The Colonial Legacy

The Western colonial encounter with Muslim Africa had a direct impact on the pre-colonial legacy of church state relations in the region. The encounter helped strengthen the tradition of Muslim religious and political integration, either through the process of colonial administration or by creating an independent Muslim state, which would be the result of the Muslim resistance to the colonial rule. The relationship between religion and politics, between the church and the state, has been a well-rehearsed issue in Muslim history as a dual tradition of church and state, and the colonial encounter did not change this fact. The colonial experience has strengthened and developed all Muslim institutions in Northern Nigeria.  

Colonialism became the Muslim shield, and the response to the West’s religious minimalism. In the example of British administration in Nigeria, the resident colonial officer presided over a meeting called by Muslims who headed the Native Authorities and the colonial meeting would receive charges from the Muslims against the Danish missionaries of the province for allowing the church to function. The reason was that the placing at the disposal of the church of the mosques was under the direct influence of the Muslim Native Authorities. The colonial administration backed the Muslims demands against missionary objections, for abolishing the religious instruction classes. Thus colonialism became the Muslim shield and the colonial administration worked through direct provocation or through conciliation. In practice, however, bureaucratic and military confrontation was too costly a way to achieve permanent subjugation, and so the French decided to invest in the Muslim rosary and the heart of the people. Since a coup, pious figures were courted and patronized, they were invited to state functions, with the understanding of the colonial system as the propagator of Islam. Ultimately, colonial rule would have to accommodate the Muslims, for the Mullahs controlled the state and had a sway over the hearts and the minds of the people. Therefore, Muslims would become co-partners in the colonial enterprise.

The French colonial policy was a variation of the British one. In theory, the French demanded total surrender and commitment from their Muslim subjects. In practice, however, even in the colonial administration, the colonizers understood, if its youth inoculated with English a wider and more permanent influence over the state, hence was de Tocqueville noted this tendency, saying that "converting the soul is a long and slow process. But there is de Tocqueville noted this tendency, saying that "converting the soul is a long and slow process. But there is no substitute for a new generation, and in the end it is the new generation that will have to do the work."

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The issue of integrating religion and politics has been a subject of academic discussion in the context of constitutional controversy when the military government of General Babangida, who ruled from 1986 to 1993, enrolled Nigeria as a member of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). The challenge that decision the Christian association of Nigeria (CAN) was founded in 1986 as an ecumenical grouping of non-sectarian, non-party, non-denominational, and non-political organization. The organization was established to protect the human rights and freedoms of all people, regardless of their religious or political views. The organization works to promote and protect the universal principles of democracy, freedom of speech, and the rule of law.

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