

Christianity, Islam, and Liberal Democracy: Lessons from Sub-Saharan Africa

BASED on field research and observation primarily in Nigeria, but for comparative reasons also in Senegal and Uganda, the book under review offers a helpful insight into how Christian and Muslim faith leaders affect the political attitudes of their fellow community members. This leads into an assessment of the prospects for the development of liberal democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa. The author, Robert Dowd, has chosen to focus on Sub-Saharan Africa because it is one of the most religiously vibrant regions of the world. He observes in the Introduction (Chapter 1) that in the region under consideration 'more people spend more time gathered in religious communities than anywhere else' (3). He observes that there is a general view that religious diversity in developing countries impedes liberal democracy (2) but, drawing on narratives, interviews and surveys, he shows that diverse and integrated Christian and Muslim communities are more likely to support liberal democracy than would homogeneous or segregated ones (2, 8, 10). It would seem that in religiously diverse and integrated environments, religious leaders tend to be more encouraging of civic engagement, democracy and religious liberty (11). The author provides a theoretical framework for understanding when and where Christian and Muslim communities in Sub-Saharan Africa encourage or discourage liberal democracy and uses this framework to demonstrate how religious communities are important in affecting political attitudes and actions.

Dowd defines 'religion' as 'a system of beliefs in the transcendent that communities develop and use to explain the world around them' (3) and, later in the book, 'liberal democracy'

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Christianity, Islam, and Liberal
Democracy: Lessons from Sub-Saharan
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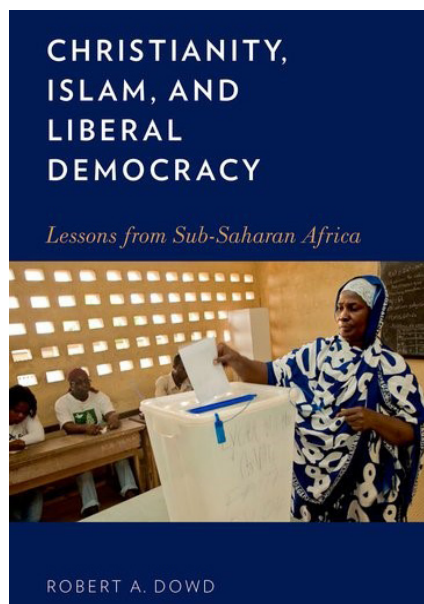
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is about rule of, by, and for the people that respects the right of people to say, associate, and believe as they desire' (82). The author has wisely limited the concept of diversity to theological and religious views about God and the worship of God within each of the two religious traditions.

Chapter 2, entitled 'Time, Place and the Application of Religion to Politics', reassesses, in a wide ranging survey, the traditional view that differences between religious traditions explain the variation in political theologies. The author questions whether religious leaders' attempts to influence political actions and attitudes of their communities depend on their being Catholic, Protestant or Muslim. His findings indicate that the religious and political context in which they are located is more determinative. The evidence points to the fact that time and place affect how religious leaders choose to apply their religious traditions to politics.

Chapter 3, 'The Role of Religious Leaders', analyses religious diversity in Sub-Saharan Africa using formulas developed by social scientists, and explains the variation in the extent to which such religious leaders have openly supported pro-democracy movements. The analysis indicates that religious leaders in religiously diverse countries are more supportive of pro-freedom political activism than those in religiously homogeneous countries.

In Chapter 4, the author offers evidence from cross-cultural survey research that Christians and Muslims are politically involved and support democracy in religiously diverse countries, and also that religious group activity and frequent contact with religious leaders has a positive effect on voting



as 'apolitical system with regular competitive elections and basic freedoms that allow people in a country to hold their governments accountable' (81). He maintains that 'liberal democracy

and support for democracy. Dowd acknowledges that the results were based on a limited body of data.

Chapter 5 presents Dowd's findings from fieldwork carried out in 2006 and 2007 in Nigeria, Senegal and Uganda and compares the ways in which religious observance has affected political participation and religious tolerance in those countries. The results show that religious observance by adherents of the two religious traditions had a more positive impact on religious tolerance in religiously diverse Nigeria than in predominantly Muslim Senegal and predominantly Christian Uganda.

Chapter 6 sets out an in-depth analysis of the Nigerian material, looking at the impact of religious observance on political culture in four settings in the country that vary in terms of their religious diversity. The locations covered are Ibadan with its high religious diversity, Jos, which is moderately religiously diverse, Kano, which is predominantly Muslim, and Enugu, which is predominantly Christian. The material shows that Christians and Muslims in Ibadan, with its greater diversity and integration, are more open to key liberal democratic values. Statements by

religious leaders in Ibadan tended to be more encouraging of political participation and respect for the separation of religious and state authority. The material suggests that religious segregation, on the other hand, inhibits religious tolerance. It would therefore seem that religious diversity is not necessarily an impediment to liberal democracy in Nigeria. The analysis provides a basis for assessing how changes across time in religious diversity and other socio-political conditions affect the likelihood that the two religious traditions may be applied in ways that promote or impede tolerance.

The author suggests that the findings should be of interest to policymakers seeking to cultivate religiously inspired support for liberal democracy, encouraging the formation of religiously diverse neighbourhoods, cities and political organisations. The inclusion of a number of tables and figures facilitates and supports the argument throughout the book.

The view that religious diversity contributes to an appreciation for the values of liberal democracy might seem incongruous, especially when one thinks of all the unscientific opinions

put forward that set Islam in conflict with democracy. In contrast, the data presented demonstrates that both Christians and Muslims in contexts of religious diversity, and in communities that have a highly educated populace who draw on their traditions and sacred texts, tend to support political activism, which in turn promotes liberal democratic institutions. Specifically, the author considers that his detailed studies of Senegal and Nigeria reflect a general attitude of religious leaders in different parts of the continent that supported calls for democratic change in the 1990s. In Nigeria, which has seen more than 40 major acts of inter-religious violence, particularly in the states of Kaduna, Kano and Plateau, the correlation of religious participation and promotion of liberal democracy or lack thereof depends on the length of the experiments in diversity, the extent of the integration of religious groups, the frequency with which they mix and mingle with other each other, and key roles played by religious leaders in promoting religious tolerance.

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PUBLIC LECTURE

"THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE INDONESIAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY"



Speakers:

1. Dr. Abdurrahman Mohammad Fachir
(Wakil Menteri Luar Negeri RI)
2. Dr. James B. Hoesterey
(Emory University)



Auditorium SPs - Thursday, September 15th, 2016

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