

Challenges of Islamic Theocracy in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective

BY

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Abstract

Islamic theocracy, both in theory and practice, in Nigeria may be perceived by people to be a new concept owing to the religious politics and tension pervading the country at present. In fact, other faiths in Nigeria may view it as a ploy to Islamize Nigeria. However, there is no doubting the fact that majority of people from northern Nigeria are predominantly Muslims who, by the dictates of Islam, should be governed by an Islamic theocracy. In addition, any Muslim from whatever ethnic background in Nigeria must submit himself/herself to the dictates of Islam. This can only be possible in an Islamic theocratic society. Qur'an 2:208 says "O you who believe, enter into Islam completely..." This is a command that every Muslim must obey - politically, socially, economically, culturally etc. Historically, Islamic theocracy is not a new concept in Nigeria. It formally became an established institution in 1804 with the success of Sokoto jihad and the subsequent establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate and its component emirates. Islamic system of government was fully entrenched in the Caliphate especially in the first five decade of its establishment. The caliph became the head of the Caliphate and emirs headed the various component emirates of the Caliphate. The caliph and the emirs were learned

and versatile in Islamic law (Shari'a). Apart from performing the acts of governance with the Quran and Hadith, the caliph and the emirs also presided over courts, they took decisions on matters of Shari'a (FATWA), tutored people on Shari'a, wrote books and exchanged correspondences on religious matters. This was the situation in the Caliphate and its emirates up till the coming of colonial rule at the beginning of the 20th century. The colonial rulers recognized Islamic theocracy in the North and allowed the people to practice their religion without intimidation or persecution. The Muslim north was groomed under the system of English indirect rule which accommodated the Sharia legal order while the Christian/Animist south was administered under the British secular state. It is in the light of the foregoing, therefore, that this paper intends to historicize Islamic theocracy in Nigeria and identify its challenges which were majorly posed by modernism. The paper also intends to offer some recommendations concerning how these challenges can be tackled. The paper intends to use both primary and secondary data for analysis and this will comprise of oral interviews and the published materials.