RELIGION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF NIGERIA

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Introduction

In contemporary discussions of ways to attain sustainable and authentic human development, there is a reluctance to consider the influence of religion. The reason for this stems from the divisiveness and intolerance among various religious groups. This occasionally results in violent conflicts which hampers, if not destroys, the projects and can precipitate the decline of nations. Development institutions and agencies often refer to wars of religions and their attendant consequences as reasons for a total neglect of religion in discourse, or for preferring civil religion devoid of creed, code and cult – committed humanism - as partners in development. In addition, when religion is involved through faith-based organizations in alleviating hunger by various forms of charity, contemporary development discourse finds itself in a dilemma as to what form their relationship with religion ought to be, in promoting development, especially at the grassroots level.

Since religion, [this paper considers the three dominant religions in Africa: Christianity, Traditional Religion and Islam], promotes integral development that goes beyond mere economic globalization, this paper defends the thesis that religion plays a very important role in the sustainable development of Africa despite conflicts, (at times violent), arising from religious intolerance. Using Nigeria as a case study, this paper, drawing from Africa's religious worldview, urges religious groups in Africa to inculcate in their adherents the importance of hard work and industrialization in the quest for the sustainable development of Africa. The author

strongly believes African Catholicism can lead the way in this by implementing the riches of the social teachings of the Church.

Progress and Religion

Religion can be involved in influencing the progress to a better world. In view of its innumerable adherents and its common belief in the dignity of the human person under God, religion is committed to the promotion of the human good so as to provide basic human needs, guarantee protection of human rights and promote integral development of the globe. Thus, neglecting religion, the source of normative meaning that grounds the architecture of infrastructural and superstructural institutions of society, is misunderstanding the world process as a whole for religious people. As long as secular discourse continues to exclude religion in its analysis of globalization, progress and development of people, the results of its analysis will always be defective. As Max Stackhouse asserts: "The neglect of religion as an ordering, uniting and dividing factor in a number of influential interpretations of globalization is a major cause of misunderstanding and a studied blindness regarding what is going on in the world."[1]

At various times in the not too distant past, the recognition of the indispensability of religion in the development discourse has given rise to changes of attitude leading to a series of dialogues between religion and various agencies concerned with the promotion of sustainable development.[2] For instance, within the context of the food and energy crisis of the 1970's[3] major

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[1] Max Stackhouse, *God and Globalization, Vol. 4: Globalization and Grace*, 57, Michael W. Goheen & Erin G. Glanville, ed., *The Gospel and Globalization: Exploring the Religious Roots of a Globalized World* (Vancouver, B.C., Canada: Regent College Publishing, 2009), 16.

[2] This however, does not mean that all involved in international development are convinced about the relevance of religion to development agenda. Some still think religion is divisive and dangerous working fundamentally toward a different agenda driven by tradition and immutable theological approaches. Some people think globalization and modernization shakes and changes traditional religious structures. While others think technology and media brings new challenges and opportunities to faith institutions. A good number of technocrats also assume religious institutions are gradually withering because of secularism. See Katherine Marshall, "Development and Faith

world religions met at the Interreligious Peace Colloquium on Food and Energy (1975) and

declared food and energy a basic human right. They issued a statement urging structural changes

in world societies in order to alleviate hunger and malnutrition.[4] Lessons of that conference bring

to the fore the complexity of such simple acts of charity like feeding the hungry as well as the

interdependency of the basic organs of society for the realization of integral development:

technological, economic, ideological and political will, religious and cultural values for world

peace.

On another occasion, with the gradual onset of economic globalization accompanying the

call for a New International Economic Order, select leaders of the major world religions

particularly monotheistic ones, Judaism, Islam and Christianity in an Interreligious Peace

Colloquium in Lisbon Portugal (1977) reiterated the importance of religion in the emerging

world order. They proposed a comprehensive grasp of the politico-economic, religio-cultural

ethnic, faith communities and ideologies as necessary for peace in the new human order,

especially as all these transnational actors in the world scene are significantly affected by faith

dimensions.[5]

Furthermore, the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) set up in 1998 continues

the dialogue of religion and development agencies such as the World Bank and the International

Monetary Fund (IMF).[6] The result of such dialogue has been an emphasis on 'integral

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Institutions: Gulfs and Bridges," Gerrie ter Haar, ed., *Religion and Development: Ways of Transforming the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 27-53, for a study of the uneasy relationship between religion and development.

[3] Joseph Gremillion, *Food/Energy and the Major Faiths* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978), 7.

[4] Ibid., 4.

[5] Joseph Gremillion and William Ryan, ed., *World Faiths and the New World Order* (Washington: Interreligious Peace Colloquium, 1978), 2.

[6] See also Molefe Tsele, "The Role of the Christian Faith in Development" Deryke Belshaw, et al. ed. *Faith in Development: Partnership between the World Bank and the Churches of Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2001), for other examples of such initiative in Africa.

development', that is, development that is not merely economic but one that includes the political, social, cultural, economic, technological as well as the religio-spiritual aspects of human life. Such development must focus on the human person involved in development and promote his overall development: social, cultural, personal and religious. Institutions now appreciate the position of faith- based groups: that "economic development programmes will not be sustainable, even within their own terms of reference, unless they incorporate the spiritual as well as the cultural, political, social and environmental dimensions of life."[7] James D. Wolfensohn former President of the World Bank foresaw the need for closer collaboration of the World Bank and other development institutions with religion and remarked:

> Religion is an omnipresent and seamless part of daily life, taking an infinite variety of forms that are part of the distinctive quality of each community. Religion could thus not be seen as something apart and personal. It is, rather, a dimension of life that suffuses whatever people do. Religion has an effect on many people's attitudes to everything, including such matters as savings, investment and a host of economic decisions. It influences area we had come to see as vital for successful development, like schooling, gender quality, and approaches to health care. In short, religion could be an important driver of change, even as it could be a break to progress.[8]

As a result of such dialogue there is a realization that the religious faith of people help shape their view of development and their life in general. Religion provides the unifying power that grounds the socio-political, economic, technological, cultural and moral dynamics of a culture. This is particularly true of Africans for whom life is an intricate web of the sacred and the secular.

Africa's Religious Landscape

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[7] Wendy Tyndale, "Religions and the Millennium Development Goals," Gerrie ter Haar, ed., *Religion and Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 216.

[8] James D. Wolfensohn, "Forward," Gerrie ter Haar, ed., *Religion and Development*, xvii.

In African thinking there is no division between religion and life, body and soul, natural and supernatural as one sees in Western thought. What this means is that humankind is best seen as a life-force interacting harmoniously with life forces in the universe namely: God, the deities, the founding ancestors of different clans, the ancestors and other living/dead of the family and tribe. According to John S. Mbiti

> It is religion, more than anything else, which colours their understanding of the universe and their empirical participation in that universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious universe. That is the philosophical understanding behind African myths, customs, traditions, beliefs, morals, actions and social relationships.[9]

Africans eat religiously, dance religiously, trade religiously and organize their societies religiously; but this is done in a holistic manner, without any dichotomy of the material and the spiritual. Since Africans are "incurably religious,"[10] the major question is whether religion in Africa helps or hinders sustainable development. If African religious values promote the human good by its emphasis on the good of the community, does the modern religious value arising from the three aforesaid religions in Africa promote or retard sustainable, integral development ? A brief examination of Africa's condition will shed some light on the role religion possibly plays in this area.

African Underdevelopment/Development

There are two ways of interpreting development in Africa: first, from the purview of underdevelopment which emphasises Africa's material poverty in comparison to other highly developed economies; second, from the viewpoint of Africa being part of the developing world. In the sense of the former, African underdevelopment reveals that the continent is almost

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[9] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heimemann Educational Books Ltd, 1969), 262.
[10] See Geoffrey Parrinder, African Traditional Religion, 27-28.

synonymous with poverty, malnutrition, disease, political instability, violence, dependence, corruption and injustice. In the book, *The Triple Heritage* (1986), Ali Mazrui asserts: "Things are not working in Africa. From Dakar to Dar es Salaam, from Marrakesh to Maputo, institutions are decaying, structures are rusting away. It is as if the ancestors had pronounced the curse of cultural sabotage." [11] The Report of the African Commission (2005) corroborates this and asserts: "Today Africa is the poorest region in the world. Half of the population lives on less than one dollar a day. Life expectancy is actually falling. People live, on average, to the age of just 46. In India and Bangladesh, by contrast, that figure is now a staggering 17 years higher."[12]

The challenges of Africa's underdevelopment are systemic. Things are going wrong on all corners. There are problems arising from poor governance and economic mismanagement, corruption and embezzlement of public funds. There are social upheavals arising from distorted border demarcations and the combination of incompatible people. The consequence has been nepotism and ethnocentrism reflected in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Another problem is the decay of the infrastructure and/ or a total lack thereof, making it difficult for Africa to compete profitably in the global market. This leads to greater dependence on food importation at a level as high as 80%. These problems are worsened by unequal relationships in terms of trade, debt and aid with the rich countries of the North.

As a developing part of the world, there are positive signs of improvement in African continent on the whole. Many African countries now boast of democratically elected leaders although much still needs to be done to ensure free and fair elections into representational governance. There is also greater regional integration with the creation of the African Union to replace the wobbling Organization of African Unity (OAU). Furthermore, there is the peer

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[11] Ali A. Mazrui, *The Triple Heritage*, 11.
[12] The Commission for Africa, *Our Common Interest*, 16.

review mechanism by which African heads of state can learn from one another through a

programme called the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), etc. The

Commission for Africa reports:

> In one African country after another the first signs are emerging that things may be
> changing. Twenty years ago it was commonplace for African countries to be run as
> dictatorships; today such governments are a minority. … War has given way to peace in
> many places. … Despite three decades of overall continental stagnation, growth exceeded
> 5 per cent in 24 separate countries in sub-Saharan Africa in 2003. … Everywhere there
> are the first signs of what could be a real momentum of change.[13]

There is also improvement in the economy. As the *Financial Post* (Canada) reports of sub-

Saharan Africa "The region is shaking off economic chaos to become one of the most incredible

success stories of the global economy."[14] In the words of Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, a Managing

Director of World Bank (and a two-time Minister of Finance for Nigeria), "There is growing

conviction among sub-Saharan Africa's leaders that sustained growth will come from the private

sector and increased integration with the global economy."[15] Thus investment is replacing aid in

Africa. For instance, Foreign Direct Investment increased from the US$9-billion in 2000 to US$

62billion in 2008.[16] According to the International Monetary Fund, real GDP in sub-Saharan

Africa increased 5.7% annually between 2000 and 2008, one of the fastest paces anywhere in the

world.[17] According to David Pett, a columnist with the *Financial Post*, "The collective output of

its 50-plus economies, meanwhile reached US$1.6 trillion, far greater than, say, global industrial

power ‚South Korea."[18] The Commission for Africa equally believes African economy is

growing measured in GDP. It testifies: "So Africa is not doomed to slow growth. Botswana is

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[13] The Commission for Africa, 12-14.
[14] *Financial Post*, Saturday, March 12, 2011, FP1.
[15] Ibid., FP6.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

not the only indicator of that. In the last decade, 16 countries in sub-Saharan Africa have seen

average growth rates above four per cent, including 10 with rates above five per cent and three

with rates above seven per cent."[19] The McKinsey Global Institute report on Africa's

development (2010) titled "Lions on the Move: the Progress and Potential of African

Economies" similarly extol the economic development of Africa and its potentials. It estimates

Africa's collective GDP in 2008 to be $1.6 trillion (roughly equal to Brazil's and Russia);

Africa's consumer spending in 2008 to be $860 billion; and new mobile phone use since 2000 to

be 316 million. It forecasts Africa's collective GDP by 2020 to be $2.6 trillion; Africa's

consumer spending by 2020 to be $1.4 trillion. It summarizes: "Africa's economic impulse has

quickened, infusing the continent with a new commercial vibrancy. Real GDP rose 4.9 percent

per year from 2000 through 2008, more than twice its pace in the 1980's and '90's. Telecom,

banking and retail are flourishing. Construction is booming. Foreign investment is surging."[20]

Unfortunately, African countries' increasing GDP does not translate into improvement

for most of the people. For instance, while Nigeria's GNP increases, paradoxically her poverty

level increases throwing more people below the poverty line of less than $1 a day. According to

the report on poverty headcount figures for 2010 and forecast/estimate for 2011 released by the

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), "the incidence of poverty in Nigeria worsened between

2004 and 2010. The report indicates that the number of Nigerians living below poverty line rose

from 68.7m to 112.5m (63.7% rise in poverty incidence) during the period while the population

rose from 139.2m to 158.6m (13.9% rise in population) between 2004 and 2010. Earlier figures

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[19] The Commission for Africa, 76.
[20] McKinsey and Company, "Lions on the Move: the Progress and Potential of African Economies,"
http://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/publications/progress_and_potential_of_african_economies/pdfs/MGI_african_econ
omies_ExecSumm.pdf

on unemployment in Nigeria corroborate this situation as the number of unemployed members of the labor force continued to swell over the same period.

During that period, however, the Nigerian economy was growing strongly at an average annual growth rate in excess of 6.6%, making the country the 5th fastest growing economy in the World in 2010 at 7.87% real growth rate."[21] This paradox of growth in the face of poverty and inequality is a result of the inequity and injustice in Nigeria's socio-politico-economic distribution, with 1% of the population, (politicians and bureaucrats) allocating the resources of the country to themselves while the rest of the populace wallow in abject poverty. The role of religion in the sustainable development of Africa, particularly Nigeria, will be assessed based on the performance of, Christianity, traditional religion, and Islam in addressing these socio-politico-economic issues bedeviling Africa.

Religion and Development in Nigeria

The role of religion for the sustainable development of Nigeria has been both positive and negative. Positively, religion stands as a reliable institution providing stepping stones to sustainable development. According to Lamin Sanneh, "Although they were little prepared for it, the churches found themselves as the only viable structure remaining after the breakdown of state institutions, and as such had to shoulder a disproportionate burden of the problems of their societies."[22] As this author wrote in another paper, "from the days of the missionaries to the

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[21] Adebayo Durodola, "The Paradox of High Growth and High Poverty in Nigeria," *The Spines*, February 16, 2012. http://thespines.blogspot.com/2012/02/paradox-of-high-growth-and-high-poverty.html.
[22] Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapis, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 15.

present, the church in Africa has focused its development strategy in two areas: education and healthcare."[23] And they have done remarkably well, as detailed below.

Christian Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Muslim FBOs like the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) in many ways contribute to sustainable development of Nigeria.[24] In the face of the weakness of the Nigerian state and the inefficiency of its institutions to provide the human good to its citizens, the Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) supplement and complement government's efforts towards improving the standard of living of Nigerians. These FBOs in Nigeria which number over 46,000 are involved in pro-poor, charitable works which alleviate poverty, promote progress, and serve as agents of development. According to Omobolaji Olarinmoye, "FBOs in Nigeria provide health and educational services through their hospitals, clinics and maternities, schools and colleges, vocational training centers, seminaries and universities. They own economic institutions, such as bookshops, hotels, banks, insurance, mass media and ICT companies and are prominent owners of real estate in the form of sacred cities and prayer camps which cover thousands of hectares of land. The lands on which their hospitals, schools and orphanages are situated also make up part of their real estate portfolio."[25]

Specifically, research on religion and development in Nigeria (2009) identifies the main Muslim FBOs to include "the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), the Nasrul-II-Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT), and the National Council of

[23] Joseph Ogbonnaya, "The Church in Africa: Salt of the Earth," Stan Chu Ilo et. al., ed., *The Church as Salt and Light: Path to an African Ecclesiology of Abundant Life* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 65-87, 74.
[24] Olakunle Odumosu et al., Religions and Development Research Programme: Mapping the Activities of Faith-based Organizations in Development in Nigeria (Ibadan: Nigeria Institute of Social and Economic Research, 2009). http://www.religionsanddevelopment.org/files/ (accessed May 18, 2012).
[25] Omobolaji Olarinmoye, "Accountability in Faith-Based Development Organizations in Nigeria: Preliminary Explorations," *Global Economic Governance Programme*, GEG Working Paper 2011/67, 15.

Muslim Youth Organization (NACOMYO). The main Christian FBOs include Christian Rural

and Urban Development of Nigeria (CRUDAN), the Justice and Peace Caritas Organization

(JDPC), the Urban Ministry, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CHAN), and the People

Oriented Development (POD) of ECWA."[26] FOMWAN with consultative status in the United

Nations among other things, aims at the intellectual and economic empowerment of Muslim

women, the rehabilitation of children and orphans, the encouragement of young girls to embrace

education and proper and adequate health care, et cetera. This it does in partnership with the

Nigerian government through the Universal Basic Education Programme and Normadic

Education Programmes. NASFAT among other programmes aim at tackling poverty and

ensuring sustainable income for the society. Thus, it promotes small scale businesses by granting

loans to individuals and cooperative societies. CRUDAN partners with the government and other

FBOs to promote rural and urban development especially in areas of "rural development,

agriculture, water and sanitation, micro-finance and livelihoods development and training."[27]

Established as an integral development commission, JDPC a Pontifical Council guided by the

social teachings of the Church, helps Catholic dioceses in policy making specifically in areas of

social development. It coordinates all programmes relating to social welfare, rural, urban and

water development, animating integral development, et cetera.[28] Established in all the Catholic

dioceses of Nigeria (over 99 in number)[29] and with branches in the parishes and zonal levels

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[26] Olakunle Odumosu et al., *Religions and Development Research Programme: Mapping the Activities of Faith-based Organizations in Development in Nigeria.*

[27] Ibid.

[28] See Olakunle Odumosu et al., Religions and Development Research Programme: Mapping the Activities of Faith-based Organizations in Development in Nigeria (Ibadan: Nigeria Institute of Social and Economic Research, 2009). http://www.religionsanddevelopment.org/files/ (accessed May 18, 2012) for more of the activities of FBOs in Nigeria especially in the promotion of sustainable development.

[29] Cf. Catholic Hierarchy, http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/dng.html

(small Christian communities),[30] JDPC sinks boreholes for good drinking water to

communities,[31] promotes good governance in many ways and partners with government to

monitor elections,[32] trains police and prison officers[33] grants small-scale loans to farmers and

traders,[34] provides housing,[35] builds hospitals, constructs and equips schools, advocates for

widows, women, unjustly imprisoned, et cetera.

This is equally true of African Traditional Religions as well as of Islam. Although not

institutionalized like Christianity and Islam, African traditional religion contributes to the

sustainable development of Nigeria psychologically. It provides a sense of security and

assurance of assistance from the spirit of the ancestors which Africans believe serve as a

protective shield against such evil forces as witches and wizards which can disrupt individual

and communal development. Therefore, when faced with the riddles of life, and in moments of

suffering and difficulty, a good number of Nigerians fall back on their traditional religious

cultural beliefs. Although Christianity and Islam frown at the 'syncretism' arising from mixing

traditional religious practices with Christianity and Islam respectively, "millions of Muslims and

Christians on the continent have managed to absorb into their system of values and beliefs

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[30] See organizational structure of Justice, Development and Peace, Catholic Archdiocese of Ibadan, Nigeria. http://jdpcibadan.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=37&Itemid=153

[31] The Tribune, a national daily newspaper in Nigeria reports this headline in its March 12, 2012 edition, "JDPC commissions five boreholes in Irewole communities." Nigerian Tribune, 15 March, 2012,

[32] For instance, JDPC Onitsha Archdiocese reports its contribution to good governance thus: "The commission monitored the 2003 and 2007 elections. Two thousand (2000) observers were used for this monitoring with representatives for all the local government booths. N1000 was paid to each observer. The Commission made its comments on the Elections publicly on the National Dallies. It also organized many seminars on Election Monitoring and Good Governance especially during the preparation for year 2003 and 2007 Elections." Cf. http://jdpconitsha.com/jdpconitsha/about.html

[33] Punch Newspaper 17 June 2012 reports "JDPC trains police, prison officers."

[34] For instance, CIDJAP SPF (Catholic Institute for Development Justice and Peace Small Projects Fund) in the year 2001, through the UNDP/Enugu State Government, solely disbursed N600m micro credit facility to communities in Enugu State as well as a N20m loan from a commercial bank. See, http://cidjap.org/fund.html

[35] JDPC Enugu Diocese Nigeria for instance built in 1996 "Nwanne Di Na Mba Social Housing Estate low cost housing estate in an effort to tackle the housing needs of the people of the area. See, http://cidjap.org/housing.html

certain contributions from ancestral indigenous creeds." [36] Furthermore, the tolerance of African traditional religion towards other religious beliefs and practices will always serve as an example for Christians and Muslims as they struggle for mutual co-existence.

However, in spite of their laudable involvement in promoting progress and sustainable development, religions in Nigeria have in some ways been inhibiting sustainable development. Christianity and Islam are often antagonists, leading to ethnic and religious conflicts resulting in loss of lives and destruction of properties. For instance, between 1980-2002 more than ten thousand Nigerians died and properties worth millions of dollars were destroyed in riots between Christians and Muslims. Toyin Falola presents the facts of countless tragedies to exemplify religious violence in Nigeria:

> In 1980, the Maitatsine crisis claimed thousands of lives (the government conservatively estimated the death toll at just over four thousand) and caused millions of naira in property damage. On the last day of October 1982, eight large churches were burned in the prominent city of Kano… A major riot in Kaduna that same year claimed at least four hundred lives. In 1984, violence sparked by Muslims in Yola and Jimeta killed approximately seven hundred people (including policemen) and left nearly six thousand people homeless. In the first week of February 1986… at Ilorin, the capital of Kwara state, Palm Sunday turned disastrous as Christians clashed with Muslims, leading to the destruction of three churches…. In March 1987, Christians and Muslims in key northern towns and cities such as Kaduna, Katsina, Zaria, and Kafanchan clashed with devastating consequences… In 1988, Christians and Muslims turned the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria into a battlefield on which a hundred people were injured and one person lost his life…. In 1991, the religious crisis in Bauchi state reached the breaking point, leading to numerous deaths and massive destruction… In 1992, large scale violence returned to Kaduna state, with severe clashes in Zangon-Kataf, Kaduna, and Zaria. Two 1994 incidents in Kano and Sokoto revived the tension…. In May and June 1995, a new crisis erupted in Kano, sparking sporadic attacks on Christians and southerners. In May 1996, eight people lost their lives when police clashed with a group of Muslim students.[37]

Similar religious conflicts, riots and violence arising from clashes between Christians and Muslims occur in Nigeria almost every year. "Rioting in 2001 killed more than 1,000 people, and

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[36] Ali A. Mazrui, *The African Condition*, 54.
[37] Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria,* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1998), 3-4

subsequent outbreaks in 2004 and 2008 killed another thousand. Smaller but no less vicious attacks in 2009 claimed dozens of lives."[38] This has only been intensified by the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, Islamic sect's militancy in Nigeria. This group better known as Boko Haram which aims at complete Islamization of Nigeria in a Taliban style has claimed, since 2009, up to 1,000 lives and destroyed valuable government and business properties. Its terrorist activities in Nigeria are crippling the economy of northern Nigeria, creating insecurity in the country, driving away investors, foreign and local, and resulting in much government spending on security instead of on infrastructures.

It should be noted, however, that as the Council on Foreign Relations in a symposium "Religious Conflict in Nigeria," (2007)[39] discovered, most religious conflicts in Nigeria also have ethnic and political nuances.

Another reason for the upsurge of religious intolerance and violence is economic. According to Paulinus I. Odozor, "A cruel irony in Nigeria is that as the country discovers more and more oil fields, a sizeable proportion of the population sinks more deeply into poverty. The concomitant decline of investment in the education and economic well-being of people, especially the young, makes the latter easy prey for religious fanatics or lunatics who promise them something greater than themselves, whether in this world or in the next."[40] For instance, the present terrorist activities of the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, (Boko Haram) arise from endemic poverty arising from bad governance and dissatisfaction with the structure of the Nigerian state. Although their violent activities have gained Nigeria notoriety as the haven of

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[38] http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1971010,00.html
[39] Council on Foreign Relations, "Religious Conflict in Nigeria Symposium," http://www.cfr.org/content/meetings/nigeria_symposium_summary.pdf
[40] Paulinus I. Odozor, "Africa and the Challenge of Foreign Religious/Ethical Ideologies, Viruses, and Pathologies," Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, ed., *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: The Second Synod* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011, 214-225, 218.

religious intolerance, across the religious divide of Nigeria evenly split between Christianity and Islam, interfaith cooperation remains a commitment of many in the modern Nigerian state.

Religious fundamentalism, whether arising from Christianity, Islam or African traditional religions, is an abuse of religion and therefore is abhorrent. Genuine religious spirituality respects human dignity under God; advocates for peace and tolerance; justice and fairness; progress and development; protection of lives and property; promotion of the common good and creation of conditions conducive to human freedom, civil and religious. The level of violence arising from religious conflicts brings to the forefront the importance of interreligious dialogue. In order to foster such dialogue, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) established an Inter-religious Dialogue Commission in response to the demands of the Vatican II Council document *Nostra Aetate*.[41] The Federal Government of Nigeria equally established the National Religious Advisory Board (1986) and the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (1999) with the goal of promoting inter-religious dialogue for sustainable peace and religious tolerance. However, these international organizations are not taken seriously in Nigeria.

Religion also impedes sustainable development by tacit collaboration in corruption and mismanagement of the economy mainly because religious leaders have failed to challenge the unjust structures that give rise to bad governance, corruption and social malaise. Although some FBOs like the Muslim Jama'tu Nasril Islam, Center for Human Rights in Islam (CHRI) and the Christian Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) and the Ecumenical Commission of Justice and Peace are socio-political organizations, they have not spoken with one voice against the cycles of injustice; greed and self-aggrandizement of the political class that confiscates the state resources for personal use, thus dehumanizing the Nigerians. On the

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[41] See Austin Flannery, ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (New Delhi: St Paul Press, 1975), 653-656.

contrary, various religious groups have sought to benefit from the corruption and nepotism of the Nigerian system when a member of their religion is in power as the president or as the governor or local chairman, et cetera. By so doing, religions in Nigeria put themselves in a position to be used at will by the political class. It is little wonder that the Nigerian government can so easily side-track people even in policies aimed at alleviating poverty like the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) programme.[42] Thus, religion instead of being an agent of development has, at times, been an agent of decline, destruction, violence, and revenge.

Since it is not enough for religions to contribute to sustainable development of Nigeria merely by providing social services which is what they have been doing. Religious leaders in Nigeria must figure out a way to honestly embrace peace and promote mutual coexistence by understanding one another's religious beliefs. Such effort was made almost immediately after independence from the British early in 1970 in the form of symposia. A journal "*Nigerian Dialogue: A Journal of Inter-Faith Studies on the Relation Between Christianity and Non-Christian Religions*" by the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was launched July 1974. It promoted such relations but could not continue perhaps due to lack of funding.[43] Through such ways, each of the members of Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam would have been equipped to tolerate one another and stem the tide of religious fundamentalism that often is responsible for varying forms of violence that results not only in wanton destruction of lives and property, but cripples the economy and sets back the clock of sustainable development, reversing

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[42] See Olakunle Odumosu, "Faith Based Organisations' (FBOs) Participation in Policy Process in Nigeria" (Ibadan: Nigeria Institute of Social and Economic Research, 2011) for details of government non-involvement of FBOs in the formulation of her economic and development empowerment programme. http://niseronline.org
[43] Nigerian Secretariat for Non-Christians, "Nigerian Dialogue: A Journal of Inter-Faith Studies on the Relation Between Christianity and Non-Christian Religions" University of Nigeria, Nsukka, (1974), vol. 1:1.

the tides of human development gained through many years of arduous labour, planning and creativity.

The Contributions of African Catholicism

Drawing from the riches of the Second Vatican Council especially the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) and from the social teaching of the Church, African Catholicism can contribute to the renewal of religions in Nigeria. A change of attitude towards Muslims and African religious traditionalists can be effected when Christians see others as human beings who, like them, worship one God and therefore are brothers and sisters and vice versa for Traditional religionists and Muslims. This spirit of openness can remove prejudice and mutual fear which often breeds hatred and violence. Such a spirit can soften the space for genuine Christian-Moslem dialogue. Jacques Jomier's advice to Nigerian Christians is reversible for Muslims about Christians: "If you pay attention to the values in the faith of Moslems, you will find many occasions to speak with some of them. … If we remember; according to Vatican II, God calls them as he calls every man living in the world and if we remember that many of them have personal relationship with God during their prayer or during their daily life then it will be easier to understand that the Moslems are our brothers and sisters."[44]

Another contribution African Catholicism can make is in the areas of civic education. This education could inculcate in Nigerians a nationalist spirit and patriotism to make them love their country, be genuinely involved in the political process, demand justice by holding their elected officers accountable and promoting internal peace. African Catholicism draws from the

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[44] Jacques Jomier, "Islam and the Dialogue," *Nigerian Dialogue (A Journal of Inter-Faith Studies on the Relations Between Christians and Non-Christian Religion)*, 1974, 1:1, 4-23, 4.

riches of the Catholic social teachings to teach these values which promote integral sustainable human development.

Conclusion

In spite of the factors inhibiting the contribution of religion, it still remains an important agent for sustainable development. This is due to a good number of Nigerians identifying themselves as religious. In fact, a survey of people's religious beliefs carried out in ten countries in 2004 by BBC NEWS[45] suggests that Nigeria is the most religious nation in the world, topping the list by ninety percent of the population opting for their religious beliefs as a moral guide for life. This religiousness can be harnessed for the development of the country. Ideally, instead of impeding sustainable development, religion ought to promote it, because faith addresses the ultimate concerns of human beings and permeates all aspects of human life: vital, social, cultural, personal and religious. Religion thus provides an anchor giving meaning to various forms of human experiences, life and actions. Promoting interreligious dialogue and education for tolerance will reduce religious conflicts. Hence, religion will be free to contribute to sustainable development through the nurturing of human conscience for honesty, transparency, and the common good.

In the light of their numerous contributions to sustainable development, religions should be integrated into the development agenda of Nigeria not as recipients of the country's wealth, but as educators to contribute to the industrial development of the country. In this way religion will help Nigerians overcome the ignorance responsible for the disconnection they often make between their faith and their civic duties and the promotion of the common good. Because they have direct access to the people, religions in Nigeria must emphasise the importance of hard

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[45] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/wtwt/3409490.

work; the role of science and technological advancement; a workable good of order; the importance of good governance for sustainable development of Nigerian peoples. While they are involved in national development through their Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), religious leaders must fight against corruption and injustice. Their influence in public policy must be to promote the common good and sustainable development of Nigeria. In this regard, worldwide Christianity and Islam must not only speak up against the various forms of marginalization of Africa in international trade, but must through their networks promote better mutual and equal relationship of Nigeria (and Africa) with other countries in all areas of partnership.

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