ELITE-PRIESTHOOD CONNIVANCE IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Oluwole Jacob Odeyemi
Department of History and International Studies, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria
odeyemioluwole6@gmail.com +2348035755768

Abstract

Though the Nigerian project is designed on colonial drawing board, its feebleness was unhidden from the founding colonial elites who among other things had discretionally fed the masses with the opium of religion to prop it up - Islam in the north and Christianity in the south, complementarily in operation to trick and tame the masses and secure the nation for colonial exploitation. The cult of the indigenous elites that gained ruling at independence had realised the taming-utility of religion on the masses and thus never stopped the opiate doses. The postcolonial reality is the connivance of the priests and the elites to seize and forage the state from the masses. For instance, the priesthood blamed people’s sins and lack of faith for the rampaging poverty in the nation, deflecting the fault away from elite’s misrule and corruption in government, while the latter allowed the priesthood to bleed the masses through the impositions of diverse offerings at spiritual jamborees for deliverance and salvation. A section of the elite circle is now aggrieved and religion is again exploited to settle scores, hence the boko haram uprising that threatened national security. This work contends that the fate of the masses and national development hang intricately on the elite/priesthood romance in the absence of mass revolution.

Keywords: Religiosity, elitism, priesthood, development, security

Introduction

The Hercules heels of man generally, are hidden in his simplicity to venerate and revere; his metaphysical perception of insecurity and insufficiency; and also in his incapability to know with certainty and non-empirically, without any iota of doubt. These, particularly his simplicity and frail mentality, incapacitation and insecurity, have combined to phenomenally burden and render humans gullible, inadvertently, to demagogical trickery and exploitation by the opportunists who are in custody of the knowledge of these inadequacies, and who could evilly afford to play on his intelligence. As posited by Robert Southey, “Man is a dupable animal. Quacks in medicine, quacks in religion, and quacks in politics know this, and act upon that knowledge”, (as cited in Microsoft Encarta, 2008). It is particularly and phenomenally worst in human societies where mediocrity is commonplace. The aged maxim of Socrates is that “the unexamined life is not worth living”. The incapability of man to meaningfully examine and comprehend life and his environment has made him to devolve the wonders of life and nature to the handiwork of a higher creating power, while also, his capability to revere and venerate has cost him the deification and the religionization of that imaginary power. Consequently, myriads of such religionised deifications have historically cropped up in human societies. The human mind is thus unlocked for the unleashing of grand manipulation along the lines of his mental frailty, including his religion, and Nigerians, being no special humans, were no exceptions to the rule.

Interestingly, two such religions, Christianity and Islam, predominated globally. Uwaezuoke and Ethel (2010) contend that these religions enjoyed governmental protection in colonial Nigeria. The two predominated because of their intellectual/doctrinal development cum incorporation of systematics for social life, and the organisation of the political state. Both had tenacity for the divine imperatives of absolute political obligation alongside religious spiritism and pietism. Quite interestingly, religion proves to be a wonderfully soothing calmative, an opiate of some sort, through
which man could assuage or explain away his difficulties particularly when they are beyond his reasoning faculty or physical capability whereupon he resigns to fate, while at the same time, remaining ever optimistically calm, though in perpetual vainness. It is in this regard that atheists considered religion as the accomplishment of nothing but a crutch provision for the weak-minded and the emotionally disturbed to get through life. Thus as people could naturally suffer and yet smiled through actual opiate dosage, so could the politically oppressed be made to smile through the opiating influence of religion.

Opium is a drug sourced from the unripe seed pods of the opium poppy containing several highly addictive narcotic alkaloids. With its stupefying, numbing effects, it is an important drug used as a sedative or painkiller. Also regarded as source of fantastic visions and a dream inducer, opium is administered to make someone experience fantasies, some sorts of fictional mills and boon. Novalis (1798) wrote in Blüthenstaub that “religion acts merely as an opiate: irritating, numbing, calming their pain out of weakness” (as cited in Wikipedia, 2012). Karl Marx stood on his intellectual shoulders 45 years later to contend that religious suffering is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Marx consequently and historically submits that Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. Religion is the opium of the people (as cited in Luchte, 2009).

Vladimir Lenin, a committed Marxist, on the other hand, was quite unequivocally harsh and broader in his interpretation of religion. Lenin argued that those who toil and live in want all their lives are taught by religion to be submissive and patient while here on earth, and to take comfort in the hope of a heavenly reward. But those who live by the labour of others are taught by religion to practice charity while on earth, thus offering them a very cheap way of justifying their entire existence as exploiters and selling them at a moderate price tickets to well-being in heaven. Religion is opium for the people. Religion is a sort of spiritual booze, in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man, (as cited in Fallman, 2010).

Fallman (2010) enunciated that Lenin sees religion as a tool of oppressors to enslave people and that it invariably comes from above (political elites), pushing people (masses) down. Lenin, above, contends further that religion would have a calming and soothing effect, preventing protests and uprisings, and in his view, only the ruling classes would gain from religion, and then only by fooling themselves. The factual corollary is that ruling elites and other class of elites have long ago realised the effectiveness of repeatedly utilizing religion to hoodwink, manipulate and tame or even insurrect the masses. Such dubious employment of religion is particularly rife in polities where the ruling elites had acted in dereliction or in contravention of people’s rights. Religion is thus viewed as an instrument of taming people since by entrenching a set of rules, coupled with the instilled fear of a consequential punishment of eternal damnation for violating the rules, elites can preserve social order and prevent riot or civil unrest. However, the elite-dupe of the masses is often done with the connivance of comprador religious elites – the priesthood. Charles Kingsley, the Canon of the Church of England, confessed to this connivance four years after Marx that “We have used the Bible as if it were a mere special constable's hand book, an opium dose for keeping beasts of burden patient while they were being overloaded, a mere book to keep the poor in order” (as cited in Wikipedia, 2012).

Inasmuch as this work is not intended as an atheistic dismissal of religion, for experience has shown that the human soul indeed naturally thirsts for spiritualism, yet it must be said that this natural yearning of man has placed him at the mercy of exploitative opportunists, who could be ruthless on occasions. The unequivocal assertion here is that man is not exclusively by nature a political animal in the strict Aristotelian sense; he is
inclusively a spiritual animal, and religion is his spiritual shell just as the state is his political habitat. Robert Imre and Jim Jose (2010) indeed have argued that contemporary leaders remain committed to embracing some degree of religious affiliation as a mantle of legitimacy. By implication, human religiosity in postmodernism is on the rise rather than declining, and since religion is natural to man, a good degree of religiosity is always required for the political legitimacy of the ruling elite. And what can one say, that presently the state of Russia, which once represented the global bastion of communism with the agenda for the total elimination of religion, as strongly advocated by their ideological heroes, Marx and Lenin, has currently, in a policy reversal, embarked on using state fund worth billions of rubles to restore the abandoned old church buildings during communism, and build hundreds of new churches around Moscow in the ongoing “Two Hundred Churches Project”.

Ostrovsky and Dorman (2013) in a television broadcast recently quoted President Putin as saying that "the church should be allowed more control over aspects of Russian life". Many critics have considered this Russian church/state romance as an intended drama for corruption and the embezzlement of state fund. But further to that truth, this work considers this elite/church affair as an unholy alliance. The Russian elites have in addition to understanding the taming-utility of religion, realized the wisdom in playing along with religion as against the futility of suppressing it. The Russian masses are thus set for emergent, gradual and unprecedented manipulations, aimed at perpetuating the Putin-led generation of elite dominance, a deal best realized through elite/clergy connivance. This lengthy preamble was made to properly ground the assertion of the utility of religion as a demagogical tool for mass-dupe across human societies, and Nigeria is no exception to that scenario. Indeed, right from the inception of the Nigerian state has religion played significant role in its modus operandi, and this work is set to argue that the current socio-political instability and skewed national development stemmed from excessive recourse to religion as a tool in statecraft by elites.

The assemblage of a phantom nation
The colonial creation of Nigeria by Britain at the commencement of the Twentieth Century was not achieved only by the forceful subjugation and amalgamation of Africans but equally through the utility of the manipulable attributes of the champion religions – Islam and Christianity. Local religious creeds like arouchuku were tyrannized by the colonialists for their obstinacy to colonial rule coupled with their inability to be utilized in the taming of the locals. This stemmed from the sustained hostility encountered by the colonialists from the locals and their religions. But most significantly too is the latter’s lack of discernible manipulable elements and systematics for statecraft as obtainable in Islam and Christianity. Uwaezuoke and Ethel (2010) recalled that the colonial pretensions against local shrines and the dogged resistance encountered from peoples connected with the local shrines forced the British administrators to demonize the reputed shrines and their adherents, and resolutely misrepresented them as opposed to justice, peace and security. It eventually prompted London Colonial Office to back-up military campaign to destroy the shrines and destabilize the local populations.

Nigeria is here regarded a phantom in that its evolution defies the concept of nationhood and nationalism by which most modern European nations had evolved, particularly on the basis of common ties of descent, religion, language and other affinities, though there were many exceptions. However, rather than being naturally evolved, the Nigerian state, like most African states, was crafted on the colonial drawing board, whereby disparate peoples with uncommon descents, beliefs, values and languages were forcibly packaged into nation-states. The consequence was that citizens of African nations were unable to give up their natural identities to forge a synthetic one as colonially envisaged. However, the project was paramount to the organizers whose motive for the forceful political bonding of the disparate Africans was less humanitarian than intended
for imperial servitude, principally aimed at the provision of extremely cheap resource garden, and labour for resource exploitation. As a writer had argued, Nigeria was viewed as a business facility used primarily for production and exports by British government, (Ogundipe, 2011). So phantom were the colonial states that, in the idea of Frantz Fanon (1963), national consciousness, rather than being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, had been only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it ought to be. It ultimately jeopardized national effort and national unity.

The feebleness of the state was obvious to the colonial elites, who among other things had discretionaly resorted to the utility and gimmicks of religion to prop it up. They, among other things, had discretionaly fed the masses with the opium of religion in order to stabilize the potentially turbulent ethnically incongruous societies as one - Islam up north and Christianity down south, complementarily in operation to trick and tame the masses, intended ultimately to secure the national facility for colonial exploitation. It is an historic fact that European missionaries partly instigated imperialism in Africa. The missionaries had purportedly hoped to use the opportunity to evangelize and liberate African peoples from the colonially-portrayed clutches of crudity, savagery and satanism. But experience showed the missionaries did more than mere evangelism particularly in areas where Europeans encountered formidable resistance in spite of their superior fire power. White missionaries connived with their colonial counterparts, sometimes in the subtle brain conditioning of Africans, aimed at softening their opposition to white rule. The colonial involvement of religion is so impactful that religious thought became a crucial conditional of political practice in Africa. Ellis and Ter Haar (2004) have observed that “it is largely through religious ideas that Africans think about the world today...Religious ideas provide them with a means of becoming social and political actors”

The colonial brain conditioning is easily achieved through such invocations as Paulina doctrine of absolute divine obedience to constituted political authority in Romans 13:1 and Hebrew 13:17. Besides that these biblical verses and many others are alluding to the divine right of state theory and the legitimacy of every, and any political government, the Paulina injunction also sought to mitigate any problem of obedience from the masses to the civil authority of the imperial Rome, even as it precludes the latter from being accountable to the former. The clause and concept – higher power had effectively legitimated the sovereignty of any government over the people, for instance, of the imperial white (apartheid) rule over the black race. With the barrages of these subtle teachings, which came handy during European imperialism, Africans steadily abandoned their initial resistance and accepted colonial rule. Thus, as the colonialists acquired new territories via superior weapons, missionaries were brought in to tame and win the people’s hearts and minds for colonial rule. But Paul, as a trained lawyer and elite may have subscribed to absolute obedience prior to his conversion to Christianity, by either of which he quite well understood the importance of tranquilly social order as against anarchy and chaos. It may also be not unconnected with his attempt to court the Roman government under whose imperial suzerainty his home-state was encumbered, and in whose territorial jurisdictions he journeyed about, riskily proselytizing. His published endorsement of absolute loyalty to Roman imperial rule may have been intended as a bribe to the Roman elites in return for safe proselytization at a time when Christians were undergoing deadly persecutions in Rome.

With Nigeria however, a little exception was to the rule. Missionaries came with the colonialists; they were however not allowed evangelism beyond the Niger River into the northern parts. The pragmatist approach that Britain adopted at colonialism had empowered its agents to adopt the right tact that best suits the situation on ground. British colonialist discovered that the Dan Fodio Jihad had already Islamized much of Northern Nigeria, a
situations that had already successfully subjugated, organised, mesmerized and solidarized the pre-colonial masses to the political authority of their Emirs, and ultimately the Sultanate. The earlier colonial experience in North Africa where Islam had effectively mobilized the peoples had put Britain wise to preserve the status quo. What was needed was to have the Sultanate and the subordinating Emirs, who had already significantly captured the hearts and minds of the peoples in colonial pocket. This was successfully done via surrogated colonial rule in which complicit Islamic rulers were propped up in government, ruling on the behalf, and under the guide of the British colonialists. This is unlike in the South where traditional rulers were rendered nominal by deliberate colonial policy, with activist or recalcitrant rulers being hunted or exiled. The result is the colonial indirect rule in the North as against the direct rule of Southern Nigeria.

The purported animism in the south could not be worked with by the colonialists, hence the need to import Christianity through the missionaries. Its further exportation to the north, where Islam had already flourished, could however be antithetical to British interests hence its halt in the lower Niger. But quite interestingly, the religious prejudices of the colonialists had not equally short the door on the Islamisation of the South. Indeed, Islam had penetrated a little down south before the arrival of the colonialists, and the Jihadist ambition of Othman Dan Fodio and his group to *deep the Quran in the sea* had made Islam to reach as far down as Lagos. However, while the colonialists would not want to halt the spread of Islam in the south *pari passu* Christianity, it was a different ball game in the North. Concerning the dual religious and governmental policies perpetrated by Britain in colonial Nigeria, Aguwa (1997) contends that the colonial policy of indirect rule allowed Muslim leaders to retain their traditional authority and preserved intact the Islamic system, including the Islamic legal system, the Sharia. The offices of the Caliphate in Sokoto and the Emirs were recognised and their authority all the more enhanced when the colonial government used the system to extend its rule over the northern area. With the acquiescence of the British, the Emirs exercised powers that could outlaw Christianity and missionary activities in their Emirates. This authority was exercised with immense enthusiasm to check Christian missionary penetration of the North.

Meaningful Christian expansion in the North was halted or unachievable until independence. Steed asserts that “the Christianization of many of the various ethnic communities in the Middle Belt is a quite astonishing recent history really only occurring since independence in 1960”, (as cited in Aguwa, 1997, p. 350). But this religious apartheid had created a situation in which different ethnic groupings were absorbed into different religions, seemingly in mutual exclusion. This form of checkered religious percolation into the ethnies provided for no equal-mix, but created an extra identity, strongly coloured by religion. As each ethnic group dominated in one religion against another, deep ethno-religious sentiments evolved that could be whipped by political demagogues. It became the groundwork for future ethno-religious crises that Nigeria has persistently and bitterly experienced. Kukah, in this regard, asserted in the mid-1990s, that “Every Nigerian carries an excess luggage of identity…even in our common quest for social justice; we are constantly negotiating with the others on behalf of a religion, an ethnic group or a state” (as cited in the African Report of International Crisis Group, 2006).

So successfully mutual were the religious prejudices to deliberately preserve the Northern Islamic integrity for colonial expediency that Mallam Aminu Kano, the late, acclaimed crusader against the oppression of the *talakawas* (the downtrodden), accused the Northern Caliphate of disappointing Islam through a devilish connivance with colonialists to exploit the masses. But this discretionary dual utility of religions to organize colonial Nigeria was novel to the synthetic creation of the phantom state. It is a phantom to the extent that as close as Nigeria is to its centennial
celebration as nation-state, the disparate peoples that made Nigeria were yet to homogenize in the national melting pot despite repeated policy attempts at engineering unity in diversity. Significantly however, the deliberate colonial segregation of the people along two dissimilar religions had resulted in the crystallization of the disparate peoples along the religious exclusivities, a situation that had *ab initio* doomed the future of the country and repeatedly fomented ruinous social crises.

**Elitism, politicking and religionism in post-colonial Nigeria**

At independence in 1960, Britain had granted political freedom to a deeply fragmented state. The previous colonial policies had not effectively garnered a truly Nigerian nationalistic spirit, but had rather sown seeds of discord. Consequently, what at best resulted was a furious but sentimental ethnic nationalism. The hidden fundamental differences resurfaced at political independence; thus it became problematic for any well-wishing politician to govern Nigeria as a single constituency. Party formation and membership at independence was characterised by this fundamental differences and political parties were deeply entrenched with ethnic or sectional loyalty, sentiments and agendas. Indeed at political independence, the political water was murky and the aura was filthy, hence, there were no true commitments on the part of the indigenous ruling elites to move the nation forward as an entity, and hence also, the political settlement for powerful Regionalism and a weak center at independence.

But quite astonishingly, it marked the best period for the country. With agro-based economy, regional politicians had begun to carefully harness and gradually transform the natural endowments and potentials of their peoples into reality, which was a veritable template for genuine sustainable wealth creation and economic development. Regionalism brought out the best in the politicians as ingenious and developmental programmes were pursued to excel their respective areas competitively. This is highly notable for instance in Western Nigeria which pioneered the country in a number of developmental projects such as the first Television Station in Africa, the first ultramodern stadium, the first skyscraper, and a lofty pursuit of free education which had placed the region above others in human development index. However, the amusement at independence is that while the early politicians were regarded as activist-nationalists, they were derisive of the phantom state and lazily patriotic to its course. They were rather zealously and patriotically inclined to the narrow course of their ethnic base.

The discovery of massive deposits of fossil fuels at the time made further pursuits of regional autonomy unattractive, thereby stultifying competitive regional development. Stupendous oil wealth had set the ruling elites thinking on a new course aimed at economic and political centralism as against decentralization. At the pace of regional autonomy; revenue sharing formula; economic development and national politicking shortly after independence, the Nigerian state was politically unsustainable and was on a sure footing for imminent but gradual and peacefully negotiated disintegration. The unexpected massive influx of petrodollars however halted the process, and gave a new lease of life to the phantom state. The oil economy, and not any genuine ethos of nationalism, has been the only motivating factor that kept the state afloat, dry up the oil wells and Nigeria would be unattractive as a national entity to the component groups. Bach (2005) argues that, due to its oil income, Nigeria has been able to preserve a neo-patrimonial state, which has collapsed in much of the rest of post-colonial Africa. The flow of *easy money* – in the form of petrodollars had killed the ingenuity of the early and latter politicians, turning them into indolent elites in the emergent prevalent rentier state.

Of course, the phantom state may never return to its ingenious good years until the oil wells dried up. After the initial commotions, a progressive abandonment of regionalism was
embarked upon while the center became acutely strengthened. Subsequently, successive ruling elites at the center (professional politicians or the military) had exploited national wealth, at best, for the parochial interests of their ethnic home states, when it is not for personal aggrandizement. Since the center is studded with real wealth, elite-recruitment into the center became a do or die affair. Voter-mobilization at elections became the agenda for political desperadoes. Every necessary sentiment, even when they are abstractly or with mammoth potentials for destructions and killing is whipped up in the struggle for power at the center. Ethno-religious sentiments had been exploited unabatedly in this wise and the ensuing bad blood had made developmental drive difficult for Nigeria. The story of Nigeria is that of a state where successive political elite have presided over the misgovernance and squandering of a state, despite its premium potentials and is consequently withering off.

Nigeria is a state with endless list of absurdities. It is only in Nigeria that brazen political elites blamed political leadership (themselves) for the development deficits of Nigeria, and yet were unwilling to throw in the towel, or take such necessary drastic measures that would address the deficits. It is rudely weird how in the circus of Nigerian elites, self-blames are traded/accepted or claimed, in explaining Nigeria’s failure. It is indeed absurd how for instance; Chief Olusegun Obasanjo recently and repeatedly blamed leadership for the nation’s woes. It is most absurd also, in that he, at present, has the singular honour of being the only Nigerian that ruled the country both as a military and civilian president, and also the longest ruler Nigeria ever had when his years as military and civilian presidents were combined. Yet, he blamed leadership, a major part of which he was, for the woes of the nation. But this political malevolence is further absurd in that while the Nigerian masses suffer the grave consequences of elite’s misrule, such as abject poverty, unemployment, debilitating hunger, poor longevity and ill health, only few members of the elite suffer the consequences of their confessed misrule.

Nigerian elites rather live in opulence and splendor, either on their stupendous rentier income, publicly looted funds, or government patronage. A few have indeed ranked prestigiously among the richest in the world. A recent publication by Forbes (2013) ranked Aliko Dangote, a Nigerian industrial elite with symbiotic ties to relevant political elites, the 43rd richest man in the world. Apart from being the only African among the hundred richest men globally, he is also the richest African, ahead of a number of other Nigerian business elite. Thus, while life is made difficult for the Nigerian masses, consequent of the elite-misrule, the elites are rather making progress with their lives. Nigerian democracy is thus definable in the Lincolnian perversion as the government of the elite, by the elite, and for the elite. Worst still, the caricaturist Nigerian democracy is the exploitation/deprivation of the masses, for the betterment of the elite, by the elite, and for the elite, since dividends of governance are never benefitted by the generality of the Nigerian people.

The question could then be asked about who is fooling who? The elites’ self-blame could be considered a gimmick to pretentiously assuage the hoodwinked masses, designed also to make the latter think that the former is troubled and genuinely worried about their plight, whereas, nothing concrete is done to correct the ills. The elites’ acceptance of guilt is merely thus a charade intended to fool the masses. With the absence of truly committed national elites, corruption and bad governance became the order of the day. After all, a brain that is busy with plans to corruptly enrich self cannot simultaneously accommodate progressive, selfless thoughts towards good governance, sustainable development, poverty eradication and commonwealth of the generality. The two are contradictory, and are mutual exclusives. The human brain can at best accommodate only a single sense of commitment.

Given that elitism is inevitable in the governance of modern states as espoused by diehard theorists of elitism, for instance as Mosca, with his theory of the impossibility of
mass rule and his doctrine of the political class contends, 'some minorities (the elite) have the necessary attitudes to direct the social corpus beneficially, others (the masses) more or less lack these, shouldn’t there be a moral guidance for elitism?' Mosca had equally conjectured that if the direction of society by an oligarchy (the elite class) was inevitable, then the crucial practical question came to settle on the quality of the political class, and the source of its recruitment, since all else depended on this. Still in Mosca’s theorization, some, in pursuing their power interests, also contribute to social progress; others bring about decay and disintegration. For elite theory, the explanation for any social decline or chronic disorder was to be sought, not so much in the structure of society itself, but in some defect in the political class and its capacity to respond to the problems with which it was confronted. Thus, for Mosca again, when a political class declines, without the rise of another which understands better how to satisfy the needs of the times, then occur those periods of immobility or gradual social decay which can be found in the history of almost all peoples, (Mosca is cited in Beetham, 1977). Similarly, Bibó, advocate of elitism, believes that the supreme good enjoyed by a society resides in well-functioning elites who do not exploit but serve society. So the privileges of the ruling elite are the consequences of their genuine social achievements. But when the elites fail to fulfill their social duties, they become an exploitative social stratum, (Bibó is cited in Kovács, 1999).

There is no doubt that elitism or the political class in Nigeria had suffered massive structural defects, and that it had brought Nigeria into chronic social decay and immobility. But why is there no rise of another which understands better how to satisfy the needs of the times in the Moscan sense. With particularity to Nigeria, the question is closely related to Mosca’s worries on the quality of the political class, and the source of its recruitment. Kifordu (2011) provides a succinct answer to this. His response to this is located in the liberal pluralists’ belief that transformation in the elite power structure depends on periodic renewals, i.e. the entrance of new persons and ideas as regimes and resources change. Of course, Nigeria has had many such structural changes but which had not been very effective in transforming the outlook of the Nigerian elite. This is because; in his argument, individual members and groups of the elite are drawn from similar and exclusive backgrounds, and that there is a certain relationship between historically entrenched values and interests that inform the political conduct of the core political executive elite and the denial of opportunities to new groups.

Another question could be asked, why the Nigerian masses are so gullibly unperturbed despite their abject conditions from the persistent barrages and consequences of elite’s misrule. Why are the prospects remote, as it were, for the revolt of the masses in Nigeria? It is after all historical, particularly in the study of mass-revolutions, even from the medieval times, that once the political elite ceased to fulfill their social responsibilities, protecting their country and ensuring the tranquility of life for their masses, put differently, when the elite had become an exploitative social stratum, the masses revolted. Why then are the Nigerian masses seemingly contented with their deteriorating conditions, and showing no iota of agitation for critical, mass-oriented, policy reforms? The answer is not far-fetched. Ruling elites have always known the importance of taming the exploited masses, and have learnt to continually perfect the art.

The cult of indigenous elites that gained ruling at independence also understood the opiateness of religion, a colonial legacy they had inherited. The first appearance of their opiate doses takes the form of public display of intense religiosity (publicized association with religious gatherings) in Islam or Christianity by either the ruling or aspiring elites. This is the first effective bait by which the elite ensnared the masses who often simply swallows it hook, line, and sinker. Such elite is deemed godly in the simple minds of the masses, and are instantly ready to trust them with political governance. Although this is not peculiar to Nigeria as Imre and Jose (2010)
had expressed a significant curiosity that “contemporary leaders (the world over) remain committed to embracing some degree of religious affiliation as a mantle of legitimacy”, it is however hyped in Nigeria. Typical Nigerian elite would invoke God deceptively and without hesitation in the Machiavellian strategy to secure the people’s trust even when facts, actions and intentions are on the contrary. A good case was Gen. Ibrahim Babangida often invoked or swore by the Islamic slogan in sha Allah (in a supposedly secular country) to trick Nigerians into believing him even when he knowingly was least prepared to do as claimed. That way, his aberrant/corrupt military regime trickily sustained for 8 years with endless and futile promises of transition to democracy until political pressures forced him to step aside from power.

As the opiate doses continue in the elite’s misrule, the consequences of their bad governance soon began to catch up with the masses particularly in the form of poverty, hunger and unemployment. Rather than be crossed with government; the masses sheepishly seek solace and solution to their problems in the religions. Unfortunately from religion’s standpoint, such and other problems had only resulted from man’s ungodly/sinful nature, when not from spiritual attacks. Dubious and avaricious comprador members of the priesthood respond with deceptive prophesying; implanting imaginary horrors in people’s hearts by demonizing the human environment; conducting endless but profit-motivated prayer sessions (where invaluable productive man-hours are misspent) to spiritually alter situations which obviously were deficits in governance, and best tackled by appropriate governmental actions, particularly if the political class was ready to become the well-functioning elites who do not exploit but serve society. There may be no Scandinavian citizen among the world’s richest; their countries are proudly the most developed in the world and their peoples are certainly the World’s happiest, (Helliwell, Layard & Sachs, 2012).

The connivery in Nigeria is by no means premeditated. It is rather accidental and circumstantial. The connivers are however aware particularly of their complementariness, though pretentious of each other’s intentions, actions/inactions that are collaborative, interdependent, and mutually rewarding, promotive and reinforcing. Both were thus determinedly encouraged to thrive in the unapparent mutuality. Their target remained the poor, unsuspecting masses who had been reprehensibly governed and deceitfully spiritualized. With reckless abandon, ruling elites unabatedly wallowed in bad governance while quack and predatory priests sustained the masses in charismatic trickery and exploitative priestcraft. The latter creates false euphoric hopes of wealth for citizen-adherents to bask in, motivating the impoverished to idly await miraculous prosperity, usually brokerable by spiritual seed sowing. Motivational talks geared towards prosperity are the hallmark of such predatory priests, and such messages are tonics for poverty stricken polities as Nigeria. The desperation of citizens to getaway their deprived state is also not unknown to the priests, by which also they are rendered gullible and easy prey. Of course, people mistook their woeful economic status to be spiritual in cause hence they troop, as a last resort, to the worship centers that had skyrocketed in number. The priests have devised veritable means, such as music, funfair and soothing speeches to calm these people before reaping them off.

Gifford has argued that in Africa, charismatic priests have built their churches into large-scale, profit-reaping enterprises, and that the success of these churches can be attributed to the entertainment value of services and to their discourse, which promotes self-help and material success. These churches promise ability to help people move out of poverty, as individuals and as a country. However, Gifford
is wary of these promises—because the ideas of miracles of faith are often used promoted rather than work ethic. (Gifford is cited in Marshall, 2005). Moreover, this clerical trickery is counterproductive, capable of pushing adherents further into desperation and corruption. Persistent priestly inducements to donate part, all or above their earnings as violent offering had pushed many to steal to greedily sow ample seeds for greater spiritual harvest, or to make up when the promised harvest failed to materialize. Nigerians have consequently, and gullibly also, fallen by this into the traps of Ponzi Schemes and wonder banks, having been cued to hope for accidental fortunes as against patience and hard work. Whereas, only by righteousness (which exalts a nation), dint of hard work, patience, frugality, and prudent governmental management of resources could genuine and sustainable wealth be created for state and citizens. By corollary also, only a significant improvement in national economy and the welfare of the generality will witness a rapid wind down in the nefarious activities of predatory priests and organisations. A significant improvement in the economic wellbeing of Nigerians is bound to witness a rapid involuntary de-escalation in Nigeria religionism.

Simbine (2011) and Marshall (2005) detailed the culpability and complicity of the priesthood in encouraging and instigating the furtherance of bad governance, corruption and expropriation, and as well in the further downtroddening of the battered and bruised Nigerian, albeit African masses. Kukah, a scholar and Catholic priest described the leaders of some of Christian congregations as “pastors scavenging for fortunes in the name of leading souls to God through the organisation of endless spiritual trade fairs called revivals and vigils... hood winking and deducing ordinary citizens away from the culture of hard work and the need to develop a truly Christian ethic to wealth, (Kukah is cited in Simbine, 2011). Ebenezer Obadare, a scholar of note on civil society, is wearied also about religious leaders (particularly Christian Pentecostals) who have evolved as veritable handmaidens of the state. His utmost worry is that overall, their class loyalty (...) is to successive ruling elite as opposed to the Nigerian people, (Obadare is cited in Simbine). Simbine similarly uncovered the fact that the churches associate with politicians that are notorious for abuse of office in Nigeria. Of course, the church is not the only guilty religious setting; the phenomenon is rather more pronounced with the Church than in other religious circles. Marshall is particularly disgusted about the charade nature of religiosity in much of Africa where many members of the clergy have outrightly adopted the commercial or business approach to churchism.

Chris Oyakhilome, a prominent Nigerian pastor, faith healer, and miracles merchant recently had his mesmerizing money-spinning programme - Atmosphere for miracles banned on public media by South African government, alleging as hoax his demonstrations of miraculous healing of HIV/AIDS. He had used same programme in Nigeria as publicity stunt into fame and fortune (without any governmental scrutiny or reprehension), and by which many have been successfully bamboozled, extorted and pushed into criminality and self-help. Lawrence Agada, an accountant with Lagos Sheraton Hotels and Towers, and an adherent whose donations in cash and gifts to Oyakhilome’s church, in the pursuit of sowing spiritual seeds for bountiful material harvests, approximated N39 million in stolen fund from his employers, (Simbine, 2011). Similarly, Matthew Ashimolowo, a prominent Nigerian pastor and owner of Kingsway International Christian Center (KICC), a transnational faith investment, was once publicly called to order by British authorities over actions considered financial impropriety in the handling of church funds. Church fund in Britain is regarded public charity fund whose expending is not subject to pastor’s whims. The UK Charity Regulatory Commission has not stopped beaming search light on the financial activities of that church even as they are currently probing the modus operandi of another Nigerian church-export, the Winners Chapel. This kind of proactive governmental action will never be taken by
Nigerian government due to the connivance theory.

However, such public reprimands have never occurred in Nigeria where Church funds are like lottery incomes from spiritual gambles. The Nigerian predatory priests describe such funds as God’s blessings from some inexplicable conceptions as open heavens, open doors, supernatural blessings, whereas these are actual confiscations from myriad of offerings imposed on members, usually diverted in corrupt self-enrichment. Scavenging Nigerian clergy thus engage in money laundering activities to stash in safe havens, their embarrassingly excessive riches, and that is when they compete not for the richest, the most flamboyant, or the most materially successful pastor. Reverend King was never publicly cautioned until his orgy of tyranny and exploitation made him to murder and maim a couple of his brainwashed adherents. Nigerian government has never acted proactively until the excesses of these spiritual merchants resulted in public embarrassments. Of course, such proactive public caution may never come as it would be antithetical to the vested mutual interests of the elite/priesthood connivancy.

In a nutshell, the postcolonial reality is the connivance of the elites and the priests to seize and forage the state from the masses. The priesthood blamed people’s sins, faithlessness and their devilish environment for the rampant poverty and instability, and as well, stunted national growth, deflecting the fault away from elite’s misrule and corruption. In return, government in deliberate complacency, allowed the priesthood to bleed the masses by imposing diverse offerings at religious jamborees for spiritual fortunes, deliverance and salvation. Thus as elites misgovern and loot the state, the priesthood watched; and as the latter in turn foraged their adherent masses, the former pretended to be unaware, and would never reprehend the latter’s excesses. In the ensuing lunatic commotion and crude Machiavellianism, the vampiric elite guzzled public funds unabatedly while the vulturine priesthood scavenged the spiritually hypnotized masses mercilessly. As both predators smiled to banks, the plundered masses squirmed unagitatedly with sustained sedatives of religion opium. The elite/priesthood connivance was the magic bullet with which the Nigerian masses were held down from challenging the predatory state.

Implications for socio-political stability and national development

Apart from the overbearing displays of high religiosity that brought about acute religious extremism, and as well, mammoth ethno-religious calamities on Nigeria, the current, non-religious socio-political instabilities witnessed in many parts of Nigeria are the inevitabilities of exploitative elitism to which the priesthood is also culpable. Put differently, high religiosity and the consequences of elite’s misrule, with the connivance of the priesthood, had abysmally plunged Nigeria into the abyss of insurgency and counter-insurgency. Nigeria currently faced massive destabilization notably from two ends. The first is the insecurity of lives and property in the Niger Delta area which had once aimed at the jugular of the nation’s economy. The other has been the sectarian uprising of the berserkly Jama’atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda’Awati Wal Jihad, popularly called Boko Haram, which had decimated innocent lives particularly in the North-Eastern/Central parts of the country. In both cases, the consequences of bad government particularly as it relates to the incidence of poverty and unemployment had provided and motivated the fighting force of the insurgent groups.

The Niger Delta insurgency which had sought to address the infrastructural decay, poverty and underdevelopment of the region, climaxing in the 2010 Independence Day Abuja bombing, had succeeded in introducing a new menace into Nigeria’s criminality. Kidnapping for ransom originated with the Niger Delta insurgency, through which the militants profited and funded their activities to the tune of millions of Dollars from oil related interests. Today, with the Amnesty for the militants, the kidnap of oil workers have
subsided, but the kidnap industry has thrived dimensionally, even targeting members of the elite, in a nation with innumerable unemployed youths. Nigeria’s high but pretentious religiosity, coupled with the grave consequences of elite’s misrule had fuelled the boko haram insurgency. Walker (2012) described the Boko Haram as an Islamic sect that believes northern politics has been seized by corrupt Muslims and consequently wanted to wage a war against them, and the Federal Republic of Nigeria generally, to create a pure Islamic/sharia state. But then, it is also known that most of its fighting ranks are swelled by the unemployed, frustrated, hungry and angry northern youths, on revenge-seeking against the state and the Nigerian elite. But besides that the boko haram is an Islamic sect, it has also been established that aggrieved elites in Nigeria have hired their insurgent services to destabilise the regime of the reigning elite. This is quite evident in the open admission of President Goodluck Jonathan that aggrieved Northern politicians had attempted to use the puppet group to bring down his government. He lamented in frustration that the boko haram had infiltrated the highest levels of politics and the military. In the final analysis, national development shall remain a wishful thinking in the presence of this insecurity.

The way forward
The unholy alliance between the priesthood and the Nigerian elite is unsustainable, likewise the Nigerian state in its present composition. The state is eventually bound to collapse. In fact, the masses may continuously be held down from agitating through this exploitative connivance, it is unlikely that they will ever be so held from revolting someday. A major step by which the situation could be salvaged is to de-phantom the Nigerian state by amicably winding up the state. By this is meant the dissolution of the Nigerian state, perhaps, into its ethno-religious components, in which many new, compact and more homogenous sovereign states would emerge, in place of this unwieldy heterogeneous unit. Of course and after all, much advocacy had been made (and resisted by the benefitted elite) for a Sovereign National Conference that could enable the concerned peoples to renegotiate the Nigerian state, much so as issues of national interests had led to many unanswered questions in the Nigeria project. But given that the disintegration of the state may be either resisted by vested interests or unfeasible to the international political order that is presently unenthusiastic to welcome new nations into its fold, winding up the Nigerian state may be unworkable.

The other alternative is to rapidly deescalate the high tone of religiosity in Nigeria. Chavura (2010) contends, particularly of the advanced West, that there has been a legal and philosophical trend over the last 60 years to remove more and more religion from the public sphere. It must be noted that religion ought to provide for moral rectitude among adherents. In other words for instance, a true adherent would of doctrinal dictate eschew corruption since most religions, particularly the two idolized in Nigeria, are vehemently opposed to corruption. Put differently, the higher the religiosity, the lower should be the extent of corruption. However, and as claimed earlier, Nigeria is a state with endless list of absurdities. While religion is found to be important to 92% of Nigerians, in a survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, the Transparency International’s 2011 survey on Corruption Perception Index (CPI) places Nigeria 134th of 178 countries in the world, (as cited in Simbine, 2011). It can be conveniently concluded that the high religiosity of Nigeria is a mere sham. Consequently, there is the acute need to dereligionize or at least to roll back religion from the public domain. The practice of religion must be very private, most personal and strictly confidential.

This is not to be mistaken for an advocacy to dereligionise Nigerians since it’s been argued earlier that man is essentially a spiritual animal whose spirituality is expressed through religion, it is his natural right to be religionist. However, Nigerians and their state must be rescued and protected from the entrapments of quacks in religion and politics. Similarly, there is the critical need to retrieve the state from the
clutches of religionists particularly in a heteroreligious civil society as Nigeria, where public adherence is sheer hypocrisy and a camouflage to dupe and perpetrate nefarious activities. Political governance in Nigeria must urgently be distanced from religion if sustainable sociopolitical stability is to be achieved and if meaningful progress and development must be made. A drastic de-escalation of religion must include, though not precluded to, the scrapping of such monuments as the National Church or Mosque, removal of worship centers or activities from State Houses and the entire public domain. It may be as drastic as compelling all Nigerians to drop religion-affiliated titles and names for mere ethnic appellations, particularly when public issues are concerned.

Activist civil society groups must provoke and alert Nigerians on the elitist dupe of their religiosity. This, no doubt, would be very challenging and tortuously prolonged since most Nigerians have undergone subtle brain conditioning and trained control in this regard for much of their live. Reversing a brainwash is quite herculean as it required a sustained, massive influx of counter-information to retrieve tens of millions of victims from the clutches of religious and political demagogues with vested interests. Nevertheless, it can be done. Nigerians must be discouraged from seeking solutions to their economic woes in religious worships/jamborees, but through agitation and vigilance to government. The priesthood must purge itself of scavengers, and yet must lead the masses to push the government in the direction of good governance. Genuine priesthood in Nigeria must strongly encourage the culture of hard work, uprightness and accountability, patience and modesty, as against the current indolence, greed and false hope that spiritual quackery breeds. Religion must be separated from the state while government must be absolutely intolerant of religion-abuse. These will spur the economic development of Nigeria.

References


