

Religious Pluralism and Governance in Nigeria: Matters Arising

KOKO, John Clerk

Abstract

Proper management of religious pluralism is not only essential but obligatory for each and every government that operates within a multi-religious context. This is because while religious pluralism can serve as an instrument for peace, stability, and sustainable development in context where it is properly managed, on the contrary, it can also become a source of disunity, conflict and destruction of lives and property in context where its management is grossly undermined. The latter part of this axiom appears to be the case in Nigeria. Thus, this paper examines various forms of mismanagement of religious pluralism by government officials in Nigeria and the likely dangers that it poses for the country. The study utilizes the discursive and analytical approach in discussing data gathered through extensive literature review and personal observation and the entire argument is based on the principles of neutrality and equal recognition of all religions, which are crucial in the management of divergent religious ideologies in modern multi-religious states. After a thorough analysis, the study reveals some discriminatory and oppressive patronages of religion by presidents, governors and other top government officials in Nigeria that evidently violate the basic principles of management of religious pluralism. These include the use of public funds to sponsor Christians and Muslims' pilgrimages, building of churches and mosques using public funds, organizing and executing state-wide Christian programmes using state's funds, etc. This paper argues that these are inconsistent with the ideals of managing a multi-religious state and can make efforts at promoting genuine national consciousness, cohesion, consensus, and stability very difficult. Therefore, it recommends the practice of responsible religious pluralism, which prioritizes neutrality and equal recognition as a way to addressing this enigma in Nigeria.

Key Words: Religious pluralism, governance, patronage, problems, and responsible religious pluralism.

Introduction

Religious pluralism is a fragile phenomenon that requires serious attention in modern multi-religious states. This is because it can serve on one hand, as an instrument for peace, unity, stability and socio-economic development if properly managed, and on the other hand, becomes a source of disunity, instability, and destruction of lives and properties when mismanaged (Agbiboa, 2012:4; Okebukola, 2012:2; Onaiyekan, 1997:45). Despondently, Nigeria appears to stand out as a foremost example of a state in which the latter part of this truism has become a reality. As a nation consisting of three major religions that are constitutionally recognized namely: African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Christianity, and other minor ones that are not listed, Nigeria is clearly a fragile multi-religious state that requires those entrusted with the mantle of governance to be cautious in the management of these diverse religions. Regrettably, this is not the case, as there are evidences of mismanagement of religious pluralism through various forms of discriminatory and oppressive patronages of religion by presidents, state governors and other top government officials in Nigeria. This is not healthy for a multi-religious state already suffocating from existing religious, socio-economic and political tensions. Therefore, this paper examines the various ways of mismanagement of religious pluralism by presidents, state governors and other top government officials in Nigeria and the potential issues accruing from it. To achieve this, the study relies on data gathered through literature review and personal observation while a discursive and analytical approach was used in the entire discussion. The essence of the whole study is to suggest ways in which Nigeria's religious pluralism can be better managed by the government in manner that overtime, peace, unity, stability and national consensus will be achieved. Before delving into the real issues, it is appropriate to clarify the usage of the terms: religious pluralism and governance.

Conceptual Clarification of Terms

A concept can easily be misconstrued if the context of its usage is not clearly defined. Therefore, it is appropriate to begin this paper by defining the terms religious pluralism and governance.

First, the term "religious pluralism" is better described than defined. For example, in defining the word "religious," the Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1960:715) rather describes it as "the act of manifesting devotion to, or to have the influence of religion or to be godly." From the above, a religious person may be said to be one who believes strongly in the existence of a God or gods; committed to what he or she believes; and is strongly influenced by it. Similarly, "pluralism" is defined by the Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language (1972:1097) as "coexistence of two to more distinctive religious or cultural groups within a given society" This implies that pluralism is not only about "manyness" or "plurality" but distinctiveness as well. In order words, religious pluralism implies the co-existence of two to more distinct

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religions in a given society. Thomas (1976:25) captures this clearly that “a pluralist society presents a person living in it with a series of live options as to which religious faith he is to accept”. He notes for example that in Ghana, there is a choice of Christianity, Islam or Traditional Religion. Clearly, it is this distinctive aspect of religious pluralism that calls for its proper management in multi-religious states. This is because a group that sees itself as distinct will most likely resist any form of ascendancy, compromise and shedding off of its identity marker. Mouw & Griffioen (1993:13-14) also hypothesize that “a pluralism is an “ism” about a plurality and that not all pluralities get “ism” attached to them.” However, pluralisms take place only “when specific pluralities take on a special significance.” In this sense a pluralistic account emerges when someone is convinced that there is something substantive to articulate about a given “manyness.” It is conjecturable then from this description of pluralism that not all forms of “manyness” are evil. Of course, plurality, be it religious, cultural, moral, sexual, or ethnic is desirable.

But more than that, the Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 18 (1972:66) equates the terms “pluralism” and “monism” to “many” and “one” respectively. For example, pluralism asks the question, how many things are there in the world? While, monism asks the question, how many kinds of things are there in the world? Whether this explanation is valid or not, one thing is clear from this description; it is the fact that pluralism immediately suggests the phenomenon of “manyness” while monism insinuates oneness. In addition to this, Netland (2001) simply describes it as the undeniable fact of religious diversity. He also explains that pluralism can refer to a particular view about the relations among the major religions concerning religious truth. However, in a more specific sense, Istifanus (1995:50) equivocally defines it as the “principle that people of different religious groups could coexist in harmony.” This implies tolerating other religious confessions. For sure, not everyone will embrace this seemingly naive description. First, because coexistence of diverse religious groups is not a guarantee that they will live in harmony, especially if there are abuses associated with it. Second, there is no guarantee also that these different groups would be willing to tolerate opposite views especially when such views contradict their own views. However, one thing is very clear from his description; this is the fact that religious pluralism implies the co-existence of two to more distinct religious confessions. In this study, the term refers to the coexistence of both the constitutionally recognized religions namely: African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity and the non-constitutionally recognized ones.

Unlike religious pluralism, the concept of governance is not alien in human society and as such has attracted dissimilar scholarly definitions as well. However, only a precise definition of the term is required in this paper. Of particular interest is the fact that the New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language, simply defines it as “the exercise of authority or control” (2010:546). Similarly, Elechi (2018:274) conceives it, as the exercise of power and the process by which decisions are

made and implemented for a given people. The shortfall of the above definitions is that both attempt to equate governance with exercise of authority that is supposedly vague in description. However, a more precise definition relevant to this paper is given by Oni (2015:239) who sees it as the exercise of political power to manage a nation's affair. It should be added that in this paper the term refers to the exercise of political power to manage the affairs of a nation by those in political positions namely presidents, governors and other top elected and appointed officials in Nigeria.

Scholarly Perspectives on the Management of Religious Pluralism

Generally, there are divergent views among scholars on how religious pluralism should be addressed in multi-religious states. Therefore, in this section, there is need to critically consider a number of these scholarly opinions. One of the most influential scholar in this regard is John Rawls who in his different works has argued that the government of any given plural state should be difference-blind to various competing moral, philosophical and religious ideologies that populate it (Rawls, 1993; 1996; 1997; 1999). Instead, the state in such a plural context should prioritize the freedom and equality of all citizens, including a fair distribution of their basic liberties above any form of recognition for particularity of identity, be it philosophical, moral or religious. Rawls (1999:362) classifies these basic liberties under what he described as “the primary goods”- that is, things that are requisite for social cooperation and the pursuit of the good life. He also argued that though citizens differ in their views about the good life, they however, necessarily hold the principles of “primary goods” in common (Rawls, 1993:188-189). And it is only by adhering to these principles of freedom and equality of all citizens that stability and social cooperation in pluralistic societies can be guaranteed (Rawls, 1971; 1993:188-189, 258; 1999:362). The most important goal that Rawls seeks to achieve is to promote a religiously pluralistic society in which citizens are undifferentiated and the government does not privilege a particular religion above others. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the reverse is the case as those in government always seek to promote and support a particular religion to the detriment of other religions.

But as Gordon (1981) correctly observed, a religiously pluralistic state should opt for liberal pluralism, that is, a type of pluralism that places emphasis on equal treatment and individual merit rather than on projecting a particular religious ideology. This position also holds strong in Novak (1983), who on his part has argued that the public space of any pluralistic society should not be dominated by a unitary moral order because this will inadvertently give rise to a unitary political power that will seek to impose its concept of the good on all citizens and this is capable of breeding instability. Hence, a free pluralistic society wherein public virtues depend only upon the cooperation of free individuals is much projected as an alternative (Novak, 1983:49, 60, 69). What

comes to the fore then is the “empty shrine” paradigm. This emptiness is the respect for “transcendence” and not the usual skeptical attitude of liberal thinkers regarding matters of ultimate concern. However, there is usually no one world, image or symbol representing a particular religious ideology for which all are to seek in a genuinely pluralistic society. Instead, the public space is usually empty and its emptiness represents the transcendence, which all free consciences are to approach from virtually infinite number of directions (Novak, 1983:53, 68). The implication of this is that the public space of any religious nation should not be saturated with a particular religious ideology or divergent religious ideologies as the case may be. Romus (1998) is then proven right to observe that efforts towards creating a mono-identity based on religion or otherwise is an ideological manipulation and oppression of the plural identities of the people. Therefore, sustainable harmony and national solidarity among citizens in a religiously pluralistic society is only achievable through promoting values that can regulate and protect the human persons.

Regrettably, in Nigeria, those who are in government appear not to have taken into cognizance the fact that efforts towards projecting a particular religious ideology in a religiously pluralistic state like Nigeria can be counterproductive and provoke the worst type of bigotry, fanaticism, violence and oppression. Though, there are some scholars who subscribe to the fact that religion should be allowed to play a role in all matters of the state. For example, Neuhaus (1984) has argued that the goal of promoting a neutral state may rather create public persons that are anonymous and irrational and who only define justice behind a “veil of ignorance” instead of promoting genuine pluralism. This position gains strength in Newbigin (1986) who argues that the dichotomy between public and private spheres with respect to religious practices is inimical to public morality. In this light, the hypothesis for an empty shrine is conceived as an ideological stand that is completely misleading. In fact, Eliade (1959), likens such a dichotomy between the private and public spheres with respect to religious practices as that between cosmos and chaos. This explains why Kalami (1976) outrightly rejects the secularist tendency of undermining the importance of religion in modern society.

Aside that, the rejection of secularist and neutralist tendencies also found expression in Livingston (2005) who strongly subscribed to religious influences at the public domain on the ground of promoting a healthy freedom in society which allows individuals and communities to practice their religions based on their own consciences, as well as give them a free voice in the community's civic life or the public square. Similarly, Shupe (1990) in acknowledging the persistent influences of religion on politics at the global arena has resonated that rather than think that religion has lost its influence in the global area; it should be given the same attention as the economy, the polity and the community. A stronger position has even been projected by Tocqueville (2004), who unapologetically argued that social and democratic order is impossible in a religiously pluralistic society without reference to religious faith. Therefore,

introduction of religious ideologies whether at the private or public domain should be encouraged because religion is the basis of morality. This view also gains support in Habermas (2003;2006), who reverberates that religion plays a vital role at the public space and as such secularism is not a sufficient condition to guaranteeing equal religious freedom for everybody. Consequently, he subscribed to a “deliberative mode of democratic will formation” which allows for all parties concerned to reach agreement on the kind of liberty they desire as the solution to problem of managing religious pluralism at the public space.

Clearly, it is worth noting that these later scholars have argued in favour of non-separation of religion and politics or religion and governance at the public space because they believe that religion plays a significant role in promoting order and peace in any given society and as such should not be expunged from public life. But while this so, it should be argued that it is completely out of place for any government to seek to promote a particular religious ideology in a plural state for purpose of retaining public morality. Instead, a genuine form of pluralism that allows for freedom and equality of all citizens as well as equal recognition for all religions should be encouraged. Scholars such as Braeckman (2009), Sheedy (2009:4), Cooke (2006:195) and Cliteur (2007:119) have observed that efforts to retain religion at the center has the tendency of elevating religion beyond its proper place. This is so because in pluralistic contexts, lack of proper management of religious pluralism could make it a potential danger to the general welfare of the state as the case in Nigeria has shown. Therefore, the next section will examine various ways in which the Nigerian government mismanages religious pluralism and the potential dangers that it poses to the general welfare of the state.

Instances of Mismanagement of Religious Pluralism by the Nigerian Government

It is not misleading to state that religious pluralism as a phenomenon has not been fairly managed in Nigeria, especially by successive Nigerian governments. This partly accounts for the near stand-still situation of the country as Onaiyekan (1997:45-46) noted. Outrightly, there are various ways in which religious pluralism has been mismanaged in the country by successive Nigerian governments. Perhaps, the most pronounced is the patronage of religion by the government at all levels of governance. It is common to see public officials both at the states and federal levels manifestly patronize a particular religion at the expense of others. This happens especially in contexts where adherents of a particular religion form majority of those in positions of authority as Sampson(2012:122) observed. For example, it is commonplace for northern governors in Nigeria to buy food items and other valuable gifts with public funds for Muslims during Ramadan fast, but fail to do same for Christians and Traditionalists during their own festivals (Sampson, 2012:122-123).The same applies to southern governors who are known for using public funds to purchase food items and other valuable gifts for Christians during Christian festivities to

the neglect of adherents of Islam and African Traditional Religion in those states.

Regrettably, in most cases, the patronage of religion by these governors does not end in just buying of food and gift items for Muslims or Christian faithful during their festivities but extends to donation of huge sums of money in favour of whatever religious divide they belong. For example, Eme(2012:191-192) has noted that Bauchi state government donated 50 million naira to sponsor an annual convention programme organized by the women wing of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Also, in 2008, Gombe state government donated 100 million naira to Muslims for the purpose of building a mosque and 50 million for the building of a church, respectively. It is also on record that late President Umaru Musa Yar'adua donated the sum of 90 million naira to 15 northern states for purpose of Quranic education (Eme, 2012:191-192). This form of patronage was replicated by President Goodluck Jonathan, who made several huge donations to specific churches in the country as well. It is important to argue that such religious patronages by states and the federal governments, are clear violations of the basic principles of mismanagement of religious pluralism, which are equal recognition for all religions, neutrality of the state, and equal protection of the rights of all religious citizens in a multi-religious state. Unfortunately, in the Nigerian case, these basic principles have always been violated by both states and the federal governments.

Aside the foregoing, the use of public funds by states and federal governments to sponsor pilgrimages and other religious programmes are also clear instances of the patronage of religion in Nigeria that violate the basic principles of management of religious pluralism. This is because religious pilgrimages to Mecca for Muslims and Jerusalem for Christians are exclusive religious affairs. Regrettably, in Nigeria, it has become one of government's top priorities. For example, in 2010, 2014 and 2015 alone, states' government namely: Kebbi, Plateau, Kano and Borno, are known to have spent the sum of N2.1 billion, N300 million, N242 million and N500 million, respectively for the sponsorship of Hajj (Eme, 2012:191-192). The same is applicable to Christian dominated states like Rivers, AkwaIbom, Cross River, Abia, etc., where huge sums of money were also spent for the sponsorship of Christian pilgrims without a corresponding sponsorship for Muslims and Traditional religionists. Records available also show that the federal government spent the sum of N57.6 billion in 2015, N7.9 billion in 2016 and N136.56 billion in 2017, respectively for sponsorship of Hajj but spent only N11.3 billion for sponsorship of Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem in 2015 (Eleonu & Madume, 2019:337-343, Adeoye & Alagbe, 2017 and Eme, 2012:191-192). In fact, the creation of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) and the Nigerian Christian Pilgrim Board (NCPB) clearly shows the federal government involvement in religious affairs. Sadly, in all these, both the states and federal governments have always been discriminatory in their sponsorship. African traditional religionists have always been relegated to the background even though it is constitutionally recognized by the 1999 Constitution as amended. Arguably, this is not healthy for the

country because it violates the basic principles of management of religious pluralism. Where this happens, sustainable peace, unity and development can be difficult to achieve. For example, in 2015 and 2016, the lopsided sponsorship of pilgrimages by the federal government generated intense protests from Christians across the country who felt that they were unjustly treated. Clearly, this has the tendency of further polarizing the country along religious line.

Suffice it to say that government's patronage of religion in Nigeria does not end in sponsoring religious pilgrimages and programmes but involves open participation as well. This cuts across presidents, governors, ministers, senators, representative members and other top government officials. For example, in 1986, General Ibrahim Babangida, under the military regime fronted the registration of Nigeria into the full membership of Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) (Agbaje, 2000). Though, Nigeria had already joined the OIC in 1970 under observer status during the regime of General Gowon as well as established a diplomatic tie with Vatican, the fact that it was fronted by the Head of State, who by virtue of his office was supposed to promote the principles of equal recognition and neutrality and not the interest of a particular religion makes it a serious concern. Hence, the OIC saga as Kukah (1999:104-105) observed, has become and is still a major divisive issue in the country as far as the management of religious pluralism is concerned. This is so because such an open support by the Head of State in a multi-religious context like Nigeria, amounts to privileging Islam over the other religions. And this is not healthy for a country with a long history of inter-religious crises. For example in 1986 alone, Nigeria witnessed two major inter-religious crises involving Muslims and Christians on the 4th of March in Kwara state and on 5th of July in Oyo state, respectively, which resulted to loss of lives and properties. Arguably, this possibly happened because the involvement of then government in purely religious affairs had already polarized the country along religious line, hence, it was easy for any little misunderstanding between members of the two major religious divide to result into intense crises. This also explains the heated Christian responses that followed. On this note, it is justifiable to argue that the registration of Nigeria into the OIC by the then Head of State violates the principles of management of religious pluralism.

A similar incident occurred in 2014 when President, Goodluck Jonathan publically participated in a religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the company of 19 governors, some serving ministers, top government officials and the then President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor. Most disturbing is the fact that during this pilgrimage, the President was sighted kneeling down and prayers offered for him through laying of hands. He also made several open visits to Churches like the Living Faith Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Apostolic Church and the Dunamis Church, respectively, without a corresponding visit to other religious houses. Clearly, such an involvement of a president in purely religious matter has the tendency of overheating the polity and polarizing citizens along religious line. This accounts

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for why the 2011 and 2015 elections took the form of religious colourations. In fact, the post-election violence that followed the announced of the winner in 2011, claimed over 1000 lives in the North. Therefore, it should be stated that whereas the 1999 constitution as amended, particularly section 38 (1) of chapter 4, clearly guarantees the freedom of religion and association, these instances of open participation of the then President in exclusive Christian programmes, contravenes the basic principles of equal recognition and neutrality, which are crucial in the management of religious pluralism.

While this is so, the full declaration and implementation of Sharia in some northern states of Nigeria in 1999 by some states governors, is another indication of top government officials' open involvement in supposedly exclusive religious matters. It should be stated that a detailed argument on the advent of sharia in Nigeria is beyond the scope of this paper. However, for purpose of clarity, sharia is an Islamic law or Islamic code of life. It is believed to represent the broad principle on which the system of human life is based as stated in the Quran (Imo, 2006:41). It is also believed to be a prescribed or revealed religious law (Igboin, 2014:265). Muslims believe that the sharia is imposed on the society or the state from above and as such transcends human influence and modification (Apebende, 2014:91; Imo, 2014:41). Its material source is the Quran but corroborated by the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad (Apebende, 2014:92). Ordinarily, there is nothing wrong with the sharia if its interpretation, practice and implementation are strictly Islamic affairs. However, the fact that it was fronted by governors who by virtue of their positions are supposed to remain neutral and protect the interest of all religions within their states makes it a serious issue of concern. In fact, it clearly violates these basic principles required to properly manage religious pluralism in any given multi-religious context. This explains why its full implementation in 1999 and 2000 was strongly opposed by Christians and other civil society groups. Ehianu (2012:225) records for example that on February 21, 2001, the anti-sharia protests in Kaduna resulted into massive killings and destruction of properties. Similar reprisal attacks also took place in cities like Uyo, Onitsha, Aba, Owerri, Delta, Umuahia, etc. Since then, it has become a major divisive factor that has further increased inter-religious tensions and this is not healthy for a country already suffocating from serious ethnic and religious conflicts.

Perhaps, the last but also crucial evidence of mismanagement of religious pluralism by top government officials in Nigeria is the emerging trend in which southern governors have made it a norm to organize and front state-wide Christian programmes such as thanksgiving, Easter and Christmas celebrations in their respective states. This cuts across states like Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Cross River, Abia, Enugu, amongst others. It should be argued outrightly that there is nothing wrong with such state-wide Christian celebrations, if they are planned, financed and executed strictly by the various Christian denominations in those states and not by the governors. Regrettably, from all indications, these state-wide Christian celebrations are usually planned, financed

and executed with public funds without extending similar favours to other religions in those same states. Arguably, this breaches the principle of equal recognition of all religions in multi-religious context. Beyond being the chief organizers of these celebrations, they also publically lead in the officiating, thereby violating the basic principles of neutrality and equal recognition, which are required to manage religious pluralism. This is not healthy because it could build up religious sentiments that will eventually result into serious inter-religious crisis.

It should be unequivocally stated that whereas the 1999 Constitution, clearly guarantees the freedom of religion and association, these instances of open participation of top government officials in matters that are supposed to be exclusively Islamic and Christian, contravenes the basic principles of equal recognition and neutrality, which are crucial in the management of religious pluralism. In fact, as we have seen, the patronage of religion by top government officials, especially by heads of state, presidents, governors and elected officers contravene the ideals of managing religious pluralism in a fragile multi-religious context like Nigeria. As Koko (2017:194-201) correctly observed that it is forbidden in a religiously pluralistic context, for the government to interfere into purely religious issues, either partially or fully. Fully in the sense that “no religion” should be given a particular treatment over the others in any way. Partially because the state should not interfere into religious matters in terms of policy making or funding. Most regrettably, in Nigeria, these have been violated in both ways. Undoubtedly, this has contributed in no little measure to the high level of mutual suspicion inherent in the country between adherents of the two major religions as Abbas & Uthman(2012:131) and Agbiboa(2013:21) observe. This is so because public office holders are supposed to represent the interest of all persons in the society and not the interest of a particular religious group as the case in Nigeria. Therefore, in all sensibility, such top government officials' involvement in purely religious matters violates the basic principles of managing religious pluralism in any given multi-religious context. This is capable of further heating the polity. Also, it can undermine government's authority and ability in handling issues of peace, stability and national consensus (Osivwi, 2011:64-65). Overall, it can serve as a basis for unhealthy rivalry among the divergent religious groups that populate the country. Eme (2012:195) is then proven right to have argued that religious crises in Nigeria are product of high-level manipulation by the government.

Strategic Recommendation for Management of Religious Pluralism in Nigeria

Given the above, how should the mismanagement of religious pluralism by government officials be addressed in Nigeria? Clearly, the solution rests in embracing what can be fittingly be termed the “practice of responsible religious pluralism,” which the paper has been directly or indirectly dealing with all along and which the writer has recommended elsewhere. As a term, responsible

religious pluralism has to do with a situation in which the basic principles of managing religious pluralism namely neutrality and equal recognition of all religions, are strictly adhered to by government officials in the exercise of their religious rights. This implies two things. One, is that government officials, especially elected ones, in the discharge of their responsibilities to the state should remain neutral to the diverse religions that populate the state. This means that they must not be seen or perceived to be supporting a particular religious ideology in the discharge of their duties. However, they are free to practice their religion at the private sphere in a manner that does not override public trust.

Secondly, the practice of responsible religious pluralism also implies that government officials in the exercise of their responsibilities and religious rights should adhere strictly to the principle of equal recognition of all religions and avoid discriminatory tendencies that can pose distrust among members of the diverse religious groups in Nigeria. As Taylor (1992:25-28) correctly argues, that due recognition is not only a duty we owe people but a right that we must give to all human beings irrespective of their age, colour, language, culture and religion. Therefore, government officials have a duty to protect the interest of all religions in Nigeria by providing equal opportunity to all religious groups.

Conclusion

In this paper, effort has been made to argue that religious pluralism is a fragile phenomenon that deserves proper management in Nigeria, if peace, stability, national integration and sustainable development must be achieved. Regrettably, the Nigerian experience has shown that the management of this phenomenon has often been undermined by Governors and Presidents through various forms of discriminatory and oppressive patronages of religion such as the use of public funds to sponsor Christians and Muslims' pilgrimages, building of Churches and Mosques using public funds, organizing and executing state-wide Christian programmes using state's funds, etc. The paper argues that these discriminatory and oppressive patronages are inconsistent with the ideals of managing a multi-religious state and can therefore, make efforts at promoting genuine national consciousness, cohesion, consensus, and stability difficult. Therefore, the paper recommends the practice of responsible religious pluralism, which is anchored on the basic principles of neutrality and equal recognition as a way to addressing this enigma in Nigeria.

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