religion and the Kanuri-state Kanem-Borno with its long dynastic history and long history of Islamic influence successfully resisted the conquest.

The reform movement’s attempt to conquer the South was strongly resisted in the Middle Belt, in the centre of Nigeria, came to a halt around Ilorin in the South-West and did not reach the South-Eastern parts of Nigeria. However, Uthman dan Fodio and his followers firmly imposed on the conquered territories a form of political leadership that was different from what existed then: an Islamic theocratic state, the Caliphate of Sokoto. This meant that a large area and a number of ethnic groups were united under a theocratic leadership and the Sharia Law with all its implications (Adigwe 1968: 454 f.).

Early encounters between Christianity and ATR in what today is the Southern part of Nigeria, in the Niger Delta and the kingdom of Benin for example, soon after the beginning of the transatlantic (slave) trade do not seem to have left lasting traces of any significance (Kalu 2003: 4). The history of Christianity in what is Nigeria today can be partly traced to trade contacts, anti-slavery campaigns and missionary endeavours of the “Sierra Leonians”, later known as the Crios, liberated Africans and recaptives, especially after the disintegration of the Oyo Empire of the Yoruba (around 1830); and partly to the new missionary work by Protestant Missionary Societies, especially the Niger Mission, founded by the *Church Missionary Society* (CMS), and last but not least by Catholics. (Avery 1980: 103 ff.; Isichei

1977: 125ff.; Sanneh 1983: 53ff.) In 1868 the *Society of African Missions* (SMA) arrived in Lagos. From 1885 onwards Catholic missionary work in the South-Eastern parts of the country was undertaken by the *Holy Ghost Fathers* (Spiritans) – with Onitsha as their first foothold (CSN 2004). The influence of Christian missionaries and Christian traders among the Yoruba (in the South-West) was quite significant from the second half of the 19th century onwards, especially through their role as intermediaries and pacifiers between conflicting societies in connection with their re-organisation after the fall of Oyo on the one hand and the British with their commercial interests on the other hand (Ajayi 1979: 397; Ayandele 1977: 13; 54-68; Crowder 1968: 124 ff.).

“A certain feature was that evangelism was recruited as the civilizing component of this new endeavour (...) Christianity was imagined as the civilizing yeast in the [following] colonial enterprise.” (Kalu 2003: 5)

In Northern areas not affected by the Muslim conquest, especially in the Middle Belt, and in the South, government remained largely within the indigenous set-up and closely connected with the ATR as practised in each of these groups.

Nigeria's colonial encounter with the British

When the British moved into West Africa they relatively easily arrived at an accord with the rulers of the Northern area, the emirs, and established what they termed the Indirect Rule system of administration. In effect it meant that the British colonizers interacted almost exclusively with the existing political-religious leaders.

In the Middle Belt, the situation was different as people had not embraced Islam or the Muslim rule. The British however allowed the leaders of the far North to impose their rule over this area. And further down in the South-West, where the political influence of Islam, not Islam as a religion, remained limited, the existing old and new ruling hierarchies somehow adapted themselves to the system of Indirect Rule.

In the South, especially in the South-East among the Igbo-speaking population, the British had to carry out many military expeditions in order to subjugate the people and had to realise that it was not easy to impose the

so-called Indirect Rule on the people, not used to an autocratic “one-person-political-system”. The leaders who were appointed by the British to administer the colonial laws were in most cases not accepted by the population and did not have the support of their religious affiliation as they did in the North. This led to some form of identity crisis and loss of authenticity. And since these leaders had been imposed on the people, they had to cling to the colonial power as their sole source of authority (Adigwe 1968: 454 f.).

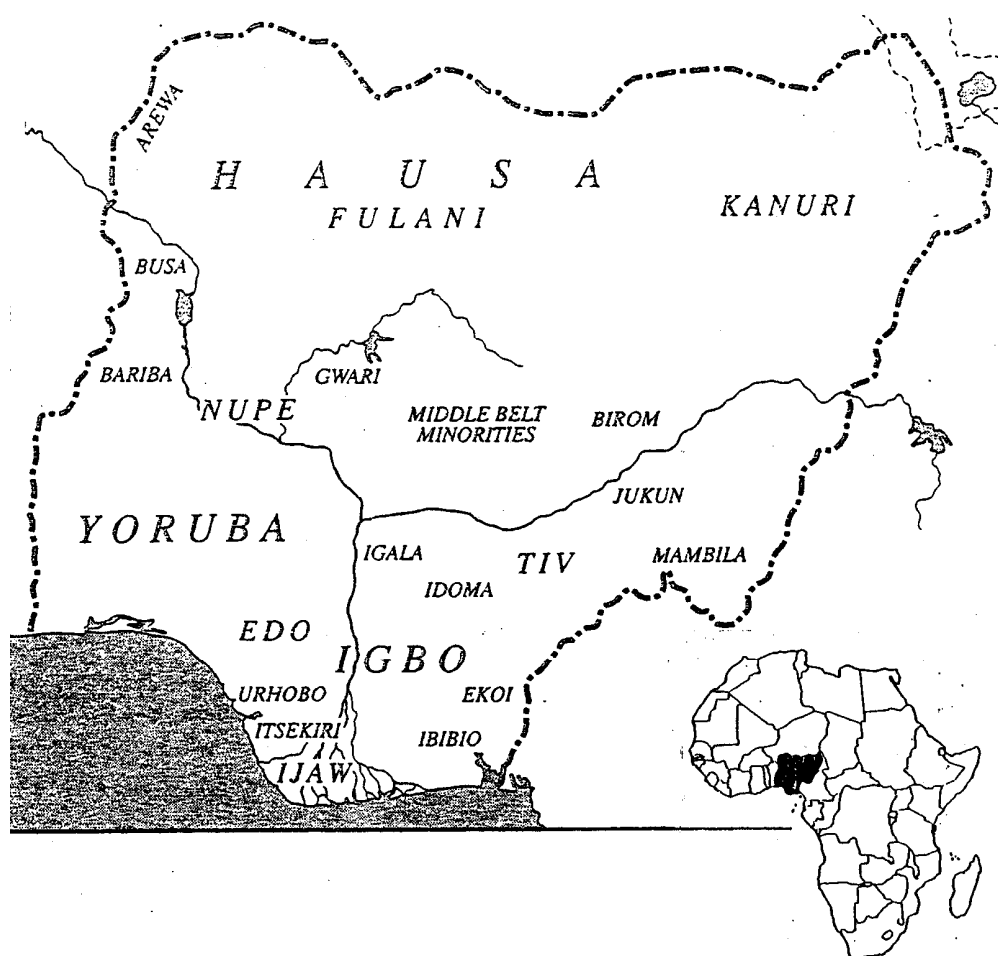
The advent of the missionaries in most parts of the South-East was almost simultaneous with that of the British. The missionaries not only brought their religion, they also brought “Western” education, useful for the people in the context of colonialism. Through their educational evangelism they empowered especially the male population - to work closely as clerks and officers of the colonial masters. The fidelity to religion, which Islam gave to the Northern Muslims and ATR to the Southern independent groups, was supplied to these neo-educated Christians by Christianity - with a slight advantage against the ATR, occasioned by their nearness to the colonial administration. This has de facto given rise to a dual loyalty. It also brought in some tensions between the Christians and community life style.

In effect there were three religious systems available for the supply of authenticity to political leaders – albeit in varying degrees and modalities: Islam, Christianity and ATR. And while the political-religious Muslim leaders of the North were at the same time part of the colonial administrative system, political leaders of the South, many of them educated in Christian mission schools, developed loyalties outside their former “traditional” religious sphere and therefore had to create a political system characterised by a certain separation between religion and politics.

In 1914 Frederick Lugard did his amalgamation exercise by pulling together all the various ethnic groups that the British had conquered and subdued in the area, and created a rather nebulous entity called Nigeria. Its main aim to facilitate trade and commercial engagement required an atmosphere of at least some form of consistent political control. Obviously, the British formed the umbrella government and the authority was visibly evident. All other leaders and political office holders within the area now given the name Nigeria were expected to be loyal to the British administration. This, however, was not acceptable to the generality of the people in the South-East who actually felt and resisted an intrusion and disturbance of their

communities with their own systems of governance and the evolving new social groupings and led to various uprisings and protest movements against British colonial control, among which so-called grass-root-revolts of women and their institutions played quite a significant role (Grau 1992; 1998).

The new political leaders of the South, who had been educated mostly in the mission schools, though serving under the colonial administration, were the first to rise in opposition to the autocratic colonial regime: they claimed for independence and they were able to transport this message through their political pressure groups to the people at the grass-roots in the South, while this message of independence found a slow response in the North whose religious-political system was almost left intact under the system of Indirect Rule.



Source: unknown

Independent Nigeria

By the time Nigeria gained formal political independence in 1960 two distinct types of leadership had emerged: on the one hand the leadership from the North, which more or less remained authenticated by the Muslim religious affiliation and was supported by the British administration, and on the other hand the new-breed leaders of the South, whose credibility and authenticity derived from the hope given to the people that they are being freed from the burden of colonialism and being launched into a new life-style that guaranteed: freedom, prosperity and progress. This latter leadership did not enjoy the patronage of the British government. Therefore the Northern leaders were given a stronger hold on political power over the whole of Nigeria by the British independence arrangement.

The South: authenticity through ethnicity?

The first executive Prime Minister of the civilian government after independence, Sir Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa² (*Northern Peoples Congress / NPC*) was from the North. While making an attempt to be an acceptable ruler throughout Nigeria, he did not forget his political roots in the Muslim North, his immediate constituency. The Northern Region, that formed one of the three regions of Nigeria, was ruled by Sir Ahmadu Bello³ (NPC), the Sarauta of Sokoto, who had plans to continue the Islamization process which had come to a halt in the 19th century.

From the South were the politicians Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe⁴, who was the Governor-General, the Premier of the Western Region, Obafemi Awolowo, and Michael Okpara, the Premier of the Eastern Region. To be able to form the government of the Federation, an alliance was formed between Tafawa Balewa's *Northern Peoples Congress* and Nnamdi Azikiwe's *National Council of Nigerian Citizens* (NCNC), while Awolowo's *Action Group* (AG) remained in the opposition.

Contrary to the situation in the North, the Southern political leaders did not have their roots in any specific religious group. Though many of them were

² October 1, 1960 - January 15, 1966 (Omoruyi, 1999: 3-4)

³ Premier of the Northern Region

⁴ Governor-General: November 16, 1960 - October 1, 1963; the ceremonial President of Nigeria [with no real political powers]: October 1, 1963 – January 15, 1966 (Omoruyi, 1999: 3-4); for a detailed political analysis see Schicho 2001: 84ff.

Christians they did not consider their political programmes as deriving from their religious background, but rather stood for a separation of religion and politics, of Church and State. Soon, however, it came clear that their economic and welfare programmes did not meet the high expectations of their constituencies and they therefore lacked credibility and authenticity in the midst of the dwindling political influence and achievements vis-à-vis the Northern Region. The answer was quickly found in ethnicity. For the Southern political leaders it became important to demonstrate their affiliation to an ethnic group, Yoruba or Igbo, and to stand for “ethnic politics” as rooted in the British colonial policy of Divide-and-Rule.

The Church leaders on the other hand, who had been in favour of the Nigerian independence, were not in a position to wield much influence over the politicians, which was due to the fact that the missionaries were expatriates, many of them Catholics from Ireland. Therefore, it was assumed that their view of colonialism may well have been influenced by the fact, that the colonial masters were British and/or Anglicans. And moreover, it was certainly not convenient for them to prominently influence the immediate post-colonial independent Nation at a time when “independent” politicians were expected to show high degree political programmes, independent of their former colonial masters and their “brothers and sisters” among the missionaries. Therefore, most of the Southern politicians were reluctant to their being associated with Christianity (Enwerem 1995: 49-50).

In effect, while at the early stage of Nigerian independence, the Muslim political leaders of the North, not those in the South-Western Region, could draw on inspiration and support from their religious background, the Christian leaders of the South distanced their political programmes from their religious base and filled it with their ethnic affiliation.

The Nigerian Crisis - the new political consciousness of the Christian laity

Organised by young soldiers, in January 1966, the first but unsuccessful military coup took place. General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi⁵, as the most senior military officer, struck back, repulsed the process of the coup plotters and, under advice of the Speaker of the House of Assembly, took over control of

⁵ January 16, 1966 - July 29, 1966 (Omoruyi 1999: 3-4)

the Nation. Built on the fact that the coup resulted in the killing of the Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and the Premier of the Northern Region, Ahmadu Bello, the political leaders of the North argued, since the leader of the coup plotters was an Igbo, albeit from the new Mid-Western Region that it was aimed at the Muslims of the North and therefore had an ethno-religious implication. Ironsi on assumption of office as Head of State introduced a unitary system for Nigeria, which was considered unacceptable by the Northern political elite.

A counter-coup in July 1966 eliminated General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi and the Governor of the Western Region, Adekunle Fajuyi (Adigwe 1968: 458). General Yakubu Gowon⁶, who at the time of the January 1966 coup had been the most senior surviving military officer from the North, was chosen by the Muslim political elite to take over Ironsi's position, even though he was a Christian and from the Middle Belt. This can be seen as a deliberate political strategy at that particular time since most of the Northern military personnel originated from the Middle Belt, and Gowon had exhibited sufficient allegiance to the Northern political elite. It is noteworthy that already during Gowon's regime the Nigerian membership of the *Organization of Islamic Conference* (OIC) was planned. Indeed a delegation had left Nigeria for the meeting of the Presidents and Head of Governments of member countries of the OIC to register Nigeria as a full member, but then Gowon was persuaded to send an envoy to inform that the Nigerian delegation was only coming as observers because protests against the political implications of a full membership, like limited access to political functions for non-Muslims, were feared (Adigwe 1987).

Immediately after, the systematic persecution of people originating from the Eastern Region but resident in the North was initiated. The political move of the North, including the announcement of the creation of twelve states out of the four former Nigerian regions, North, West, Mid-West and East, three out of the Eastern Region, by Gowon (May 27, 1967), led to the declaration of the Republic of Biafra under the leadership of their former Military Governor Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. The rest of Nigeria responded with the declaration of war which Gowon termed a "police action". The war lasted for 30 months – and ended in January 1970 with the capitulation of Biafra.

⁶ August 1, 1966 - July 27, 1975 (Omoruyi 1999: 3-4)

During the Civil War the relationship between the Church, especially the Catholic Church, and the Government of the Biafran State, changed insofar as the missionaries, while not supporting Biafra as a political entity, had an important role in the humanitarian action for the starving population and had initiated, organised and carried out very efficient relief operations. The Federal Government of Nigeria took this as an indication that the Catholic Church was supporting Biafra, especially as the major relief organisation, the *Caritas Internationalis*, was supplying the goods with great support of the Pope himself. It is worth mentioning however, that *the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria* remained silent throughout the entire war.

At the end of the Civil War, despite Gowon's declaration of "no victor, no vanquished", the foreign missionaries who were working in the former Biafran enclave were expelled from the country and all the mission schools in the East Central State were taken over by the government. This immediately put the Church into opposition to the government. In addition, other measures imposed by the Federal Government clearly placed the people of the former Biafra in a very difficult position. These measures included the introduction of the so-called "federal character" in civil service, the quota-system in admission into Tertiary Institutions and the setting up of *Pilgrims' Welfare Boards* specifically and exclusively for Muslims. (Enwerem 1995: 66) Since some of these apparent anti-Christian or pro-Muslim measures did not get the expected attention from the Christian leaders of the Eastern part of Nigeria, they gradually began to lose credibility among their people – and to some degree also self-confidence. However, the immediate post-war leaders, notably Ukpabi Asika⁷ and his followers, were still able to maintain reasonable amount of self-confidence as they could operate directly under the umbrella of the Federal Military Government and did not depend on the goodwill of the people and the Church for carrying out their repressive functions. But the political leaders of the East could not satisfactorily explain the consistent exclusion of the people of the Eastern States in serious political matters and in civil service. For the new emerging political elite in the East this situation was an invitation to look back to their "old friend in the time of need", the Church, to supply the missing credibility.

⁷ Dr. Anthony Ukpabi Asika (1939-2004), Administrator of the East Central State (ECS) 1967-1975

In addition, the clergy began to study the documents of the 2nd Vatican Council (1962-1965), which were fashioned just before the Civil War. With the European missionaries expelled from the East after the war, the clergy had become indigenous and receptive of the call for political responsibility among the laity. Church leaders like Francis A. Arinze, who in 1967 became Archbishop of Onitsha and Metropolitan of the Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province, which then covered the whole territory known as Biafra, wrote several pastoral letters, telling the laity that their hour had come (see Arinze 1983a,b,c). The awakening of the political consciousness of the laity, the evolution of a new Christian elite, ready to participate in politics as Christians continued to grow not just within the territory of the Eastern States but among Christians all over Nigeria. The formation of the *Christian Association of Nigeria* (CAN) in the mid-1970s initiated a strong ecumenical movement. In this regard Enwerem (1995: 76 f.) points out that: “[t]here are various accounts regarding the formation of CAN, depending on the regional and/or religious background of informants.” According to C. O. Williams, the national Secretary-General of CAN in the 1990s,

“it (...) started with a telegram which the CCN [*Christian Council of Nigeria*] received (...) in August 1976 from the then Brigadier Shehu Yar’Adua, the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Military Headquarters, inviting church leaders to a meeting at Dodan Barracks (...). Present at that meeting were thirty-three church leaders from thirteen denominations (...). The church leaders (...) had themselves recorded later as the ‘Foundation Members of the Christian Association of Nigeria.’” (Enwerem 1995: 78-79)

From then on the Northern political leaders regarded the CAN as the political wing of the Christians, especially as it had occasionally taken stand on government dispensations that Christians regarded as discriminating Christians. The reaction of the Northern political leaders towards this development strengthened again the consciousness of the Christians for greater need for their involvement in the political arena. They became aware of the inspiration and support which Islam had provided for Muslim politicians and strived for a reciprocal situation among Christian politicians. President Gowon, who himself is a Christian, got increasingly under pressure by the military officers. He was ousted in 1975 and replaced by

General Murtala Muhammed⁸, a Muslim of the North. Murtala Muhammed became very popular among the generality of the Nigerians and initiated some people-oriented programmes, including the return to civilian rule. One of the tools envisaged by him was therefore the fashioning of a new constitution for the Nation. Before this could be done, he was killed in a coup-d'état in February 1976. General Olusegun Obasanjo⁹, a Christian from the West, who was the highest military officer, took over the position of the Head of State on condition that he carried out Murtala Muhammed's programme.

In a Joint Pastoral Letter *The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria* (1979) emphasized the civic and political responsibility of all Christians:

“(...) it is the noble right and serious duty of every responsible citizen to do what he can towards the establishment, maintenance and successful operation of a good government. (...) The prospective voter should be convinced of the importance of his vote. Neglecting to vote is the denial of potential support for social justice and progress (...) voting conscientiously and purposefully is the citizen's most available and direct way of contributing to the election of most suitable leaders and support of (...) beneficial policies. (...) It is also in this sense that selling one's vote or cashing it for short-sighted gain is offensive before God and man.” (in Schineller 2002: 85)

Matthew Kukah (2003a: 31) refers to this document as particularly significant “because coming from a tradition of non-political involvement, Catholics in particular and Christians in general were literally obsessed with the fact that politics was a dirty game, in which no good Christian could participate.”

The Sharia Debate and the Transition to Civilian Rule

Before Obasanjo could hand over power to an elected President, the Constituent Assembly was put in place to prepare a Constitution for Nigeria. When the debate on the position of the Sharia¹⁰ was tabled on the

⁸ July 27, 1975 - February 13, 1976 (Omoruyi 1999: 3-4)

⁹ February 14, 1976 - October 1, 1979 (Omoruyi 1999: 3-4); later President of the civilian government 1999-2007

¹⁰ for the position of Islamic Law in the Nigerian context see also Abun-Nasr (1993a,b)

floor of the House, a clear divide between the Muslim and Christian political leaders became evident. Before this time the Nigerian Constitution made provisions for the Sharia Courts for the Muslims in the Northern parts of Nigeria. This provision restricted the application of Sharia to Personal Law and did not include Criminal Law (the Penal Code). Apart from the Northern Region, the other parts of Nigeria, for all practical purposes, knew little or nothing about the Sharia.

“It was in 1979 that non-Muslims outside the north appeared to have heard of the Sharia for the first time. During the debate on the draft constitution for the new republic the members of the National Assembly stumbled on a clause in the draft, which stated the following:

1. There shall be a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal, which shall be an intermediate Court of Appeal between the States’ Sharia Courts of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Nigeria.
2. The Court shall be composed of a Grand Mufti and whatever number of Muftis (not less than three) the National Assembly shall prescribe.
3. In each State of the Federation that so desires there shall be a Sharia Court of Appeal to be established by the Constitution of the State.” (Kukah 2003a: 22)

The new awareness about the legal and political implications of the application of the “full” Sharia as it was often called (Personal and Criminal Law), created a new political solidarity among the Christians represented in the National Assembly. They decidedly stood their ground on not letting the promotion of Sharia have its way. Subsequently the Muslim members left the Assembly in a stance that seemed to indicate either Sharia or nothing. Only with the intervention of the Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo, the Muslims could be convinced to come back to the Assembly to strike a compromise solution (see Adigwe 1988).

“After negotiations a sub-committee was set up, which finally tabled a draft proposal for the members to consider. This draft was accepted and duly inserted in the proposed constitution. It stated that, instead of having a separate Federal Sharia Court of appeal, which might appear to be on a par with the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court should comprise some members learned in Islamic Law to hear appeals from State Sharia Courts of Appeal.” (Kukah 2003a: 22-23)

Even though this compromise solution enabled the Constituent Assembly to complete its assignment and the transition to civilian rule to take its course, subsequent events showed that religion had come into Nigerian politics in a stronger way than before. The Muslims on the one hand seem to have braced up to pursue the Sharia issue and to implement the Sharia in the entire Federation while the Christians on the other hand were set on the alert and considered ways to foster solidarity among themselves in resistance to feared attempts at the Islamization of Nigeria. Finally, religion had become a factor that no political leader could conveniently afford to ignore.

President Obasanjo vigorously pursued the transition programme and, in October 1979, handed over power to Alhaji Shehu Shagari¹¹, a Muslim from the Northern oligarchy, who therewith had become the first elected executive President of the new civilian government. When Shagari contested for presidency he chose a Christian from the South-East, specifically an Igbo, Alex Ekwueme, as his running mate. Similarly his opponent Obafemi Awolowo, a Yoruba from the South-West, chose a Muslim from the North as his running mate. It had become like a taboo for anyone to mention religious affiliation when striving for political leadership. Nevertheless, at States' and Federal levels, political office contenders found it necessary to at least cling to a religious group in order to gain credibility and consequently the necessary support for their political ambition. Therefore, when Shagari and Ekwueme came into power both needed to show that Nigerians take their religions, Islam and Christianity, seriously. The Muslim arrangement for Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) organised by *Muslim Pilgrims' Welfare Boards* continued to be strengthened and the Christian demand for a reciprocal support resulted in greater attention for the establishment of *Christian Pilgrims' Welfare Boards*. State Governments experienced an increasing pressure to reverse some measures, which had been taken against Christians by the former Military Government, particularly in connection with the take-over of mission schools. While some of the schools were returned, in other cases concessions were made to the churches for the establishment of new mission schools especially in the South, whereas in the North such concessions were difficult to come by.

¹¹ October 1, 1979 - December 31, 1983 (Omoruyi 1999: 3-4)

To the discomfort of the Muslims the invitation and the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1982 contributed to the increased awareness of political responsibility of Christians. Indeed, the scheduled address of the Pope to the Muslim community was practically received by proxy: it was read in the Kaduna Airport waiting hall in the presence of the Governor, the Ministers and the other officials.

At the latest by that time, Islam and Christianity had taken a clearer position in the political life of Nigeria. This however does not mean that ATR were relegated to the background. Even Muslim and Christian politicians, privately and secretly consult the priests of the ATR, especially when it comes to political agreements and business contracts. However, the ATR were not a determining factor in the fashioning of state policies and political programmes.

Military Rule, the Sharia Debate and Nigeria's enrolment in the OIC

With the growing political consciousness of the Christian political leaders and apparent concessions given to Christians by the Shagari administration, it appeared necessary for the Muslim political class to redefine their strategy. Another military coup seemed to be a solution in order to be able to sustain their programme. This time it fell on two Northern Muslims, Major General Muhammadu Buhari¹² and Tunde Idiagbo, to become the Head of State and Chief of Staff. Both did not hide their identity or their plans. *The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria* (1984) submitted a Memorandum (in Schineller 2002: 141 f.) to the Head of State, in which they called for "freedom of opinion and expression for all genuine religious bodies" and enjoined Government to "carefully guard against any action likely to create suspicion of discrimination against or partiality in favour of any religious body".

Buhari and Idiagbon came back to the Sharia issue in a bid to expand its scope and had already drafted a constitutional amendment to that effect. This draft however, did not reach the *Judicial Advisory Committee* before General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida¹³ overthrew the Buhari government and took a Christian, Ebitu Ukiwe, from the South as his second in command. The appointment of a few Christians in his cabinet seemed to

¹² December 31, 1983 – August 27, 1985 (Omoruyi 1999: 3-4)

¹³ August 27, 1985 - August 26, 1993 (Omoruyi 1999: 3-4)

have sent a wrong signal to “the Arab world” questioning, whether he was a “good Muslim”. As a response to such reactions he decided for a constitutional amendment in respect of the Sharia by simply removing the word “personal” wherever *Muslim Personal Law* appeared, thereby expanding it to the entire Muslim Law. But by far the most striking political move that sparked off opposition from Christians was the surreptitious enrolment of Nigeria in the OIC (Adigwe 1987). *Tell*, a critical Nigerian weekly magazine, reported on March 20, 2000 (quoted in Odey 2000: 31-32):

“At the height of his regime’s islamization policy, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Northern Zone, made the following observation: ‘Since Babangida Administration came to power it has unashamedly and in utter contempt for national unity manifested its naked discriminatory religious posture through overt and covert acts of patronage and preference for Islamic religion. One is therefore left with no alternative but to conclude that the Babangida administration is the principal agent for the islamization of Nigeria.’”

And *The Catholic Bishops’s Conference of Nigeria* (1986) declared in their Press Release “The Catholic Bishops’ Stand on the OIC issue” (in Schineller 2002: 179-180):

“(…) [i]n the overall national interest of unity, peace, equity and progress, we strongly advise the Government to withdraw the country from the organisation of Islamic Conference. Our continued membership is perceived by many as indirectly but effectively making Nigeria an Islamic State despite all assurances to the contrary. To elevate one religion to the status of a state religion is clearly against our Constitution (section 10).

(…)With its religious pluralism, Nigeria cannot as a State become a member of an international body whose objectives are essentially the promoting of one particular religion (cf Articles II and IV). To do that would mean injustice in an area so all-embracing and sensitive as religion (…).”

Christian politicians claimed that they were witnessing the Islamization of Nigeria. Christian protests led to the removal of second in command, Ebitu Ukiwe, from his office, which to the Christians again signalled the need for intensified cooperation with their religious leaders.

Babangida set up a committee comprising Christian and Muslim leaders to look into the implications of the Nigerian membership in the OIC. The futility of this committee brought it clearer to the Christian leaders that they must show more responsibility towards the integrity of their religion if their constituency was to take them seriously.

It was however at the Constituent Assembly in 1988 that the conflict over religion finally escalated (Adigwe 1990c). The divide between the Christian and the Muslim members of the Assembly became clear and sent a red signal to the entire population. The Christians, led by one of the Catholic priests who was a member of the Constituent Assembly, were bent of having the entire Sharia expunged from the Constitution. They suggested that the Muslims may apply their law within their religious sphere just like the Christians apply their own laws without involving the State. The situation had come to a serious deadlock. Babangida had to step in and declared the entire Sharia issue a “no-go-area”. So, the Draft Constitution came out without a clause on the Sharia. Nevertheless, when Babangida promulgated the Constitution, he on his own re-inserted the Sharia clauses (Adigwe 1988).

By 1990 when Babangida’s so-called transition programme started once again,

“[t]he president claimed to be seeking a clean break with the past by banning those cold old-breed politicians and ushering in the new-breed political class. But it was clear that not much had changed in the conduct of the politicians.”
(Kukah 2003a: 33)

In this context *The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria* (1990) declared in their document “The Church and Political Transition in Nigeria” (in Schineller 2002: 242-243):

“(…) The Bishops remind all that Nigeria is a secular state. This is not to say that religion has no place or say. The individual citizen, Christian, Muslim or of another tradition, should bring his/her religion to bear in political practise (...) [But w]hen one religion controls the state, the doors are left wide open for persecution, oppression or discrimination against other religions. (...) The Bishops see the need for new breed politicians. To change things for the better, it is not enough to have new faces around. What is needed is new

breed politics. It does not really matter whether the faces are new or old. The important thing is that new politics ensure justice, peace and stability.”

The overwhelming victory of the Muslim candidate Mashood Abiola at the next Presidential Elections that would have led to the end of Babangida's transition programme and ushered in the much expected civilian democratic rule may appear as a contradiction to the Christian solidarity in political matters. In fact however, the reverse is the case. There were actually moves by the Christians to consolidate their solidarity by founding a Christian political party. This was prevented by Babangida, who prohibited any party based on religious affiliation and registered only two political parties, founded by himself with constitutions imposed on them. In what looked like a carefully planned move, Babangida had after his cancellation of previous nominations presented two presidential candidates, Mashood Abiola, who is a Muslim from the South, and Bashir Othman Tofa, a Muslim from the North. And above all, Abiola had as his running mate another Muslim from the North, Baba Gana Kingibe, while Tofa had a Christian from the South. It was obvious then that no Christian candidate would emerge as the president and the Christians were therefore expected to vote for the candidate with the Christian running mate. This political manoeuvre would have ensured that a Muslim candidate of the core-North would carry the vote for president of the country. Indeed, the CAN rejected in a swift statement the “Muslim-Muslim-ticket” Abiola and Kingibe. But then CAN considered that the Southern Muslims like Abiola were likely to be more disposed towards religious tolerance and harmony and that a shift in power from the North to the South may not be all that bad for the country. The Christians therefore voted massively for Abiola and the masses of the Muslims saw the “Muslim-Muslim-ticket” as quite attractive. The outcome of the election was a shock to the Hausa-Fulani-oligarchy and their military supporters, led by Sani Abacha. They quickly arranged the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections.¹⁴ Subsequently Babangida arranged his stepping aside, appointing Ernest Shonekan¹⁵ from the South Head of the *Interim National Government* and placed Sani Abacha at his side, as second in command. The move was obvious. Abacha ousted Shonekan and government returned once more to the oligarchy.

¹⁴see Brunner 2000: 288f.; for a detailed analysis of the annulment see Omoruyi 1999

¹⁵ August 26, 1993 - November 17, 1993

The years under General Sani Abacha¹⁶ were marked by a complete loss of confidence in the ruling class, not only on account of Abacha's repressive regime, but also on account of the aggravated level of fraud. This time around, Christian leaders no longer sought affiliation with the Church quietly. It appeared to them that only their open and public identification with the Christian religion would salvage their credibility. A run for Church attendance and participation in Church activities occurred. Kalu suggests that the challenge of the Sharia debate had intensified new forms of ecumenical enterprises among the Christians; increasing poverty and abuse of human rights had compelled the Catholics to further political consciousness among the laity (see also Arinze 1983d) and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe had changed the international political scene.

"Western countries moved against African dictators, by-passed corrupt military governments by channelling funds through NGO's to support civil societies (...) In this new dispensation the NGO-ization of churches became prominent because of the vast array of social network that could serve as a civil society's active force." (Kalu 2003: 9)

To Abacha this new phenomenon was obvious and it was rumoured that he himself even approached some Catholic priests and Protestant pastors to support his programme. He even welcomed the Pope at his second visit to Nigeria in 1998 at the presidential villa in Aso Rock. The death of Abacha soon after the papal visit for many was a sign of "divine intervention" and Nigerians openly thanked God for this "first class miracle".

Transition to Civilian Rule – religion as an increasing factor in political discourse

Abacha was succeeded by General Abdulsalami Abubakar¹⁷ who arranged a swift transition programme. Remarkable is that he opened the doors of the prison to many who were arrested under Abacha's rule. One after the other of these ex-political-prisoners was released, praising God openly, including Olusegun Obasanjo, who went for a thanksgiving service and made a

¹⁶ November 17, 1993 - June 8, 1998 (Omoruyi 1999: 3-4)

¹⁷ June 8, 1998 - May 29, 1999 (Omoruyi 1999: 3-4)

marathon-speech, published in Nigeria's *The Guardian*. From that time, Obasanjo increasingly showed affiliation to Christianity, specifically the Methodist Church, and took occasions even to function as a lay reader. He did not declare any intention to contest for a political office. When however he was asked about the presidency, he said he was praying over it and has left for God to give him an answer. One could notice his deliberate attempt to make him appear an ardent Christian. In May 1999 Nigeria's long lasting military rule and often interrupted transition to civilian rule came to an end, and Olusegun Obasanjo became the President of the Third Republic¹⁸.

A very important aspect in connection with religion as an increasing factor in political discourse can be seen in the fact that soon after Nigeria's return to civilian rule the Governor of Zamfara State announced the adoption of Sharia Law as its state law; since then other Northern states followed. The Nigerian author Odey (2003: 13) commented on this:

“(...) the Sharia law is as old as Islam. But to ensure that we lived in peace and harmony, its ruthless penal code was never imposed on any state or on the nation by any head of state or by any governor. But today things have fallen apart. A good number of Muslims, including two former heads of state, Alhaji Shehu Shagari and Buhari, tell us that Muslims have every right to do whatever they like in the name of Sharia. Hence, as soon as Obasanjo became the country's leader, Sani Yerima of Zamfara State imposed the Sharia on his state, thereby virtually declaring his state an Islamic state.”

Matthew Kukah looked into the Sharia issue in Northern Nigeria and Nigeria as a whole during the different periods of history – from pre-colonial times up to the present. He analysed the question whether the Sharia debate is a sign for a crisis of religion, politics or power in Nigeria. Under the civilian rule of Obasanjo it was often interpreted as “a threat to democracy” (Kukah 2003a: 19) but also “(...) in the context of the struggle within Muslim society for self-renewal in a democracy” (Kukah 2003a: 27). Apart from discussions on whether the adoption of the Sharia as state law was constitutional or not, or Obasanjo's claims “that there was what he called a political Sharia as distinct from the real Sharia” (Kukah 2003a: 24), Kukah asks for the reasons behind the support of the adoption of Sharia law by the “ordinary Muslims” in Northern Nigeria. He comes to the

¹⁸ May 29, 1999 – May 29, 2007

conclusion, that as it was primarily Nigeria's poor population who suffered from excesses of military rule, corrupt and inefficient governments,

"(...) the possibility of a return to the Sharia gave them hope of something much better than in the past. (...) Whatever the limitations in the application of the Sharia might be, the vacuum created by the failure of the state was at the heart of the popularity of the initiative, particularly among poor ordinary Muslims. Thus, the governors who introduced the Sharia were merely exploiting a vacuum." (Kukah 2003a: 25 f.)

For the Islamic poor the introduction of the Sharia first of all meant that their leaders would themselves have to stick to the Islamic Law and have to improve the social standings of the poor. Kukah therefore concludes that the persistent crises between Muslims and Christians are to a lesser extent "evidence of religious, communal or ethnic intolerance", but "for the most part responses to very poor government policy." (Kukah 2003a: 37) With Nigeria's progress "in its experiment with democracy" (Kukah 2003a: 27) such conflicts could be avoided.

In a similar way Kalu explains the "reinvention of traditional societies and cult groups". "Nigerians resorted to primal religious powers as enabling vitality for competing for scarce resources in the modern public space." (Kalu 2003: 9) Kalu also argues that some explanations for the rapid growth of charismatic and Pentecostal churches in the 1980s and 90s could be found in the fact, that they "(...) fit into the primal worldview that accepted the spiritualized worldview and offered power in Christ to deliver people from witchcraft and other demonic forces (...)" and "(...) the collapse of the economy and abuse of human rights made the upper and middle class just as vulnerable; all surged into charismatic churches that preached prosperity gospel and appropriated modernity (...)" (Kalu 2003: 10).

Similar attitudes as shown by Obasanjo towards Christianity before and during his presidency have become widespread among aspirants to political office in Nigeria. Reverend Adasu became the Governor of Benue State after the prompting of the people. The Reverend Pastor Tanko Yusuf had twice become the Governor of Tabara State. The former Governor of Anambra State, Odera Mbadinuju, suddenly declared himself a preacher before running for governorship. As Governor he went about preaching on a regular basis at various market places in the state. He conducted religious

services at the government office for the civil servants. Many Governors have since engaged pastors of different denominations either as Commissioners or Special Advisers as members of their cabinet.

In popular discourse, Nigerian authors and the press sarcastically and harshly criticize "devout" Christian leaders with no mercy for the poor, and pastors popularly referred to as "Men of God", who are providing public officials with "supernatural comfort".

"(...) there are many 'devout' Christians who believe firmly in God. He is merciful, compassionate, a loving father, generous, and all that. Some of these devout men can go any length in order to defend these attributes of God. But one thing they may not do is to allow God's compassion, mercy, generosity and love to flow to the poor, the needy, the homeless, the disabled, the jobless and the hungry without making it a sort of investment that would later yield some handsome dividends." (Odey 1999: 14)

Okey Ndibe, a lecturer of the University of Lagos, is quite outspoken about so-called "Men of God":

"Many so-called men of God are complicit in the industrious, carefully orchestrated abuse of divinity. (...) Desperate in their pursuit of lucre, many of these pastors provide comfort to the public officials who [are] ruining the life of millions. I don't know a single prominent Nigerian public official who does not identify himself as a devout Muslim, a committed or born-again Christian. Yet, I can't name more than a handful whose conduct in the public arena would earn the admiration of those whose interests they profess to serve." (Ndibe 2004: 65)

According to Kalu in Nigeria's elections in 2003 religion was at the centre of campaigning.

"One index is to follow the number of religious items that appear in all the newspapers: in the editorial column, letters to the editor, syndicated pages and other commentaries and specific articles about religious matters and religious leaders commenting on religious matters." (Kalu 2003: 13)

A few examples from the Nigerian press illustrate the interplay of religion and politics. After the declaration of a state of emergency in Plateau State on

May 18, 2004, the Nigerian newspaper, *The Guardian*, wrote about the suspended Governor Joshua Dariye:

“Dariye had told journalists in Jos on Sunday, May 30, that he has resigned himself to fate and that he has begun a six-month spiritual retreat as a solution to his present predicament. He said that spiritual retreat was the only solution following the declaration of a state of emergency slammed on the state on May 18. ‘I am proceeding on a six-month retreat to seek the grace of the Lord for Plateau State and Nigeria. This spiritual option is adopted because of my firm belief in destiny. I am adopting spiritual option rather than legal option being suggested by some people because of my belief that God has a purpose for allowing the incident that befell Plateau State. I remain loyal to President Olusegun Obasanjo and would pray for him during the retreat,’ Dariye said. (...) Dariye, who said Bible is his food, added: ‘My decision is biblical, it was God who gave me the position of governor in the first place (...) I am holding on to what the bible said in Jeremiah 29:11 where God said: <I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future.> this is what I am holding on to (...) God in His own time makes things beautiful.’” (Abdullahi 2004:11)

The *Sunday Punch* reported:

“[the suspended Governor of Plateau State, Chief Joshua Dariye], who spoke while delivering a sermon at the Church of Christ in Nigeria, Horop-Mushere, his place of origin, during a thanksgiving service with members of his family, expressed his belief in a brighter future for the country. Basing his message on God’s faithfulness to those who trust in him, the governor took his readings from the books Romans, John, Joshua and the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians, he charged Nigerians to look up to God in whatever situation they found themselves as God never disappoints those who trust in him. (...) He [Dariye] later led the church to pray for the country, especially President Olusegun Obasanjo and other top leaders. Speaking with journalists later, he said there was nothing strange in his mounting the pulpit since the primary duty of every true Christian is to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.” (Owuamanam 2004: 10; 38)

Pastor Seyi Ogunorunyinka, the “general Overseer The Promised Land Ministries Surulere, Lagos”, published some “prayer points” in his article

on "Passover" (2), which can not be regarded as useful in building up an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance in a country:

"(...) O Lord, dash all my enemies into pieces like a potter's vessel in the mighty name of Jesus.

O Lord, break the feet of all my enemies in the mighty name of Jesus.

O Lord, destroy all my enemies using poisonous tongues against my life in the mighty name of Jesus." (Ogunorunyinka 2003: A19)

Nigeria has continued to experience serious conflicts arising from ethnic affiliation, "the indigene versus non-indigene-syndrome", inadequate distribution of resources, educational imbalance and religious intolerance.

In this contribution the focus was laid on religion as an increasing factor in political discourse. In many instances where ethno-religious violence occurs, as for example in the year 2003 in Kano, Kaduna and Jos, they may be explained as a result of "turning religion into the most lethal weapon even as they [some disgruntled and greedy politicians] try to make God an accomplice in their crimes against the nation and humanity." (Odey 2003: 18) It is interesting to note that Odey, a Catholic priest, dedicated his publication "To Col. Abubakar Dangiwa Umar. A Muslim Who Has No Trace Of Religious Prejudice In His Blood. A Social Justice Crusader. A Man For All People. A Patriotic Nigerian" (Odey 2003).

About a week after the killings of some people in Yelwa and the reprisal attacks in Kano the former Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, led a few thousands of Christians in prayers to avert further violence and bloodshed in the country under the platform of the *South-West Zone of Nigeria Prays*, a programme founded and chaired by Gowon himself (Obe 2004). The former Lagos State military administrator, Brig.-Gen. Mohammed Marwa,

"(...) condemned in strong terms the (...) ethno-religious crises that occurred in some parts of the North, especially in Plateau and Kano states. He noted that God had already created every one to live in different ethnic groups and practice religions of choice, adding that no human should fault God for His wisdom (...)" (Isiguzo 2004: 5)

In connection with Nigeria and "men-made-problems" (as there are corruption, fraud and intimidation) it is often spoken of the "Nigerian Factor", as it was also only recently done, in connection with the elections of

2007. Under the headline “Yar’ Adua And The ‘Nigerian Factor’” Esajere criticizes in *The Guardian* “[t]he dark side of April 14 and 21 general elections, which have gone down as the worst ever witnessed in Nigeria’s political history”, while “[s]olidarity visits to the President-elect, Alhaji Umar Musa Yar’ Adua¹⁹ are already going on (...).” (Esajere 2007: 60)

It is quite interesting, that around this time, in May 2007, a booklet with the title “The G-Factor in Obasanjo’s Administration” was published by “Aso Villa Chapel” (“Aso Rock” is the place of the Presidential Villa). The “G[od]-Factor” in Obasanjo’s administration, in contrast to the “Nigerian Factor”, therein describes “God’s Role in Obasanjo’s Government”, “The Passion for National Renewal” and “The Future Expectations”.

Under the headline “My Election Is Will of God, Says Yar’ Adua”, Ogbodo (2007: 6) is quoting the President-elect with the following words:

“My election has the interest of Nigerians at heart. God has all powers and bestows power on whom he chooses. My election is the will of God²⁰. I, therefore, appeal to all those who feel aggrieved to follow the constitutional provision. Arbitrariness and chaos are no alternatives to the rule of law. (...) What matters now is the task of building a new Nigeria that will be the pride of all.”

On November 13, 2007, *The Daily Trust* (Bajulaye/Ojoember 2007) published an article on the former President Obasanjo, who went for a post-graduate Diploma in Theology at the National Open University of Nigeria. “Dr. Rivers, representative of the Latin University of Theology, the institution that conferred the doctorate degree on Obasanjo [is quoted as having said] they did so because of the fight against corruption Obasanjo successfully started.”

The question will remain to be answered if these inclinations to religion by the political leaders are motivated by genuine religious interest or by mere political expedience.

¹⁹ May 29, 2007-

²⁰ In the discussion following the presentation of this paper at the Afrikanistentag in July 2007, a Nigerian participant pointed to the fact, that by using the term “God” instead of “Allah” in this context, the article seems to suggest, that the election of Yar’ Adua is an election in the interest of all Nigerians, Christians, Muslims and believers of ATR.

Summary

The Nigerian journalist Ebere Ahanihu asked the Ugandan-Indian social scientist, Mahmood Mamdani, who visited Nigeria for the launching of the African edition of his book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Late Cold War and the Origin of Terror*, in June 2004:

“Why has religion taken the centre stage as we move into the 21st Century? (...) I asked that question because even in this country [Nigeria], we are seeing more and more of religious-based conflicts. Recently, we experienced it in Plateau and Kano states. [Mamdani]: Maybe we should reverse the question. Maybe the question really is why has [sic!] our political institutions atrophied? Why is it that people turn to religious institutions? Why is it that they can find no other credible alternatives? Conflicts like these are anchored on control over resources. (...) What I am saying is that if you have political institutions, which are adequate in containing conflicts and dealing with them, then conflicts over resources between two groups would not get to this stage. (...)” (Ahanihu 2004: 13)

We asked for the reasons why religion has become an increasing factor in political discourse in Nigeria since the 1960s. A short flashback into the history of what today is known as Nigeria and into the colonial encounter with the British has shown a substantial loss of authenticity in leadership. Colonial states have not evolved from the needs and interests of the respective colonised societies but were created for their colonial masters' economic interests. The British administrative strategy of Indirect Rule and their policy of Divide-and-Rule laid the ground for a regional and ethnic consciousness within the artificial entity called Nigeria and, in addition, Christian missionary work has contributed to changes in religious beliefs and educational developments.

Postcolonial governments and their leaders were faced with a struggle for a new identity. The process of nation building after independence suffered from the strong predominantly ethnic-oriented policy of some of her Southern political leaders, who because of the religious plurality in the South and the interconnection between Christianity and colonialism better did not refer to their religious affiliation. The situation was quite different in the North, where the incorporation of the political-religious Muslim leaders of the Emirate-system into the colonial administration had laid the ground

not only for ethnic politics but also for the strong supply of authenticity by Islam during colonialism and after independence.

Post-independence experiences with corrupt and inefficient governments in connection with the experience of increased poverty, insecurity and the abuse of human rights have not only laid the ground for an increased Christian political consciousness, it also laid the ground for the acceptance of the introduction of the "entire Sharia" by the Islamic poor (Kukah 2003a: 25 f.), the "reinvention" of ATR and cult groups by people struggling for scarce resources and for the rapid growth of charismatic and Pentecostal churches (Kalu 2003: 9 f.).

Wole Soyinka gives in his paper, delivered at the *International Congress of Dialogue on Civilizations, Religions and Cultures*, organised by UNESCO and the Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Abuja in December 2003 an example for the high value that is attributed to religious tolerance in Yoruba religion:

"The brash youth meets an ancient babalawo and strikes him. He meets an old herbalist and humiliates him. He runs into a venerable moslem priest kneeling in prayer and knocks him to the ground. Ifa divined for such insolent ones who boasted that they were beyond correction. (...) Don't you know that a youth who strikes a priest of Ifa will not partake in this world for long? Premature is the death of the youth who strikes the devout imam at his devotions. (...)" (Soyinka 2003b: A14, A19)

But in Soyinka's view "the faith that is *orisa*" does not claim "monopoly on the virtues of tolerance". Christianity and Islam have also a true commitment to justice, fair play and tolerance. Yar' Adua, Nigeria's new President was reported to have said after his election "what matters now is the task of building a new Nigeria that will be the pride of all." (Ogbodo 2007: 6) If this means, that he dedicates his presidency to Nigeria's progress "in it's experiment with democracy" (Kukah 2003a: 27), than the Nigerian people would be ready again to address political problems and conflicts over resources in a more adequate way than in the past years.

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel analysiert den Beitrag postkolonialer Entwicklungen in Nigeria an der Erweckung eines politischen Bewusstseins unter

ChristInnen, was zum verstärkten politischen Engagement christlicher Laien führte. Er beginnt mit einem kurzen Rückblick auf die Geschichte des heutigen Nigeria und das koloniale Aufeinandertreffen mit den Briten, das vor allem im Süden des Landes zu einem wesentlichen Verlust an authentischer *leadership* führte. Die Einbindung der politisch-religiösen Führer aus der Oligarchie des Nordens und des vorkolonialen Systems der Emirate in die Kolonialverwaltung schufen im Norden die Grundlage für die Abstützung der Authentizität der politischen Führung durch den Islam. Im Süden wirkte sich das britische Verwaltungssystem der *Indirect Rule* deutlich anders aus. Im Unterschied zum Norden entstanden im Süden zwei getrennte Zweige politischer Führung, „koloniale Chiefs“ und neue politische Eliten, die beide wegen der religiösen Pluralität, wegen des Nebeneinander-Bestehens von Islam, Christentum und *African Traditional Religions* (ATR), gut beraten waren, sich eher nicht auf ihren jeweiligen religiösen Hintergrund zu berufen. Der Artikel nimmt Bezug auf öffentliche Diskurse im Zusammenhang mit der Scharia-Debatte und auf Beispiele aus der nigerianischen Presse, um das sich intensivierende Wechselspiel von Religion und Politik zu veranschaulichen.

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