

## **RELIGIOUS POLITICS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST INDEPENDENCE NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The multi-dimensional social impact of religion is apparent, hence the subject matter is unarguably an issue in the question of sustainable development, which is equally multi-faceted. In the area of politics, which is the focus of this paper, religion has been a strong determining factor in aspects, such as style of governance, policy formulation, and the electoral process in Nigeria, especially in the post-independence milieu. However, the impact could be both positive and negative. In other words, as religion enhances sustainability, so also it could be counter productive in the matter of politics. In view of the foregoing, this paper x-rays, critically, the influence of religion on politics, with emphasis on the concept of sustainable development, as experienced in Nigeria. In doing this, the history of politics, in relation to religion since independence, is probed, with attention paid to the prospects or otherwise of the apparently unavoidable relationship. Recommendations are made toward ensuring the sustenance of the positive influence, on the one hand, and tackling the challenges of the negative influence, on the other hand. This is a way of establishing the relevance of religion in achieving sustainable development in Nigeria in this epoch of political upheavals, which have been a threat to an enduring democracy.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Religion, Politics, Sustainable Development

### **INTRODUCTION**

The obvious interplay between religion and society has attracted the reactions of scholars in the sociological study of religion and what seems the consensus of such reactions is the indispensability of religion to the growth, development, and survival of humanity. This is not to say that we cannot think of its negative impacts. This piece is aimed at showing the implications of the influence of religion on Nigerian politics for sustainable development, with emphasis placed on the post-independence era. In this attempt, religion is presented as two sides of a coin, with a view to establishing the relevance, or otherwise, of religious politics to the title of the paper.

### **RELIGION AND SOCIETY: AN OVERVIEW**

Religion, as a social phenomenon, has an interactive relationship with other social units of a society. However, there are some viewpoints that de-emphasize, ignore, or reject this dimension of religion. To those schools of thought, it (religion) is the context of people's communion with the supernatural, an expression of an instinctual reaction to the cosmic forces and an explicit set of messages from a deity. In whatever way we see religion, the fact cannot be denied of its interaction with

other social institutions and forces in society. It follows and illustrates sociological principles and laws (Johnstone, 2001). According to Dzurgba, (2009) it can be argued that religion created the society in as much as God created the universe. He represents religion while the universe represents society. Thus, all aspects of society, such as marriage, homes, schools, medical institutions, and business corporations, among others, are influenced by religion. Corroborating this, Awolalu (1988) opines that:

In Africa, traditional society, religion, and political authorities were interdependent. Religion and state were inseparable. The king promoted religion-built places of worship, enforced doctrine, and ritual observances...In Islam, there is no dichotomy between religion and the state. Islam is a religion, as well as a way of life and government. As far as a Muslim is concerned, Allah has revealed, through Muhammad, a pattern for the life of man, in which politics, ethics, economics, and social order are bound together in an indissoluble totality by the will of God, which is the transcendental element in the compound. In classical Islam, the state is not sovereign; the ultimate sovereign is God and it is the duty of each Muslim to obey the state, since the purpose of the state is the promotion and protection of Islam... In the New Testament, there was no clear cut division between the church and the state...God was the acknowledged ruler working through his chosen servant... “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s”. This saying implies both the validity of the authority of earthly rulers in their own spheres and the illegitimacy of their claims to an absolute obedience that belongs to God alone.

The inference that can be drawn from the foregoing is that religion and society are, in practice, inseparable entities. For this reason, the claims by Comte and Marx regarding the relevance of religion have come under severe attack and they cannot be established.

## **UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The term, sustainable development, has been explained in different ways. Therefore, attempting to know its exact meaning seems difficult. According to the Brundlant report of the World Commission on Environment and Development of the United Nations (1987), sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable\\_development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_development)). This has become the most often quoted definition of the concept. The content varies according to culture, time, and perspective and can only be properly understood by adopting the integrative approach involving ecological, social, political, and economic considerations. Thus it can be conceptually broken into three parts, namely: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and socio-political sustainability (<http://www.google.co.ke/searchsustainabledevelopment>). In the light of this, Hasna opines that sustainability is a process which tells of a development of all aspects of human life affecting sustenance. It emphasizes conflict resolution and involves pursuit of economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social equity (Hasna, 2007). Sustainable development is an eclectic concept thereby having a wide array of views under its umbrella.

For the purpose of this paper, we shall be concerned with socio-political sustainability, with emphasis placed on the level at which Nigeria is developing socially and politically and the role that religion can play in this variant of development and

ways of sustaining it, amidst political upheavals that have pervaded the country since independence. In doing this, the following questions are pertinent: Is Nigeria developing in the socio-political context? If she is, how can it be sustained?

### **RELIGIOUS POLICY IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria as a country is religiously pluralistic. Apart from the three major religions, Christianity, Islam, and Traditional Religion, there are several others competing for relevance and recognition. In spite of this reality, in theory, Nigeria is a secular state. This has been indicated in the constitution since independence. For the purpose of emphasis, the word, secular, is derived from the Latin word 'Secularis', which means temporal. It is taken to mean 'of or relating to worldly, as opposed to sacred things or having no particular religious affinities'. Secularism, as a doctrine, rejects religion. It maintains that religion should have no place in civil affairs and civil rulers should have no interest in religion. The condition of being secular is understood to mean secularity (Nwolize, 1989). Thus, a secular state is a state where religion communities have no recognized role in politics and no formal relation to the state. Individual citizens have a freedom of conscience and religion; and freedom from discrimination on the basis of religion. This is different from a theocratic or a religious state (Awolalu, 1988).

As stated in the 1999 constitution, "the government of the federation shall adopt any religion as state religion". Therefore in policy formulation, governance, and other governmental activities, religion should not be an issue. By implication, every citizen has a right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Section 38 is categorical, that:

1. Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony, or observance relates to a religion, other than his own or a religion not approved by his parents or guardian, and
3. No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination.

It states, also, that:

...accordingly, national integration shall actively be encouraged, whilst discrimination, on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic, or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited, while national ethics shall be Discipline, Integrity, Dignity of Labor, Social Justice, Religious Tolerance, Self-reliance, and Patriotism. Also, membership of political parties is opened to every citizen irrespective of his place of origin, circumstances of birth, sex, religion, or ethnic group (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

From the foregoing, the religious policy in Nigeria can be understood, theoretically. The legal provisions are made in order to ensure that citizens enjoy religious freedom and that the state or government does not affiliate itself or show preference for

one religion (Nwolize, 1989). The dictum 'live and let live' is held and the contribution that religion can make to the life of citizens are recognized, hence the belief in religious tolerance (Awolalu, 1988).

### **MANIFESTATION OF RELIGION IN NIGERIAN POLITICS**

It will amount to an error of contradiction to claim that secularity in Nigeria is absolute and the legal provision notwithstanding. Without mincing words, religion has been a potent factor in Nigerian politics since independence, thereby threatening her secularity. The fact that no religion is recognized as a state religion does not suggest that religion is not an issue of concern to successive administrations in Nigeria. In fact, it has been a matter of inevitability. However, the pluralistic nature of the country is largely recognized. For this reason, as much as practicable, the three major religions are given equal opportunity, but in this respect, the traditional religion is disadvantaged, as we shall see shortly. This is not unconnected with politics of evangelization of the two main foreign religions, i.e. Christianity and Islam. Christianity, for example, has a universal mission and, therefore, rests on the principle of a universal God, evangelism, salvation, and brotherhood of mankind. Islam is also a missionary religion and, going by history, it aims at growing numerically. Prior to the arrival of these two religions, in what is now known as Nigeria, traditional religion was firmly rooted. However, their arrival spelt doom on its fortune as the religion was condemned in its entirety and many Muslim and Christian converts were won. It follows that not many people could proudly associate themselves with it, thus the growth of Islam and Christianity is the end result of the wane or African Traditional Religion. Another factor is its small scale nature. This religion is highly segmented, localized; and not universal. (Mbiti. 1976) Moreover, zeal for evangelism manifesting in membership drive is not its attribute. It is, therefore, ironical that Christianity and Islam are now more recognized than the traditional religion.

Religion manifests in various aspects of life in Nigeria, however, what is interesting is the fact that caution has always been taken not to cause religious acrimony. This is done by making sure that no religion is overtly preferred or neglected. For example, at public gatherings, it is either prayers are not offered at all or they are offered by leaders or functionaries of the recognized religions. In this case, if the opening prayer was said by a Muslim, a Christian will say the closing prayer, and vice versa. This is a way of preventing conflict, which may snowball into violence. On the issue of public holidays, Christianity and Islam are adequately taken care of as work free days are observed during their festivals. But, in the history of Nigeria, no public holiday has been declared for traditional festivals by the Federal Government. Though no official reason has been given, one is noticeable. As noted before, the traditional religion is segmented and, invariably, there is no common interest. Festivals are celebrated locally and many of them could last for a week or more and the times they are observed vary from one community to another. For this reason, there are no specific days or times as obtained in Christianity and Islam. More importantly, it has never been seriously impressed on the government, especially at the federal level, to declare public for the celebration of these festivals. This notwithstanding the development does not reflect religious plurality. Apart from the traditional religion, there are other religions that are suffering the same fate. Perhaps as the country advances and those religions grow, they could be constitutionally recognized.

Religious organizations have never pretended not to be interested in the affairs of the country as they are, in many ways, involved. One of such ways is prayers that are offered for leaders and the country as an entity. These prayers are both

solicited and unsolicited. Sometime ago, the Vice President of Nigeria, (now President) Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, enjoined all Nigerians to be praying for the government. While we are not condemning this, one is concerned about its constitutionality. This request did not appeal to the sensibility of those who believe that most of the problems confronting Nigeria are man-made. The state of health of the late president, Ya'radua, engaged the services of many religious personnel, who consistently prayed for his quick recovery. It was reported in the news media, shortly before his death, that some renowned clergy men visited him even when the, then, acting President did not have free access to him.

The establishment of the Pilgrim Welfare Board is another way of understanding the erosion of secularity in Nigeria. The implication of this is that government now has serious influence on pilgrimage and a great deal of public fund is expended yearly to run the Board. Not only this but also the government, at different levels, has sponsored pilgrims to Jerusalem and Mecca, which has made the exercise to be an appendage political activities. The reason is that the manner in which people are sponsored is not apolitical, as it has become a means of rewarding those who are loyal to the government of the day. In this era of democracy, one needs to know how many of those who are sponsored by the government do not belong to the ruling party at the level in which they are sponsored. This development questions the spiritual relevance of pilgrimage. Also, the building of the central Mosque and Christian Center in Abuja was supported by the government, while in various Government Houses, there are either a Chapel or a Mosque or both, depending on the prevailing religious situations in the states concerned. These structures are maintained by public funds.

One religious issue that has, for a long time, been a subject of debate and discord in Nigeria is the question of Sharia, the Islamic legal system. On its origin, (Kukah 1994) has argued that the Sharia debate of the Constituent Assembly (C.A) of 1978 must not be seen as the beginning of the introduction of the religion into Nigerian politics. He (Kukah) maintains that the basis of the Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio was the establishment of an Islamic state based on Sharia. In its Native Court proclamation in 1900, the British accepted Sharia Court as being at par with the Customary Court, thus they were empowered to administer native laws and custom prevailing in their area of jurisdiction. Punishments that are not repugnant to natural justice could be awarded. The first Sharia Court of Appeal was established in Kaduna, in 1960. However, its jurisdiction was restricted to Islamic personal law. This was in apparent recognition of religious plurality of the, then, Northern region. (Ngwa, 2002) The issue took a political dimension with the setting up of the Constitution Drafting Committee (C.D.C) in 1976 as part of the efforts to return the country to civil rule. In the draft constitution, the following provisions were made:

1. There shall be Federal Sharia Court of Appeal, which shall be an intermediate Court of Appeal between the states Sharia Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Nigeria.
2. The Court shall be composed of the Grand Mufti and such a member of Muftis (not less than three) as the National Assembly may prescribe.
3. In each of states of the Federation that desires, there shall be a Sharia Court of Appeal to be established by the constitution of the state. (As quoted by Kukah 1994)

When the Constituent Assembly began to deliberate on the proposed constitution, Sharia was prominent, as there were divergent views in respect of its adoption, or non-adoption. Expectedly, many Muslims were in support while Christians were antagonistic. Some were indifferent, but the debate continued and a walk out was staged by many Muslim members of the Assembly, but this did not halt it. On the recommendation of a sub-committee, the controversial provision was deleted. This was not the end of Sharia in the politics of Nigeria, as it was featured during subsequent constitutional conferences. Nwolize reports that there was a move by the Buhari government:

To forcefully and secretly amend section 10 of the 1979 constitution to insert Sharia law as Federal law in 1984. The Buhari government instructed the Governors of the ten Northern states to champion the struggle to incorporate the Sharia law. The ten governors met a few times without agreeing and, eventually, a few “faithful” governors wrote and sent a secret memorandum to the Federal Military Government for Sharia law. The Buhari government, then, got some government official to draft an amendment to section 10 of the 1979 constitution...The draft was awaiting its recommendation to the Supreme Military Council when the Buhari government was overthrown on Aug. 27, 1985 (Nwolize, 1989)

The move by Nigeria to join the Organization of Islamic Conference (O.I.C), initiated by Buhari and amplified by Babangida, also almost tore the nation apart. General Babangida, whose regime was welcomed because of his restoration of the freedom of speech after the days of Buhari/Idiagbon, shocked many Nigerians with this development. It was ironic that many of the key members of his government who were Christians claimed to be ignorant of such move. The Christian community did not take kindly to this and Nigeria's total and immediate withdrawal was demanded. The Federal government was further advised against joining because such constituted a threat to the unity of Nigeria (Kukah, 1994). For years, the status of the country was unknown and at present it can not be said with precision whether or not Nigeria is a member. The recent happenings in the Northern part of the country; especially the Boko Haram attack and recurring ethno-religious violence in Plateau State, among others, suggest the strong influence of religion in Nigeria.

As contained in the 1979 constitution, theoretically, Sharia was not problematic, but it developed into a major political confrontation in 1999 and, in 2000, former governor of Zamfara State, Zani Yerima, inaugurated the adoption of the Sharia legal system. Following his example, some states in the North adopted it. The first victim was Buba Bello Jengede, who had his wrist amputated for stealing a cow. This was condemned by non-Muslims in all parts of the country and there was an attempt to resist its adoption in Kaduna State. In Atubi's (2007) remark:

The anti Sharia demonstration by Christians on 21<sup>st</sup> February, 2000 led to a major conflict between the two groups, resulting in massive killings of people on both sides, the destruction of religious buildings, general arson, and destruction of property. The scale of the massacre and destruction was very high and thousands of people were

reported to have been slaughtered like rams. The Kaduna conflict demonstrated the fundamental problem created by the adoption of the Sharia legal system. There was insecurity of life among Christian minority groups in the state. Many people, on both sides, called for partition of Nigeria, rather than adoption and abandonment of the Sharia system. The Kaduna religious crises led to retaliatory killings and burning of Mosques in Abia and Owerri, in which Igbo youth targeted Northerners who they accused of killing their kith in the North.

Furthermore, there are some fundamental principles underlying religious factors in the electoral process in Nigeria. One of such is how religion often determines the choice of flag bearer/running mate for the posts of the president and governor in some states. This is done to ensure that the interests of adherents are protected. Where and when this principle is adopted, there is usually a Muslim/Christian or Christian/Muslim ticket. Thus in 1979, the National Party of Nigeria (N.P.N) adopted a Muslim/ Christian ticket while the Unity Party of Nigeria (U.P.N) did not take religion into consideration, hence its adoption of a Christian/Christian ticket. Perhaps, Chief Awolowo saw this as one of the reasons why he lost, he chose a Muslim from the North as his running mate in 1983. Even some military regimes recognized religion as a factor in governance. For instance the Murtala/Obasanjo era was a Muslim/Christian ticket and Obasanjo, upon becoming the Head of State, chose a Muslim as his deputy. However, the Buhari/Idiagbon regime was Muslim/Muslim, while the two Chiefs of the General of Babangida were Christians. Both Abacha and Abubakar maintained the status quo as they picked Diya and Akhigbe (Christians) as their second in command, respectively.

In subsequent political dispensations, religion has continued to be a sensitive factor in choosing candidates at the national level. During the aborted republic, the National Republican Convention (N.R.C) had a Muslim/Christian ticket, while that of the Social Democratic Party (S.D.P) was Muslim/Muslim. Former President, Obasanjo, had a Muslim as his vice. The immediate past president was a Muslim, while his vice was a Christian. It is important to remark that religion is only being considered on the surface; it is not based on how religiously committed the candidates are but, at least the tension will not be generated if no religion feels marginalized. This is indeed a political diplomacy, but it is problematic because the signal is that only Islam and Christianity are existing religions, given the fact that the adherents of traditional religion and others are not, in any way, considered; just like what obtains in the matter of public holidays. However, since no agitation has been made from them and if none is ever made problems may not arise.

It is also an issue that voting and campaign, in some cases, are based on religious sentiment. In this case, religion could use either canvass support for a candidates or dissuade the electorate from voting for him or her. This is why some Muslims will not support Christian candidates and vice-versa. On this, Johnstone opines that:

A widely recognized point of religious influence over politics is that of peoples voting preference and behavior ...Such interest gives very explicit recognition to the correlation that exists between religious affiliation and commitment, on the one hand, and voting behavior, on the other. That there should be a correlation is exactly what would be

expected, of course, if religious affiliation and commitment mean anything at all (Johnstone, 2001).

During the 1983 electioneering campaign in the North, Alhaji Dankwaro composed a song enjoining Muslims to vote for Shagari and the N.P.N, as follows:

Since the time of Ahmadu Bello, there has never been another leader with power, except Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the trusted one. He is the grandson of the servant of God. He is a servant of God- Bawan Allah. My happiness is that, our flag, which has been lying down in Mecca, the reign of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, has raised it up. In the face of Islam today in the world, Nigeria is first (Kukah, 1994)

In 2003, Major General Buhari, of the All Nigerian Peoples Party, was criticized for his stand on religious matters and this, no doubt, worked against his political fortune. As a perceived advocate of the Sharia law and fundamentalist, he was quoted to have said that Muslims should not vote for Christian candidates. From the foregoing, it can be inferred that religion could be a dangerous factor in an electoral process. The input of religion has been both liberal and radical in that it is not, in all cases, that religious beliefs govern political attitudes or that Nigerians vote on religious sentiment. For example, in 1979, Muslims in the southwest voted for Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a Christian, while Christian in the north voted for Alhaji Shehu Shagari, a Muslim. The result of the annulled 1993 presidential election lends credence to this claim as the victorious party adopted a Muslim/Muslim ticket and Christians did not because of this decision not to cast their votes for its candidates. On a radical note, religion is not a unifying factor, but an agent of division and a negative determinant. On this issue, an Islamic Cleric, Abubakar Ahmed Gumi is quoted to have predicted that religion and the north-south divide was going to determine the Babangida transition programme. According to Clarke 1991:

It was Gummi's contention, then that the stage would be set for a political contest between Islam and Christianity, ending, possibly, in the breakup of the federation. The reason he gave was that since Muslims could not, on grounds of faith, join a Christian led party or if the Christians refused to join a party led by a Muslim, then there will appear a two party system and the two party system will not be south against north, but Islam against Christianity. .

It must not be understood as a chance occurrence that states like Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, and Kano, among others, have never produced Christian governors. The questions that come to mind at juncture are: Of what relevance is religion in the choice of candidates? Does religion determine the level of competence and performance of a leader? Unarguably, Nigerians do manipulate religion for their selfish ends in ensuring electoral victory. Ironically, this does not guarantee good governance. Religion is often used to cause confusion or woo or pacify the electorate. General Babangida promised "Insha Allah", in 1993, to hand over to a democratically elected president, but it was later discovered that the statement was made, just like any other statement, while Chief Obasanjo would have fulfilled the third ambition, if he had asked for from God. Also in 2003, Pastor Chris Okotie and some other aspirants claimed to have received revelation from God that they would emerge as winners. It is funny that after he had lost, he was still optimistic that he would be sworn in as president on May 29.



Senator Peter Adeyemo, who decamped from the Alliance for Democracy having lost the senatorial ticket, tried to win the support of Christians in Oyo State, claiming that God had commissioned him to lead the state to the Promised Land. Interestingly enough, none of them gave any reason why God did not fulfil, or has not fulfilled, that promise. Shortly before the election, there was a crisis in Ibadan when some fundamentalists wanted to enforce the wearing of Ijab by Muslim girls in all schools, including the ones funded by Christian Missions. This move was seen by a group of Christians as a calculated attempt to destabilize Nigeria's nascent democracy (Anglican Diocese of Ibadan, 2003).

After an election, the oath of office is administered on whoever is elected or declared as such. The main thrust of the oath is the promise to act faithfully and in accordance with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In doing this, the help of God is solicited. Though religious leaders are not given specific roles to play when the oath is being administered, the mention of God's name, coupled with the holding of scripture or any religious object, is enough to establish the invocation of the divine (Ayantayo, 1999; Ilesanmi, 2004).

The infiltration of religion into the electoral process is consummated with thanksgiving by politicians in Churches and Mosques to acknowledge God's sovereignty and faithfulness; and for granting them victory no matter how fraudulent the election might be. It has not been recorded, in recent time that such people were prevented, by religious leaders, who ideally should not be part of any fraud (Familusi, 2008). This has been understood as partisanship of religious leaders and one needs to ask whether God, in his sovereignty, granted those people dubious and questionable victory or simply allowed rigging; or, as the Omnipotent Being, rigging is His handiwork. Conversely thinking, as the omnibenevolent God, He wouldn't have supported rigging, which is a form of evil. The fact that many religious leaders have not been courageous enough to condemn rigging and other social vices has consistently questioned the relevance of religion in society.

On the whole, as earlier mentioned, severing religion from any aspect of society is a mission impossible and that is why it is an issue that cannot be ignored in the question of sustainable development. At this point, we shall discuss the implications of religious politics for socio-political sustainable development in Nigeria.

## **POSITIVE IMPLICATIONS**

The impact of religion on politics will enhance sustainable development if, and only if, the impact is positive. In this sense, one expects religious ethical values to manifest at every point of influence. This means that religious people have a duty to abide by the ethical teachings, inherent in their religions and such, will provide good leadership and obedient Followership. This confirms Comte's creed of 'religion of humanity', which is aimed at bringing material, security, peace, justice, and progress. According to him:

Love is the principle,

Order is the basis, and

Progress is the end (Dzurgba, 2009).

Adherence to religious ethical values is imperative for all religious practitioners. Interestingly, Nigerians are one of the most religious people in the world. Therefore, there is a need to live a moral life because it is commanded by God (Omogbe, 1998). Failure to do this will be counterproductive in the matter of sustainable development.

One expects a credible electoral process in a religious community, like Nigeria, if the rules are obeyed. Religion, being an agent of social control, helps to keep people with the norm of the society, which is the real basis of politics. As affirmed by Adeleye (1988):

Religion breeds an ideal heart in man to be able to be conscious of the need to have a clean heart. By this, he will grow to have a philanthropic or patriotic thought before venturing to lead or represent his people in government of the state. In another words, religion will prepare the mind of man to be a good politician who will constantly fall back upon his religion to guide him. The teachings or threats of religion are expected to guide him to be able to lead his people aright as a politician with fear of God in him. He will never consider himself first, rather he knows that he is the servant of the electorates (sic)-his people. Religion in an idealistic set up, therefore, serves as oil to lubricate politics. This is to say that religion bears peace and love, both of which are vital ingredients that can sum the interests of societies together for an ideal and a very healthy and purposeful politics.

Without mincing words, a hitch free election will produce legitimate leaders who will govern with the fear of God; and obedient followers. Achieving this will solve problems, such as political instability, violence and insecurity, maladministration, retardness of growth and development, and international stigmatization and apathy towards politics, which apparently are by products of electoral malpractices. Johnstone corroborates this view that:

What one believes, with respect to that which is good, true, and desirable as well as what God intends for people and society, could be expected to influence the choice one makes in the political arena. That is, religion should affect people's voting pattern (Johnstone, 2001).

Another expected, positive input of religion in politics is adherence to the oath of office. In this case, political leaders, having invoked God when the oath is being administered, will rule with the fear of God. We must be cognizant of the fact that every content of the oath is a guarantee for good governance, if imbibed. In practice, the positive implication is hypothetical as religious moral values have not impacted governance in Nigeria since independence. Whereas, none of the rulers, past or present, have claimed or claim not to be religious. What has been experienced is the manipulation of religion, the effects of which, on sustainable development, are discussed as follows.

The influence of religion on politics has, at various times, threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria. For example, the issue of the Sharia Court of Appeal almost brought the Constituent Assembly to an abrupt end in 1978, given the walk out that was staged by some Muslim members and the antagonism of non-Muslims. This wouldn't have arisen if the

secular/pluralistic nature of the country had been respected. Religious crises have further worsened inter-ethnic animosity. The Kaduna violence of 2000 displaced many people who had settled in the northern part of the country for many years as it became necessary for them to relocate their places of origin. That some parts of Nigeria are not safe for all citizens is divisive and this cannot guarantee sustainable development. Also, the adoption of Sharia law by some state governors almost terminated the National Youths Service Corps scheme, which, for many years, has been a major unifying factor. The reason was that many southerners did not want their children or relations to be posted where they would be forced to obey Islamic law. The tension was doused when the general public was assured of their safety. The killing of some Corp members in Jos, in 2008, is another way of understanding this issue. In fact, a motion was moved at the National Assembly that all Youth Corpers posted there should be redeployed consequent upon the violence that has become a recurring decimal in that state.

No society can grow in the atmosphere of religious violence which, more often than not, has political undertone. It should be mentioned that the 2008 Jos crisis started as a political war and it later took ethno-religious dimension in which several lives were lost (Ohia, 2009). The cancellation of the Miss World Pageant, that was to be hosted by Nigeria, could have been averted in a country where the constitution is adhered to in a religious matter. All these have economic implications on individuals, states, and the country, as a whole. Many people in the south do not see the reason why taxes collected paid on businesses, prohibited by the Sharia law, should be used to develop states that operate it.

Still, on the economy, one may not be wrong to conclude that public money expended on religious matters, such as pilgrimage activities, places of worship in government houses, and other public places, could have helped the ailing economy. What about several public holidays declared yearly for religious festivals? People are definitely paid for the work that is not done. More often than not, public money is donated by political leaders to religious organizations as a subtle way of silencing those who may be critical of the activities of the government of the day. Any government that is more concerned about sponsoring people to Mecca or Jerusalem at the expense, pressing matter that can enhance development, is an insincere government.

Sacrificing merit on the altar of religion cannot be beneficial. The irony of this, as earlier noted, is that the level of commitment of those who use religion for their selfish interest cannot be determined. Many of them are simply after what they stand to gain. Moreover, where people vote on religious sentiment, mediocre leaders are most likely to emerge and, when this happens, growth and development will be retarded. Suffice to say that spirituality and leadership skills are not, in any way, synonymous. In Akinola's (1999) view:

The spiritually advanced person could be so preoccupied with the salvation of his soul that he is not concerned about worldly affairs and, obviously, they take little or no interest in things happening around them, thus they cannot influence the course of democratic change.

The plea by President Yara'dua during the last ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) strike is worth commenting on. He tried to use religion to pacify the striking lecturers, when the 2009 Muslim fasting was about to commence, by urging

them to the call of the strike in the spirit of Ramadan. One expects that a truly religious president would be burdened to honor a negotiated agreement with ASUU in the same spirit. When religious statements are made by leaders who merely 'shout' their religiosity without 'acting' it, no meaningful development can be expected. This has been a practice in Nigeria and it has largely accounted for socio-political backwardness. What can we say about the former president (Obasanjo) who sought the face of God before he decided to contest in 2003? Did he equally seek His face before he came out with political world view of 'do or die'?

In the light of what is experienced in Nigerian politics, can it be said that the country is developing at all? If she is not, how does the question of sustainability arise? It is only when development is noticed that one can think of sustainable development. That is why we remarked earlier that the positive implication of religious politics on sustainable development is a matter of hypothesis. The negative implication will continue to perpetuate socio-political retrogression, which has been characteristic of Nigeria since independence.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

From what has been experienced in Nigeria and as established in this paper, absolute secularity is not achievable because of the unavoidable interplay between religion and society. This to say that religion in politics has come to stay and religion shall continue to be relevant in the society. What can be done in view of this reality is to utilize the benefits accruing from it so as to attain sustainable development, which has been elusive in Nigeria since independence. On this note, we recommend adherence to religious moral values by both leaders and the led. This is imperative because they all have responsibilities to discharge in ensuring good governance and these responsibilities are implied in religious ethics. With this in place, the social relevance of religion as established by Emile Durkheim shall be justified. (Ritzer 1996).

Government should, as a matter of necessity, handle religious matters with caution in order to prevent the recurrence of violence. Any country or society that is caught in the web of religious violence can not experience social stability, unity and integration, which are necessary conditions for sustainable development. More importantly, the Constitution should be religiously adhered to, while manipulation of religion should be avoided by all stake holders. Also those who are found guilty of using religion to destabilise the society must be made to face the wrath of the law according to the severity of their offences. A major problem in Nigeria is non application of rules of any kind. This is why many people commit religious crimes with impunity. At this point, it is suggested that the judiciary should be given every necessary incentive to play its role fearlessly. The issue of sacred cow should not arise because the rule of law stipulates equality.

It has been noted that much money is expended on government's interference in religious matters at all levels and this has always affected the ailing economy. The government is advised to stop using religion as a political tool by way of sponsoring people on pilgrimage with public funds. If this trend continues, the economy will not grow hence, no meaning development can be expected. As a matter of fact, money spent by the government to finance religion will be more useful in the areas of job creation and sincere poverty alleviation.

On the whole, the interplay between religion and politics in Nigeria since independence has been established in this write up. Without mincing words, religion in politics could be of immense benefit while at the same time it could be counter productive in the matter of sustainable development. It is on this ground the foregoing recommendations were made. If all these are observed, religion will cease to be an agent of disunity and backwardness. Thus sustainable development will no longer be a wishful thinking and Nigeria will have an enduring democracy.

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