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Abstract

Religion is frequently a factor in international conflict. It is rarely the principal cause of conflict, even when the opposing groups are differentiated by religious identities. Religion can be invaluable in promoting understanding and reconciliation, and it can provide a basis for peacebuilding efforts with its effects on political and economic strands of the nation. Religion plays an increasingly powerful role in shaping local and international politics, economy, as well as public opinion. It is often too sensitive and conjures too many strong feelings. Many may argue that it's best to leave religion alone and stick with safer topics. But case studies abound that demonstrate that sensitive subjects such as religion are important to tackle in seeking to prevent, manage, or resolve conflict that brings about national development politically and economically for the benefit of all. This paper aims at establishing the intrinsic role and connection between religion and a sustainable political and economic development as well as how it could serve as a tool for ensuring peace and security in a multi-ethnic Nigeria. It argues that religion has transforming power if sincere commitment to its tenets exists. It also argues that under normal circumstances, religion plays a unique role in socio-economic transformation of society. It also examines the function and role of religion at facilitating sustainable politico-economic development spelling out the significance of repositioning religion in Nigeria. The paper postulates that there is the need for a model that will ensure the economic and political transformation of the Nigerian people especially now that recession is extant.

Keywords: Religion, Religious tenets/attitudes, Peace, Security, Politics, Sustainable Economic Development.

Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous African country predominantly inhabited by Christians and Muslims. It is the most culturally and ethnically diverse African nation. Nigerian faith traditions are buoyant at home and abroad, yet these traditions are also at a crossroads (Olupona: online). There is a scientific representation of neither the numerical strength of these religious groups nor their geographical distribution. (Most claims about Nigeria's Christian-Muslim population distribution are anecdotal and based purely on assumptions, since 'religious distribution' is not an index in Nigeria's National Population Commission's head counts. Some Western-based population resource services like Index Mundi.com, CIA World Fact Sheet, Population Resource Centre etc - which are commonly relied upon - put Nigeria's population ratio at 50% Muslims, 40% Christians, and 10% indigenous believers.

These approximations are not based on Nigeria's official estimates and therefore lack statistical integrity. The Islamic faith preponderates in the Northwestern and Northeastern parts of the country. On the other hand, Christianity is more prominent in the Southeastern and South-south geographical zones with Edo State arguably comprising an equal distribution of Muslims and Christians. The Southwest and North-central zones have reasonably balanced numbers of Muslims and Christians. The South-east, which is entirely composed of Christians and followers of Traditional Religion (TR). Although often marginalized, TR has a fair amount of followers and, therefore has a significant degree of influence in the determination of state-religion relations. In spite of the apparent dominance of Islam and Christianity in public relations, the syncretic nature of religion among Nigerian tribes has paradoxically made TR a sort of melting pot, as those who profess both Islamic and Christian faiths frequently patronize traditional religious priests for spiritual rituals (Elebuibon: 2015).

Contemporary state-religion relations in Nigeria are characterized by ill-defined boundaries. Whereas the Nigerian Constitution has declared freedom of religion and apparently seeks to separate state affairs from the doctrinal leanings of religion, the same constitution creates and recognizes executive and judicial institutions with religious biases. Thus the existence of multiple judicial systems based on secular, religious, and traditional jurisprudence, as well as multiple educational systems based on secular and religious principles; only serve the purpose of obfuscating the real character of the Nigerian state, whether secular or religious.

The consequence of this dysfunctional configuration of state-religion relations is the persistence of religiously induced conflicts in the country since the early 1980s. The persistent struggle by Islamists in Northern Nigeria to establish sharia law and governance has been a consistent source of conflict; hence radical and violent groups often take advantage of the predominant deference to sharia law and governance among northern Muslims to orchestrate their clandestine motives. This scenario necessitates an enquiry into the real nature and character of the Nigerian state in terms of its relationship with religion. In this regard, this paper argues that the contradictions propagated by the colonial administration in the northern and southern regions before their eventual amalgamation in 1914 are deeply implicated in the post-colonial character of state-religion relations.

Reports from most of the National Dailies in Nigeria showcase that the nation is going through some economic regression. A cursory look at the Nigerian economy critically, revealed further that the Nigerian economy was being looted by Nigerians who have access to the corridors of power. Efforts of the present government led by President Muhammadu Buhari at recovering the loots from the past leadership of the nation show the extent to which the economy of the country had been badly battered and jeopardized by the elected officers of the federation.

This paper argues that there are reasons to believe Nigerian political economy is being strangled and looted by those who have access to it. The traditionalists and others may have an excuse for looting the economy. But Christians do not have any reason for doing the same. Nowhere in the scriptures of the Christians has it been found any biblical justification for looting the economy of the nation. Something must be fundamentally wrong with Nigerian Christian worldview, if he/she engages in looting.

From all indications the Christianity received at the beginning was a *thin* faith that placed a premium on personal faith and saw religious life as a *thin* faith and those disconnected from public life. It was founded on the Greek dualistic worldview that divided the world between secular and sacred (matter versus spirit). Christianity which was seen as the sacred sphere was logically contrasted with the secular sphere which was a sphere where God supposedly has no business with. This dualistic tendency or assumption has led to what Michael Walzer calls *thin* rather than *thick* morality and ethics (Michael, x-xi). In this thin ethical and moral vision, the Christians in Nigeria cannot grasp God's kingdom (political) ethos and perspective of life. God's Kingdom here refers to God's reign over all spheres of life, including all aspects of the secular life or sphere. This paper therefore calls for a repositioning of our religious (otherwise rendered as Christian) worldview so that Christians in Nigeria will grasp what it means to say "Jesus is Lord over all of life".

Conceptual Definition Religion

The term "religion" is a bit difficult to define in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world. This is so in that no single definition of the phenomenon had been agreed upon by Scholars as well as Theologians. The term religion was one of the items eliminated in the list of data usually required in most censuses in this country in the 2006 census organized in the nation. Perhaps, this was based on the assumption that religion has contributed to the several religious crises experienced and still being experienced, particularly in Northern Nigeria and some other parts of the country.

In the Western world, like in Nigeria, the meaning of religion has long been in contention. The term "religion" in this paper refers specifically to the two monotheistic religions – Christianity and Islam and their interactions with the dimension politico-economic development and the Nigerian social realities. Religion as Clendenen rightly defines it is "that aspect of human culture constituting the response of individuals or groups to the prevailing concepts of the supernatural. This includes what people believe about the supernatural and how their beliefs directly affect their actions (and practice) (Clendenen in Dockery: 275).

In contrast, monotheistic religion provides both political and economic certainty. In worship, economic and political realities are cast in new light. In monotheistic religion God is seen as the God of political, social and economic justice and as One who protects the oppressed from their political and economic injustice. Thus religious, economic and political perceptions are intrinsically and intriguingly connected.

The thrust of this paper is that the religiosity of a people can immensely contribute to the political and economic development of their society, particularly, when religion is repositioned and allowed to play its positive role of guaranteeing peace, love, justice, hard work, honesty, trust, confidence, hope, courage, security among other virtues in the society. These powerful and positive ingredients of a religion are lacking in the Nigeria State, resulting in a lower level of economic development and ethnic, political and religious violence.

Religious Tenets/Attitudes

Religion is not mainly about beliefs. It is a way of being, with attitudes that shape what we see. These can include appreciation and compassion and, in the words of William James, a sense that "great and wondrous things are in the air". To be and to see oneself as religious can be less drab than a view that just focuses on the facts. Many things in the world are clearly less than beautiful or ideal. With religious attitude, we can work toward improvements in ourselves and in our world, and also try to accept and appreciate things as they are. Attitudes that religious naturalists may consider or embrace include: Appreciation/gratitude; Reverence/respect; Mindfulness; Humility; Compassion and Acceptance. The religious attitude is quite different from faith associated with a specific creed. The latter, as a codified and dogmatized form of an original religious experience, simply gives expression to a particular collective belief. True religion involves a subjective relationship to certain metaphysical, extramundane factors.

Peace

Peace in a lay man's definition is seen as freedom from war, or the time when a war or conflict ends; a calm and quiet state, free from disturbances or noise. It is also a state of mental calm and serenity with no anxiety; a situation where conflict or disagreement among people or groups of people ceases and a peace treaty agreeing to end a war or hostility between warring parties is entered into.

Security

Security is the degree of resistance to, or protection from, harm. It applies to any vulnerable and valuable asset, such as a person, dwelling, community, item, nation, or organization. It provides "a form of protection where a separation is created between the assets and the threat". These separations are generically called "controls," and sometimes include changes to the asset or the threat (ISECOM, 2014). Security is said to have two dialogues: Negative dialogue is about danger, risk, threat etc. Positive dialogue is about opportunities, interests, profits etc. Negative dialogue needs military equipment, armies, or police as in the case of combating with the dreaded Boko Haram and the Herdsmen menace in Nigeria. Positive dialogue needs social capital, education, or social interaction in order to ensure a meaningful development in a nation such as Nigeria. Security could also be seen as the state or feeling of being safe and protected, the assurance that something of value will not be taken away from one or the society.

Politics

Politics is the process of making decisions applying to all members of each group. It more narrowly refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance - organized control over a human community, particularly a state. Politics also is the study or practice of the distribution of power and resources within a given community as well as the interrelationship(s) between communities. A variety of methods are deployed in politics, and these include promoting or forcing one's own political views among people, negotiation with other political subjects, making laws, and exercising force, including warfare against adversaries (Edward: 73-96).

Sustainable Economic Development

Sustainable economic development is an economic development that attempts to satisfy the needs of humans but in a manner that sustains natural resources and the environment for future generations. An economy normally functions in the ecosystem and it is an obvious fact that the economy cannot be separated from the ecosystem of any nation/society. In fact, an economy cannot exist without it. The ecosystem provides the factors of production that fuels economic growth and development such as land, natural resources, labour, and capital (which is created by labour and natural resources). Sustainable economic development is managing these resources in such a manner that they will not be depleted and will remain available for future generations.

Religion from Scholars' viewpoints and approach

Many scholarly works have been carried out on several areas ranging from: i. Economic studies of religious beliefs, behaviour, and institutions. An approach which focuses on explanations for conversion and commitment that emphasize choice and rationality over irrationality and indoctrination; ii. Religiously-oriented critiques of economic theory and practice. An approach that focuses on "Christian Economics," "Biblical Economics," and "Islamic Economics"; iii. Theoretical and observed differences between different forms of religion. In this approach, the concern is "religion" versus "magic," and monotheism versus polytheism. It is further interested in why Christianity displaced Greco-Roman paganism, and why polytheism is less morally constraining than monotheism; iv. The study of religious "markets"; v. Study of how religious commitment and religious groups influence the well-being of individuals, families, youth, communities, and nations vi. Studies of religious trends: the personal and social determinants of religiosity, and the relationship between religious and politico-socio-economic attitudes; and, vii. Policy implications regarding the state regulation of religion, religious liberty, church-state relationships, the treatment of minority and deviant faiths, among others.

The approach of this paper is quite different in that it aims basically at examining how religious variables in Nigeria have negatively contributed to the economic stagnation and non-performance of the nation state (politics) and how religion could be repositioned (positively) for a sustainable political and economic development. Nigeria no doubt is a country that is better blessed with diverse religious affiliations. Undoubtedly, three religions have taken root in the shores of the country namely: African Traditional Religions (otherwise rendered as African Religion), Christianity and Islam. This makes the country's religious situation comparable to India where Hinduism, Islam, and the Sikh faith have taken deep root. Unlike Nigeria, however, in India these three religions have played a significant role in advancing economic, social, and moral developments (Vale:2008). The worth of a state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it. Whereas the worth of the individual depends on his or her relationship to God, and this involves worship. If individual godliness declines, the morality of the nation declines (Warren: 1996).

Christianity in Nigeria is bedeviled with many problems; but the real problem could be pinned down to the fact that most Nigerian Christians are firmly holding the form of their religion, yet their public practices, actions and behaviors are complete denial of the transforming power of religion which can bring about holistic human flourishing in society.

Religious extremism has not allowed Nigerian Christians to connect their religious activities with certain crucial aspects of their social life, particularly the politico-economic life. The Nigerian elites take advantage of the society's religious extremism for their political, economic and social achievements. It is an alarming reality that in Nigeria the elite have for quite some time repositioned religion for their political advantage and to the detriment of the socio-economic benefits of the masses. They have recreated God in their own images rather than the former in the latter's image as it ought to be. They have continued to amass wealth which they use to hold the masses at bay. Consequently, poverty and unemployment are the lot of our youth. Hence they become easy prey to the political class who uses them as political magnets or weapons of mass destruction before, during and probably after elections.

Alexander observes that:

Christian ethics is the application of Christian values to the decision-making process... The foundation of Christian ethics in business is not rules but the changeless character of God... Christianity operates on the notion that ethics (the study of human character) logically follows theology (the study of God's character). Behavior consistent with God's character is ethical (Alexander: 13 - 14).

Alexander identifies three changeless characteristics of God that have direct bearing on ethical decision-making which are repeatedly emphasized in the Bible: God is holy, God is love, and God is just. He argues further that Christian ethics requires all three characteristics to be taken into account when decisions are made. Holiness, when (disconnected) from justice and love, drifts into hypocritical legalism. Likewise, justice that loses its anchor in holiness and love produces harsh outcomes. And finally, love when it is orphaned lacks an adequate moral compass (Alexander: 15). With this understanding let us now reexamine the role and function of religion in economic development in Nigeria.

Role of Religion in Sustainable Economic Development in Nigeria

The role of religion for the sustainable development of Nigeria has been both positive and negative. Positively, it stands as a reliable institution providing stepping stones to sustainable development. On the negative side, in spite of their laudable involvement in promoting progress and sustainable development, religions in Nigeria have in some ways been inhibiting sustainable development politically and economically. Christianity and Islam are often antagonists, leading to ethnic and religious conflicts resulting in loss of lives and properties. If we take religion as it is today, then it is apt to observe that it has done more harm than good to the political, social and economic development of the world.

Religion or spirituality is the science and art that teaches man how to get united with the cosmos or with God. It connotes the same meaning as the word yoga. Man is not separated from the cosmos, but due to ignorance and the limitations of his mind, he identifies himself with merely his physical body. This creates the notion of fragmented consciousness or separation from the whole, hence the feeling of "I, mine and thine". How can religion in light of the above help economic development and political progress? Religion is inexistent today in the world. This statement is surprising when examined alongside the religious

proclamations world over. Should religion really exist, then the world would be a much better place (a paradise). What we have nowadays is the distorted version or relics of religion.

Religion has to do with the heart and mind of people, with their health. Living in harmony with the laws of nature is to be religious. Oneness with life is the first true sign of being religious. The outcome of that sublime state of consciousness is inner peace, love, bliss, eternal life and the spontaneous overflow of virtues. But what we find today are confusion, conflict, pandemonium, violence, greed, lust, selfishness, hatred, jealousy, fanaticism, exploitation, poverty, rape, kidnapping, banditry and such like vices inspite that we have countless churches, temples, mosques, synagogues and other places of worship both in the country Nigeria and world over.

Religion has been reduced to a set of beliefs, dos and don'ts, rites and rituals, commandments and books that people blindly follow. A person who is ignorant about himself cannot become a virtuous, loving, peaceful, creative and responsible citizen. And where these virtues are absent, there cannot be economic and political progress which comes only when people are selfless, creative, dynamic and intelligent. To produce more and of a better quality, to be creative and satisfied, one needs to be at peace with himself and others. Workers should be well-paid, well-treated and have a convenient work environment.

It has been said that united we stand, divided we fall. No one is ready to unite these days as evident everywhere as things are falling apart. We no longer live as one family rather as very much divided individuals. Economic development takes place when there is trust, peace, harmony, love, political stability, mutual respect and professionalism. All these are born out of intelligence. Corruption, absence of meritocracy, redtapism, selfishness, laziness and absence of creativity are the main causes of economic impediment. These can be eliminated by a transformed mind and a heart full of love, purity and compassion. Religion or spirituality is the only means to produce such an individual.

It has also been said that nature has enough for every man's need, not for everyone's greed. Today people have become so greedy that they have plundered and destroyed much of our natural resources. Consequently, many countries are suffering from lack of food, energy and natural resources, thus leading to poverty. Greed can only be eliminated by religious or spiritual practices.

A trustful and sane atmosphere can enhance the producing capacity of an individual. A really religious person is religious everywhere. For him alone, duty becomes God and work is worship. However, any employer or the government should not expect employees to have such virtues solely for the purpose of producing more, without themselves possessing truly religious attitudes. That should be a corporate affair.

Religious manipulation has become the order of the day in Nigeria. This is because certain persons in society feed on the back of victims of religious violence. As such, they hijack and manipulate religion in Nigeria to their own advantage and to the detriment of the poor whose only hope is their religion (the opium of the oppressed/masses). All religions with no exception are manipulated in Nigeria as evident in Boer's (1994: 6) opinion that: "No religion

is immune to manipulation - and neither are religious leaders, whether they be Christians or Muslims". Boer observes further that this class of people operating under a hidden political agenda expect religion to "produce a people with high personal morality, a great sense of duty and obedience, but certainly not inclined to radical social thinking, let alone action" (Boer: 3). A religion that is used as a tool for political manipulation creates structures of social, economic, and political injustice. It also perpetuates poverty, resulting in long-lasting frustration, hopelessness and wanton destruction of lives and properties in society; the case being for long experienced in Nigeria in the wake of the Boko Haram and Herdsmen insurgencies.

The Importance of Repositioning Religion in Nigeria

Discussion above so far has shown that something is fundamentally incorrect with our perception of the religion, especially Christian religion, in Nigeria. There is a disconnection between religion and work ethics. Religious experiences do not translate to real life. This is why religious praxis does not trickle down to other spheres of life. We therefore need to re-orientate Christians toward a thicker economic ethics. This thick ethic teaches us that we cannot separate religion from economic development because religion drives people's behaviour and actions in more productive direction. Furthermore, our politicians have used religion to exclude the masses from meaningfully participating in nation building. If religion is repositioned, it will be able to engender the realization of a model, inclusive community, which is controlled by the concept of the *Imago Dei* (image of God) - a concept that impresses on all the fact that all mankind are created equal and in the image and likeness of God. Nobody should be denied full participation in the economic life and development of Nigerian nation.

One of religion's most important contributions to the economic development process was its value as a moral enforcement mechanism. In Nigeria there is widespread belief in God. Yet the impact of corruption at all levels of human endeavours is alarming. Hence the point is that it is only when religion is repositioned that it enables full and robust participation in political and economic development that will be more sustaining for the benefit of all.

Khan and Bashar's delineation fits the discourse on repositioning religion. In their analysis of the findings of Collier (1998), particularly his characterization of religion as a social capital, Khan and Bashar distilled certain features of a repositioned religion as follows:

- Religion is categorized as civil social capital, which contributes to the building of networks among population;
- Religion also affects productivity through certain personal traits, such as work ethics, thrift, honesty, and openness to people. These traits, in turn, may make people more or less economically productive. For most religions, hard work is a norm. Work is a duty to God and one should put diligent effort in his work. To the believers, work not only helps them to stay away from a sensual, immoral life but also is the best means for glorifying God.
- Religion can enhance economic growth and development by promoting a positive attitude toward honesty.
- Religious rituals also play a significant role in economic activities. They promote group trust and cooperation that help overcome collective-action problems.

- Religion exerts positive impact on human capital by enhancing educational level. Individuals are encouraged to be literate so as to be able to read scriptures and religious teachings. Believers are expected to read, listen and reflect on the word that epitomizes knowledge and wisdom (Khan & Bashar: 5).

Yet these positive ingredients of religious life of a people have not been part of our experience in Nigeria. The reason is not farfetched. First, the complexity of Nigeria's society is making it difficult to do justice to an analysis of its situation. The saga of youth unemployment which has resulted in many youths taking to commercial motorcycling, which spells doom for the future of Nigeria is seriously in need of attention. The global economic recession, financial crisis and economic meltdown (especially during the Covid-19 pandemic which had turned the economy of the world to almost nothingness) have heightened the fear of high rate of youth unemployment and the resultant increase rate of crimes in Nigeria ranging from looting of properties, raping, kidnapping to banditry.

Our graduate youth continue to be jobs seekers instead of jobs creators due to a defective educational structure which does not offer them the entrepreneurship skills needed to enable them create jobs for themselves and for others. Nigeria inherited an educational structure that was aimed at keeping us under colonial domination. This was geared toward maintaining the status quo. So it adopted the banking method of education (where the teacher deposits knowledge to a blank slate, the student) instead of the dialog method, (where the teacher sees himself or herself as a facilitator of learning), which makes learning a collaborative experience between teacher and students and thus is able to pull out the student's potentials in a more meaningful and positive way.

In Nigeria, religion is the hope of the people. Nigerians and Africans are very religious. Ironically, we tend to leave religion in the periphery in our discussion of crucial matters. We do not always make a deliberate attempt to include religious perspectives in our discussion of desperate life-affecting matters, such as the issue of socio-economic or socio-political transformation agenda of our people. This negligence emerges from the assumption that religion is a private matter and must therefore be confined to the home, the church or the mosque and not government parlance.

Therefore this paper is advocating the need for our Pastors and Priests to collapse the dualism that now exists in our conception of Christianity into one single entity. This will necessitate the emphasis on God's kingdom perspective and ethics. We need an economic vision that is inclusive not exclusive.

In the past two or more decades we have witnessed not only the polarization of religion but the distortion of religion. Since then religion has often been used as an instrument of divide and rule, resulting in religion becoming a weapon of massive social and economic destructions. This shows that something is fundamentally wrong with the nation. This is the most populous and the most religious black nation in the world. Yet she has generally been described as an economically dysfunctional state.

This paper contends that the wrong use of religion by the elite has contributed to Nigeria's political and economic woes. Consequently, Lewis states how, "Nigeria today, more than ever, faces developmental challenges in the economic, political, and social dimensions... He observes that economic stagnation often arises from a generalized crisis of governance (politics) and poor economic performance contributes to the infirmities of the state. This picture of our nation can change if religion is repositioned."

The hope for peace, security and sustainable development of the Nigerian political and economy must not ignore the vital role of religion as one of the cardinal dimensions of the Nigerian social landscape. The case for this paper is an enabled moral agency in our quest for politico-economic transformation. A disabled moral agency will only lead to economic oppression, political manipulation, resulting in the destruction of human flourishing.

An authentic understanding of religion is desperately needed in Nigeria. It must be categorically pointed out that an unadulterated religious perspective encourages the creation of an inclusive community where people are encouraged to trust and depend on each other. Such a stance will result in respecting the God-given human dignity and human rights of each other. It will undoubtedly enable each person to meaningfully exercise their social responsibility and obligation to each other. In sum, a true and pure religion fosters a community where there is recognition that God has given us the mandate and the responsibility of making the world habitable for all of life.

Summary and Recommendation

Religion is the most important of all the many ways in which Nigerian citizens "get involved" in the life of their community and society. Therefore, our religious life must equally impact our social, cultural, political and economic life. Religion can really promote peace, security and sustainable political and economic development through the following:

- i. We must let religion play its powerful influence not only on individual character and action but also on our communal life as a people. One of those powerful influences is that money isn't everything. One issue in this life is to make sure that whatever we do must have the interest of others at heart.
- ii. We must be willing to recognize the fact that religion is the foundation for a just politico-economic transformation. Religion provides the needed ingredients for sustainable business ventures in the world: love, justice and peace. Pure monotheistic religion helps persons in their pursuit of profit to abstain from unscrupulous activities that are in many cases detrimental to human flourishing. Religion encourages justice, love and peace in all human relationships.
- iii. Through worshipping God, religion ushers the worshipers into a way of life that encompasses economic perspectives. We must be willing to relate biblical faith and practice to the whole of our contemporary life - cultural, social, political, and economic - not just to personal and family morality (Bellah: 237).
- iv. Religion helps us to realize that hoarded wealth breeds frustration because the victims always feel humiliated. This humiliation is the key to all kinds of violence. "It is when people or nations are humiliated that they really lash out and engage in extreme violence" (Friedman: 400).

- v. True and pure religion promotes peace which is an important ingredient in economic and political matters.
- vi. We must realize that repositioning religion for the sustainable political and economic development of Nigeria is the responsibility of all and sundry. "Expanding the achievement of world peace" (Coward and Smith: 281).
- vii. Repositioning religion for peace, security and sustainable political and economic developments. Interfaith and interdenominational activities offer opportunities to collaborate, share the work of economic development that results in peace building. Interfaith initiatives also offer opportunities for the personal and interpersonal transformation required to build peace" which is a necessary ingredient in economic cum political transformation (Coward and Smith: 291).

Conclusion

There are many compelling reasons for repositioning religion for peace, security and sustainable political and economic development in Nigeria. i. Religion has been used to divide the nation for political self-interest and the desire for power. ii. False understanding of religion in Nigeria unlike in China and India where Buddhism and Hinduism are predominantly the nations' religions respectively. iii. We inherited the Graeco-Roman concept of dualism: secular versus sacred, matter versus spirit. Christianity has been compartmentalized. Consequently, the proliferation of churches has not helped matters. iv. Nigeria's vision for peace, security and sustainable political and economic development can only work when religion is repositioned. The plight of the poor who are already economically disadvantaged must be critically put into the fore in any visionary programme.

The abuse of God-given stewardship has led Government to deceptive tendencies. Government tells the poor and the vulnerable in society what it thinks they want to hear. But the poor and oppressed know that in most cases government officials are only bent on fulfilling their goal of maintaining the status quo - maintenance of their hold on political and economic power - and not the interest of the poor. That attitude encourages injustice, resulting in general uncertainty which negatively hinders economic freedom, justice and the rule of law and due process which are required for the growth and sustenance of internal economy of the Nigerian state. Therefore, we need a true and an unadulterated religion - a monotheistic religion, as a creator of moral values that has the capacity to encourage social and economic order, freedom and justice. Hence this paper is pushing for the need to re-instill value system, particularly, character virtues such as honesty, truth-telling, trust, hard work, selfless service, moral rectitude, integrity, God-fearing, compassion, love and justice.

Our political leaders must need to understand the crucial role religion plays in many people's lives in the country; religion permeates belief and behaviour and thus must factor religion into their thinking, economic policies, and actions.

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