



Assessing the Influence of Personal Interest on Religious Values: Implication for National Development

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Abstract

The claim that religion has any bearing on a country's growth is still up for discussion. Nigeria is not exempt from the widespread underdevelopment that is currently sweeping through the African continent. Religious leaders and their followers' personal interests affect the contributions that religion should have made to the nation's growth and development. Religion itself is being misused for nefarious and selfish ends. The decline in the country's educational, social, political, and economic conditions coupled with problem of insecurity is proof of this. The nation is witnessing high level of insecurity, kidnapping, banditry, and corruption in public sectors is getting worse. This paper aims to identify reasons why religious values are being relegated, and why religion is not doing much to counter some of the menaces retarding development. It was discovered that religious leaders and adherents had contributed negatively to the development of the nation by placing personal interest above religious values through desire for power and love for money. Karl Marx's theory on religion is applicable to this research considering the practise of religion in our society. The article suggests, among others, that religion must play the social role of helping to conserve the national values that can guarantee virtues of national development as against private gain.

Keywords: Personal interest, religious values, National development

Introduction

Religion is a social phenomenon that dominates every society. It is pertinent therefore to study the involvement and the contribution of religion in societal affairs. Religion has a powerful moral influence that can foster peace and serve as a motivator to help the society achieve its goals for the growth of the nation; it is not merely a place where spiritual problems are discussed. It permeates all systems and institutions in the cultural, social, political, economic, scientific, and technical spheres (Dzurgba 2009:22). Through its moral tenets, religion fosters an environment that is favourable to development. It is regrettable that people use religion's power and influence to further their own interests. This passion is constantly at odds with religion, and how it serves society.

Religion and spirituality are important components of daily life in Nigeria. Due to the significance assigned to it, it has a significant impact on legislation, thought, and attitude. Because of this, it is a key factor in developing and carrying out important public programmes and projects. That some Nigerians are religious, but atheists are not being disputed. The lack of accountability in all operating systems is one of the obstacles to Nigeria's progress. The search for monetary success, utility, and denial of God is the dominant moral values in our society today. As observed by Ayantayo (2018), materialism has made many people to abandon God for their selfish purposes. The increase in number of churches and mosques has never reflected in religious moralities of Nigerians. Religion in our society has become a tool for satisfying one's personal interest. To use his exact words "an average religious practitioner places strong emphases on monetary acquisition, commercialization of every aspect of life and less value on morality. All these come in the garment of get rich quick syndrome." Numerous new breeds/newly greedy politicians are proliferating in every nook and cranny of the country. The unavoidable harsh reality is that this beloved country is devoid of genuinely altruistic, patriotic, passionately devoted, and upright citizens. Sadly, the importation and widespread adoption of foreign beliefs, interests, and lifestyles have brought about a disruptive moral crisis in our modern Nigerian society. The amount of utter moral resignation by most people is even more concerning. Unmoral behaviour is acknowledged and encouraged; it is frequently tolerated rather than resisted (Ejiogu, 2000).

The credibility of the church is being weakened, according to Pope Francis in *Awake* (2014:3), by the contradiction of Pastors and the faithful between what they say and what they do, between word and way of life. In fact, it is anticipated that religion should speak for society's ethics and frequently provide a "list" of principles to follow, some of which may be seen as being especially crucial in the battle against corruption. Paul, Enojoh, Olatunmibi, Omisore & Wada (2014:187) put it that religion plays a crucial part in nation-building. This point considers religion as a means of achieving substantive growth. Additionally, religion is viewed as a tool for raising people's moral standards and fostering peaceful coexistence, both of which contribute to the progress of a nation. The sad situation painted by Obafemi Awolowo in a Church document in 1992 has not changed:

Suffice it to say that Nigerian Society today is in the throes of five-dimensional crisis – environmental, social, economic, political and spiritual. There is pervasive moral degeneration, indiscipline, obsession with materialism as a result of which, in effect, money, wealth and status are worshipped and God is relegated; corruption in various forms is on the increase, our work ethic is generally low, our sensitivity to the sanctity of human life has been dulled; violence has become a way of life in the country. Religious intolerance, student unrest and political disturbances regularly rear their ugly heads with incalculable loss of lives and properties. In short, our sense of values has been greatly distorted.

When given serious consideration to the pervasive social disorder, economic suffering, political instability, and environmental insecurity facing us as a nation, we realise that what Awolowo assessed to be the status of our country in 1970 is at its peak now. The killing of innocent people in Zamfara, Benue, Adamawa, Kaduna, and Plateau states by Fulani herdsmen, as well as the kidnapping of innocent Nigerians for monetary ransom, have become daily occurrences in Nigeria under the cover of religious purification. This has become especially pitiful in the northern part of the country where Boko Haram insurgency has become a nightmare. In May 2022, Deborah Samuel, a Christian, was brutally murdered by her schoolmates in Sokoto State, northern Nigeria, in the name of religion for what they claimed to be blasphemy against the Quran.

On the other hand, corruption Perception Index from Transparency International 2021 indicated that corruption in Nigeria is getting worse. It placed Nigeria as the second most corrupt country in West Africa. Nigeria ranked 154 out of 180 countries surveyed (Sanni, 2022). Corruption in Nigeria is not reduced despite increase in number of churches and mosques. This ranking suggests that religious value is relegated in Nigerian society. Religion is now what individual considered practicable and not what the holy book (Quran or Bible) teaches. Simbine (2013) observed that this rating is *pari passu* with a high ranking in the religiosity index using metrics like the Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion and Public Life, which shows that 90 percent or more of respondents in most of their surveyed countries identify as, and are deeply committed, to either Christianity or Islam. The ranking also showed that many still practise elements of traditional African religions. Furthermore, the 2007 Global Attitudes Project discovered

that a significant portion of Nigerians (almost 80%) saw political corruption as a major issue. The analysis shown above prompts a few intriguing queries:

- i. Do people practice the tenets of the religion they profess people's?
- ii. Are religious ethical teachings obstacles to people's economic interest?
- iii. Are people religious for other reasons other than what religion upholds?
- iv. Do religious leaders lead by example among their religious followers?

The misuse of religion is what causes problems. The concerns about this misuse are mostly financial in nature. The corruption of religious principles has turned religion's expected role in fostering societal harmony and togetherness into a scourge. The misuse of religion may be bigger than its benefits since our morals and religiosity do not align. We cannot hope to overcome the problems presented by national development until our moral development catches up with our religious life. One of the main obstacles that affect religious values is personal interest, according to this research.

This study uses qualitative and descriptive methods of inquiry to identify how religious leaders and their followers' personal interests affect the contributions that religion should have made to the nation's growth and development, and how religion itself is being misused for nefarious and selfish ends. The research further seeks to identify reasons why religious value is relegated to the background. The development of a nation's politics, society, and economy is not the sole responsibility of the leading force (the country's leadership). Rather, it includes both the rulers and the ruled, manifesting in all of their actions, in the services they provide and the manner in which they provide those services, in their loyalty, in their truthfulness, in their faithfulness, in their commitment to their jobs, and in their social, economic, and political responsibilities.

Marx's Theory of Religion

This paper adopts Marx's views on religion considering his overall perspective on society. Karl Marx (1818–1883), a social philosopher, maintained a pure materialist worldview and believed that economics—including class distinctions—was the primary determinant of society. This situation allows for exploitation of workers and oppression of the poor. In a class society, the freewill of people is crushed (Dzurgba 2009:26). According to Marx, ideology is a set of ideas that modifies people's views of reality in ways that advance the interests of the privileged few. He contends that through organisation such as the church, the educational system, and the media, the class that controls economic production also exerts control over the generation and dissemination of ideas in society. According to Marx, religion serves as an ideological tool the ruling class uses to explain away the suffering of the underclass because of a divine mandate. The impoverished are misled by religion into thinking that their suffering is noble and that they will be treated well in the afterlife. Such ideas produce a false sense of self. Class conflict will last for a very long period, according to Mbah (2006:82, 83), which caused Lenin (1893–1947) to refer to religion as "spiritual gin" and

intoxication given to the masses by the ruling class to keep them going and keep them in their place. Lenin contends that the ruling class deliberately distorts reality by using religion to control the populace and prevent them from trying to overthrow the ruling class (Paul, Audu, Omisore & Enejoh, 2014:186). The theory's tenets are as follows:

- Class distinctions
- Religion is the pain-relieving drug.
- Societal changes are dependent on the economy.
- The human mind and human consciousness are part of the matter.

The competitive character of the capitalist economic system is what leads some people to having an advantage over others. A society is divided into class due to economic interests. According to Dzurgba(2009:26), “ Karl Marx observed that in the production and distribution of goods and services, workers were exploited and oppressed.” Religion becomes a tool in the hands of both the oppressors and the oppressed. “It is the pain relieving drug” to the oppressed Dzurgba (2009:27). The class of the oppressors uses religion to manipulate, cajole and control the oppressed for a sustainable economic advantage. Religious values have been relegated to promote self-interest. Marx’s theory is applicable to Nigerian society because religion permeates every sector and institution. An average Nigerian is openly proud of the religious sects they belong and could fight to defend the same. A lot of religious activities are daily carried out like crusade, prayer and revival meetings, Bible study or Quran recitation. Religious functionaries have also become rich at the expense of their followers. Obviously, Christianity and Islam have both contributed to national development, socially, economically and politically but evil practices like corruption, kidnapping, cheating, money laundering, and unpaid workers’ salaries are having inimical effects on Nigerian society due to relegation of religious values. Class is created due to conflict of interests.

Religion serves as an opiate delivery system for the cruel exploitation of the weak, destitute masses. Religion, however, conceals the fundamental issue of exploitation that fuels the demand for it, much as opium masks pain rather than addressing its underlying source. According to Ayantayo (2009), religion serves the largest percentage of interests of the economic, political, and religious elites because it is made up of sharply divergent worldviews and is unable to address the socio-political and economic suffering of today. Instead, these promises of a hidden paradise and a magnificent residence led to an imagined euphoria that diverts attention away from the genuine causes of pain, which are corruption and greed. Marx, therefore, believes that religion is a result of alienation. It is a result of pain, and serves to comfort it while ignoring the root of the problem, which is class exploitation. Religion serves as an ideology that justifies the exploitation of the working class and the misery of the impoverished. Religious functionaries have also created a class within the religious

circle as every leader scramble for membership since numerical strength of their followers determines monetary and material gains.

Personal Interest and Religious Values: Implications on National Development

Development is a continuous process as long as the world exists. A development leads to another development. The extinction of one gives birth to a new one. Normally, it is a value word. It is always normative because it is directed towards the objective that people desired (Bello & Ahmed 2017). For instance, Seer in Akinmeji (2018), views development from human well-being perspective. To him, it does not mean only capital accumulation and economic growth, but also the condition in which the people in a country have adequate food and job income inequality among them is greatly reduced. It is a process of bringing about fundamental and sustainable changes in society. Development then encompasses growth, embraces such aspects of the quality of life as social justice, equality for all citizens, equitable distribution of income and democratisation of the development process (Lawal, 2007, Egharevba & Chiazor, 2013). According to Rodney in Akinmeji (2018), development, whether economic, political or social should imply increase in both input and changes in the technical and institutional arrangement by which it is produced. In other words, development as a multi- dimensional concept is basically about the process of changes which lies around the spheres of social life. From the foregoing therefore, it has become obvious that development involves the capacity of a society, government or social system to manage resources effectively to improve the well-being of citizens.

Religious values are different from self-values. Personal interests are often unstable because of dynamism in human behaviour motivate self-values. Religious values can be defined as a stable belief that a certain model of human behaviour or the ultimate goal of a person’s existence, is the only preferable one from a social and personal point of view, rather than a different manner or behavior or some other ultimate goal of existence (Ekateria, Marina, Kristina & Maryana 2019). Human behaviours are often influenced by values. Hence, personal values are in conflict with religious values depending on priority. The values of religion, especially Christianity and Islam, are determined in the Holy Scriptures while economy, politics and social happenings within the society influence human behaviour towards self.

Personal interest and personal value are synonymous, and they frequently clash with religious and national beliefs. It shows up in many ways, including avarice and conceit, among others. Self-interest is what defines personal interest. The rise of society undermines "self" because it slows down societal progress. For example, to wish for the death of others while wishing for your own survival is to wish for "self". To direct your good intentions on yourself while harming other people is also considered an interest in the self. Interest looms over every human action and decision. Personal interest is a self-centered objective that is hostile to and at odds with the shared responsibility needed for society's development. It is not wrong to have personal interests but when it clashes with social interests, which is permitted by the constitution, it turns into a

crime. When something violates someone else's rights or societal norms intended to advance national progress, it is considered a crime. In Nigeria, our personal interests in politics, religion, and the economy, influence religious values. The interests of people and groups take precedence over religious teachings. In other words, religion is not respected but rather used as a tool by dishonest politicians, false prophets, traders, and married couples for their own gain through coercion, manipulation, and deception. Instead of demonstrating compassion, tolerance, and forgiveness, which are some of the main principles of religious ideals, religion is being utilised by people to oppress and destroy perceived opponents through violent prayers. In our analysis, we can see how this individual interest in economics, politics, and religion has a harmful impact on the advancement of our country.

When religion is used as a tool, the nation falls apart and development is slowed. The use of religion as a "tool" was very prevalent in Nigeria before independence. Some believed that political unification between the three areas could only be achieved if Islam is acknowledged as the only legitimate faith, in contrast to the West and the South, who were clamouring for independence. This, according to Awolowo(1947:51) was the primary factor delaying the establishment of self-government until the problem was handled.

Religion

Most Nigerians are emotionally affected by religion. Implicitly, religious authorities in a bid to further personal interests, frequently employ religion as a tool. People in Nigerian society are aware of, and are strongly rooted in their faith, even in secular affairs. Religion has been drawn into secularisation. Religion makes logical appeals to win over pity and indifference. People's reasoning is being subjected to deception, coercion, sensitisation, and other tactics. This makes religion the common people's drug of choice. Because religion is the opiate of the people, many religious leaders have room to exploit their flocks through sexual assault, financial extortion, bogus miracles, and false prophecy.

In most situations, the competition for places among religious leaders is not motivated by love of God, but rather by the financial rewards that come with holding an office. For instance, the church has abdicated its role as a force for social change because of disputes among its members, even over trivial issues. The body of Christ, or the followers of the Christian faith, is referred to as the "Church." To some extent, moral standards are no longer set by the church. The economic potential of the individual is frequently taken into consideration when electing religious leaders and appointing them to positions of authority in both Christianity and Islam. The length to which many pastors, clergy, imams, and bishops go to hold positions of authority within their various religious sects undermine the values and tenets of religion that are outlined in their sacred texts. As observed by Ayantayo (2018:20) "an average religious practitioner, places strong emphasis on monetary acquisition, commercialisation of every aspect of life and less value on morality. Most religious leaders likewise avoid speaking the truth or denouncing the wrongs being committed by politicians at the national level because they stand to gain financially from doing so. "Religion has been traded by

people and groups on the platter of polarism to reach personal profits and selfish objectives of some groups and individuals at the expense of the nation as a whole," claims Oladiti (2003:185). Asceticism, simplicity, and moderation are moral principles that are in opposition to the materialism that dominates the lives of religious practitioners (Ayantayo,2018).

Nigeria has sunk further into a socioeconomic quagmire and is unable to escape the mess, which is largely a result of her own avarice and parasitism. To legitimise their shaky hold on power, factions of the ruling class frequently turn to manipulate ethnic, religious, and regional prejudices. Paul, Audu, Omisore & Enejoh in Ayobolu (2012) state categorically as follows:

Is this not the greatest explanation, for instance, for the zeal with which some northern governors pursued the Sharia agenda at the start of this political era in 1999, showing complete disregard for the purported secularity of the Nigerian State? Are people who voluntarily become suicide bombers for Boko Haram not the targets of this kind of manipulation...? Are not the leaders of Boko Haram in Nigeria most likely the unintentional victims of foreign religious extremists who believe that the ruling class of Nigeria is supporting neo-imperial forces in the fight against terrorism? They are therefore scheming to bring about the collapse of the nation through religion. Is it not likely that the millions of common Muslim northerners who reportedly have some sympathy for Boko Haram are not the targets of psychological manipulation that leads them to believe that the establishment of a theocratic Islamic state will significantly improve their existential material circumstances?

Economic Issues

Religion and economic issues cannot be separated considering the relative importance and impact both have on humans. In addition to the many necessities that must be met by humans, such as food, clothing, shelter, safety, and social niceties, religion also provides them with consolation, encouragement, hope, and explanations for events that are beyond his comprehension. An average Nigerian tends to be selfish because they want to get by or "make it" in the country's unfavourable economic climate. Our social, economic, political, and moral obligations sometimes reflect this selfishness.

Religious principles such as perseverance, commitment, honesty, bravery, discipline, accountability, candour, kindness, and loyalty should encourage economic interest in a goal that is positive in nature. Today's Nigerians, on the other hand, place a higher value on economic interests that are bent toward the egotistical accumulation of material gain at the expense of others or the general welfare of society. It is impossible to overstate the catastrophic ills that have hampered national progress in Nigeria over the years because of people and groups prioritising their interests over those of the country. Every interest of individuals and groups is directed toward avaricious financial gain, which is frequently the covert motivation driving their behaviour. Religion has been used as an excuse for

practically everything, ignoring its essential principles in favour of promoting a selfish underlying objective or motive. People cover up their lies or the evil they are committing by using the name of God. One of humans' Adamic tendencies is selfishness, which the Bible and Quran both condemn. According to Kingsley Uwaegbute, the quest to make economic gain leads many religious Nigerians to cheating and other vices thereby undermine the good of the Nigerian society, for the issue of fake drugs and other goods which are dangerous to the life of many Nigerians.

Today, it seems that an average Nigerian's thinking is driven by selfish economic interests, which have reduced religion and its teachings to simply ostentatious piety with little impact on the advancement of community or country. Without internalising her basic national values, which are the outgrowth of the socially articulated cultural values regarded as healthy for the peaceful coexistence of people within the society and national growth, Nigeria as a developing nation cannot develop at the pace it should. Religion is a component of the structure required for society to uphold and advance societal values. Capitalist competition that ought to bring out the best and provide us with choices that can foster a healthy economic development is messed with all forms of evil practices. Embezzlement of public funds, delay in payment of workers' salaries, ritualism, bribery and corruption, fraud and money laundering just to mention but few are manifestations of personal interest. People would do anything to survive; hence, daily atrocities are committed in large numbers. Nigerians visit churches and mosques to demonstrate their religiosity, but their conduct and behaviour go against the very religion they claim to follow. The impact of these religions does not sufficiently affect behaviour (individually or corporately) in social, political, or economic affairs, according to Omoyajowo (2001).

Money is now more important in Nigeria than God. This could explain why there have been so many crises and controversies throughout our nation's social, political, and economic turmoil. It is not improbable that some of the murders and other social vices in the nation had sponsors. In addition, most likely, given the current economic situation, individuals would be eager to perform any abhorrent task that was offered in order to make ends meet. In our country, kidnapping is increasingly being done for financial gain to demand a ransom. This observation is supported in Obiora in Ayantayo (2018:19) that:

The commercialisation of Christianity has led to corruption, immorality, and their forms of indiscipline in our Churches today. The church, which supposed to be a house of God, has become a den of robbers, a place for mischief-makers, cheats and immoral activities.

The herdsmen's savage killings and property devastation, which have turned into a nightmare for Nigerians, have a history. The Fulani "have often shown themselves politically ambitious" with a desire to obtain land, a house, and protection for themselves as well as pastures for their cattle by threat," according to Stride & Ifeka (1971:13-14). They went on to say:

The reasons for the Fulani's expansion throughout Sudan (now Nigeria is in focus) are obscured but clear. Solutions present themselves. With growing herds, pastoral people would constantly be looking for new or better pastures. Additionally, the Fulani who have settled are renowned for moving around in their quest to promote Islam. Furthermore, they frequently demonstrated their political ambition. As a result, they have not only established states in the areas where they have landed but have also been forcibly evicted from their homes by rulers who mistrust them.

Thus, we observe how some Fulanis in Nigeria's self-serving economic interests and political aspirations trump the moral precepts of the Islamic religion they practise, which protect the sanctity of human life. The cattle are more valuable to the armed Fulani herders than human life. Of course, values affect attitudes and behaviour. Therefore, they do not consider it unethical to slaughter to safeguard their financial stake in their livestock.

Politics

Political corruption, according to Achebe (2012), is the root cause of Nigerian society's socioeconomic ills. In other words, because of the country's structure, there was inherent power conflicts among the ethnic groups, and naturally, those in authority desired to maintain their position. In the 1950s and 1960s, they were egregiously exploited because doing so was the simplest and easiest method to maintain it, even in a small area. Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, decided to create the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in the Islamic lands he controlled in the late 1940s. According to Komolafe (2012), politics and religion have frequently coexisted in Nigeria throughout its history. The paradox is that this symbiotic relationship, as proposed by Komolafe, has simultaneously served as a breeding ground for opposing ideological currents and the primary driver of alliances and rivalries. The most common are found where Nigeria's two most popular religions, Islam and Christianity, diverge. In response, political calculations and arrangements are made in such a way that religion takes much more of the ideological center stage for the nation's identity than any arrangement along cultural or historical lines. According to Usman (1987), Nigerians are convinced that a small oligarchy is responsible for this campaign of violent religious politics that aims to destroy our nation. This oligarchy is determined to maintain its power, wealth, and privileges at all costs, including using violent and well-organised mobs in the name of religion.

It is understood that commercial interests have increasingly impeded the beneficial impact that Christian principles ought to have on Nigerians during elections. Conflict and discord among adherents of the same faith are frequently caused by economic motive. When people of the same religion are divided or in dysfunctional relationships, brotherhood is compromised. Personal interest also supports this in several ways. Politics in Nigeria is a game of life and death. Some of our leaders employ hate speech not only against themselves but also go so far as to take the lives of others they view as their political rivals. Religious morality that protects the sanctity

of human life has no place among our political leaders due to self-serving motives. In contemporary society, it is common knowledge that holding political office is one of the quickest routes to sudden “billionairedom”. Politics in Nigeria has developed into a successful and profitable industry. In fact, it is claimed to be the fastest method of becoming rich quickly due to how shockingly lucrative political roles are (Familusi 2010).

The more people express a personal interest in politics, the more alluring the advantages are. Personal interests will continue to impede our country's development until the financial gain from political officeholders' wages and benefits are decreased. Many of our political figures would continue to look out for themselves rather than the constituents they represent. Political officials are simply interested in how to accumulate wealth, claim Familusi & Oke (2011).

Politics and religion coexist; they both look to the same people, society, for dedication and involvement. The kind and degree of various religious and political systems as well as their various socio-cultural contexts may affect how closely religion and politics are related. Politics attempts to acquire “power,” and “power” is the capacity to force people to do as they choose without resistance. In a democratic environment, power is more than just the use of physical force; it also refers to the constitutional authority granted by the electorate to manage their public affairs. The affairs of the people involved, among other things, their political, social, and economic lives. The implementation of Sharia law in Zamfara state in 1999/2000 was a self-motivated agenda of the then governor, not because of his religious enthusiasm but rather as a source to get support from his people on his political (Adeiwa 2006).

This form of religious function infuriated Karl Marx since it limits human thought, freedom, and the right to dominate (Dzurgba 2009). People in Nigeria tend to be religious for financial reasons. They draw nearer to God in accordance with their demands, which are typically centered on surviving financially. Basic requirements including food, clothing, and shelter are necessary for human survival. The fact that some of our politicians in Nigeria take advantage of and mislead the voters during elections is no longer breaking news. In addition to the customary cash donations, some politicians were caught buying votes during the 2015 general elections by providing voters with necessities including kerosene, rice, salt, and even water. According to a Channel Television News report from the 2018 Ekiti State governorship election, politicians bought votes with money, and voters—that may or may not have been Christians or Muslims—sold their votes in order to advance their own interests rather than those that would have ensured the emergence of a credible leader for the state. Local and foreign observers noted that despite the federal government's deployment of nearly 30,000 security personnel to guarantee a free and fair election, money politics continued to flourish. Vote buying had a significant impact on the primaries held in May 2022 by the A.P.C. and P.D.P. in their race for the presidency in 2023. It is understood that we compromise the principles of the faith we practise in order to survive and get by, especially in the face of extreme poverty.

It is likely or unavoidable that religious beliefs will frequently clash with personal interests when political action is required for economic survival. When it comes to getting a big piece of the national pie, Nigerian politicians don't make any distinctions. This, according to him, was made worse by the Abuja factor—the ambition to land a contract that resulted in nefarious activities (Omoyajowo 2001). During elections, religious teachings are compromised for the sake of money and material gain. Many Nigerians think that once in power, politicians forget about the people who voted for them. Politicians prioritise their interests over those of the voters who supported them due, among other things, to their need to recover the money they spent on campaigns and their dread of the future. Because of these, voters feel that they should obtain from them whatever they can for their own existence before casting a ballot. As a result, their decision on which politicians to support and which political party to join, is influenced by money and material gains. Election choices are most frequently made primarily on what people and groups stand to gain, not on the moral uprightness of party candidates. The June 1993 election that M.K.O Abiola and his running mate, Babagana Kingibe, won and was deemed the fairest one Nigerians had ever was ultimately thrown out. The annulment was carried out for egotistical motives, best known to General Ibrahim Babangida, the then-military ruler of the state, and his inner circle. One of Islam's core theological principles, brotherhood, was compromised because the persons involved were Muslims, which served their own personal interests.

Recommendations

While there is general agreement that our society is in bad shape, there is less agreement on our readiness to make changes. Thus, we cannot disregard the attitude and character that have interacted to cause our current condition if we are serious about the frequently professed intent to address the hydra-headed problem of decay and other ills bedevilling us. Therefore, this paper recommends that:

- i. Religious adherents should exhibit love in practicality. “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you even so to them for this is the law and the prophets” Matt 7:12. According to Hadith in Islam, “no one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself”. If we put these teachings into practice in our society, we would have an enabling environment free from social vices, and thus promoting healthy development not only in our economy but also in our National politics, and our environment would be safe to live.
- ii. Religious leaders should be more concerned with transformation of life, promoting moral principles that can change our society for good, in their preaching, than interest in cash and material gifts. They must display courage for the truth. They should stop hobnobbing, dining and wining with the societal criminals and corrupt people for the purpose of monetary or material gains.
- iii. Inculcating moral values should not be the sole responsibility of religion and educational institutions. It should begin from home and parents should set good examples for their children emulate by not placing money above good virtues.
- iv. For religious value to have positive impact on our national development, both religious functionaries and their followers have to practise what their religious books teach. We should stop celebrating

mediocre because they are rich. The pulpit should stand up against unrighteousness rather than celebrating criminals for material gains. Religion must play the social role of helping to conserve the national values that can guarantee virtues of common loyalty to the nation as against loyalties to one's clan and tribe for the purpose of private gain, to the detriment of the national wellbeing.

v. Political leaders should not allow the interest of their tribes override the interest of the Nigerian populace as a whole.

vi. Government should do more to improve our security level and give commensurate punishment to those that engage in any form of evil acts.

vii. Both government and religious leaders need to do more to stand against corruption. During elections, the electorate should be educated not to sell their votes for money

viii. African culture and values, which uphold the notions of rapid retribution for wrongdoing, peaceful coexistence, and communalism, should be viewed as a tool for the advancement of Nigerian society and the development of the country..

ix. Since most young people who are literate now have access to the internet, the National Orientation Agency should step up its social media campaign to reorient individuals toward the nation's essential values. They are the future leaders, thus this need to be handled seriously.

Conclusion

On this note, the ethical and moral models that religion provides should deter public officials and, in fact, everyone from predilections to corruption and all other social vices in a nation like Nigeria where faith is a fundamental and inseparable part of people's life. In the eyes of most Nigerians, nothing has changed. Even if they are not identical, religion and society are related. It anticipates that both will benefit the populace without causing any negative side effects. This is fundamentally different in the West because of the separation made between religion as a private belief and as a public activity. In a sense, Nigeria experienced a foreign, unpleasant situation with the manipulation of religion to seize political power, business/economic exploitation of the weak, and means of violence/occultist devastation of lives and property, kidnapping, banditry and ritualism. The introduction and acceptance of modern societal vices in religion can be linked to what might be seen as the beginning of the exploitation of religion for selfish purposes and legitimacy. Observably, personal interest is becoming a form of religion that must be discouraged to promote a sustainable development in Nigeria.

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