

John O. Hunwick, ed. *Religion and National Integration in Africa: Islam, Christianity, and Politics in the Sudan and Nigeria*. (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1992) 176 pp.

Organized religion in Africa has been lauded for contributing to national integration, stability and peace, and derided for being a source of division, discrimination and violent conflict. The contrasting roles that religion has played in the world throughout history, and in Africa since independence, reveal that religion *per se* is neither intrinsically conflictual nor inherently integrative. Religion is what people make of it. And, what people make of it depends in large part on the set of social, political, and economic circumstances which they face. This is evident in the book under review which includes papers that explore the political salience of Christianity and Islam in the Sudan and Nigeria. The papers were originally presented at a one-day seminar held in May 1988 at Northwestern University.

By comparing and contrasting the role of organized religion in the Sudan and Nigeria, the authors provide insight into the reasons for and the consequences of politically mobilized religious groups. The authors contribute to a better understanding about why, at both the individual and societal levels, a primary identification as Muslim or Christian often seems to override other loyalties. However, some of the authors propose definitions and explanations which appear to oversimplify religion and religious identity, treating it as an independent variable only, rather than also recognizing the ways in which religion can be a dependent variable. The best of the papers appreciate the dynamic nature of religion and invite the reader to explore not only the impact of religion on politics, but the impact of politics on religion.

The Religious Divide: A Cause or Consequence?

The conventional wisdom holds that the religious divide between a Muslim north and a non-Muslim/Christian south is the major reason for the lack of national integration in states like the Sudan and Nigeria. Some of the authors support, at least implicitly, conventional wisdom by treating religion as an independent variable or cause of the conflict that prevents national integration. Other authors stress the way in which politicized religious identity is, at least in part, a dependent

variable, the result of a combination of socio-historical factors (i.e. arabization of the north, British colonial policy that segregated the populations, relative economic deprivation) which has created a largely fictitious dichotomy between people within the same state.

The Sudan

Abdullahi A. An-Na'im argues that it is the Sharia which makes integration of Muslim and non-Muslim impossible in the Sudan (p.28). The political problems faced by the Sudan are products of attempts to impose the Sharia, and imposition of the Sharia has largely been an attempt by Muslim politicians to secure the base of their support among northern Muslims in order to counterbalance mounting political opposition from the south. An-Na'im proposes that, in the end, any realistic hope for national integration in the Sudan requires the rise of the educated and enlightened Muslims who will face the proponents of the Sharia with the unworkability of their model of statehood, while at the same time propose a viable Islamic alternative (p.33). As others have argued, An-Na'im proposes that an Islamic state need not be intolerant.¹ It is possible for there to be an Islamic state which does not universally apply the Sharia as it has been proposed for application in the Sudan (i.e. Egypt).

Francis M. Deng touches on how other factors interact or combine with religious cleavage so as to make national integration in the Sudan difficult. According to Deng, the central theme in the Sudanese conflict is the north-south religious, racial, cultural dichotomy, and its attendant disparities or inequities in shaping the sharing of power, wealth, and others values (p.40). From the colonial period onward the north has benefited more than the south from opportunities for political, economic, social, and cultural development (p.40). Despite the reality that the contemporary Sudanese scene includes people with layers of multiple identities that defy monolithic labels, the identities of Sudanese tend to be oversimplified by claims of "pure" religious (Islamic vs. Christian), racial (Arab vs. African), and

¹ Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*. (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

cultural identities (p.42). In the short-term, Deng proposes that the Sudan adopt a federal or confederal approach to government, giving groups as much regional autonomy as possible while giving the regional leaders a stake in the survival of the Sudan as a nation (pp.57-58). In the long-term, Deng proposes that national integration in the Sudan is likely to be the product of persuasion and education, not coercion. It is through education that the Sudanese will recognize the extent to which the symbols that divide those identities are more fictitious than real (p.61).

While An-Na'im provides the reader with an understanding of the intra-Islamic differences which exist, especially with regard to the Sharia and its application in an Islamic state, Deng's description gives the reader the socio-historical background necessary to understand that religion is not simply a cause of the political divide, but that the religious divide is, in part, the product of political, economic, and social processes which date to the beginning of the colonial period in the Sudan. An-Na'im attempts to show how Islam itself is not the cause of the problem, but that a rather narrow and fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, and the Sharia, is the problem. An Islamic state, guided in part by enlightened Muslims, can accommodate the non-Muslim citizens legally and socially. While not refuting the problem that a fundamentalist and universalist application of the Sharia presents, Deng attempts to dig more deeply into the power relations which have led to the politicization of religious identity and the fictitious characterizations which prevent national integration in the Sudan. Deng's proposal that some form of federalism be adopted in the Sudan seems to be a very reasonable avenue for policymakers. However, if lessons from Nigeria are telling, federalism does not necessarily resolve 'the national question'.

Assuming that the Sharia is a major obstacle, the reader is left with questions about the prior conditions which make the Sharia such a politically salient issue among northern Muslims. It is not only important to explore the rationale for those politicians who promote the Sharia, as An-Na'im has done, but in order to get at the core of the problem it is necessary to examine the rationale of those 'ordinary' citizens who find political leaders who support the universal application of the Sharia so attractive. It is important to explore if, and to what

extent, certain social and economic factors contribute to the political salience of the Sharia among Muslims in the north. Within the Islamic community in the north, which both Sudanese authors claim to be a relatively diverse community, which groups are most likely to support the universal application of the Sharia? The answer to this largely unaddressed question is, in this reader's view, essential to a better understanding of the role of religion and the national question in the Sudan. The reader is also left with the question: If the Sharia were no longer an issue, would the protracted conflict in its present form persist in the Sudan? In this reader's view, the answer would likely be 'yes'. A study which would pick up where Deng leaves off, exploring the prior conditions which underlie identity formation in the Sudan would likely contribute to the formation of a general theory about the relationship between religion and conflict.

Nigeria

Ibrahim Gambari argues that it is important to understand that there is a class dimension to the rise of 'fundamentalisms' and religious conflict in Nigeria. Gambari notes that religion has been a reinforcer of prior ethnic identities, identities which are the real driving force of Nigerian politics. The role of religion as reinforcer had much to do with the westernization that Christianity sponsored in the south, which included education and access to employment in the government (p.88). As opposed to the situation in the Sudan, it is primarily the Islamic community that has been relatively deprived, compared with Christians. According to Gambari, it is this situation of relative deprivation which has led to the growth of "Islamic fundamentalist" groups which have organized systematic riots and killings of fellow Muslims (i.e. 1980 the Yan Tatsine or Maitatsine sect in Maiduguri, Yola, and Gombe) and against Christians and the wealthy of all religions (i.e. in Kaduna State in March 1987) (p.90). Gambari notes that the religious fanaticism, which could threaten to tear Nigeria apart, may be an instrument for the oppressed and dispossessed class to challenge the status quo in other sections of national life (p.96). Popular discontent and frustration with the prevailing socio-economic conditions could find expression through religious rallies and riots

guided by political entrepreneurs. For Gambari, politicized religious identity is the product of other factors; it is largely dependent on other variables.

Religious identity is a major cause of political instability, according to Don Ohadike. Religion, by its nature, is an intolerant institution, and therefore presents a major obstacle to national integration in a multi-religious state (p.101). Therefore, secularism is the only way to national survival. The causes of Muslim-Christian conflict in Nigeria include the resurgence of rival fundamentalist and reformist ideologies; the spread of Saudi Arabian and Western cultural imperialism; and the politicization of religion by some Nigerian political entrepreneurs (p.119).

As with the case of the Sudan, the reader is presented with two different views of the role of religion in Nigeria. Gambari's view may be characterized as primarily an instrumentalist view of religious identity, and Ohadike's view may be characterized as largely a primordial view of religious identity. Gambari sees politicized religious identity as a consequence of socio-economic differentiation and a tool used by political elites. Ohadike sees that it is the nature of religion to be political. Although it is well known that Islam necessarily includes a political vision, Ohadike points out that it is important to recognize that strains of Christianity also have political visions which favor Christian culture and values, and that those strains of Christianity are on the rise in a Nigeria which continues to go through socio-economic crises.

This reader finds both analyses useful. Gambari's is useful because it provides insight into how religion may be a dependent variable before it is an independent variable. Ohadike's is useful because it reveals, perhaps unintentionally, the poverty of only considering religion as a cause. If religion is, by nature, an intolerant institution, as Ohadike argues, then it would follow that a multi-religious state is an impossible proposition. Based on the experience of other countries, even those including sizable populations of Muslims and Christians, this simplistic assertion is known to be false.

One major contribution of the authors who focus on Nigeria is that they do not simply treat Christianity as one entity or Church. Just as Abdullahi An-Na'im helps the reader to see that Islam in the Sudan includes different groups and schools of thought, it is important to

recognize that Christianity includes many different churches, some of which are very tolerant of diversity and some of which are very intolerant. Sweeping statements about religion, whether it be of Christianity or Islam, are almost always wrong.

Conclusion

In some countries, even those which are multi-religious, religion has been lauded for the role it has played in national integration. In other countries, it has been condemned for sowing the seeds of discord and for being an obstacle to national unity. The most convincing papers in this book help the reader to understand that religion, by its nature, is not inherently conflictual nor intrinsically integrative. What people make of religion depends in large part on a set of social, political, and economic circumstances which vary to some degree from country to country. The reader cannot help but come away from this book with a better understanding, even if *via negativa*, of the role of religion in the politics of the Sudan and Nigeria. There is much more work to be done on how religious identity is both a consequence and a cause of political conflict and political stability.

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