



Religion's importance in Nigerian politics and its long-term viability for political development

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Abstract

Religion has risen to prominence in Nigerian politics. The country is the most populated in West Africa and is rich in religious diversity, including Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. These religions are linked with the country's political actions. Political office holders are utilizing religion to achieve power, while religious leaders are misusing it to gain personal gain from those in public office. As a result, religion has been used primarily negatively in Nigerian politics since independence. The study employs descriptive technique to investigate how the religious impulse has influenced political history and how, when employed positively, it can lead to long-term political progress.

Keywords: Christianity, Islam, African traditional religion, religion, politics, sustainable political development

Introduction

There is an unmistakable link between religion and politics. While the actual function of religion in politics has been debated, the link between the two notions has long been acknowledged (Falana, 2010) ^[14]. Religion has no effect on whether people are nice or wicked. In Nigeria, on the contrary, technology is being utilized as a tool of tyranny and deception. Nigerians appear to have accepted their fate, which may be exacerbated by poverty, illiteracy, and a lack of political education on the side of the majority. This situation is exacerbated by the widespread belief that politics is a filthy game in which only those who can deceive, manipulate, and ruthlessly gain wealth should engage (Egbe Wole and Etudaiye, 2011) ^[10]. Despite the fact that Nigeria has millions of religious individuals, the amount of insecurity, destruction of lives and property, and crimes done in God's name is overwhelming. The importance of political stability in Nigeria cannot be overstated. The link between religion and politics is a crucial variable in Nigerian politics, which some regard as inseparable, while others advocate for the separation of religion and politics so that the former does not inherit the corruption inherent in the latter. In general, there is a widespread misconception that religion and politics are two distinct spheres of social action. This causes some observers to speak of the politicization of religion, claiming that it is contrary to the original objective of the founder of religion, or God himself (Van der Veer, 1996:50).

Religion has a major role in the daily lives of her residents all across the country; religion influences how we connect with one another, our clothing, food, and politics. In other words, religion and politics are inextricably linked, and it empowers man to operate in his society by running for a political position and contributing his philosophy. Nigeria's population of roughly 140 million people is nearly evenly divided between Christians and Muslims. The fact that religion, rather than nationality, is the way most Nigerians prefer to identify themselves, though not in all situations, demonstrates the significance of this difference. Thus, religion, secularism, and politics are increasingly intermingling in both overt and covert ways. Sectarian

politics is intrinsically problematic (Tar and Shettima, 2010) ^[33]. As a result, there is a need to examine the impact of religion on politics in Nigeria since independence. Furthermore, the research will look into how religion might help our politics achieve long-term development. It finishes by advocating religious tolerance and the foundation of politics on moral principles.

Religion and politics

Religion has always been an important phenomenon in Nigeria. It had become a significant influence in political debate (Adigwe and Grau, 2015) ^[3]. Religion's effect is not restricted to politics; it has an impact on almost every aspect of life. Political power has an impact on economic development, social relationships, educational growth, and society's psyche. Nigeria is dominated by three religions: African Traditional Religion, Islam, and Christianity. All of these religions and ideologies allow for religious and political cooperation. A society's traditional religion is a systematic reflection of its socio-cultural orientation, history, and legacies on elemental forces, which leads to believe in a supreme cosmic power that created heaven and earth. All things in their social psyche belong to this authority. Thus, traditional populist politics is inextricably linked to theocratic belief. To the Yorubas, the political leader of the people, the Oba (king), is only retaining his position on trust for Olodumare (the Supreme Being). Furthermore, before an Oba is chosen or appointed, the Ifa oracle must be sufficiently consulted for spiritual approval. As a result, in traditional culture, politics and religion are inextricably linked and have a direct impact on one another. Even towards the end of the twentieth century, this is still the case (Laguda, 2018) ^[24].

Furthermore, Islam as a way of life directs and governs Muslims' entire lives, from cradle to grave. As a result, his political interests, economic considerations, social ideals, and engagement are frequently given Islamic interpretations based on the Holy Quran, prophetic practices, and other Islamic sources of law. These virtues are required to pervade any Islamic state's sociopolitical system. During his lifetime, Prophet Mohammed was both the spiritual and

political leader of his people. Following his death, the Caliphs arose and maintained the same ideas. Regardless of the nature of the society, Islam encourages Muslims to uphold its ideals by following the Holy Quran and Sunnah. We can conclude that Islam permits a spiritual link between religion and politics (Akintola, 2017)^[5].

Similarly, Abubakre (2019)^[1], writing from an Islamic standpoint, says that Islam is a way of life that governs political theory and practice in any Islamic culture. He emphasizes that Islamic principles are beneficial and are intended to guide political action; yet, the practices of such goals are typically influenced by socio-cultural institutions in society, including politics. Islam is a whole way of life for many Muslims. According to this point of view, it is incorrect to speak of religion and politics, but rather religio-politics. Islam is thought to be significant and important in politics, law, education, social life, and the economy. These are not considered secular institutions or sectors of life, but rather parts of Islam. Religion and society are so inextricably linked.

According to Laguda (2018)^[24], Christians in Nigeria would prefer not to get involved in politics, yet the truth remains that Jesus Christ did not discourage political participation for the devout. However, Laguda's reasoning is dubious because many Christians are participating in politics and have earned positions as governors, senators, and honorable. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the God of war (Josh. 6:20), economy (Ex. 16), obedience, and moral values in Judaism, which supplied the foundation for Christianity (Num. 21:4-8). In Judaic traditional philosophy, religion, and politics, Yahweh is all-encompassing. The Church witnessed an effective interplay between religion and politics during the Apostolic age. Where such engagement has a bad outcome, the Apostles have frequently used Christian teachings to solve the situation as the church's spiritual leaders. The most major connection between religion and politics in church history occurred during the Constantine and post-Constantine eras, when the emperor employed governmental machinery to promote Christianity. Thus, religion became political, and politics also hampered the church's progress throughout this time period. Because they are representatives of God, Jesus' teachings and Pauline theology urge political participation and respect for people in positions of power (Matt. 22:17-20).

As a result, since the beginning of Nigeria's three major religions, politics and religion have effectively complimented one other. Humans played the political role while the Divine played the religious role. And the efficiency of religion and politics has been dependent not only on the Divine's engagement in man's activities, but also on adhering to its ethics and ideals.

According to political scientists, man is a political animal. This means that we cannot live without both politics and religion in our daily lives. As a result, because we employ each of them in our daily lives, we tend to politicize religion and religionize politics. Thus, "politicization of religion and religionization of politics" describe Nigerian politics (Adogame, 2016)^[4]. When the two are combined, religion loses its sanctity and politics becomes filthy. This reality is reflected in the nature of Nigeria's postcolonial state system, particularly the capture and control of state power by a self-centered and divided political class that used religion and politics strategically to divide the people, consolidate and extend its control over resources and power in Nigeria's

emerging capitalist formation. For example, upon Nigeria's independence in 1960, Northern Nigeria's premier, Sir Ahmadu Bello, launched a "official" drive to "Islamize" the north and eventually disseminate Islam to other regions. This impulse instilled dread of religious extinction, particularly among Christians and practitioners of African Traditional Religions (ATRs). Politicians have been observed openly espousing religious sectarian views while canvassing for public support. Furthermore, "no one can aspire to or occupy political office in Nigeria without seeming to be religious" (Kukah, 2013)^[20, 21]. Religion invariably goes hand in hand with politics, and it will be difficult to hold public office without a religious foundation. Politicians use religious influence not only to attain their goals, but also to oppress their opponents and legitimize their faith. As a result, the two largest religious groups, Islam and Christianity, have been fighting for political control of the country (Bujra, 2016)^[8].

Many scholars have proposed various definitions of religion; nonetheless, there is no concise meaning for it because defining religion is difficult. Indeed, Idowu (2013)^[18] contends that religion is a difficult topic to address, whether we are discussing its connotation, genesis, or meaning. According to Wali (2019)^[35], religion is a people's way of life that includes both tradition and social engagement. It is man's fundamental life attitude. Man has never been free of religion, no matter what form it is, since the beginning of time. It is vital to highlight that religion has enormous functional importance and is thought to have existed as a facet of human life since time immemorial. As a result, it is clear that people place a high value on religion. It has complete control over man. It demonstrates that man, regardless of his or her beliefs, cannot exist without religion. Furthermore, religion encourages man to exert control over his environment by vying for power in order to achieve his goal (s). In a nutshell, religion gives man the ability to pursue political power and other forms of authority that allow him to exert tight control over his environment. It is inextricably linked to politics because religion grants man access to supernatural powers. According to a Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life survey conducted from May to June 2016, 76% of Christians say religion is more important to them than their identification as Africans, Nigerians, or members of an ethnic group. 91% of Muslims said religion was the most important thing in their lives. This demonstrates the strength of religion and the importance people place on it (Ruby and Shah, 2015)^[31].

Politics, on the other hand, lacks a universal definition. Politics is the activity by which individuals create, maintain, and alter the general rules by which they live. As such, it is fundamentally a social activity, intimately related to the existence of diversity and conflict on the one hand, and a willingness to cooperate and act collectively on the other. A constitution and political parties are required for politics. It is ideological. It comprises criticism (opinion); it necessitates the public and the state, both of which are comprised of individuals (Dzurgba, 2018)^[9]. It is about acquiring power and wielding that power. Onyekpe (1998)^[30] defines it as follows:

The struggle for power, which is defined as the authority to make or develop and implement decisions and policies that must be approved by society... It is a struggle for governmental power, particularly executive authority.

Politics, as previously stated, is a daily occurrence. Politics is used in our homes, offices, schools, organizations, churches, mosques, and so on. It is all about power, superiority, and authority. As a result, power plays a role in religion and politics.

Because the relationship between the sacred and the profane is symbiotic, there is no reason for religion not to affect political views and vice versa. Where such engagement is conceivable and permitted, the nature of the society and its strata has a lot to do with determining the mode of such a relationship. Although not a general condition, religion and politics can interact completely in a religiously homogeneous country, and peace and economic posterity will always be the result of such a relationship. This may lend credence to the Aristotelian school's contention that religious uniformity is a prerequisite for political stability. Divergent viewpoints regarding religious ideas and ideologies may not allow for a cordial relationship between religion and politics in a diversified and pluralistic society. This could be why political parties in diverse societies are not started on religious grounds (Esposito, 2018) ^[13].

In a pluralistic society, however, there is the possibility of constructive interaction between religion and politics. This relationship will be heavily influenced by societal factors. These include political secularization, religious belief flexibility and respect for the other (where members of other faiths are neither obsessive or particularistic), and religious independence from politics. Similarly, it is conceivable to have pluralized religious conceptions in homogeneous cultures. However, where there is agreement on the doctrines and practices of such religions, there is certain to be political unity (Alfold, 2014) ^[6]. In other words, the society will define the success of the partnership, and this will be determined by how they apply their religious tenets to all societal issues.

Religion and politics since independence

Generally, religion can influence politics in three ways: direct involvement of religious men in politics, fusing the two (religion and politics) as one, and subjecting politics or government to religious doctrine or laws, thereby carrying out politics or governance along the line of religious doctrine, ideals, or laws (Omogbe, 2013) ^[29]. All of this is evident in Nigerian politics, making religion and politics interwoven.

Religion and religious strife have always been a feature of Nigerian politics and public life. While Nigeria was still under British rule in the 1950s, Islamic law (Sharia) was introduced into the country's legal system.

Religion was a component in the late 1960s internal turmoil that eventually exploded into the Biafra war (1967–1970), which killed around 600,000 people. Despite Gowon's pronouncement of "no victor, no conquered," foreign missionaries serving in the former Biafran enclave were ejected from the country at the end of the civil war, and the government took over all mission schools in East Central State. This immediately placed the Church in opposition to the government. Furthermore, additional Federal Government initiatives plainly placed the people of old Biafra in a precarious position. These steps included the adoption of a federal character in civil service appointments, the implementation of a quota system in the entrance procedure to tertiary institutions, and the establishment of Pilgrims' Welfare Boards for Muslims. The Northern

political elites have viewed the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) as the political wing for Christians since its inception in the 1970s. However, since the mid-1980s, conflict between Christians and Muslims has been a recurring aspect of Nigerian politics. The reaction of northern political elites to this development intensified their opposition to Christians' desire for greater political involvement. They became aware of the motivation and support that Islam offers Muslim politicians and worked to create a reciprocal situation among Christian politicians (Enwerem, 2015) ^[11]. In 1986, Nigeria's then-Muslim military ruler admitted the country to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), prompting an outcry from many Christians. As a result, Nigerian Christians pressed the government to establish formal diplomatic relations with the state of Israel, which was accomplished in the early 1990s.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria underlines the civic and political obligations of all Christians in a Joint Pastoral Letter. This snippet represents the letter's overall content.

... Every responsible citizen has the noble right and serious duty to contribute to the development, maintenance, and successful functioning of a good government. The potential voter must be persuaded of the significance of his vote. By failing to vote, you are denying potential support for social justice and progress... Voting conscientiously and meaningfully is the most accessible and direct means for citizens to contribute to the election of suitable leaders and the support of useful policies. It is also in this sense that selling or cashing one's vote for short-term benefit is insulting to God and man (Schineller, 2012) ^[32].

This paper is particularly noteworthy, according to Kukah (2013) ^[20, 21], "because coming from a culture of non-political activity, Catholics in particular and Christians in general were literally preoccupied with the concept that politics was a dirty game, in which no true Christian could join."

After the successful election and orderly handover of leadership from the former Head-of-State, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar, to the then democratically elected president, Olusegun Obasanjo, religion played a vital role. Obasanjo and Olu Falae, the two presidential candidates, are not only Yorubas (from the southwest), but also Christians. It was believed that because Muslims from the north had been ruling as military Heads of State for several years, it was time for a Christian from the west to take over the mantle of leadership. Though Obasanjo's selection was more ethnic than religious, religion was regarded a crucial influence in deciding/voting for presidential candidates. Section 10 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's Constitution of 2019 states:

The federation or state government shall not establish any religion as the state religion.

Section 38(1), on the other hand, states

Every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the right to change his (sic) religion or belief and the right to manifest and propagate his (sic) religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private).

Furthermore, the Nigerian Constitution recognized the right of Nigerians to Shari'a justice in Section 275 (1): There shall be a Shari'a Court of Appeal for each state that demands it. In addition, Section 260(1) provides for the establishment of a Shari'a Court of Appeal in the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja.

Effects of religion on politics

Obasanjo's presidency in 2019 saw the revival of religious discourse, particularly on Sharia law. His presidency was expected to be a reward for the north's unwavering support during the 2019 election. Although, according to Kukah (2013) ^[20, 21], non-Muslims outside the north appeared to have heard of Sharia for the first time in 1979. During the debate on the draft constitution for the new republic, members of the National Assembly came upon the following clause:

1. There must be a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal, which shall serve as an intermediary Court of Appeal between the Sharia Courts of Appeal of the several states and the Supreme Court of Nigeria.
2. The Court shall be composed of a Grand Mufti and the number of Muftis prescribed by the National Assembly (not fewer than three).
3. In any Federation State that so wants, a Sharia Court of Appeal shall be created under the State Constitution."

With this understanding, Christians in the National Assembly came together to oppose the endorsement of Shari'a legislation. Similarly, the Muslim members stayed firm in order for it to become law. Following negotiations, a subcommittee was formed, which eventually presented a draft proposal to the members for consideration. This draft was approved and incorporated into the proposed constitution. It stated that, rather than having a separate Federal Sharia Court of Appeal that appears to be on par with the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court should include certain members who are knowledgeable about Islamic law to hear appeals from State Sharia Courts of Appeal. Despite the fact that this proposition was adopted, subsequent events revealed that religion had invaded Nigerian politics in a more forceful way than ever before. On the one hand, Muslims appear to have braced themselves to pursue the Sharia issue and implement it throughout the Federation, while Christians, on the other hand, were put on high alert and considered ways to foster solidarity among themselves in opposition to feared attempts at Islamization of Nigeria. Finally, religion became a powerful element in policymaking that could not be ignored.

Furthermore, the argument over Sharia law resulted in schism. Many Muslims read the constitutional provisions by emphasizing the section on religious freedom. Many Christians, on the other hand, have concentrated on the stipulation that no State religion be established, and believe that the implementation of Shari'a law is unlawful since it interferes with their religious freedom. With the implementation of Shari'a law, some Christian organisations have 'translated' the contemporary Muslim dispute into the arena of Christianity, calling for the implementation of (Christian) canon law in mostly Christian states (Imo, 2018) ^[19].

Furthermore, the imposition of Sharia law resulted in religious instability, murder, and the destruction of Christians, particularly in Sharia-compliant states. Christian-

Muslim animosity worsened throughout Obasanjo's presidency. Twelve states opted to apply Sharia to criminal cases shortly after he took power in 2019, causing substantial resentment from Christians. Simultaneously, numerous Christian denominations increased evangelistic and missionary activities in the middle and northern states, further escalating tensions. Atubi (2015) ^[7] makes the following observation:

The anti-Sharia march by Christians on February 21, 2000, sparked a huge battle between the two factions, culminating in massive murders on both sides, destruction of religious institutions, widespread burning, and property destruction. The scale of the killing and damage was massive, with thousands of people reportedly killed like rams. The Kaduna conflict revealed the basic issue generated by the Sharia law system's implementation. There was a sense of uneasiness among the state's Christian minority groups. Many people on both sides of the conflict advocated for Nigeria's split rather than the adoption and abandonment of the Sharia system. The Kaduna religious conflicts sparked retaliatory killings and mosque burnings in Abia and Owerri, with Igbo youth targeting northerners they claimed of killing their relatives in the north.

Over 10,000 people have perished as a result of communal-religious confrontations since May 1992. Plateau, Benue, Taraba, and Borno states had the largest number of casualties. According to some figures, over 10,000 people have been killed in sectarian clashes in the last seven years, particularly in Kaduna and Plateau States. Since 2001, incidences of Christian-Muslim conflict have been more common and bloodier. In Nigeria, violence between Muslims and Christians has cost hundreds of lives over the last decade. It erupted again in February 2016, when Muslims were offended by cartoons of the prophet Muhammad, resulting in the death of dozens of Christians in the north, followed by retaliatory killings of Muslims by Christians in the south. Over 150 people were killed, and many churches and mosques were damaged.

Furthermore, the impact of religion on politics has resulted in people voting based on their beliefs, regardless of the candidate's ability to lead the country. This was especially noticeable in the southeast. Catholic priests in Anambra State, for example, openly urged their parishioners to vote for Peter Obi (previous governor) because of his religious beliefs. "He constantly clasped his chaplet tightly in his hands to signal to the Catholic faithful that he was unquestionably one of them," he said. And they welcomed him (Okafor, 2011) ^[28]. Dr Danladi Sankara, a former Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) senator for Jigawa Northwest senatorial constituency, also condemned a supposed religious undertone in the 2011 presidential election. Sankara, who was also the Jonathan/Sambo returning agent for Jigawa State in the election, claimed that the opposition parties in Jigawa colluded to indoctrinate the populace to vote for Muslims. The defunct Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) candidate, Gen. Muhammodu Buhari (rtd), received the most votes in Jigawa State in the 2011 presidential election, receiving 665,994 votes to defeat the People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate, President Goodluck Ebelle Jonathan, who received 419,252 votes. During the announcement of the results at the INEC headquarters in Dutse, the state's presidential election Collation Officer, Prof. Jibrila D. Amin, Vice Chancellor of the Federal University of Dutse, stated that the total votes

cast were 1,214,774, with 1,140,766 valid votes. According to him, Nigeria is ruled by the constitution, not any religious text, because party politics transcends religion and tribalism (Furtune News, 2011)^[16].

Although Islam and Christianity have acquired a prominent place in Nigerian politics, this does not mean that African Traditional Religion has been relegated to the margins. Even Muslim and Christian officials visit the ATR priests individually and covertly, especially when it comes to political alliances and business negotiations. However, ATR does not play a significant role in the development of governmental policies and political initiatives.

The manipulation of religion by certain powerful persons who hide behind religion to pursue selfish objectives, as well as the greediness of some religious leaders who pamper corrupt rulers, continue to be part of religion's detrimental consequences on the polity. Greed has infiltrated the religious landscape to the point where certain religious leaders now befriend corrupt monarchs to satisfy their need for money and other material rewards. Efforts by Nigerian politicians to attain prominence and power have resulted in a situation in which politics has swept away fundamental religious principles, contaminating people's hearts with hate and enmity towards the religions of others. As a result, Falana (2010)^[14] quotes Bala Usman, who says:

The actual reason for the manipulation of religion in Nigeria today is the need to conceal from the people of Nigeria a fundamental component of our reality: the dominance of our political economy by a class of middlemen who are increasingly exposed. And this is to allow this class to hide behind religious and ethnic masks in order to further divide our people and impede their awakening at any cost, including the unity of our country for which so much has been sacrificed.

On the other side, the good impact of religion on politics has rekindled Christian reawakening in politics. Pentecostal Christians openly endorsed Obasanjo's candidacy under the banner of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2019 elections, seeing him as a symbol of the restoration of Christian power over Nigeria's government and the "end of Muslim political dominance" (Ojo, 2004)^[27]. Pentecostal leaders held an all-night prayer meeting for Obasanjo after he was elected president. This act received political support and was rewarded with the construction of a chapel in the Presidential Villa, the headquarters of national politics. Obasanjo's election victory and subsequent inauguration as president on May 29, 2019 were immersed with Christian Pentecostal symbolism. This is evidenced by a drama that was spectacularly recreated in later elections:

Many Christians saw Obasanjo's "second coming" as a spiritual metaphor, transcending the ordinary fact of his fortuitous emergence as a beneficiary of political compromise between the country's geopolitical power blocs... It was a fulfillment of God's promise to save his children (Southern Christians) from the yoke of northern (Muslim) authority. A politically expedient "second coming" was thus endowed with a spiritual aura, and Obasanjo himself was turned practically overnight into a virtual "Messiah" (Obadare, 2016:969)^[26].

After President Olusegun Obasanjo completed two four-year terms and an unsuccessful third term, political leaders began discussing about rotating the presidency between the predominantly Christian south and the predominantly Muslim north. After much infighting and the

disqualification of several potential candidates, all of the country's major political parties chose Muslims as their candidates, and Alhaji Musa Yar' Adua was elected President in a contentious election. Through occult practices, cultism, and superstitions that serve as a tool for politicians to tussle for power.

(2013) highlights some undeniable facts about our religious-in-politics quandary. "Religion has a part in the life of every nation, including Nigeria," he says. Religion, regardless of faith or denomination, has been and continues to be sacred when practiced in its purest form and spirit. It is essential for purposeful leadership, community building, social justice, law and order, peacemaking, reconciliation, forgiveness, and the healing of political, family, and personal wounds." This means that if people truly apply the beliefs, values, and attitudes inherent in religion to politics, it will produce focused and resolute political leaders in the country free of sanctimonious hypocrisy. It will also help to bring about political fairness.

Religion as a political development mechanism for sustainable development

Religion can promote long-term political development by instilling in citizens and leaders a 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, and so on (Omogbe, 2013)^[29]. If a religion fails to instill a sense of morality in its followers, it has failed in its mission and is unable to contribute to good governance and long-term political growth in a society where it has failed to enhance the moral standard of its followers.

The leaders' and followers' adherence to religious tenets will substantially enrich political activities. Each religion contains ideas, traditions, and ethics that serve as a check on human behavior excesses. As a result, religious values are feasible tools for political stability and progress. Furthermore, religion can serve as a uniting force for political development because it influences every aspect of human life and serves as the foundation for human existence.

Religion can promote inter-religious conversation, which can lead to religious tolerance in society. Inter-religious conversation is a forum in which religious leaders talk and educate people about the meaning of religion and its role in society. As a result, religious leaders must guard against hypocritical teaching that threatens peace and political stability. As a result, the exchange of ideas diminishes ignorance and religious conflicts.

Furthermore, political leaders' fulfillment of the oath of office will preserve political development. Political officeholders should let their religious beliefs guide them at all times. Adeye (2018)^[2] claims that:

Religion cultivates an ideal heart in man, allowing him to be aware of the need for a pure heart. By doing so, he will develop altruistic or patriotic thoughts before attempting to lead or represent his people in state government. In other words, religion will develop man's mentality to be a good politician who will continually look to his faith for guidance. Religion's lessons or threats are meant to guide him so that he can lead his people correctly as a politician who fears God. He will never put himself first; instead, he understands that he is the servant of the electorates (sic) -

his people. Religion, in an idealized setting, thus functions as lubricant for politics. This is to suggest that religion fosters peace and love, both of which are essential factors in bringing societies' interests together for an ideal and extremely healthy and useful politics.

As a result, religion should serve as a guiding force in all political activities undertaken by the country in order to achieve good governance and political stability. If the impact of religion on politics is favorable, it can help to promote long-term development.

Despite the fact that the harmful consequences of religion have continued to imperil the country's existence since its inception;

From the Biafra conflict to the Boko Haram issue, which has taken on a religious-political dimension. With the politicization of religion, there is a sense of religious reawakening, which is meant to have a good impact on the country's political development but has had the opposite effect. Religion, on the other hand, can help with national integration, political mobilization, ethnic identity reform, nationalism, peaceful coexistence, economic, social, and political development.

In a word, religion's impact on politics around the world is bidirectional, meaning it has both beneficial and harmful effects. It is good in the sense that, as previously stated, religion is value-driven, and it naturally robs the polity through the engagement of committed religious believers. The negative effect might be deduced from the viewpoint of sectarianism, in which religious fanatics will do anything in the name of religion to ensure that their adherents attain positions or offices. Such people believe that their principles and beliefs rule any setting in which they find themselves (New York Times, 2005)^[25].

Recommendations and conclusion

The government should empower the National Religious Advisory Board and the Nigeria Inter-religious Council to promote inter-religious dialogue and religious tolerance by organizing seminars and workshops for religious devotees, which will aid in the establishment of long-term political stability. According to Haynes (2009:68)^[17], when interfaith discourse is carefully arranged and pursued, it can motivate those who have personally been involved in conflict to work together for peace accommodation.

Furthermore, the practice of religious diversity in Nigeria should be aimed toward achieving long-term prosperity and political stability. This is critical for a developed country. Furthermore, attaining political power must be founded on the ability to perform with high moral standards. It should not be based solely on religious affiliation. Religious leaders, rather than intervening in politics, should work as watchdogs for political office holders, guiding them against undesirable actions that undermine political growth.

The government should discontinue utilizing public funds to finance pilgrims. Instead, the funds allocated to it should be used to create jobs for our teeming youth, strengthen our educational institutions, and reduce poverty in society. Thus, using religion in Nigerian politics should aim to ensure harmonious and peaceful coexistence (of Christianity and Islam) as well as political growth.

Finally, religion has been and continues to be exploited to incite violence, resulting in stunted growth for our political stability and long-term development. In any society, the interaction between religion and politics should be mutual,

and if correctly managed, it should bring about peace and growth. However, if the relationship is not well handled, it may lead to conflict. This is due to the fact that religion is about personal experience and access to supernatural powers, whereas politics is all about attaining political power for personal gain. Because these are mutually and exclusively related, a symbiotic relationship is always required. As a result, religion can bring either conflict or peace, development or destruction, growth or stagnation, stability or instability, security or insecurity. It is dependent on how it is used in conjunction with politics. The mixing of religion and politics is not a problem; however, the level of morality, patriotism toward the country, and proper understanding of religion are determining factors.

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