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THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE POLITICS OF NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract
The focus of this article is on the indispensible role of religion in the politics of the Nigerian society. There is an incontrovertible connection between religion and politics. The need for political stability cannot be overemphasized. The researchers made use of secondary sources of data collection as their methodology. This work found out that in order to achieve good governance and political stability, religion should serve as a helpful factor in all the political activities in Nigeria, the positive impact of religion on politics can enhance sustainable development, religion if well used in politics can contribute to national integration, political mobilization, reformation of ethnic identity, nationalism, peaceful co-existence, economic and social development of the Nigerian society. The work suggested that government should give more support to the national religions. Advisory Board and the Nigeria inter-

religious council in promoting inter-religious dialogue and worship for religious tolerance through organizing seminar and worship for religious adherents which will help in building sustainable political development in the country.

Keywords: Role, Religion, Politics, Sustainable Development, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

There is an incontrovertible connection between religion and politics in the Nigerian society. While the actual role that religion plays in politics has remained debatable, the nexus between the two concepts has been established for long (Falana, 2010). Religion does not make people good or bad. On the contrary, it is being used as an instrument of oppression and deceit in Nigeria. It appears that Nigerians have resigned themselves to fate and this is possibly further compounded by poverty, illiteracy, and lack of political education on the of majority. This position is further aggravated by the general perception that politics is a dirty game and that only people who can deceive, manipulate and greedily accumulated wealth are meant to participate (Egbewole and Etudaiye, 2011). The number of religious people in Nigeria runs into millions yet the level of insecurity, destruction of lives and properties and crimes committed in God's name is overwhelming. The need for political stability in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. A major variable in the Nigerian polity is the relationship between religion and politics which some consider as inseparable, while some support the motion of the separation of religion from politics, so that the former will not imbibe the corruption inherent in the latter. Generally speaking, there is a common fallacy that religion and politics are two different fields of social activity. This leads observers sometimes to speak of the politicization of religion, and ever that it is against the original intent of the founder of religion, or God himself (Van der Veer, 1996:50). All over the country, religion plays an important role in the daily lives of her citizens; the way we interact with one other, our choice of dressing, food, and politics are mostly affected by religion. In other words, religion and politics are intertwined and it empowers man to function in his society by contesting for a political position so as to contribute his ideology. Nigeria's population of over 200 million is divided nearly equally between Christians and Muslims. The importance of this division is well illustrated by the fact that religion, not nationally, is the way in which most Nigerians choose to identify themselves; though not all cases. Thus, the domains of religion, secularism and politics are becoming increasingly intermingled in both over and convert ways. Invariably, sectarian politics is inherently problematic (Tar and Shettima, 2010). Thus, there is a need to look at the effects of religion can bring sustainable development to our politics. It concludes by agitating for religious tolerance and the hinging of politics on moral codes.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

Religion has been an indispensable phenomenon in Nigeria. It had become an important factor in political discourse (Adigwe and Grau, 2007). The influence of religion is not only limited to politics but its power influences virtually all other facets of life. Political power affects economic prosperity, social relation, educational advancement, and the psych of the society. There are three dominant religions in Nigeria: African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity. All these religions and their ideologies allow for interaction between religion politics. The traditional religion of a society is a systematic reflection of their socio-cultural

orientation, history and legacies on elemental forces, which in turn produces a belief in a supreme cosmic power that created heaven and earth. To this power belong all things in their social psych. Thus, traditional politics of the people has a strong linkage to belief in theocracy. To the Yorubas, Oba (king), the political leader of the people, is only hokding his office in trust for Olodumare (the Supreme Being). More so, before an Oba is selected or appointed, as the case may be, the Ifa oracle must be adequately consulted for spiritual approval. Therefore, politics and religion in traditional society are intertwined and have direct influence on each other this is still the situation even at the close of the 20th century (Laguda, 2008). Also, Islam as a way of life dictates and governs the totality of life of Muslims from cradle to grave. Consequently, his political interest, economic considerations, social values and interaction are often given Islamic interpretations based on the Holy Quran, prophet practices and other sources of law recognized in Islam. These virtues are expected to permeate the socio-political structure of any Islam state. In fact, Prophet Mohammed was the spiritual as well as the political leader of his people during his lifetime. After his death, the Caliphs emerged and still held on to the same principles. Regardless of the nature of the society, Islam encourages Muslims to hold on to its principles by allowing the Holy Quran and the Sunnah to be their guide. We can conclude here that Islam allows for a spiritual relationship between religion and politics (Akintola, 1997). Similarly, Abubakre (1984), writing from an Islamic perspective, suggests that Islam is a way of life, which dictates the political ideology and practice in any Islamic society. He points out that the ideals of Islam are good and are meant to guide political conducts, however, the practices of such ideas are usually influenced by the socio-cultural institution in the society, including politics. For many Muslims, Islam is a total way of life. It is not correct, according to this viewpoint, to speak of religion and politics but instead religio-politics. Islam is believed to be relevant and integral to politics, law education, social life, and economy. These are not viewed as secular institutions or areas of life but as aspects of the Islamic religion. Thus, religion and society are interrelated. Laguda (2008) argues that Christians in Nigeria would rather not get involved in politics but the fact remains that Jesus Christ did not discourage political participation for the faithful. However, Laguda's argument is unconvincing dur to the fact that there are many Christians who are involved in politics and that have won political seats as governors, senators and honourable. In Judaism, which provided background to Christianity, the God of Israel, Yahweh, is the God of war (Josh. 6:20), economy (Exd 16), obedience and moral virtues (Num. 21:4-8). Yahweh is all in all in the Judaic traditional though, religion and politics. In the Apostolic age, the Church witnessed an effective interplay between religion and politics. And where such interaction tends towards negative ends, the Apostles often adopted Christian principles to solve the problem as the church spiritual leaders. Perhaps, the most significant interaction between religion and politics in church history was witnessed during the Constantine and the post-Constantine era, where the emperor used machinery of the state to promote Christianity. Thus, religion became politicized, and politics also marred the progress of the church during this period. Jesus' teachings and Pauline theology encourage political process and respect for those in political offices, since they are representatives of God (Matthew 22:17-20). Hence, from the outset of the three main religions in Nigeria, politics and religion have effectively complemented each other. As the Divine played the religious role, human played the political role. And the effectiveness of both religion and politics has been based, not only on the involvement of the Divine in the activities of man, but also in following its ethics and principle. Political scientists believe that man is a political animal. This means that we cannot do without politics as well

as religion in our everyday life. Therefore, since we make use of each of them in our daily activities, we tend to politicize religion and religionize politics. Thus, Nigerian politics is characterized chiefly by "politicization of religion and religionization of politics" (Adogame, 2006). Mixing the two together makes religion to lose its sanctity and politics to become dirtier. This reality is manifested in the nature of Nigeria's postcolonial state system, particularly the capture and control of state power by a self-centred, and divided political class that strategically used religion and politics to divide the people, consolidate and extend its control over resources and power in Nigeria's emerging capitalist formation. For instance, after Nigeria's independence in 1960, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the premier of Northern Nigeria, embarked on an "official" campaign to "Islamize" the north and eventually spread Islam to other regions. This drove generated, particularly among the Christians and adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATRs), the fear of looming religious extinction. It has been observed that politicians openly espouse religious sectarian sentiments in campaigning for public support. In addition, it was observed that "no one can aspire to, or hold political office in Nigeria without pretending to be religious" (Kukah, 1993). Invariably, religion goes hand-in-hand with politics, and it will be difficult to hold a public office without hold on religion. Politicians make use of the power entrenched in religion, not only to achieve their aims, but also to subjugate their opponents and to legitimize their religion. For this reason, the dominant religious groups; Islam and Christianity have been locked in a fierce battle for the political control of the country (Bujra, 2006). Many scholars have postulated several definitions of religion; however, there is no concise meaning for it because there are problems in defining religion. In fact, Idowu (1973) argues that religion is a difficult topic to handle, whether we are considering its connotation, its origin, or its definition. Wali (1989) asserts that religion is a people's way of life including both their tradition and social interaction. It is man's integral attitude of life. From the dawn of his creation, man hs never been divorced of religion, whatever kind it may be. It is important to note that religion possesses great functional value and, as a dimension of human, is believed to have been present since time immemorial. Hence, it is glaring that people attached a strong significance to religion. It controls man in its entirety. It shows that man cannot do without religion regardless of what he/she believes in. in addition, religion stimulates man to control his environment by struggling for power, so as to achieve his objective(s). In a nutshell, religion empowers man to pursue political power and other forms of power that can make him to have firm control of his environment. The access to the powers which religion gives to man makes religion inseparable from politics. In survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life from May to June 2006 explained that 76% of Christians say that religion is more important to them than their identity as Africans, Nigerians or members of an ethnic group. Among Muslims, the figure that chose religion as their most important factor stood at 91%. This shows the power inherent in religion and the value people place on it (Ruby and Shah, 2007). Politics on the other hand does not have a common definition. Politics is the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live. As such, it is an essentially social activity, inextricably linked on the one hand to the existence of diversity and conflict, and on the other, to a willingness to co-operate and act collectively. Politics requires a constitution and political parties. It involves ideology. In includes criticism (opinion); it requires the public and the state which is made up of individuals (Dzurgba, 2008). It is about the acquisition of power and the use of such power. Onyekpe (1998) defines it as:

The struggle for power which itself is the authority to determine or formulate and execute decision and policies, which must be accepted by the society … it is the struggle for power of governance, especially executive authority.

From the aforementioned, politics is an everyday affair. We make use of politics in our home, office, school, organization, church, mosque etc. It is about control, supremacy and authority. Hence, there is an element of power in religion and politics. The fact should be stated that since the relationship between the sacred and the profane is symbiotic, there is no reason why religion should not influence political ideologies and vice versa. Where this interaction is possible and allowed, the nature of the society and the strata therein has a lot to do in dictating the mode of such a relationship. Although, not a universal condition, in a religiously homogenous society, religion and politics could interact absolutely, and peace and economic posterity will always be the fruit of such a relation. This, perhaps, goes to support the view of the Aristotelian school that religious homogeneity is a condition for political stability. In a heterogeneous, as well as pluralistic society, divergent opinions in relation to religious beliefs and ideologies, might not allow for a cordial relationship between religion and politics. This may be the reason why political parties, in heterogeneous societies are not found on religious grounds (Esposito, 1988). However, there is a possibility of effective interaction between religion and politics in a pluralized society. These include secularization of politics, flexibility of religious beliefs and respect of the other (where adherents of different faiths are not financial or particularistic) and separation of religion from politics. In the same vein, in homogeneous societies, it is possible to have pluralized religious ideologies. But where there is a consensus on teachings and practices of such religions, there is bound to be unity of political purpose (Atfold, 1981). In other words, it is the society that will determine the success of the relationship and this depends on how they apply their religious tenets to every issues related to the society.

RELIGION AND POLITICS SINCE INDEPENDENCE

Usually, there are three ways in which religion can influence politics, namely, by the direct involvement of religious men in politics by fusing the two (religion and politics) as one and by subjecting politics or government to the doctrine or laws of religion, thereby carrying out politics or governance along the line of religious doctrine, ideals or laws (Omoregbe, 2003). All these are obvious in Nigeria politics and this makes religion and politics inseparable. Religion and religious conflict have long been part of Nigerian politics and public life. In the 1950s, while Nigeria remained under the British rule, Islamic law (Sharia) was incorporated into the country's legal system.

In the late 1960s, religion was one factor in the internal conflict that eventually erupted into Biafra war (1967-1970), during which about 600,000 people were killed. At the end of the civil war, despite Gowon's declaration of no victor, no vanquished, the foreign missionaries who were working in the former Biafran enclave were expelled from the country and all the mission schools in the East Central State were taken over by the government. This immediately put the Church into a position of opposition to the government. In addition, other measures imposed by the Federal Government clearly placed the people of the former Biafra in a very difficult position. These measures included the introduction of the Federal Character in civil service appointment, the quota-system in the admission process into tertiary

institutions and the setting up of Pilgrims' Welfare Boards specifically and exclusively for Muslims. Since the creation of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in the 1970s, the Northern political leaders have regarded it as the political wing for Christians. Since the mid-1980s, however, tension between Christians and Muslims has become a consistent feature of Nigerian politics. The reaction of the northern political leaders towards this development strengthened against the consciousness of the Christians for greater involvement in the political arena. They became aware of the inspiration and support which Islam provides for Muslim politicians and strived for a reciprocal situation among Christian politicians (Enwerem, 1995). In 1986, the then Muslim military ruler incorporated Nigeria into membership of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), provoking an immediate outcry from many Christians, who objected to it. In response, Nigerian Christians pushed the government to establish a formal diplomatic relations with the state of Israel and this occurred in the early 1990s. In a joint Pastoral Letter, The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria emphasizes the civic and political responsibilities of all Christians. This excerpt represents the general content of the letter …. It is the noble right and serious duty of every responsible citizen to do what he can towards the establishment, maintenance and successful operation of a good government. The prospective vote should be convinced of the importance of his vote. Neglecting to vote is the denial of potential support for social justice and progress….voting conscientiously and purposefully is the citizen's most available and direct way of contributing to the election of most suitable leaders and support of beneficial policies. It is also in this sense that selling one's vote or cashing it for short-sighted gain is offensive before God and man (Schineller, 2002).

Kukah (2003) refers to this document as particularly significant "because coming from a tradition of non-political involvement, Catholics in particular and Christians in general were literally obsessed with the fact that politics was a dirty game, in which no good Christian could participate." Religion played an important role after the successful election and proper handing over of government by the former Head-of-State, Gen. Abdusalami Abubakar, to the then democratically elected president, Olusegun Obasanjo. The two presidential contestants: Obasanjo and Olu Falae are not only Yorubas (from the Southwest) but also Christians. It was held that Muslims from the North had been ruling for several years as military Heads-of-State, hence, it was time for a Christian, from the West, to take over the mantle of leadership. Though the choice of Obasanjo was more of ethnic than religion, religion was considered a major factor in deciding/voting for contestants to the presidency. In the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Section 10, states that:

The government of the Federation or the state shall not adopt any religion as the religion. On the other hand, Section 38(1) holds that: Every person shall be entitled to the freedom of thought, conscience and religion including freedom to change his (sic) religion or belief, and (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate its religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
Also, the Nigeria Constitution acknowledged the right of Nigerian to Shari'a justice in Section 275(1) that: There shall be for any state that requires it a Shari'a Court of Appeal for that state. And in Section 260(1), There shall be a Shari'a Court of Appeal of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

EFFECTS OF RELIGION ON POLITICS

The Presidency of Obasanjo in 1999 again brought about the return of religious debate, especially on the Sharia law. His presidency was supposed to be recompense to the North for totally supporting him during 1999 election. Although according to Kukah (2003), it was in 1979 that non-Muslims outside the North appeared to have heard of the Sharia for the first time. During the debate on the draft constitution for the new republic, members of the National Assembly stumbled on a clause in the draft which states as follows:

1. There shall be a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal, which shall be an intermediate Court of Appeal between the States' Sharia Courts of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Nigeria.
2. The Court shall be composed of a Grand Mufti and whatever number of Muftis (not less than three) the National Assembly shall prescribe.
3. In each State of the Federation that so desires there shall be a Sharia Court of Appeal to be established by Constitution of the State".

With this understanding, Christians in the National Assembly were united in purpose to stand against the endorsement of Sharia law. Likewise, the Muslim members stood their ground to see it become law. After negotiations, a sub-committee was set up, which finally tabled a draft proposal for the members to consider. This draft was accepted and duly inserted on the proposed constitution. It stated that, instead of having a separate Federal Sharia Court of Appeal, which might appear to be at par with the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court should comprise some members that are learned in Islamic law to hear appeals from State Sharia Courts of Appeal. Though, this proposal was accepted, later events revealed that religion has penetrated into Nigerian politics in a powerful way than ever before. The Muslims on one hand, were set on the alert and considered ways to foster solidarity among themselves in resistance to feared attempts at the Islamization of Nigeria. Finally, religion became a strong factor that could not be waved aside in policy making. In addition, the debate on Sharia law led to schism. Many Muslims interpreted the constitutional provisions by focusing on the provision on freedom of religion. Many Christians, in contrast, focused on the provision that no State religion be adopted and feel that the introduction of Sharia law is unconstitutional, because it affects their religious freedom. With the introduction of Sharia law, some Christian groups have 'translated' the current Muslim debate into the realm of Christianity and demanded the introduction of (Christian) Canon law in predominantly Christian States (Imo, 2008). Moreover, the implementation of Sharia law brought about religious unrest, violence and annihilation of Christians, especially in the States that adopted Sharia law. During Obasanjo's tenure, Christian-Muslim tensions deepened. Shortly after he assumed office in 1999, twelve states decided to apply Sharia to criminal cases, provoking considerable hostility from the Christians. At the same time, many Christian denominations stepped up evangelistic and missionary efforts in middle-belt and Northern states thus, further heightened tensions. On this, Atubi (2007) remarks that:

The anti-Sharia demonstration by Christians on 21st 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 Kanduna 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 crisis led to retaliatory killings and burning of Mosques in Abia and Owerri, in which Igbo youths targeted Northerners who they accused of killing their kith in the North.

Since May 1992, over 10,000 people have died from communal-religious conflicts. Plateau, Benue, Taraba and Borno states constituted the highest figure of casualties. According to some accounts, more than 10,000 people have been killed in sectarian conflicts, primarily in Kaduna and Plateau states in the last seven years. Subsequently from 2001, incidents of Christian-Muslim violence have become more frequent and bloodier. Violence between Muslims and Christian in Nigeria has claimed thousands of lives in the past decade. It flared again in February 2006 when Muslim were outraged at the caricatures of the prophet Mohammed which led to a massacre of dozens of Christians in the North, followed by reprisal killings of Muslims by Christians in the South. More than 150 people were killed and numerous churches and mosques destroyed. Also, the effect of religion on politics has brought about people voting according to their faith regardless of the capacity of the candidate to lead the country. This was evident in the Southeast. For instance, Catholic Priests in Anambra state openly enjoined their members to vote for Peter Obi (former governor) because of his religious inclination. According to him, "he always clutched his chaplet tightly in his hands to demonstrate to the Catholic faithful that he was certainly one of them." And they accepted him (Okafor, 2011). Also, the former People's Democratic Party's (PDP) senator for Jigawa Northwest senatorial district, Dr. Danladi Sankara decried an alleged religious undertone in the 2011 presidential election. Sankara, who was also the Jonathan/Sambo returning agent for Jigawa, whereby they indoctrinated the people to vote for Muslims. The defunct Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) candidate, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (rtd), scored the highest vote in the 2011 presidential election Jigawa State, polling 665,994 votes to beat his closest rival, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who pulled 419,252 votes. During the announcement of the result at the INEC headquarters in Dutse, the presidential election Collation Officer for the state, Prof. Jibril D. Amin, the Vice Chancellor of the Federal University of Dutse, indicated that the total votes cast were 1,214,774, adding that the total valid votes were 1,140,766. According to him, Nigeria is governed by the constitution, not by any of the holy books, because party politics goes beyond religion and tribal consideration (Furtune News, 2011). Although, Islam and Christianity have taken a clear position in the political life of Nigerians, it does mean that African Traditional Religion is relegated to the background. Even Muslim and Christian politicians, privately and secretly consult the priests of the ATR, especially when it comes to political agreements and business contracts. However, ATR is not a strong factor in the fashioning of state policies and political programs. The manipulation of religion by some powerful individuals who hide under the guise of religion to pursue selfish interests, and greediness of some religious leaders who patronize corrupt rulers remains part of the negative effects of religion on the polity. Greed has crept into the religious terrain to the extent that some religious leaders now patronize corrupt rulers to meet their lust for money and other material gains. Efforts by Nigerian politicians to gain ascendancy and power have led to situation in which politics have swept away sacred precepts of religion, and in the process, contaminated the hearts of people with bitterness and enmity for the religion of others. Hence, Falana (2010) quotes Bala Usman who

says that: the real basis f the manipulation of religion n Nigeria today is the need to obscure from the people of Nigeria, a fundamental aspect of our reality; that is the domination of our political economy by a class of intermediaries who are being increasingly exposed. And this is to enable this class to cover themselves with religious and ethnic disguises in order to further entrench division among people, slow down their awakening at any cost; even the unity of our country for which so much has been sacrificed.

On the other hand, the positive effect of religion on politics has brought about the reinvigouration of Christian reawakening to politics. In the 1999 elections, Pentecostal Christians openly supported Obasanjo's candidature under the banner of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), viewing him a symbol of the restoration of Christian control over the government of Nigeria and of the "ending of Muslim political dominance" (Ojo, 2004).

After Obasanjo was elected president, Pentecostal leaders conducted an all-night prayer meeting for him. This gesture was politically endorsed and rewarded with the construction of a chapel in the Presidential Villa, the seat of national politics. Obasanjo's victory at the polls and his eventual swearing-in as president on 29th May, 1999 was heavily steeped in Christian Pentecostal symbolism. A drama that was spectacularly replayed in subsequent elections testifies to this:

To many Christians, Obasanjo's "second coming" was a spiritual metaphor, one that went beyond the ordinary fact of his fortuitous emergence as a beneficiary of political compromise between the country's geo-political power blocs … For Christians, it was a fulfillment of God's promise to liberate his children (Southern Christians) from the yoke of Northern (Muslim) leadership. A political exigent "second coming" was therefore invested with a spiritual halo, and Obasanjo himself became transformed into a virtual 'Messiah' almost overnight (Obadare, 2006:969).

After the completion of two four-year terms and the abortive third term by President Olusegun Obasanjo, political leaders began talking of alternating the Presidency between the largely Christian south and predominantly Muslim north. After considerable infighting and the disqualification of several would-be contenders, all of the country's major political parties chose Muslims as their candidates and after the controversial election, Alhaji Musa Yar'Adua emerged as the President. Though occult practices, cultism and superstitions which serve as a device among politicians to tussle for power becomes paramount. Eso (2003) notes some incontrovertible facts pertinent to our religion-in-politics dilemma. According to him, "religion has a place in the lives of every nation, Nigeria included. Irrespective of the faith or denomination, religion when truly practiced in its truest form and spirit, has been and remains sacred. It plays a vital role in purposeful leadership, community building, social justice, law and order, peacemaking, reconciliation, forgiveness and the healing of wounds, be it political, family or personal". This means that if people truly make use of beliefs, values and attitudes inherent in religion into politics, it will bring about focused and resolute political leaders in the country who will be devoid of sanctimonious hypocritical attitude. It will also help in bringing about fair play into politics.

RELIGION AS A MECHANISM FOR SUSTAINABLE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Religion can bring about sustainable political development through the inculcation of high sense of morality, sense of duty, selfless service, public accountability, respect for human lives, love of one's neighbor, sense of humanity, abhorrence of violence, love for peace contentment with what one can legitimately have, corruption, justice etc. in the citizens as well as the leaders (Omoregbe, 2003). If a religion fails to inculcate a sense of morality in the people, then it has failed in its creed and is not in a position to help bring about good governance and sustain political development in a country where it has failed to raise the moral standard of the people. Adherence to religious tenets by the leaders and follower will greatly enrich political activity. Embedded in each religion are the beliefs. Practices and ethics that serve as check for excesses in human behavior. Thus. Values in religion are viable mechanisms for political development, since religion influences every aspect of human lives and serves as a basis for human existence. Religion can boost inter-religious dialogue is a platform where religious leaders discuss and orientate people about the essence of religion and its efficacy in society. Hence, it is important for religious leaders to guide against hypocritical teaching that can disrupt peace and political stability. Therefore, exchange of ideas removes ignorance and eliminates religious conflicts. Also, the observance of the oath of office by the political leaders will sustain political development. Political office holders should allow their religious tenets to guide them continuously. Adeleye (1988) asserts that: 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 respect his people in government of state. In other words, religion will prepare the mind of man to be a good politician who will constantly fall back upon is religion to guide him. The teaching of threats of religion is expected to guide him to be able to lead his people alright as a politician with fear of God in him. He will never consider himself first, rather he knows that he is 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 interest of societies together for an ideal and a very healthy and purposeful politics.

Therefore, in achieving good governance and political stability, religion should serve as a guiding factor in all political activities that country engages in. The impact of religion on politics can enhance sustainable development if the impact is positive. Though the negative effects of religion have continue to endanger the country's existence since independence; starting from the Biafra war to the Boko Haram crisis that has taken religio-political dimension. With the politicization of religion, there is a sense of religious reawakening which is supposed to have a positive impact on the political development of the country but has had a negative effect. However, religion can contribute to national integration, political mobilization, reformation on ethnic identity, nationalism, peaceful co-existence, economic social and political development. In a nutshell, the effect of religion on politics all over the world is bifocal, in the sense that it is both positive and negative. It is positive in the sense that religion, as earlier identified, is value- driven and it naturally robs off on the polity through the participation of ardent religious believers. The negative effect could be deciphered from the perspective of sectarian tendency; where religious bigots do anything in the name of religion to ensure that position or offices are gained by their adherents. Such people stand on

the position that their ideals and beliefs dominate any environment they find themselves (New York Times, 2005).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONLUSION

The government should give more power to the National Religious advisory Board and the Nigerian Inter-religious Council in promoting inter-religious dialogue and religious tolerance through organizing seminars and workshop for religious adherents which will help in building sustainable political development. Haynes (2009:68) argues that when interfaith dialogue is skillfully organized and pursued, it can encourage those who have personally involved in conflict to work together towards peace accommodation. In addition, the practice of plurality of religion in Nigeria should be geared towards attaining sustainable development and political stability. This is essential in being a developed country. Also the basis of gaining political power must be based on religious identity. Religious leaders should act as watchdogs to political office holders by guiding them against unaccepted practices that can jeopardize political development, not meddling with politics. The governance should stop using public fund to sponsor people to pilgrimage. Instead, the fund apportion to it should be used to create unemployment for the for the teeming unemployed youth, improve our educational institution and to alleviate poverty in the society. Thus, making use of religion in Nigerian politics should be geared towards ensuring a harmonious and peaceful co-existence (of Christianity and Islam) and political development.

In conclusion, religion has been used and is still being used to induce violence and has caused stunted growth to our political stability and sustainable development. The relationship between religion and politics in any society should be mutual, and if properly managed, bring about tranquility and development. On the other hand, if the relationship is not properly managed, it could generate conflict. This is because religion is about personal experience and access to divine powers, while politics is all about gaining political power for personal reasons. Since these are mutually and exclusively related, there is constant need for symbiotic relationship. Hence, religion can either bring conflict or peace, development or destruction, growth or retardation, stability, security or insecurity. It depends on how it is made use of along with politics. The mixing of both religion and politics is not a problem, but the level of moral standard, patriotism towards the country and proper understanding of religion are the determining factor.

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