Religion and Politics in Nigeria from 1841-1845: An Essay on Church-State Relationship

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Religion and Politics in Nigeria from 1841-1885: An Essay on Church-state Relationship

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Résumé Il est souvent dit que religion, politique et économie s'allient, Emmanuel Orobator, dans son essai, tente de soutenir la thèse suivante: la religion fut le principal instrument qui permit d'asseoir les intérêts politique et économiques britanniques entre 1841 et 1885 dans la région qui, plus tard, se nommera Nigéria. Même si les missionnaires ne sont pas toujours considérés comme agents de colonisation, il s'avère que leur collaboration fut largement bénéfique aux colons.

Introduction The coming of Christianity to the present-day geopolitical entity known as Nigeria dates back to the late 15th century. The initial sporadic efforts to implant the 'white man's religion' in Nigeria bore no fruit at all. That the early missionaries were all sponsored by their home governments as agents of civilization points to a pattern of relationship between religion and politics at that time. This relationship gravitated towards close collaboration or cooperation, albeit in view of differing goals.

The next decisive stage of the missionary venture occurred with the passing of the Abolition Act of 1807 by the British Parliament. This act spelled doom for the lucrative Slave Trade. The determination of the British government to eradicate this form of commerce is what, in part, led to the 'civilizing mission' of 1841. The composition and aim of this mission reveal something of the character of the relationship between religion and politics. It was comprised of missionaries, traders and government officials. 'Civilization' was considered indispensable if trade and commerce were to be successful-substitutes for slave trading.

This essay attempts to demonstrate the following thesis: Religion was the principal tool that facilitated the establishment of British political and commercial interests in Nigeria between 1841 and 1885. The missionaries did not always consider themselves as agents of the colonialists, but the evidence suggests that the cooperation

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was largely advantageous for the colonialists. To prove this, the characteristics of the initial missionary ventures will be discussed as far as they reveal patterns of relationship between religion and politics. This will be followed by an examination of the period between 1841 and 1885 when active cooperation thrived between British government representatives and the missionaries. Some of the areas of conflict between religion and politics in this civilizing mission will be pointed out. Besides the European missionaries, the role of certain key figures, such as Thomas Buxton, Henry Venn and Ajayi Crowther will also be briefly considered in determining the nature and course of this relationship.

Before proceeding any further, two points are relevant here. First, one could raise the objection that it is anachronistic to talk about religion and politics in Nigeria before 1914, because the political entity known as Nigeria did not exist before that date. However, this term is retained in this essay on the understanding that the area covered by missionary and British government influence, which is the focus of this present study, coincides with the political creation later known as Nigeria. A second objection: To be complete this study should consider the triad of religion, politics and trade. This triadic relationship is presupposed, and it will be dealt with it to a certain extent. Nevertheless, as time went on, trade became more explicitly welded to and indistinguishable from British political interest as its sole motivator. Therefore, one can justifiably treat only the subject of religion and politics in this period.

The Birth of the Missionary Adventure

The history of Christianity in West Africa was inaugurated in the 15th century owing to a combination of several factors. Notably, great advances had been made in navigational technology which in turn aided European seaborne expansion. Equally decisive were the prospects of lucrative commerce and trade on the coast of West Africa for many European nations, like Britain and Portugal. In addition, these nations shared a common conviction that Western civilization had to be extended to the 'dark continent.' With all these factors accumulated the first Europeans sailed to the Gulf of Guinea or the West African coast and, subsequently, to the Bights of Benin and Biafra.

The initial actors in the unfolding history of European presence along the West African coast were competitors. Portuguese merchants and missionaries, who had an advantage over the British, the Dutch and even the Italians, were eager— as indeed were the others— to acquire and protect their own prime areas of influence. When the Portuguese first landed on the Islands of Cape Verde and Sao Tome in the mid-15th century, the key motive was pursuit of commercial interests (gold, slave, pepper, and ivory). But within a few years Sao Tome had also become the base from which missionary ventures were launched to Benin and Warri (Nigeria).³

Another important factor in this development was that the missions were funded, appointed and controlled in large measure by the Portuguese Crown.... The government provided the finances and the transport and thereby made missionary activity

is not clear how, in fact, the Christian missionary factor became wedded to this enterprise. One can advance two hypotheses which will become clearer in the second half of this essay. First, it was not unusual for personnel of 15th century voyages to include chaplains who ministered to the spiritual needs of the seafaring Europeans. Secondly, Christianity was considered an effective vehicle for conveying the tenets of European civilization, which in turn would prepare the way for trade between Europeans and Africans. Under these circumstances, during the initial scramble for West Africa, the fate of the earliest missionary endeavours on the Gulf of Guinea became inextricably tied to the political and commercial fortunes of the European traders.

In the Bight of Benin, one can point to the examples of Benin and Warri where "trade formed the basis of contact" between European missionaries and Nigerians. Here it is important to note two aspects of this contact concerning the relationship between religion and politics. First, the missionaries depended on the merchant ships provided by the Portuguese Crown for transportation. Secondly, they also found it necessary to engage in slave trade "primarily as a means of financing evangelisation and supporting themselves. What is more, the Portuguese government gave approval to this practice and legalised it by granting slaves or allowing the church to trade in them on its own accounts." The realities of life on the coast of West Africa were harsh for the Europeans.

One conclusion that could be drawn from the foregoing is that, before 1841, the cooperation between Christianity, trade and politics was one of necessity and not of choice. Therefore, this period provides little interesting material concerning religion and politics in Nigeria. Still, the events of this period set the stage for what was to follow in the second phase of the history of Christianity in Nigeria. Whereas in this second phase the missionaries enjoyed a slightly wider latitude in choosing means for propagating the faith, they still preferred to collaborate with the "British secular arm" – which by now had completely supplanted Portuguese commercial interest in West Africa – to a point of exclusively relying on it in order to succeed in their mission to 'save souls'.

At the end of the 18th century the early missionary drive had ended. In the area now known as Nigeria a total of three centuries of missionary work had left no appreciable mark on the lives of the people: "The cost had been heavy and the gains were few." Historians are unanimous in identifying the reason for this failure. Sanneh states the consensus of historians when he asserts that "the reason for this is straightforward enough." He continues: "Christianity was too closely identified with existing European interests (commercial and territorial) to be able to follow an independent course in African States." This reason is instructive in terms of religion and politics in Nigeria. In a situation where the fate of the Christian missions depended heavily

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7Sanneh; see also Clarke, *West Africa and Christianity*, pp. 25-26.
on the calculations of the traders, the sole losers were the missionaries themselves. Thus, besides the fact that missionary ventures were promoted as the “schemes of European kings,” practically all the “European traders ignored arguments of religion in pursuit of profit and were not averse to restricting missionary work if commercial reasons demanded it.”

The 1841 Civilizing Mission and After

In the preceding section, it was clear that the first attempt at evangelizing Nigeria proved abortive. A new phase would open in the 19th century. The decisive factor in the intervening period was the abolition of slave trade which not only formed the basis for earlier contacts between Europe and Nigeria, but also determined to a considerable extent the pattern of interaction between trade, religion and politics. Another point to note here is that while the earlier missionary quest was led by Catholic missionaries, the agents of missionary expansion in this second phase would be chiefly Protestant missionaries from England.

Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786-1845)

In many ways Thomas Buxton can be considered as the grand patron of the modern missionary venture in 19th century Nigeria. Besides the fact that he was founding chairman of the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for the Civilization of Africa, sufficient evidence can be garnered from his book, The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy, to substantiate this assertion. Following the abolition of slave trade in 1807 and subsequently in 1833, Buxton proposed two “preparatory measures” aimed at making slave trade “more precarious and less profitable than it is at present.” He outlined these measures as follows:

1. An augmentation of the naval force employed in the suppression of the Slave Trade, and the concentration of that force on the coast of Africa, thus forming a chain of vessels from Gambia to Angola.
2. A corresponding chain of treaties with native powers in the interior, pledging them to act in concert with us; to suppress the Slave Trade in their own territory; to prevent slaves from being carried through their dominions, and, at the same time, to afford all needful facility and protection for the transport of legitimate merchandise.

Buxton conceded the inadequacy of these measures. He proposed them “not as a remedy, but as an expedient necessary for a time, in order that the real remedy may be applied in the most effectual manner.” The true or real remedy, he argued, was a combination of economic ventures (agriculture and legitimate commerce) and Christian missions launched by “ministers of the Gospel.” According to Buxton:

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*Sanneh, p.52.


10Buxton, p.299.

11Buxton, p.300.
The ransom for Africa will be found in her fertile soil; and the moral worth of her people will advance as they become better instructed, more secure, more industrious, and more wealthy.... The ministers of the gospel, the best of civilizers, will, as gently, as irresistibly, work out a change in the current opinion, and effect the cheerful renunciation of bloody and licentious customs.\(^\text{12}\)

Buxton’s argument was convincing, forcefully backed by a collection of both accurate and inaccurate data based on the accounts of seafaring European merchants. His rallying cry “the Bible and the plough” struck a responsive chord in the hearts of many. Buxton himself described the response to his appeal as “quite an epitome of the State, Whig, Tory and Radical; Dissenter, Low Church, High Church, tip-top High Church or Oxfordism, all united.”\(^\text{13}\) The result of Buxton’s spirited appeal was the ill-fated civilizing mission of 12 May 1841 up the basin of the Niger and Benue rivers.

According to the \textit{Journals of the Expedition of 1841} kept by Rev. J.F. Schon and Ajayi Crowther, the composition of the mission was an odd mix of government commissioners, officers, commanders and men of the admiralty, a surgeon, interpreters, agricultural workers, traders and “Reverend J.F. Schon, a German missionary of the CMS, and a young African catechist, the freed slave, Samuel Ajayi Crowther.”\(^\text{14}\) Each of these men or groups represented a facet of British interest in Nigeria ranging from philanthropy, commerce, science and politics to religion, all subsumed under the title ‘civilization’. In addition, in Buxton’s blueprint the government was to pay the salaries of the chaplains once they were established on the Niger.\(^\text{15}\)

Though this mission was a catastrophic failure – it was recalled one year later – “the British missionaries (especially those of the CMS) never believed that the expedition was a total failure.”\(^\text{16}\) It effectively set the stage for further missionary work in the Niger region. Besides, it also helps to explain the pattern of relationship that developed in the later years between religion and politics in Nigeria. A second and a third mission followed in 1854 and 1857 respectively, “the (British) Government, the CMS and commercial interests all taking part.”\(^\text{17}\)

A close examination of the facts clearly indicates that in the subsequent missions the missionaries forged an increasingly inseparable alliance with the British secular arm: “Henceforth, missionaries preaching the Gospel, merchants bearing manufactured goods and envoys concluding treaties with Nigerians became the major ‘civilising’ forces with which the British were to invade and, eventually to subjugate, the river basin.”\(^\text{18}\) Ayandele argues the same point when he asserts that “missionary

\(^{12}\)Buxton, p.338.


\(^{15}\)Buxton, p.559.

\(^{16}\)Kalu, \textit{The History of Christianity}, p.100.

\(^{17}\)Kalu, \textit{Christianity in West Africa}, p.20.

enterprise turned the white man's activity in Nigeria into a veritable political and social force" or that "missionaries were pathfinders of British influence."

Areas and Patterns of Cooperation
The areas and corresponding patterns of cooperation fall under the four broad interrelated categories of protection (and transportation), local politics, social (and moral) reforms and education. This separation is quite artificial, because in the ordinary run of affairs they were not clearly marked out or separated. Yet, this categorization has the merit of allowing an in-depth and more lucid study of the various elements involved in religion and politics and permits a fuller grasp of the peculiarities of the different patterns of relationship.

Protection
Travel up the Niger was a trying experience for the missionaries. Expectedly, like their 15th century predecessors, they relied on transportation provided by government agents. These agents — after the 1841 mission — were largely traders. And these were the ones, as Crampton correctly notes, who helped to maintain the Niger as a "British sphere of influence" before the introduction of direct government. It was not until 1877, over 30 years after the first mission, that Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who had become Bishop of the Western Equatorial Africa Beyond the Queen's Dominions, succeeded in persuading the CMS to purchase a vessel, the Henry Venn, to facilitate his missionary journeys. This development had the immediate consequence of lifting the pressure from the traders who openly resented the burden of ferrying missionaries up the Niger. Bishop Crowther could now pursue his work as the "undesignated consul on the (Niger) river."

Yet, there remained another area in which missionaries were to rely on the "secular arm" of the British government to aid the propagation of the faith. By and large, the tribes along the Niger Delta posed a threat to missionary journeys into the interior. Devoid of any effective means of warding off this threat, the missionaries turned to the government for protection. Ajayi argues convincingly the fact that "missionaries could now bank on more effective protection from the anti-slavery preventive squadron" was a direct consequence of the 1841 mission. Crampton notes an instance of how the missionaries "cooperated very closely with the government" in 1860: "The missionaries were unable to travel up the Niger because the Royal Navy failed to appear in time to clear the way past the hostile Delta tribesmen." Ayandele argues with a high degree of consistency that the missionaries had come to expect such protection from the British Government as an "inalienable

20 Ayandele, p.29. Crampton thinks that Ayandele's assertions are exaggerated. It is difficult to support such claims of exaggeration when the facts are carefully examined. See Edmund Crampton, Christianity in Northern Nigeria (Gaskiya Corporation Ltd., 1975), p.20.
21 Ayandele, p.27.
23 Kalu, Christianity in West Africa, pp.22-23.
25 Crampton, Christianity in Northern Nigeria, p.21.
right.\textsuperscript{26} That explains why Reverend Hope Waddell, a United Presbyterian missionary, would insist on the British government's guarantee of "every protection" to his missionary party before leaving London for Calabar (Nigeria) in December 1845.\textsuperscript{27} Examples from other parts of Nigeria show that this pattern of cooperation was established as a regular feature of the missionary venture from its inception.

The first example is that of Methodist missionary Reverend Thomas Birch Freeman. Freeman established the first mission in Badagri (Lagos) as an outstation of the Methodist Mission in Cape Coast (Ghana). The course of action which he took after settling in this mission is instructive. He sought the patronage of Governor Maclean of Cape Coast (Ghana) to whom he offered Badagri as an "extension" of Maclean's protectorate. Maclean's response on 16 August 1843 epitomized the relation of religion and politics in this period. He gave instructions to a Ghanaian soldier to proceed to Badagri and "to hoist the English flag in the English town and afford due protection to all English subjects... to afford every protection to the Christian mission establishment there, and to all connected with it..."\textsuperscript{28}

When, on 4 January 1843, CMS missionary, Reverend Henry Townsend arrived in Abeokuta, north of Badagri, the competitiveness of the missionary groups was becoming more evident. But their basic procedure of seeking protection from the "secular arm" remained the same. It was Townsend who invented the famous "Abeokutan policy" whose first tenet was to seek and fortify military might in order to facilitate the spread of the gospel and, secondly, to strengthen the hands of traditional rulers, using their power to protect and further the cause of the Christian mission.\textsuperscript{29} The second half of this policy will be treated in depth later.

Within the first few years of the civilizing mission, a notable shift occurred in the way the secular arm was invoked in aid of the gospel. Navy squadron vessels were no longer considered adequate. Gradually, but persistently, both missionaries and traders began to advocate for greater "imperial commitments" to the Niger. These commitments took shape in a succession of events: John Beecroft was appointed the consul of the Bights of Benin and Biafra in 1849, the British annexed Lagos in 1851, and signed a series of treaties with Lagos, Abeokuta and Badagri. Each of these treaties contained a "missionary clause" which clearly shows the nature and extent of protection that the missionaries were to expect from the British and the local chiefs:

Encouragement shall be given to such missionaries in the pursuits of industry, in the building of houses for their residence, and schools and chapels. They shall not be hindered in their endeavours to teach the doctrines of Christianity to all persons willing and desirous to be taught....\textsuperscript{30}

Two years later, when a consul was appointed for Abeokuta, his job description also included an explicit instruction to "co-operate with the missionaries."\textsuperscript{31} The net

\textsuperscript{26}Ayandele, \textit{The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria}, p.7.
\textsuperscript{27}U.P. Minutes, 1843, in Ayandele, \textit{The Missionary Impact}, pp.7-8.
\textsuperscript{28}From Freeman's 1844 Manuscripts, quoted in Ajayi, \textit{Christian Mission in Nigeria}, p.35.
\textsuperscript{29}Freeman, p.79 ff.
\textsuperscript{30}From Beecroft's 1852 Brief to the Foreign Office, quoted in Ajayi, \textit{Christian Missions in Nigeria}, p.77.
\textsuperscript{31}Beecroft, p.80.
consequence of these developments would be to strengthen the existing cooperation between agents of the triad of commerce, politics and religion.

Local Politics

The socio-political configuration of the various tribes along the Niger Delta, the Bight of Benin and in the interior revolved around the personality and authority of the king or chief. In general, the king—sometimes, along with a council of elders—wielded absolute power. On him devolved the responsibility of dealing with matters of trade and external affairs. Consequently, the early missionaries, who understood clearly the socio-political characteristics of these tribes, sought to conduct their Christian mission through the medium of the local chiefs and kings. Their method rested on the logic that the conversion of the ruler would aid—if not automatically lead to—the conversion of the entire town or village. This missionary strategy that Kalu aptly terms “court alliance” would ultimately drag the missionaries into the web of local politics, particularly the perennial problem of succession or border disputes.

Often a split arose in the towns or villages between pro-missionary and anti-missionary factions. It is interesting to note the kind of political mentality at play here. On the one hand, the missionaries saw their alliance with a particular ruler as a vital instrument for establishing their missionary agenda. In effect, this was a missionary rule of thumb that dates back to the 15th century. According to this rule only the converted ruler could guarantee a favourable climate for the spread of Christianity as “agents of Christianisation.” On the other hand, the rulers were motivated by an entirely different interest to seek alliance with the missionaries. They (rulers) solicited “the patronage of missionaries” as a source of increased political clout over their rivals and/or prestige among their supporters and subjects. Examples of this pattern of relationship can be multiplied, but that of the celebrated case of Akitoye vs. Kosoko will suffice.

The struggle between Akitoye and Kosoko was one of succession. Each of them represented a rival ruling family who laid claims to the throne of Lagos. In the ensuing drama Akitoye was expelled from Lagos in 1845. He sought refuge in Abeokuta from where he would make repeated but unsuccessful attempts to unseat his opponent. Already, Christianity was taking roots in Abeokuta under Townsend. It was Townsend, along with Rev. C.A. Gollmer of CMS Badagri, who impressed it upon Consul John Beecroft on a visit to Abeokuta “that Britain must intervene in the Lagos dispute on the side of Akitoye.” The interest of the missionaries in this dispute is aptly alluded to in a confidential report of 28 August 1855 by a Mr. Sandeman. He

33Sanneh, West African Christianity, p.36.
34Cf. Ayandele, The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, p.10; Clarke, West Africa and Christianity, p.63. However, it was not unusual in some cases for local chiefs to decline welcoming missionaries in their domains. In Ibadan, for instance, the chief denied the Methodists permission to station a catechist “after consulting the Ijọ oracle.” M.M. Familusi, Methodism in Nigeria 1842-1992 (Ibadan, Nigeria: NPS Educational Publishers Limited, 1992), p.26.
35Ajayi, Christian Missions in Nigeria, p.69.
wrote: “The fact is... Akitoye was made a tool to carry out the ambitious views of these two men, Messrs. Gollmer and Townsend.” Nevertheless, the British acted swiftly: “At the close of the year (1851) an English squadron attacked Lagos, overthrew Kosoko, and restored the rightful chief, Akitoye.” It was after the reinstatement of Akitoye as king of Lagos that the 1852 treaty containing a “missionary clause” was concluded.

The pattern set by the case of Akitoye vs. Kosoko further cemented the pact between British administration and the missionaries. It is important to note that sometimes this had a negative effect on the work of the missionaries. Therefore, whenever the local rulers perceived them as a threat, that is, as pathfinders of British domination, they tried to clamp down on the missionaries. In such cases, the fortunes of the mission depended on the reaction of the local populace to the presence of the British administrators.

Social and Moral Reforms

In many ways this topic is closely connected with the preceding issues of protection and local politics. To state it simply: the missionaries relied on the influence which the local rulers had on their subjects to introduce certain reforms. However, when the influence of the rulers proved to be inadequate or outright ineffective, the missionaries summoned the British secular arm to enforce such reforms. This is not to suggest that the missionaries did not rely on the power of the gospel to convert and introduce the necessary reforms. Bishop Crowther, for example, confronted by the problem of the killing of twins, “condemned it repeatedly from the pulpit...” He believed that “only the effective preaching of the gospel would gradually cause such (human) sacrifices to disappear.” Yet, it did not, because the matter concerned deeply ingrained religious practices. The missionaries found it difficult to dislodge these practices and introduce new Christian laws. A look at one such example will suffice.

Reverend Hope Waddell established the United Presbyterian Mission in southeastern Nigeria in 1846. His sphere of influence comprised a network of towns and villages on the Niger Delta. Waddell’s initial policy was to rely on the power of the king, local ruler King Eyo of Creek Town, to promote Christian values. As usual, the king allied with missionary interest for political reasons and carried out “the most revolutionary social legislation in Nigeria in the nineteenth century.” He outlawed the immolation of slaves and curtailed the power of “masters” over their slaves. Since the reform measures touched deeply the lives of his people, he soon found out that he had limited influence in enforcing these reforms effectively. In 1850

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36 Ajayi, p.76.
40 Loiello, p.49.
Hope Waddell promptly launched a missionary reform programme and formed the Society for the Abolition of Inhuman and Superstitious Customs and for promoting Civilization in Old Calabar. By so doing he had usurped the position of Eyo in decreeing and enforcing social legislation: "Henceforth, reforms were not to issue from Eyo himself. The new Society made itself the watchdog of the... law and its stringent implementation, and dedicated itself to the demolition of one custom after another...."42

Besides abolishing "inhuman and superstitious customs" it was also the aim of Waddell and his missionary party to promote "Christian civilization." Specific elements of this civilization included monogamy, in opposition to the local practice of polygamy; Sabbath observance, and laws against the consumption of alcohol. The Calvinistic bent of these reforms is perceptible in the following legislation passed in Creek Town in 1873:

HENCEFORTH ON GOD'S DAY NO MARKET IS TO BE HELD IN ANY PART OF CREEK TOWN TERRITORY; NO SALE OF STRONG DRINK, EITHER NATIVE OR IMPORTED IN DOORWAYS OR VERANDAHS; NO WORK: NO PLAY [sic]; NO DEVIL MAKING: NO FIRING OF GUNS: NO EGBO [Masquerade] PROCESSIONS: NO PALAVER.43

This decree was followed by the 1878 treaty with king and chiefs of Duke Town which forbade all "practices against which the mission has had to contend."44 As McFarlan correctly notes: "This treaty put a political seal on the patient work of the missionaries throughout the years. The Consul acknowledged that such an agreement would have been impossible but for the long-continued residence and teaching of the mission."45

The interesting thing to note is that the success of the Society’s reform programme owed largely to the propitious influence of what has consistently been referred to as the British secular arm. The missionaries tried to convert through preaching. But when this failed, the physical force of the consul and naval squadron had to be invoked. Consul John Beecroft was a member of the Society, and Waddell was confident that “the man-of-war’s guns would back up the missionaries.”46 This, in fact, was what had happened earlier in 1855 when Old Calabar was destroyed by the Royal Navy. Ayandele’s conclusion is worth quoting in full:

The significance of the destruction of Old Town is that it is one of the first examples of military action by the British, largely at the behest of the missionaries, designed to coerce traditional conservatives who resisted the pen-

42Ayandele. Donald McFarlan gives a detailed description of the “court alliance” between Waddell and the kings and chiefs of Old Calabar, but he omits any reference whatsoever to the use or threat of force to secure social reforms. The threat of severing all “friendly intercourse” was not the only tool used to put pressure on the local rulers. See Donald McFarlan, Calabar: The Church of Scotland Mission 1846-1946 (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1946), pp.8-37.
44McFarlan, Calabar, pp.65-66.
45McFarlan, p. 67.
etration of European moral and Christian codes, even though the Africans in this case had not in fact committed themselves by treaty to such a course. A precedent was set for the future when the Old Town was forced to accept missionaries and their revolutionary programme as the condition for the rebuilding of their town in 1856.47

**Education** Chronologically, the treatment of education as a factor of the relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria comes last. In the 1841 mission, formal education was not a top priority. Conversion from “superstitious and inhuman customs” was the main aim to be achieved. In this sense, religious instruction was a vital tool in weaning young children “from ‘pagan’ ideas and prejudices of their unyielding parents.”48 Besides, in Buxton’s blueprint for the missionary venture the important thing was to preach the gospel and demonstrate the “superior value of man as a labourer on the soil.”49 In full compliance with this logic, Reverend Henry Venn, Secretary of the CMS (1842-72), made a spirited case against providing any formal education for the converts. This issue is of special interest because it is here, for the first time, that noticeable cracks begin to appear in the alliance between missionary enterprise and the British secular arm.

Besides the elementary religious instruction mentioned above, the other form of education provided was aimed at training local employees and religious instructors of the different missionary groups. In the case of CMS the few selected for higher forms of missionary work were sent to England for further training. In general, during the period under review, all the missions showed noticeable “disdain for grammar schools” in favour of agricultural institutions. One of the reasons they advanced to support this attitude was the claim that the educated elites hankered after “secular” posts or became traders. In the mind of the missionary, this development was not conducive to the spread of Christianity in Nigeria.50

When the missionaries finally decided to provide formal elementary and grammar school education, government support became an issue and a source of tension between the missionaries and the government. From 1859, the CMS, along with the Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic and Wesleyan Missions, began to establish a string of grammar schools. The initial disdain shown for grammar school education changed rapidly. This can be attributed to two major interrelated factors. First, the missionaries competed among themselves. Secondly, they competed to secure government aid for their schools. From 1871 to 1881, government grants to mission schools were distributed equally with no conditions attached.51

In May 1882, the British administration in Nigeria promulgated the Education Ordinance which contained a “religious clause.” Consequently, this area of education that had been the exclusive preserve of missionaries became subject to govern-

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51Ayande, pp.294-299.
ment regulation and control. Ayandele provides useful hints regarding the content of this Ordinance and its implications for the relationship between the government and the missions after 1882. In this Ordinance, the government declared "neutralism" both in the content and the purpose of education and set conditions for further government aid to mission schools. These conditions clearly indicated the government's plan to promote "intellectualism" instead of "spirituality," which had been the cardinal tenet of mission education. The government system of "payment by results" meant that schools had to revise their curriculum in favour of secular subjects which were judged to be more relevant to the development of the society.

For the missionaries, knowledge of the Bible and catechism determined a student's suitability for promotion to the next class. Under the new scheme, the determining criteria of government aid and promotion from one class to another were the teaching of English language, writing and arithmetic. In the missionary mentality this amounted to outright "secularization" of education.

Another area of divergence was that of personnel of mission schools. Mission teachers were considered "spiritual agents," not professionals as the government sought to make them under the new dispensation. Besides the fact that new government regulation meant higher pay for these poorly paid mission teachers, they also had to pass government stipulated tests in order to become teachers in the schools. This was unacceptable to the missionaries who, consequently, opted to reject government grants in order to avoid government control of and intrusion into their religious educational enterprise. "Henceforward," Ayandele concludes, "the missions became apprehensive of Government avowal of interest in education and whatever financial help it offered." Consequently, from the end of the 19th century to the amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria in 1914, government and the missions drifted apart considerably in their conceptions of education.

Conclusion What has been said so far is an attempt to examine the relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria from 1841 to 1885. Evidently, the topic is as complex as it is interesting. The approach employed in this study made it possible to isolate four important interrelated headings under which the subject was treated. The sections covered do not represent the whole picture. Between the Berlin Conference of 1885, which marked the formal inauguration of British colonial rule in Nigeria, and 1960 the bases of the relationship between religion and politics were radically altered. There was noticeable tension between the government and the different Christian missions and churches. Although in many areas this relationship remained one of cooperation and mutual dependence, between 1885 and 1960 the initiative now lay squarely in

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52 Ayandele, pp.283-304. Given the relevance of this Ordinance to the relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria, Amadi's passing reference to it fails to emphasize adequately its decisive nature. See Amadi, "Church-State Involvement in Educational Development in Nigeria," p.490.


54 Ayandele, p.299.
the hands of the British government. Thus, “after being in the vanguard, dragging traders and consuls after them, missionaries were beginning to follow after the political officer.”

At the attainment of independence in 1960, the missionaries and the churches were in the vanguard of those who asserted the “secular” nature of the nascent Nigerian state. A new factor, in the form of Muslim influence and domination, had suddenly become apparent. It bode ill for the Christian religion, and Christians sought to stem its negative consequences by calling on the government to avoid mingling the interest of state with the tenets of any religion. For the Muslims the separation of religion and politics was impossible both in theory and in practice. This issue has remained a source of political tension in Nigeria since independence.

Today, the identity of interests which bred cooperation between the Christian religion and politics in the late 19th century no longer exists. The relationship is now fraught with tension and mutual suspicion.

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