



## **The Role of Religion in Nigerian Politics for Sustainable Development**

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### **Abstract**

Religion and Politics seems to be two different entities but could not be totally separated from one another. Religion has been taken an important position in Politics while politics could not do away with religion. This paper seeks to explain the role of religion in Politics with emphases on the view of Islam on political matters as demonstrated by the Prophet of Islam and his successors. It discusses among other things, the relationship between religion and politics, Islamic Political theories and ideologies for polish politics, impacts of religion on sustainable political development. The concluding part of the paper centers on summary and recommendations in form of suggestions.

Keywords: Religion, politics, sustainable development

### **1. Introduction**

The relation between religion and politics continues to be an important theme in political philosophy. Religion has been a dominant factor in Nigerian politics especially in this post-independence era. In whichever way one sees religion, the fact cannot be denied of its interaction with politics in Nigeria. The obvious interplay between religion and politics has attracted the reactions of scholars and what seems the consensus of such reactions is the ambivalent role of religion in the growth, development, and survival of the Nigerian nation. Accordingly, it is not a small question to ask in which way religion involves itself in political realm, this depends on how much value Nigerians attach to their faith. This is to say that the impacts of religion on Nigerian politics could be both positive and negative.

To have a better grasp of the topic of this paper, some key words need to be clarified through their definitions. Hence, terms worthy of clarification are religion, politics and development. Religion has been defined by many scholars from different purviews. Ugwu (2002) defines religion as “faith and practices involving the relationship between mankind and what is regarded as sacred” (p. 2). In a more comprehensive manner, Merriam (1980) sees religion as:

The outward existence of God... to whom obedience, service and honor are due, the feeling or expression of human love, fear or awe of some superhuman and overruling power, whether by profession of belief, by observance of rites and ceremonies or by the conduct of life. (p. 250).

According to Iwe in Nmah (2007), religion may be defined from four basic points of views namely: subjectively, objectively, morally and institutionally. Subjectively defined, religion is man’s natural and innate consciousness of his dependence on a transcendent superhuman Being and the consequent natural and spontaneous propensity to render homage and worship to him. Objectively, religion may be defined as a complex or configuration of doctrines, laws and rituals by which man expresses his loyalty to a transcendental Being, God. On the other hand, it is defined morally as a virtue in a person, an enduring quality, a habit, which disposes him who has it to pay, steadfastly and well, the depth of honour and worship



that he owes to God. Subsequently, religion may be also defined institutionally as possessing its own definite system of beliefs, system of activities and system of values, like any other social institution.

For the present study, the definition of religion given by Obiefuna (2018) will be adhered here. Obiefuna sees religion as, “a phenomenon in human society. It is part of life [but] which shapes the traditions of society - marriage, politics, education (formal and informal), economy, law and health as social institutions” (p. 10).

According to Hornby (2000), politics has to do with “the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a society” (p. 899).

Etymologically, politics refers to the art of governing a city. Iwe in Nmah (2007) defines politics as the process of adjustment and inter-play of power and interest within the public life and affairs of a society on national and multi-national levels.

According to Dahl in Okafor (2007), politics has to do with who gets what, when and how. The very decision to support a particular religion or set of principles in a society as opposed to an individual is a political decision. Politics is essentially about good governance and primarily involves the structuring of power for achieving some articulated goals.

Development has been defined variously by scholars. Rodney (1981) sees development as many-sided process in human history, which at the level of the individual implies increased skill, discipline, responsibility and material well-being. In common parlance, development describes a process through which the potentials of a nation are enhanced until it reaches its stable position. It is a process of allowing people to meet their own aspirations. Hence, the sharpening of human abilities and the productive organization of nation’s mentality are of utmost importance for development because the agents and beneficiaries of development are the humans of a given nation. Nwana in Obi (2009) says that “development is the harnessing of available resources by a people for the realization of their major objectives, solving their major articulated problem without deliberately creating new problem situations” (p. 63).

Alao (1991) also defines development as:

A multi-objective process designed to achieve among others, the eradication of poverty and diseases, the liberation of the individual, increased productivity within a balanced ecosystem, justice and equity, individual freedom and social security, cultural buoyancy, and the stable society. (p. 3)

National development is a vital issue hence it has always engaged the attention of every citizen and government of Nigeria. Development, therefore, is a multiple process through which a nation may attain growth, change and stability in all facets of existence.

## **2. The Relationship between Religion and Politics**

The relation between religion and politics continues to be an important theme in political philosophy, despite the emergent consensus on the right to freedom of conscience and on the need for some sort of separation between church and state. One reason for the importance of this topic is that religions often make strong claims on people’s allegiance, and universal religions make these claims on all people, rather than just a particular community. For example, Islam has traditionally held that all people owe obedience to Allah’s will. Thus, it is probably inevitable that religious commitments will sometimes come into conflict with the demands of politics. But religious beliefs and practices also potentially support politics



in many ways. The extent and form of this support is as important to political philosophers as is the possibility for conflict. Moreover, there has been a growing interest in minority groups and the political rights and entitlements they are due. One result of this interest is substantial attention given to the particular concerns and needs of minority groups who are distinguished by their religion, as opposed to ethnicity, gender, or wealth. The relationship between this two include;

1. **Religion and politics have one common goal: that is to acquire political power and use it to fulfill their aims.** However, to achieve this object, their methods are different. Religion mobilizes religious sensibilities of people in order to get their support to capture power; while politics uses intrigue, diplomacy, and makes attempt to win public opinion either democratically, if the system allows it, or usurps power with the help of army, if the society is under-developed and backward.
2. **Politics and religion make attempts to undermine each other.** If religion holds political authority, its ambition is to exploit it to fulfill a divine mission. It claims that it derives authority from divinity and therefore its mission is holy, motivated to reform society under the spiritual guidance. Politics, on the contrary, bereft of any value, directs its policy on the needs and requirements of society whereupon, **it obliges to change laws and system of government accordingly.** This is a basic difference between two approaches of religion and politics:
  - Religion determines its authority on divine laws which could not be changed with human intervention;
  - While in pragmatic political approach society should move ahead, change and adjust itself with the new arising challenges of time.

In its secular approach man is responsible to determine his destiny. He is not under the control of divinity to remain submissive and inactive. On the contrary, he is supposed to initiate and plan to build a society according to his vision.

#### **There are three models in history related to religion and politics.**

- **In one** when religion and politics both unite with each other in an attempt to monopolize political power. We call it integration and sharing model.
- **In the second model**, politic, after subduing and overpowering religion, uses it for its interests. In this model religion plays subservient role to politics.
- **In the third model** both come into conflict with each other that subsequently lead their separation. In this model they appear as rivals and compete to struggle for domination.

**The study of beginning and spread of any religion shows that every religion is started in particular space and time;** therefore, main focus of its teachings is the solution of existing problems. However, with the change of time there are new challenges and a religion has to respond to them for its survival. In this process, it has to adjust its teachings according to changes. With the passage of time, a stage comes when a religion fails to respond to challenges of its time and finds hardly any space to adjust according to new environments. For example, in case of Islam, it took nearly two and a half centuries to complete its orthodoxy. Once the process was complete, it became impossible for orthodoxy to give any place to new ideas and new thinking. It was believed that any change in the structure would weaken its base. On this plea it persists to retain its old structure without any addition.

At this stage there remain three options for any religion:



1. **Avoid and disapprove any change in its structure.** If any attempt is made to reinterpret its teachings, such attempts either is crushed politically or with the help of religious injunctions (fatawa in case of Islam). Those who claim to reconstruct religious thoughts; they should be condemned as enemies of religion and believers should be warned to boycott them and not listen to their views.
2. **In the second option, religion has a choice to adapt itself** according to the needs of time and accept new interpretation relating to its teachings and accommodating modernity.
3. **In the third option, if religion fails to respond to the challenges and feels insecure,** it withdraws from the active life and decides not to entangle in worldly affairs. It confines its activities to **spirituality**

**Political aspects of Islam** are derived from the Qur'an, *hadith*, and *sunnah* (accounts of the sayings and living habits attributed to the Islamic prophet Muhammad during his lifetime), the history of Islam, and elements of political movements outside Islam. Traditional political concepts in Islam include leadership by elected or selected successors to Muhammad, known as Caliphs in Sunnī Islam and Imams in Shī'a Islam; the importance of following the Islamic law (*sharī'a*); the duty of rulers to seek consultation (*shūrā*) from their subjects; and the importance of rebuking unjust rulers.

A significant change in the Muslim world was the defeat and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire (1908–1922). In the modern era (19th–20th centuries), common Islamic political themes have been resistance to Western imperialism and enforcement of *sharī'a* law through democratic or militant struggle. Events such as the defeat of Arab armies in the Six-Day War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism as a viable alternative have increased the appeal of Islamic movements such as Islamism, Islamic fundamentalism, and Islamic democracy, especially in the context of the global sectarian divide and conflict between Sunnīs and Shī'ites along with the popular dissatisfaction with secularist ruling regimes in the Muslim world

### 3. The Role of Religion in Politics

Religion has been a potent factor for politics. Religion manifests in various aspects of life There is little consensus among the public when it comes to the level of influence religion should play in politics and government policies. People who are unaffiliated with a religion tend to see religious influence as excessive, while those who identify with particular faiths are more inclined to regard religion as having either the right amount of influence or too little.

Although some countries say religion should have little or no impact on most policy issues while few consider the religious beliefs of candidates an important factor when deciding how to vote, there are large differences by religious identification.

However, most people think religion should have a role in addressing poverty. Overall, 57 percent of people say religion should influence government policies dealing with poverty, including 65 percent of those who identify with a particular faith and 34 percent of those who are unaffiliated.

#### 3.1 Some Islamic Political theories and ideologies for polish politics

In social studies, a political ideology is a certain set of ethical ideals, principles, doctrines, myths or symbols of a social movement, institution, class or large group that explains how society should work and offers some political and cultural blueprint for a certain social order. A political ideology largely concerns itself with how to allocate power and to what ends it should be used. Some political parties follow a certain ideology very closely while others may take broad inspiration from



a group of related ideologies without specifically embracing any one of them. An ideology's popularity is partly due to the influence of moral entrepreneurs, who sometimes act in their interests. Political ideologies have two dimensions:

1. Goals: how society should be organized; and
2. Methods: the most appropriate way to achieve this goal.

Early Islam arose within the historical, social, political, economic, and religious context of Late Antiquity in the Middle East. The second half of the 6th century CE saw political disorder in the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula and communication routes were no longer secure. Religious divisions played an important role in the crisis. Judaism became the dominant religion of the Himyarite Kingdom in Yemen after about 380 CE, while Christianity took root in the Persian Gulf. There was also a yearning for a more "spiritual form of religion", and "the choice of religion increasingly became an individual rather than a collective issue." While some Arabs were reluctant to convert to a foreign faith, those Abrahamic religions provided "the principal intellectual and spiritual reference points", and Jewish and Christian loanwords from Aramaic began to replace the old pagan vocabulary of Arabic throughout the peninsula. The *Hanīf* ("renunciates"), a group of monotheists that sought to separate themselves both from the foreign Abrahamic religions and the traditional Arab polytheism were looking for a new religious worldview to replace the pre-Islamic Arabian religions, focusing on "the all-encompassing father god Allah whom they freely equated with the Jewish Yahweh and the Christian Jehovah. In their view, Mecca was originally dedicated to this monotheistic faith that they considered to be the one true religion, established by the patriarch Abraham.

According to the traditional account the Islamic prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca around the year 570 CE. His family belonged to the Arab clan of Quraysh, which was the chief tribe of Mecca and a dominant force in western Arabia. To counter the effects of anarchy, they upheld the institution of "sacred months" when all violence was forbidden and travel was safe. The polytheistic Kaaba shrine in Makkah and the surrounding area was a popular pilgrimage destination, which had significant economic consequences for the city.

The origins of Islam as a religious and political movement are to be found in the life and times of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and his successors. In 622 CE, in recognition of his claims to Prophet hood, Muhammad was invited to rule the city of Medina. At the time the local Arab tribes of Aws and Khazraj dominated the town, and were in constant conflict. Medinans considered Muhammad as an impartial outsider who could resolve the conflict. Muhammad and his followers thus moved to Medinah, where Muhammad drafted the Constitution of Medinah. The laws Muhammad established during his rule, based on the Qur'an and his own doing, are considered by Muslims to be *sharī'a* or Islamic law, which Islamic movements seek to re-establish in the present day. Muhammad gained a widespread following and an army, and his rule expanded first to the city of Makkah and then spread across the Arabian Peninsula through a combination of diplomacy and military conquests.

The real intentions of Muhammad regarding the spread of Islam, its political undertone, and his missionary activity (*da'wah*) during his lifetime are a contentious matter of debate, which has been extensively discussed both among Muslim scholars and Non-Muslim scholars within the academic field of Islamic studies.; Various authors, Islamic activists, and historians of Islam have proposed several understandings of Muhammad's intent and ambitions regarding his religio-political mission in the context of the pre-Islamic Arabian society and the founding of his own religion.



In Islam, "the Qur'ān is conceived by Muslims to be the word of God spoken to Muḥammad and then passed on to humanity in exactly the same form as it was received". While the Qur'an doesn't dwell on politics, it does make mention of concepts such as "the oppressed" (*Mustad'afeen*), "emigration" (*Muhijrauna*), the "Muslim community" (*Ummah*), and "fighting" or "struggling" in the way of God (*jihād*), that can have political implications. A number of Qur'anic verses (such as 4:98) talk about the *mustad'afeen*, which can be translated as "those deemed weak", "underdogs", or "the oppressed", how they are put upon by people such as the pharaoh, how God wishes them to be treated justly, and how they should emigrate from the land where they are oppressed (4:99). Abraham was an "emigrant unto my Lord" (29:25). War against "unbelievers" (*kuffār*) is commanded and divine aid promised, although some verses state this may be when unbelievers start the war and treaties may end the war. The Quran also devotes some verses to the proper division of spoils captured in war among the victors. War against internal enemies or "hypocrites" (*munāfikūn*) is also commanded. Some commands did not extend past the life of Muhammad, such as ones to refer quarrels to Allah and Muhammad or not to shout at or raise your voice when talking to Muhammad. Limiting its political teaching is the fact that the Quran does mention "any formal and continuing structure of authority", only orders to obey Muhammad, and that its themes were of limited use when the success of Islam meant governance of "a vast territory populated mainly peasants, and dominated by cities and states" alien to nomadic life in the desert.

The Prophet of Islam [pbuh] set up an ideal Islamic state with a commonwealth. The Holy Prophet was the Head of the state and sovereignty belonged to Allah. Besides Executive and judiciary powers, he was also vested with military powers. He was the law giver, chief justice and supreme military commander. A mosque was established at Madinah which was a place of prayer. Besides, social, political and economic activities were also organized from there. There was consultancy in matters of the State with his companions. His administration was Islamic oriented rather.

### **3.2 Religious Administration.**

Muhammad [pbuh] was first a prophet and then an administrator. His administration was based on Islamic principles. The main purpose of his administration was to promote Islamic values. The prophet's Mosque was the Centre of all activities, religious or otherwise. Other mosques were to serve as centers of local activities. He sent missionaries to teach Islam to people of different tribes. Quran readers were trained and sent to different parts of the country to promote its study. The Holy prophet organized the Hajj as an institution of international importance. He himself led the Hajj before his demise.

### **3.3 Revenue Administration**

In the days of the Holy prophet the revenue of the State consisted of *Alghanimah*, [booty] *Aljizya* [poll tax] *Zakat*, *Sadaqah*, *Alkharaj* [land tax collected from the non-Muslims] and *Alfay* was the revenue derived from State lands. 4/5 of the booty captured during the war were distributed among the soldiers and 1/5 went to public funds.

### **3.4 Military administration**

At the outset the Muslims fought aggression from the Quraysh and the hostile tribes. In the beginning there was no regular or organized army. During the Battle of Badr, the Muslim force, comprised of 313 volunteers. But when Islam spread the number of Muslims increased significantly. Ten thousand Muslims were present during the conquest of Makkah and that number increased by three-fold during the expedition of Tabuk. The soldiers were under the direct command of the Holy prophet. The five-winged formations were adopted, front guard, rear guard, the center, the right and the left.



### **3.5 As a statesman**

A State was founded and a code of life was implemented based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Unlike the church system, Islam enjoined man with God. Provinces were created, with governors who were accountable for their act of omission and commission to the Holy prophet. Social equality of men was promoted. The poor were assisted by the rich. Congregation was to meet in the mosque. Islamic values got an impetus, namaz and other elements of faith were promoted. An economic system was established which functioned with fairness, Booty was distributed accordingly; the haves not were relieved from the burden of poverty by receiving zakat and *Sadqah*. A public fund was also established in order to control the State revenue appropriately.

In Madinah the Holy prophet drafted a charter in which the rights and duties of the citizen was found. It was the first written constitution in history. It stipulated that:

- All blood feuds [long war among family tribes] were to be abolished
- A murderer was subject to blood vengeance. He was not to be protected
- All people of Madinah whether Muslims or non - Muslims were to form one community.
- The Jews and other communities were to enjoy equal rights.
- The Jews had to support the Muslims against aggression of Madinah.
- All communities were to live in peace and harmony.
- All disputes were to be referred to the Holy prophet and his decision was to be final.

## **4. Impacts of Religion on politics**

The influence of religion on Nigerian politics has both positive and negative implications. The implications can be considered as follows.

### **4.1 Positive Impact**

The positive influence of religion on politics enhances national development. In this sense one expects religious ethical values to manifest at every point of influence. This means that religious people have a duty to abide by the ethical teachings, inherent in their religions and such, will provide good leadership and obedient followership. Religion provides mankind with moral values by which to live. According to Nnadi (2004), "... religion is often used to subvert political needs and aspirations of the ruling class.... Religion if positively used promote the political life of any society" (p. 113). Every religion, whether Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religion, etc., has moral values which regulate and harmonize human life. In Exodus 20 of the Christian Bible, there is an outline of the Ten Commandments which guide the behaviors of Christians in the society. In the same way, Islam and African Traditional Religion (A.T.R.) have rules, which their adherents must obey.

No religion condones immorality. Highlighting the function of religion as a provider of moral values, Mbiti in Nmah (2004) says, "It is religion which tells what is right, and what is wrong... religion enriches people's morale for the welfare of the individual and society at large" (p. 177). Adherence to religious ethical values is imperative for all religious practitioners. Interestingly, Nigerians are one of the most religious people in the world. Therefore, as posted by Omoregbe (1998) there is a need to live a moral life because it is commanded by God. Failure to do this will be counterproductive in the matter of national development.

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



Religion breeds an ideal heart in man to be conscious of the need to have a clean heart. By this, he will grow to have a philanthropic or patriotic thought before venturing to lead or represent his people in government of the state. In another words, religion will prepare the mind of man to be a good politician who will constantly fall back upon his religion to guide him. The teaching or threats of religion are expected to guide him to be able to lead his people aright as a politician with fear of God in him. He will never consider himself first, rather he knows that he is the servant of the electorates. (p. 165)

Without mincing words, a hitch free election will produce legitimate leaders who will govern with the fear of God; and obedient followers. Achieving this will solve problems, such as political instability, violence and insecurity, maladministration, retardedness of growth and development, and international stigmatization and apathy politics, which apparently are by products of electoral malpractices. Johnstone (2001) corroborates this view that:

What one believes, with respect to that which is good, true, and desirable as well as what God intends for people and society, could be expected to influence the choice one makes in the political arena. That is, religion should affect people's voting pattern. (p. 103)

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

#### **4.2 Negative Impact**

The influence of religion on politics has, at various times, threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria. For example, the discrimination acts of some extremist against the use of Hijab in public places such Schools, Hospitals and Offices and all sort of assaults and blaspheming of Religious Leader with the support of some Political office holders. Misinterpretation of what *Shar'iah* stand for by non-Muslim. This wouldn't have arisen if the secular/pluralistic nature of the country had been respected. Religious crises have further worsened interethnic animosity. The Kaduna and Jos ethno-religious crises displaced many people who had settled in the northern part of the country for many years as it became necessary for them to relocate. That some parts of Nigeria are not safe for all citizens is divisive and this cannot guarantee sustainable development.

No society can grow in the atmosphere of religious violence which, more often than not, has political undertone. It should be mentioned that the 2008 and 2010 Jos crises started as a political war and it later took ethno-religious dimension in which several lives were lost. The cancellation of the Miss World Pageant, that was to be hosted by Nigeria, could have been averted in a country where the constitution is adhered to in a religious matter. All these have economic implications on individuals, states, and the country, as a whole. Many people in the south do not see reason why taxes collected on businesses, prohibited by the Sharia law, should be used to develop states that operate it.

Still, on the economy, one may not be wrong to conclude that public money expended on religious matters, such as pilgrimage activities, places of worship in government houses, and other public places,





could have helped the ailing economy. What about several public holidays declared yearly for religious festivals? People are definitely paid for the work that is not done. More often than not, public money is donated by political leaders to religious organizations as a subtle way of silencing those who may be critical of the activities of the government of the day. This is why Familusi (2010) says, “Any government that is more concerned about sponsoring people to Mecca or Jerusalem at the expense of pressing matter that can enhance development, is an insincere government” (p. 166).

The level of commitment of those who use religion for their selfish interest cannot be determined. Sacrificing merit on the altar of religion cannot be beneficial. Both Christian and Moslem politicians have failed in Nigerian politics since they cannot blend politics with religious values. Unfortunately, religion is often used to cause confusion or woo or pacify the electorate in Nigerian politics. It is funny that these people would likely lose the elections as Chris Okotie had done in the past. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo also played religious politics when he was the civilian President to the detriment of the masses. According to Ugwueye (2009):

During Obasanjo’s democratic administration, the link between religion and politics was very glaring from the vast use made of the Christian religion by the ruled and the ruler alike. Unfortunately, it was done, for the most part, for selfish interest, not for real religious reasons. (p. 253).

The current move by some religious institutions towards 2023 general elections is posting a wrong signal to well-meaning Nigerians. For instance, some religious leaders have resulted in making collection of voters card a core requirement for gaining entrance into place of worship. Some are publicly preaching to their members to vote in members of their faiths into political offices irrespective of his/her competency, moral uprightness and accountability

True democracy is dependent upon free, fair and credible election, a situation whereby the electorates are free to elect their leaders. The elected leaders will in turn sustain the rule of law, which is the benchmark of any true democracy in a civilized society. Many of them are simply after what they stand to gain. Moreover, where people vote on religious sentiment, mediocre leaders are most likely to emerge and, when this happens, growth and development will be retarded.

The negative impact of religion in Nigerian politics is increasingly manifested in the nation. Every political process in Nigeria has religious undertone. The civil service, appointment to important positions in the government, and the entire body politic of the nation are seriously influenced by religious prejudice. Many Nigerians are now refusing posting or transfer to some parts of the country because of the manner religion is being handled in Nigeria. This ugly situation continues hampering national development in the country

## **5. Recommendations**

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

There is need for religious liberty though this is recognized by the constitution which describes the nation as a secular state. Every religious group should help to encourage religious freedom whereby



everybody will be free to seek the truth without any coercion or inhibition. This freedom of religion was realized very early by the United Nations and was consequently enshrined in the fundamental human rights charter. Absolute religious liberty in Nigeria is therefore, a challenge to all the religions being practiced in Nigeria. Religious leaders of the three major religions in Nigeria must seek ways and means to forge forums for mutual understanding, collaboration and dialogue independent of government interference and political manipulation.

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

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

## **6. Conclusion**

This article has established that there are religious influences on politics in post-independence Nigeria. These religious influences have both positive and negative implications for the development of Nigerian nation. Without mincing words, the role religion could play in Nigerian politics is limited by the individual's orientation and the nature of the society. In spite of these limitations, religion continues to influence political decisions of successive governments of this country. This suggests that religion and politics could relate effectively in Nigeria, but the benefits suggest that religion and politics could relate effectively in Nigeria, but the benefits that could be derived from such relationship depend solely on the sincerity of those who are engaged in the practice of these phenomena. However, in Nigeria, this interaction has often generated negative impacts, but politicians and adherents of religious faiths need to recognize the right of individuals to freedom of religion. It is on this ground that the foregoing recommendations were made. If all these are observed, religion will cease to be an agent of disunity and backwardness. Thus, national development will no longer be a wishful thinking and Nigeria will have an enduring democracy.

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