

The Role Of Religion In Nigerian Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The role religion can play towards ensuring sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. It is unfortunate that rather than unite the Nigerian state towards national development, it has become a tool in the hands of their drivers to propagate ethnicity. The problem of religion defines another set of issues. Religion no doubt has to do with two spheres of activities in the life of an individual. Citizens who belong to religious groups are also members of the secular society and this dual association generates complications. Religious beliefs have moral and social implications, and it is appropriate for people of faith to express these through their activities as citizens in order to ensure national sustainable development. The objective of this study is to establish a relationship between religion and sustainable development. This study also sets out to advocate for adherence to religious tenets to strive to contribute to social reconstruction and development. It portrays religion as the potent factor that guides human reasoning and actions in the society. It anchors on sustainability theory as its framework of analysis. It was discovered that religion is becoming politicized and problematic especially when it has to do with the issue of national interest. The researcher adopted descriptive phenomenology in the execution of this research work. The research concludes that sustainable development is impossible without religious values. Religion must regulate our nascent democracy to be able to provide the anticipated dividend, for it is religion which turns democracy into the service of a people by the people and for the people.

Keywords: *Religion, sustainability and Development.*

Introduction

The issue of religion has become problematic especially when it has to do with politics and religion has a relevant role to play in National Development. Nigerian nation has been crippled by series of political unrest, youth restiveness, corruption by political holders, religious bigotry, and other social vices that undermine national sustainable development. The tendency for religions in all societies to be supportive is a central proposition in current social theory. It is concerned with the attainment of the values for which man strives for power and prestige.

If everyone were permitted to pursue these values by means of one's own choice, an organized society would be impossible. Religion (especially,

Christianity) provides this control on the use of coercive power. According to Uche (2011:73), religion does not only raise values to the position of ultimate concern but also serve as an evaluative factor in politics.” And, by emphasizing common values, religion may reduce the sharpness of the tensions that result from the pursuit of scarce values.

It is quite disheartening to know that, Nigeria has been bedeviled by all sorts of religiously cum politically-based restiveness and insurgencies thereby truncating all efforts and policies geared towards sustainable development in Nigeria. The truth is that religion is not a tool of intolerance and instability. Rather it has been wrongly applied and manipulated by their leaders for their selfish interests and ends. Suffice to observe that peace is a necessary condition for sustainable development hence religion have a crucial role to play in this regard by inculcating in their adherents the values of tolerance and good neighbourliness. Ekpenyong argues in the context of violent conflict pervading the Nigerian society and the world in general as he states:

It is now widely accepted that violent conflict is the major hindrance to the development of the African continent and Nigeria in particular. It inflicts human suffering through death, destruction of livelihoods, constant displacement and insecurity. Violent conflict disrupts the process of production, creates condition for pillage of the country’s resources and diverts their application from development purposes to servicing war. Thus, this work shows the factors that regularly threatened development in Nigeria (Ekpenyong, 2011:95)

It is obvious that the recent Boko Haram insurgence in the country have been claiming lives of innocent citizens and individual properties and of state agencies. No doubt that their actions are religiously motivated, if this is true then, how can these religious intolerance perpetrated almost on daily bases lead to a sustainable national development in Nigeria? This is the problem this study seeks to solve.

This research adopted descriptive phenomenology as its method. This is because not much empirical studies have been carried out on religion and sustainable development dialectics, hence the need for the adoption of this method for the study. More so, the two concepts here, religion and sustainable development, have to do with the people and their interaction. The study finds out that religion (Christianity and Islam) has a stint in Nigerian politics – a springboard that propels national development (especially on the moral attitude of political office holders) and so many people have dragged religion into politics and are also using religion as a tool for achieving political powers by using it to cause violence and destruction of properties in the country. It is obvious that this scenario cannot foster development. It is the aim of this study to highlight the basic roles religion has to play towards national development. This will help in establishing the anticipated relationship between religion and sustainable development. The study equally seeks to correct

the wrong notion people have towards religion. It aims at recommending possible ways by which religion can bring about sustainable development in Nigeria.

The problem of this research is that it has been discovered that religious leaders are not doing enough in admonishing their followers towards embracing peace and dialogue as the best possible means of settling differences rather than resort to destruction of lives and properties. It's obvious that such atmosphere of wanton destruction can neither promote nor encourage sustainable development.

In these circumstances, Western civilization has been associated with individual freedom, secularism and tolerance, while Islamic civilization was associated with collective rights, individual obligations, despotism and intolerance (Karen, 2002). Huntington, 1993, is of the view that, the world will be shaped in large measure by the differences between these realms of irreconcilable interests and natural clashes between these two civilizations. He maintains that these differences are the product of centuries which are borne out of basic differences involving history, language, culture, tradition and, most importantly, religion. Huntington's approach upholds impervious boundaries between different cultures elevated to the status of civilizations, and makes religion the focal point of identity within cultures as found in the world of Islam and Western Christianity (Huntington, 1996). The assertion of secularization of the world by the West as a measure of social determinant of modernity are transforming into manifold of cultural divides (Mehmet, 1994; Karen, 2002). More importantly, the effort by the West since the late 20th century to advance its values of democracy and liberalism as universal values and to promote its economic interests engender countering negative responses particularly from Islamic world (Mehmet, 1994). The overall cost of this conflict is obviously high, and Nigeria is not left in all of these. It's unfortunate to observe that just a single page of Koran burnt in Canada, Belgium or United States of America sparks violence in Nigeria thereby leading to loss of lives and properties.

In his book, *the end of History and the last man*, (Fukuyama, 1992) writes:

It is true that Islam constitutes a systematic and coherent ideology, just like liberalism and communism, with its own code of morality and doctrine of political and social justice. The appeal of Islam is potentially universal and not just to members of a particular ethnic or national group. And Islam has indeed defeated liberal democracy in many parts of Islamic world, posing a grave threat to liberal practices even in countries where it has not achieved political power directly.

Although this discourse is not on Islam or Christianity but are genre of religions practiced in Nigeria which the former and its adherents have been at the centre of most violence witnessed in Nigeria. According to the author, it can be deduced that Islam as a religion is perceived to impose "a grave threat to liberal practices" by extension if nothing serious is done to check current adherents of this religion, sustainable development in Nigeria will become a mirage.

It will be pertinent at this juncture to highlight what the two concepts really mean – that is, a working definition of religion and sustainable development in Nigeria before examining their relationship.

Towards a Definition of Religion

According to Obilor (2003:133), etymologically, religion is derived from the Latin noun ‘religio’. The beauty of this Latin word is that, it is most closely allied to other three verbs: ‘religere’ – which means to ‘turn to constantly’ or “to observe conscientiously”, ‘religari’ – which means “to bind oneself (back)” and ‘reeligere’ meaning “to choose again”. He further avers that, “a closer scrutiny shows that the three verbs point to three possible religious attitudes and thus a purely etymological probe can tell us much about religion and can also help to resolve most of the difficulties often associated with religion”. Gilbert (1980:5), avers that religion is described as, “any system of values, beliefs, norms, and related symbols and rituals, arising from attempts by individuals and social groups to effect certain ends, whether in this world or any further world, by means wholly or partly supernatural”. In his analysis on Gilbert’s definition of religion, Obilor (2003:134) observes that, the use of the term ‘supernatural’ is fraught with complexities in certain contexts. It has one merit, that of not limiting his definition to a belief in a God or gods and at the same time not forgetting the ‘religious’ dimension of man, which opens him beyond himself and towards a superior power, a supernatural reality, or merely a transcendent being.

By ‘religious’, Obilor (2003:137) interprets it as, “a capacity or a power which enables man to observe the laws of his nature, the natural law and /or of the divine law”. One can then see the term ‘religious’ as that potentiality of participation in the ways of the divine. The term ‘religious’ in this context therefore does not presuppose the acceptance of the supernatural but is simply the capacity that opens man towards the acceptance or rejection of the supernatural. In his own analysis, Ayers (1977:81) says the word ‘religious’ does not refer to some sort of static substantive reality defying changing circumstances in human thought and behaviour; rather it is to be understood as referring to certain characteristic roles or functions played by some sentences and beliefs in the discourse and behaviour of people.

Therefore, the word religious is a quality identifiable in expression and in behaviour. The notion that man is a religious being means that, it is part of man to express himself religiously and to behave himself religiously. Man can do this either negatively or positively. This is why people can use their religious power for evil and other social vices.

CONCEPTUALIZING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The idea of sustainability came to public attention after a 1972 report, “Limits to Growth,” issued by the International Think Tank Club of Rome. In 1980, the World Conservation Strategy developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, in collaboration with the U.N. Environment Programme and World Wildlife Foundation, worked to make sustainability a benchmark of

international action. Then the term “sustainable development” achieved international public prominence through the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, often called the “Brundtland Report” after the name of its chair, former Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. It presented the famous definition: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987, 43).

For many organizations and agencies such as UN and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), that formula or something close to it remains a working definition. Although the Brundtland definition have been criticized for binding sustainability too closely to development and for focusing on human needs. But the Report has helped initiate an international public debate on sustainability that has since generated numerous alternative formulations.

It has been observed that sustainability is an inclusive and ambiguous concept, precisely because it brings society’s future dependency into moral relation with its religious and political systems. In an early expression of what that relation implies, the 1974 Cocoyoc Declaration (the result of a U.N. sponsored symposium in Mexico) stated that sustainability relates “inner limits” of human needs to the “outer limits”. Among the first uses of sustainability as a concept to help integrate response to related environmental and social problems was the 1975 programme of the World Council of Churches (WCC) for a “just, participatory, and sustainable society.” For the WCC, sustainability might well contradict existing development processes as well as reshape economic and political priorities.

Certainly in its search for durable responses to global problems sustainability is a temporally prospective concept, but it does not reduce considerations of the future because it includes contemporary problems (like overcoming extreme poverty and bringing about peaceful co-existence). As the Brundtland definition indicates, sustainability must seek a way to balance obligations to the present and the future? (Jenkins, 2010).

Jenkins (2010) further asserts that, in a pragmatic approach, the philosopher Hans Jonas has proposed that new powers of human agency, able to comprehensively threaten their own conditions, require a new moral imperative to act responsibly for the sake of human survival. Perhaps sustainability is neither a strong question about nature’s intrinsic value nor a weak one about producing opportunities but rather a pragmatic question about keeping our species in existence (Jonas 1984). Sustainability is then a question about maintaining a decent survival, enhancement and peaceful co-existence in a nation, Nigeria inclusive.

A view on the role of religion in sustainability debates holds that religious metaphors and spiritual practices have unique capacities for interpreting life’s complexity and generating holistic responses. If part of the challenge of sustainability is to understand the mutual relations of humanity and nature within a wider worldview, then religions may have useful resources.

For some communities, the crisis of sustainability presents an opportunity for religious renewal or spiritual renaissance. Certainly the world has witnessed, in all lands and from many cultures and traditions, new forms of religious change and spiritually motivated activism as communities attempt to comprehend and respond

to political challenges. Religious thought enters public sustainability debates as societies are increasingly challenged to make decisions about what is worth sustaining and to formulate questions about what sustains them. There is a paradoxical depth to such questions; although they inquire about the moral minimum of a decent survival, answering them invites reflection on the totality of how things can be done to sustain the people in a given society. For many, a good answer must reach toward the religious-toward spirit, the sacred, God, love, faith, or grace. Because sustainability requires humans to recognize the simple facts of moral consciousness, it can provoke reflection on our dearest values and most fundamental beliefs, our intimate habits, and our overarching worldviews. To meet the challenges of sustainability in the twenty-first century, individuals and communities alike are seeking ways in which to explore the *spirit* of sustainability such as respect for God and His creation, love and value for your fellow man, enhancement of human life and maintaining the existing cosmic and social order in the society.

Linkage Between Religion, Politics and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Sustainable development according to the Brundtland convention is defined as “living within the carrying capacities of the supportive ecosystem without compromising the need of the future generations.” (Ntamu, et al. 2014:309). It can also be defined as a system of governance and cohabitation where any government strive to develop areas within the territorial integrity of the country so that citizens of that country can live comfortable lives and maintain the available infrastructures and resources to meet the need of today without compromising the infrastructural and social needs of tomorrow’s generation, (Borger, 2008, Eneji, et al. 2011). Omare, (1999) in Ntamu et al (2014:310) had earlier defined sustainable national development as “a process and ideologies where national governments implement and develop policies and programs that is lasting and continuous, which is beneficial to the present generation while still being useful to the generation yet unborn.” Sustainable national development causes all forms of long lasting development, human resources, and materials, social, infrastructural, industrial and structural development including security of lives and properties and improvement in existing social, economic, human and other social facilities, (Baker, et al., 2000).

Some religious activities have deterred the spate of political development in Nigeria, negative religious fundamentalists in the northern region of the country has been discovered to be a threat to sustainable national development in Nigeria. Religious riot orchestrated by Maitatsine and the Shiite Sects holding tenaciously to their religious dogma including sacrificing anything including their own lives and those of other persons in pursuits of their heinous objectives, have in no small way disturbed the relative peace and security of the lives and properties of the inhabitants of this country. Marshall, (2009) observed that since 1980, Nigerian politicians have therefore exploited these ugly trends to advance their political ambitions. This has become more worrisome based on the injuries it has caused on individuals, properties and national development.

Sustainable development does not stop at provision and accessibility of physical infrastructure in a particular moment, but is a continuous process. Sustainable peace is not just the mere absence of war or maintenance of balance of

power between enemies and dictatorship. It has to do with the sustainability and promotion of peace always and at every time of the year and among persons and group irrespective of the tribe, ethnic nationality or religious affinity. Any religion that does not propagate peace remains inimical to sustainable development. The bombing of the World Trade Center and Pentagon House in September, 11, 2001, the 2003 bombing of the Train Station in Madrid and Manila (Spain), the Bombing of Train Station and Double Decker Bus in London are all aspects of religious bombing which are very inimical to sustainable development in the world (Uchendu, 2004, Mcconnell, 2009). Down here in Nigeria, there were many cases of attacks which include but not limited to the bombing of UN Office in Abuja, Edet House of Force Headquarters in Abuja, Madala Attacks, Gwagwalada Park Bombing, Abduction of the Chibok Girls, among so many numerous attacks especially in the North-Eastern Nigeria, claiming thousands of lives, stalling economic activities and disrupting governmental activities and programs. The efforts of international communities under the new imperialism is also contributing severely to deterring the sustainable development of the third world and other developing countries, this led Fidel Castro to propagate a theory that the people of the world should be able to say:

The war against terrorism is unwinnable and unrealistic until exploitation, oppression, big power violence, humiliation, impoverization, gross inequalities, terrorism propagated through globalization must continue in leap and bounds, the root causes of terrorism are banished from the face of the earth from the so called super powers, global dictators, (Madunagu, 2006).

Model democracy, political stability, socio-economic development, human resources development and civilization in Africa will be far from achieving the desired goals, it has been severally said by many Nigerian leaders that Nigeria cannot survive another civil war, this is a fallacy-the issue is not whether Nigeria can survive another civil war in an armed conflict, a civil war has the same effect as armed rebellion or even a successful coup d' etat inspired by mass hatred. In his paper Bakare, et al, (2009) concluded that "religion represents a significant element of ethnicity and an important source of identity which informs the basis of group discrimination and grievances in any particular nation". Fox (1997) however posits that 'religion is salient if it is a defining trait that sets a group apart' and has the capability of shaping all forms of group's political and social activities (Fox & Sandier, 2003). Emanating from the above situation, the possibilities of breeding discrimination against minor religious groups by the majority based on their dissimilar interests and goals in the society is very high (Fox, 2003, Bakare, et al, 2009); Owuamanam, et al., 2009; Hines 2009, Adedeji 2009; and McConnell 2009).

It is however observed that where there is a perceived disagreement, discrimination, dissatisfaction or threat to the survival of a religion, religious institutions can therefore become a cheap recruiting ground for the recruitment and mobilization of dissidents for both protest and rebellion. This is more worrisome when such religion supports the use of physical force when issues concerning its

core value and interests are under threat. This situation was captured by the study of Juergensmeyer (2003) who found out the prevalent in scope and dimension of religious violence in modern day Christianity and Islam in Nigeria and most African countries. It has been found that religion possess a strong influence and social force in the politics of the state given its capacity for effective political mobilization. Fox and Sander (2003) however gave six major reasons why this is so, these reasons are as follows: (i) religious organizations have strong international links and enjoy global solidarity, (ii) religious organizations have the capability to easily unite differential social groupings in the society; (iii) religious organizations are often strong in weak states; (iv) the restriction of religious activities is often difficult for state regimes; (v) religious organizations often enjoy good patronage in the media and (vi) religious organizations have the 'ready-made' platform for political meetings.

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 (2003:15), "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." "From the days of the missionaries to the present, the church in Africa has focused its development strategy on two areas: education and healthcare" (Ogbonnaya, 2011:65). And they have done remarkably well, as detailed below.

Olakunle et. al. (2009) accentuates that, 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. 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 (2011:67), "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."

Specifically Ogbonnaya (2009) avers that, research on religion and development in Nigeria 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 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 (CAN), and the People Oriented Development (POD) of ECWA” (Olakunle et. al. 2009). Olakunle et. al. (2009) further elucidates that, 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 Programs. NASFAT among other programs 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.”

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 (Ogbonnaya, 2014). According to Ogbonnaya (2014), it coordinates all programs relating to social welfare, rural, urban and water development, animating integral development, et cetera. Established in all the Catholic dioceses of Nigeria (over 99 in number) and with branches in the parishes and zonal levels (small Christian communities). JDPC sinks boreholes for good drinking water to communities, promotes good governance in many ways and partners with government to monitor elections, trains police and prison officers, grants small-scale loans to farmers and traders, provides housing, 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. According to Ogbonnaya (2009), “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 certain contributions from ancestral indigenous creeds.” Furthermore, Ogbonnaya (2009) adds that, 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.

On the recent problems associated with religion and politics in Nigeria, the following few brief comments may be helpful in clarifying this issue in the context of the problem of religion and politics in general.

1. All attempts to get laws passed are efforts to impose the beliefs of some on everybody. It is legitimate for any group of people to try to get a law passed if they believe it will promote the common good. In that sense, it is appropriate for Christians who are so inclined to get laws passed that make abortion illegal but not because abortion is judged to be morally wrong by the specific religious doctrines held by them. They should seek to ban abortion because it would be wise and good to do so in terms of the values present in the moral and cultural traditions of the nation. Moral arguments in favour of a policy are legitimate, but in so far as is possible, it is better if they are based on an appeal to public reason not on the tenets of a specific religious faith or theology.

This distinction for purposes of the political debate involving citizens of many different religious and secular persuasions ideally ought not to rest on the authority of some specific religious text, institution, or authority as such. Rather the distinction between a potential and an actual person should be supported by general appeals to reason and common human experience available in principle to all thoughtful Nigerians. Individuals may personally accept the full personhood of the fetus on religious authority (the Bible, the church, the Pope, the creed of their faith, etc.) and vote accordingly. Ideally, however, they will seek to persuade their fellow-citizens – a majority of whom do not belong to their group – on the basis of more general principles and norms that reside in the culture as a whole. This sets the terms of the debate. It in no way predetermines the outcome.

2. Every belief that citizens try to express politically is rooted in some philosophy or religion or some set of assumptions about society and its well-being. They do not come from out of nowhere. Religiously-based convictions about society and morality are as legitimate as those that spring from non-religious philosophies. Hence, Christians, Muslims, or Jews may seek to get laws passed that are rooted in their religious convictions. Such laws are appropriate as long as they have a secular purpose and do not constitute an establishment of religion. Whether these laws are wise or worthy of enactment must be judged by whether they promote the common good as judged by national values not by the fact that they are or are not rooted in the religious faith of those who support them.

3. Ideally and in principle, religious believers should not seek to get laws passed on religious grounds but because they express the values of the secular society. These norms and goals are defined by the founding documents and cultural traditions as they have come to be embedded in the common life. For example, if people of faith want to crusade for universal health coverage, e. g., they should argue for the policy not because the Bible or the Pope authorizes it or because God wills it but because it promotes "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". Likewise, religious groups that seek to outlaw racial or gender discrimination should make their case on the claim that it would be good for society as a whole not on the fact that it is authorized by their religious faith.

4. In practical terms, however, if believers feel that distinguishing between the religious basis and the political implications of their faith is an intolerable splitting of a unitary set of beliefs, then let them act accordingly. If people actually convince other voters to support legislation because the Bible, the Pope, Buddhist teachings, the Koran, or church doctrine mandates it, not much can be done about it

except to make an effort to persuade them that there is a better way. We cannot determine or control the reasons why people vote or support the policies they do or prevent them from convincing others to do the same. In the voting booth citizens are a law unto themselves. They can vote for whatever or whoever they want for any reason that motivates them. It is pointless to demand purity of principle on this matter. Voters act out of prejudice, self-interest, racial identity, ignorance, and for all sorts of other good and bad reasons, including their religious beliefs, philosophical commitments, and a devotion to justice based on American principles. Being realists about the matter is important. Democracy is an untidy, often messy, matter. The people can do what they want restrained only by Constitutional mandates. But it is better when acting politically in the public arena for believers to translate religiously-based beliefs into the traditions, language, and values of the secular order. This is called for as a matter of principle. It is advisable pragmatically as well, since the tying of policy or voting explicitly to the tenets of a particular religion, denomination, or sect may repel large number of voters and hinder rather than further the cause.

5. Hence, a two-sided critique is required. Against those who explicitly base political policies on the beliefs of a particular religion, we must insist that our government does not rest on principles peculiar to one subgroup. In this sense, we are a secular state. Hence, the political and ethical implications of faith should be framed in terms of the values embodied in our national history and traditions. Against some secular zealots, we must insist that religious people have as much right to express the social and ethical consequences of their faith in political terms as they have to express their non-religious or atheist philosophies.

6. Churches and Mosques must determine on the basis of their polity and doctrine whether it is legitimate or wise for a church or mosque official, congregation, or denominational body to endorse a particular policy or candidate. Hazards abound in doing so. It may bind religious faith injudiciously to a particular or controversial political program, and it may run the risk of splitting the congregation or the denomination. The state, however, must determine whether partisan political activities engaged in officially by religious institutions jeopardize their tax exemption or the income tax deduction for gifts to them, since it then becomes a matter of church and state.

Working out the relations between church/mosque and state and between religion and politics requires all the wisdom we can summon. But it will help if we remember that they are not the same. In both cases, we should be prepared to deal with complexities, ambiguities, and overlapping realms in which practical discernment must find workable principles to guide us that are as compatible with fundamental Constitutional imperatives as human reason can devise. Those who look for absolutely clear prescriptions requiring no delicate balancing acts or imprecise lines of demarcation between what is permissible and what is not are doomed to perpetual frustration. Or they may be tempted to resort to desperate efforts to find simplicity and purity of doctrine by suppressing legitimate but complicating elements in the total ensemble of historical principles and practices that govern the nation.

Conclusion

Religion is a potent factor for peace and it should be practised to overcome differences that will dovetail into sustainable development. The true practice of the tenets of religions will build Nigeria, a nation where peace and justice shall reign. It is the “leaders of religion” in Nigeria who are turning religion into a weapon of disaster. As Obilor (1998:29) would say, “it is not possible for the human race to survive without the religious dimension. This will naturally lead to anarchy and confusion in human relationship and societal cohesion without which there is no human family”.

The place of religion is located in the totality of human development. From the cradle to adult life, religion is very important. This is how John Obilor (1999:109) sees religion in the field of academics: A good mathematician who lacks moral values falls short of an educated person. The intellectual who lacks the basic moral and religious values is like a man without a soul. Parents who desire to have a lawyer in the family equally desire a cultured and morally good lawyer. One can go further by stating that: a leader who lacks the capacity to put into practice the basic rudiments of his or her religion should not be elected into office in Nigeria or anywhere. Any good adherent to any of the three major religions in Nigeria should be elected into office. As we have insisted, the problem in Nigeria is not religion but the operators of religion.

In Nigeria, there is the need for religiously minded leaders whose intellect is well attuned to what is honest, right and just. Our nascent democracy which is the bases for sustainable development cannot survive unless we have men and women and religious bent at the helm of affairs. For Odumuyiwa (2010:94) “Democracy and National Survival will continue to elude Nigeria unless everybody in government carries the ideals of the religion into whatever he does”. It must learn from history that whenever religion is relegated to the background, the consequences are usually catastrophic. Whenever religion is divorced from the mainstream of human life, the consequences are usually immense. A tragic dichotomy between the sacred and the secular generates a tedious *ignoratio elench*. Religion must take its proper place in our politics for a sustainable development.

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