



The Abduction of God and the Quest for Sustainable Development in the Nigerian Multi-religious Milieu

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Abstract. As a multi-religious society, Nigeria is ensnared with the quagmire of religious violence resulting from the rivalry, most especially, between the dominant religions i.e. Christianity and Islam in the country. Each of these two dominating religions attempts to forcefully confine God within the ambient of its traditions, and the resultant perennial rivalry among the adherents of these religions in Nigeria is not without its implication on inter-religious relation and the quest for sustainable development. The thrust of this study, therefore, is to interrogate the effects of God's abduction by each of the two dominant religions in Nigeria on inter-religious relation and its attendant implication for the quest for sustainable development in the multi-religious country. The "abduction of God" in this context is a figurative description of the inherent tendency of exclusivism associated with each of the two dominant religions in Nigeria. The paper employed functionalism, descriptive and historical approaches to appraise the effects of religious exclusivism on interreligious relation and the attendant influence on the quest for sustainable development in Nigeria. The secondary method was employed to elicit information. The attempt to forcefully confine God within the ambient of a particular religious tradition through the claim of ideological absoluteness by each of the two major religions in Nigeria is responsible for the perennial inter-religious conflict that is threatening sustainable development. The paper therefore recommends preclusion of religious absoluteness by the adherents of the major religions towards engendering sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Abduction of God, Interreligious Relation, Dominant Religions, Sustainable Development, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Religion is a universal involvement of mankind. Mankind all over the world and throughout known histories professes one form of religion or the other. It, that is, religion is with us at every moment of life - in our innermost beings, and with regards to the great or minor events of life, it is discussed daily in the newspapers, through the radio and television, and in our conversations. It is with all of us inevitably, whatever may be our individual, avowed attitudes to it (Idowu, 1973: p.1). And religion permeates every department of human endeavour. Its significance in human community is easily noted, because man always yearns for a power greater and mightier than him to depend on for security, succor, comfort, hope, restoration, justice, love and so on. During the time of crisis and threat, he needs a supernatural force to depend on. When engulfed with the fear of the unknown and perplexity, he has recourse to religion. In fact, this is the Genesis of religion (Igboin, 2003: p.387). And this is the reason religion has refused to leave itself out as human societies progress on the path of civilization. So, in most human societies, religion constitutes a powerful force to reckon with.

In Nigeria, as it is in other climes, religion is also a very powerful force to reckon with. It is very difficult and even impossible to see a Nigerian who does not profess one form of religion or the other. Awoniyi (2003: p.356) observed that in contemporary years, nearly all the foremost living religions of the world, especially in their new appearances have come to be displayed in the country. As a matter of fact, Nigerians are not only "notoriously" religious, but are also "incurably" religious, and the religious notoriety of Nigerians is to the extent that this most populous country in the black continent is now

enmeshed in quagmires partly concomitant of religious plurality. What we are saying is that Nigeria is a religiously pluralized country, and that many of the socio-economic challenges being witnessed in the country today are partly as a result of its multi-religious nature.

The most popular of the religions in Nigeria are Christianity, Islam and African Indigenous Religion. The population of Nigeria is however bifurcated between Christianity and Islam and the religious polarity of Nigeria is intertwined with geo-ethnic schism. Sampson (2012, cited by Ogunbadejo, 2020: p.370), corroborated this observation when he argued that even though there is neither a scientific representation of the numerical strength of these major religious groups nor of their geographical distribution. One can conveniently argue that the Islamic faith preponderates in the northwestern and northeastern parts of the country (comprising of Sokoto, Kano, Kaduna, Zamfara, Borno, Yobe, Katsina, Kebbi, Jigawa, Bauchi, Taraba, Gombe and Adamawa states). On the other hand, Christianity is more prominent in the South-East and South-South geographical zones (comprising Imo, Enugu, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Delta, Edo, Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross River and Akwa Ibom states). The South-West and North-Central zones (comprising Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun, Niger, Plateau, Nassarawa, Benue, Kogi states and the Federal Capital Territory respectively) have a reasonably balanced numbers of Muslims and Christians. Also, in line with this view, Anugwom (1998, quoted by Anugwom and Oji, 2004: p.143) observed that ethnic and religious conflicts and divisions arising from them are intertwining phenomena in contemporary Nigeria society. In this sense, according to him, ethnic and geographical divisions in Nigeria, translate also into religious differences in most cases. So, in its simplest form, while the Northern Nigerians are predominantly Hausa - Fulani Moslems, the Southerners are largely Yoruba / Igbo and Christians. There is also the presence of the traditional religion in most parts of Nigeria. Even though the traditional religion, despite its autochthony, enjoys low public patronage in recent time, and is often marginalized, it has a fair degree of followership.

Despite the plurality of Nigeria in the area of religion as indicated above, however, the two most popular religions in the country, that is, Christianity and Islam continue to make claims and counter claims of monopoly of religious truth. They are thus constantly at loggerhead. Each of these two proselytizing religions lay claim of monopoly of "God's truth", religious absoluteness; each tries to confine God

within the ambient of its tradition and attributes falsity to the other. By this claim, each attempt to forcefully take ownership of God and try to deny other faiths and traditions of any access to Him. In line with this observation, Ayantayo (2018) noted that the claim of monopoly of God's truth by the two dominating religions in Nigeria is exemplified in scriptural verses like: John 15:6 in which a statement attributed to Jesus declares thus "I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the father, but by me." Surah 3:85 also states that "And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam it will never be accepted of him and in the hereafter, he will be one of the losers." Meanwhile since the emergence of these two imported religions in Nigeria, both have continued to coexist in the country notwithstanding their ideological/doctrinal differences and the resultant rivalry between the duo, and it does not seem like if any of the two will be abandoned anytime soon by Nigerians, as each continues to be appealing, and more and more famous amongst its adherents. However, the adherents of each of these two popular religions seem not to come to term with this important fact, hence, the recurrent religion-induced tensions that continue to inhibit development in the country. This study therefore probed the influence of religious exclusivism on interreligious relation and its implication for the achievement of agenda 2030 in Nigeria.

2. The Idea of God's Abduction

According to the Collins English Dictionary (2021), abduction means "the act of taking someone away by force or cunning; kidnapping. Legally, it means "the carrying off of a person by force or fraud; especially kidnapping of woman for marriage, prostitution, etc." It is the action of forcibly taking someone away against his/her will (Ayantayo 2018: p.3).

The idea of God's abduction as used in the context of this discourse therefore refers to the forceful hijacking or forceful take away of God by the adherents of each of the two dominant religions (Christianity and Islam) in Nigeria, who through claims and counterclaims of monopoly of God's truth are forcibly taking away God against His will. They do this by making claims of monopoly of religious truth and doctrinal absoluteness, and thereby attribute falsity to the religion and religious ideas of others. In attestation to this observation, Ayantayo (2018: p.4) noted that the adherents of these religions abduct God through a process known as truth claim, which is a proposition or statement that a particular person or belief system holds is the truth. On the basis of this, according to him, Christians argue that their religion

is the only religion and not Islam or Traditional Religion. Muslims counter the claim by boasting that Islam is the true religion. The two of them lay claim to some passages of their scriptures and religious traditions to prove their arguments. Christians refer to the following passages of the Bible:

John 14:6: "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me."

Act 4:12: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

1 Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

On the contrary, Muslims often quote the following portions of the Qur'an:

- Surah 3:19: "Truly the religion with Allah is Islam."
- Surah 3:85: "And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him and in the hereafter he will be one of the losers."
- Surah 48:28: "He it is who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth."

What came out of this, is what Mala, quoted by Ayantayo (2018: pp.5-6), labels as particularity trust, which is the belief held by different religious practitioners that there is no good thing in other religions different from the one a person practices. In history, this religious mentality has had sinister effects on intra-religious and inter-religious relations in Nigeria. Also arising from the above is the use of abusive words by Christians and Muslims to disparage each other's religion. For example, some Muslims labeled Christianity as a polytheistic religion because of the Christians' belief in Trinity---God the father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In quick reaction, some Christians interpret the Muslims' usage of the word "Servant/Slave of Allah" to mean that Muslims are truly slaves in the real sense of the word, while Christians are the children of God, as described in the Bible. No wonders Udoidem cited by Arukwe (2004: p.177) submitted that the impetus to the various inter-religious violence experienced in Nigeria are given by the basic philosophies of these religions; where, for instance, Islamic philosophy divides the world into 2 camps --"believers" and "infidels". Believers being the Muslim faithful who believe that there is only one God, with Muhammad as His only true prophet, with infidels, on the other hand, consisting of non-Muslims, particularly Christians who are regarded as "blasphemers". On

the other hand, in Christendom, the divinity of Jesus, His sonship of God, as well as the belief that salvation is exclusively for only those who believe in, and accept Jesus as the only means amongst other ideologies, constitute the *sin qua non* of faith, which also pitch Christians against the people of other religious faiths, especially the Muslims who only see Jesus as one of the several prophets/servants of Allah, and refute His divinity and sonship of God. As such, the Christians see Muslims and others who share the Islamic view of Jesus or who do not embrace Christian Christology, as non-believers. So, the idea of monopolization of God's truth through claims and counterclaims of religious absoluteness is what this study figuratively describes as "abduction of God", which this paper submits has a very serious negative influence on inter-religious relation in Nigeria. The paper therefore investigates the influence of God's abduction on inter-religious relation in Nigeria and its implication for sustainable development in the country.

2.1 Categories of God's Abductors

The experience of religiosity (i.e. religious behaviour) in Nigeria showcases that different groups of people can be classified among the abductors of God in the country, among the group of people categorized in this study include: broadly the adherents of the major religions in Nigeria i.e. Christianity, Islam and Traditionalists. Ayantayo (2018: pp.4-9) specifically identified religious functionaries and religious followers, Western researchers and religious fundamentalists/radicalists as the principal abductors of God in Nigeria.

2.1.1 Western Researchers

The westerners were the first set of people who initiated the idea of monopolizing God in Africa, Nigeria inclusive. The westerners who came to Africa not purposefully to carry out investigation, and indeed, did not carry out investigation about the religion of the Africans, but to explore and exploit the available resources in Africa to braze up their own economy, and in the process observed certain cultural ways of life of the Africans, were the first set of people who promoted the idea that the Africans and Nigerians in particular did not know God. These westerners constitute the first sets of God's abductors. Western scholars like Taylor, James and Levy-Bruhl labeled African Traditional Religion (ATR) as paganism (worshipping of false gods or false idols), savagism (religion of uncivilized and unpolished people, which is characterized by cruelty, brutality and ferocity), fetishism (a form of belief and

religious practice in which supernatural attributes are imputed to material, inanimate objects, known as fetishes, that is, worshiping of fetish things that has to do with a belief in the magical power of fetishes), heathenism (a religious system or rites of a heathen nation), idolatry (worshiping of idols, images or anything which is not God), and primitivism, animism and polytheism (the doctrine of, or belief, in a plurality of gods). Meanwhile, further studies of ATR showed that none of the labels is applicable to it because the religion is equally monotheistic like Christianity and Islam. Therefore, the position of the Western scholars regarding ATR is nothing, but an expression of bias, which is characterized by prejudice, subjectivity and preconceived idea which Parrinder quoted by Ayantayo (2018: p.7) describes as derogatory terms. And this is born out of the impression that only the European had genuine idea of God and had relationship with God.

2.1.2 Religious Functionaries and Religious Followers

Building on the pejorative ideas of the foreigners about the African indigenous religion, the religious functionaries and religious followers of the two imported dominating religions in Nigeria i.e. Christianity and Islam as the second category of God's abductors, having been indoctrinated with the philosophy of God's abduction of the imported religions, also continue in branding the indigenous religion of the Africans with opprobrious nomenclatures, painting the religion in bad lights by associating all sorts of evils with it. They blackmailed the adherents of the indigenous religion to get them converted to Christianity and Islam. For instance, the first generation of converts from African Traditional Religion to either Christianity or Islam according to Ayantayo quoted above, got converted neither because of their understanding about their newly found faiths, nor that they willingly changed their religions, rather, because they were blackmailed to get them converted from their original religion. This is evident in some of the words used by Christian and Islamic missionaries when they had contact with the traditional religious practitioners. For example, the traditional religious practitioners were called names such as ajebo (sacrifice eater), elebo (sacrifice maker) and onimole (owner and worshipper of evil deity) among others. This group of God's abductors, also building on the doctrines and philosophy of God's abduction of each of their religions, also attributes falsity to each other's religion while making claims and counterclaims of monopoly of religious truth. This category of God's abductors is made up of religious leaders comprising principal and subsidiary

religious functionaries such as Priests, Priestesses, Reverends, Imams, Sheikhs, Amirs, Pastors, Prophets and many other sectarian leaders with their priesthood titles as well as their followers across the three major religions in Nigeria (Ayantayo 2018: p.4). As indicated earlier in this discourse, this group also abducts God through a process known as truth claim.

2.1.3 Religious Fundamentalists and Radicalists

These are the ones who have fixed minds about the teachings of their religions and are not ready to shift ground by accepting religious pluralism. They have closed minds and always remain absolute about their religious truth claims. In most cases, this group of religious practitioners is ready to defend their faith including using arms and ammunitions and eliminating the lives and destroying properties of people belonging to faiths different from theirs (Ayantayo 2018: p.9).

3. The Concept of Sustainable Development

The term: 'Sustainable Development' suggests an enduring, remarkable, non-terminal improvement in the quality of life, standard of living and life chances of people. Such development must be capable of surviving generations over a prolonged period of time. It favours a progress curve in human development, encompassing enhanced creativity, for increased productivity (Akinwumi and Ibimilua, n.d.: p.11).

Sustainable Development has been defined in so many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from Brundtland Report, according to which it is defined as "the development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs". The idea of sustainability, which stems from the global quest to conserve both the global natural resources and social- economic fortune for the benefits of both the present and future generations, and the sustenance of a better and comfortable human race on the planet earth, without compromising the planet, is the foundation for today's leading global framework for international cooperation – the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (International Institute for Sustainable Development, n. d.).

Specifically, Sustainable Development is a way of organizing society so that it can exist in the long term. It implies taking into account both the imperatives of the present and those of the future,

such as the preservation of the environment and natural resources or social and economic equity. (<https://youmatter.world/definition/def>)

Sustainability is development that satisfies the needs of the present without compromising the capacity of future generations, guaranteeing the balance between economic growth, care for the environment and social well-being. Many challenges facing humankind, such as climate change, water scarcity, inequality and hunger, can only be resolved at a global level and by promoting sustainable development: a commitment to social progress, environmental balance and economic growth. It is a call to action to protect the planet and guarantee global well-being of people. These common goals require the active involvement of individuals, business, administrations and countries around the world. (<https://www.acciona.com/sustainable-development>)

So, the commitment to the noble and lofty idea of the agenda 2030 i.e. Sustainable Development is the expected responsibility of every reasonable society, and even individuals. In this respect, it is expected that every reasonable societies strive and work in commitment to promoting, and the achievement of the SDGs. In this connection, a serious and civilized society should preclude all tendencies considerable as inimical, antithetical, and which are capable of shattering the realization of Sustainable Development. Whereas, the controversial claims and counter claims of monopoly of God's truth and religious absoluteness by the two dominating religions in Nigeria, which threatens inter-religious peace, is posing serious threat to the achievement of sustainable development in the country.

4. Abduction of God and Interreligious Relation in Nigeria

As has been pointed out earlier, abduction of God (confinement of God within the ambient of a particular religious tradition through monopolization of religious truth and claim and counterclaim of religious absoluteness) by the major religions is not without its implication on interreligious relation in Nigeria. Its immediate consequence is religious exclusivism and the emergence of insider and outsider phenomena, not only in inter-religious relation, but also in inter-personal relation. In this regard, the term insider is used to describe an individual or group of individual belonging to a religious group, assembly, denomination, cluster, association, union or society like the Anglican Church, the Baptist Church and the Nasrul Lahi-l-Faith Society (NASFAT). For example, anyone

outside the four groups mentioned above but belongs to religious groups such as Redeemed Christian Church of God, Christ Apostolic Church, Sufi Movement and Quareeb are regarded as outsiders. However, the people so regarded as outsiders see themselves as insiders in their own religious enclaves and consider the first group as outsiders because they do not belong to their group. The term insider and outsider are used in interdenominational, group and sect senses. For instance, at the intra-religious level, Christian who belongs to the Anglican Church will consider Christians in other Christian denominations, like the Baptist Church, Christ Apostolic Church and the Redeemed Christian Church of God, as outsiders. Beyond this level, the terms insider and outsider are used for religious differentiation, especially at the broad religious level in which we make a line of demarcation among religions of the world, such as African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity, Islam, Guru maharaji, Hare Krishna, Eckankar etc. for illustration, at the interreligious level, Christians consider Muslims as outsiders, while Muslims also consider Christians as outsiders. For this reason, members of the different groups are fond of calling one another several names that have to do with different doctrines, beliefs and practices. Practitioners of ATR are called initiate/devotees, the words parishioners, brethren and congregation are used for Christians, while the word Ummah is used in Islam to describe Muslims. Practitioners of ATR (insiders) are called "Awo" meaning initiates or devotees, while non-members (outsiders) are known as "Ogberi", that is, novices. Christian (insiders) could be called brethren, believers or born-again, while non-Christians are regarded as unbelievers (outsiders). In the same vein, Muslim (insiders) are regarded as "Ummah", while non-Muslim (outsiders) are regarded as unbelievers-"Kafir" (Ayantayo 2018: pp.13-14).

This religious mentality now influences the daily social interaction of the adherents of these diverse religions, denominations and sects in Nigeria in a negative sense such that even at the intra-religious level, a young member of Cherubim and Seraphim church cannot be introduced by a young Redeem Christian Church of God (RCCG) member to his or her parents as a prospective suitor, and when situations like this arises, from experience, the next question from such fanatical parents is "Is he or she a believer"? Which means "is he or she a member of our church or denomination", if the answer is no-(that is he or she is not a member of our church or denomination), the next instruction from such parents most often is "you cannot be unequally yoked with unbelievers". What makes such an aspiring suitor in

that context “an unbeliever” is the fact that even though he or she is a Christian, he or she does not belong to the same denomination or church with that of his or her desired prospective suitor. The implication of this is that Nigerians of different religious persuasions are now socially separated from one another, and are now observing social distancing not because of Covid 19 this time around, but because the pandemic religious faiths, denominational and sectarian differences now pitched them against one another (Ogunbadejo 2020: p.379).

This attitude of religious absoluteness or claims and counterclaims of monopoly of religious truth also transmutes into attitude of religious fanaticism which in turn precipitates most of the religious crises that have been witnessed in Nigeria, in which innocent lives and properties worth billions including life supporting environment have been destroyed. Religion in all societies is said to provide a healthy terrain for a functional and vibrant society. It is regarded as the opiate of the masses and serves cohesive and euphoric functions in society. Oddly enough, the case of Nigeria is somehow different. Hence, religion functions as a means for the perpetration of violence, fueling ethnic consciousness and solidarity, acquisition of political power and socio-economic gains, massive killings and the wanton destruction and vandalisation of properties of those considered infidels or who pay allegiance to other religions (Anugwom and Oji 2004: pp. 144-145).

Conflicting doctrines and claims of monopoly of God’s truth thus lead to religious intolerance which finds its manifestation in the various religious tensions that have and are still bedeviling Nigeria. In the light of this observation, Boyle and Sheen (1997: p.55) pointed out that:

Intolerance of religion and belief in Nigeria has manifested itself through sporadic civil unrest and some internal armed conflicts. In places where Christian and Muslim religious revivalisms are in geographic proximity, the result can be explosive. Between 8,000-10,000 Nigerians died in religious violence between 1980 and 1987.

According to Awoniyi (2003: p.362), religious crises are usually ignited by seemingly innocuous factors. Take for example, the “Kafanchan crisis” began at a College of Education. The Muslim Students Society objected to a banner erected by a Fellowship of Christian Students that read “Welcome to Mission 87 in Jesus Campus”. Eventually, the banner was removed but a talk during the programme was considered offensive. Subsequently, Christian and

Muslims in Kafanchan attacked each other and this culminated in a lot of destructions.

In 1991, another round of religious violence was sparked off by a religious revival to be addressed by German preacher, Evangelist Reinhard Bonnke, and some American preachers. However, the Muslims protested and accused the government of double standards for failing to grant permission to one Sheikh Deedat from South Africa who had wanted to organise a religious revival for the Muslims in Kano. They quarried that why should the same government grant permission to Reinhard Bonnke to preach in Kano. As Rev. Bonnke arrived Kano on 13 October 1991, violence broke out, many people suffered human and material losses. Also in 1991, a Muslim group attacked the “Daily Times” office in Katsina and burned copies of their publications. The action was in response to a publication by a Christian said to have blasphemed two Muslim prophets. In addition, the preaching of Muslim revivalist leaders then served as a fuel to the religious tension in the same year and the subsequent Zangonkatar episode in Kaduna State in 1992. In these conflicts at least 1,833 were killed and hundreds injured while about 845 houses were reportedly looted and burnt including 19 churches and 11 mosques. In December 1994, Gideon Akaluka, the head of an Igbo Christian (sic) was brought before the Emir of Kano accused of blasphemy and desecration of a leaflet of the Qura’an. He was detained at Bonpai prison where he was beheaded by some Shiite fundamentalists. In 1998, Muslim and Christian students of the University of Ilorin fought each other over who was the right owner of a place of worship on the university campus. Many of the students on both sides sustained injuries in this respect (Awoniyi 2003: pp. 362-363).

Another manifestation of religious intolerance in the country is the issue of Ikenga symbol in Imo State. Traditionally, the Ikenga is a symbol of uprightness and it signifies an upright man struggling through the vicissitude of life in Igbo land. This symbol according to Awoniyi (2003: p.363) was commissioned by Allison Madueke administration. Unfortunately, the Ikenga symbol was reported in 1999 to have been destroyed on account of being an object of “Idol worship” by the protestants. However, the symbol was not just destroyed ordinarily but it was replaced with the “Cross of Jesus Christ”. The atmosphere was tensed up because of this action.

The historical negative influence of religion occasioned by the attempt at monopolising God by each of the dominant religions in Nigeria on religious

relation, and the associated rivalry between the dominating religions has continued down through the early 2000s till date. In the year 2000, thousands of people were killed in northern Nigeria as non-Muslims opposed to the introduction of sharia, or Islamic law, fought Muslims who demanded its implementation in the northern state of Kaduna. In September 2001, Christian-Muslim violence flared up after Muslim prayers in the city of Jos, with Churches and Mosques set on fire. At least 1,000 people were killed, according to a September 2002 report by a panel set up by the state government. In November 2002, Nigeria abandoned the Miss World contest in Abuja, following the death of at least 216 people due to riots that broke out in Kaduna after a newspaper article innocuously suggested that the Prophet Mohammad would probably have married one of the Miss World beauty queens if he were to be alive. In May 4, 2004, hundreds of people, mostly Muslim Fulanis were killed by Christian Tarok fighters in the central Nigerian town of Yewa. Survivors reported that they buried 630 corpses. Again, in May 12, 2004, Muslim and Christian fighters waged street battles in the northern city of Kano. Christian community leaders said 500-600 people, mostly Christians were killed within the two days of the violence. Also in February 2006, at least 157 people died in a week of rioting by Muslim and Christian mobs. The violence began in the northeastern city of Maiduguri when a Muslim protest against Danish cartoons of Prophet Mohammad ran out of control. A revenge attack followed in the South. In November 2008, clashes between Muslim and Christian gangs triggered by a disputed local government election killed at least 700 people in Jos, according to the US based Human Rights Watch. In February 22, 2009, the governor of Bauchi state imposed a night curfew on Bauchi city, a day after the clashes in which at least 11 people were killed, 28 were seriously wounded and several houses, churches and mosques were set on fire (Aljazeera News: 26 December, 2010).

A more dangerous experience of religion-induced tension in Nigeria is the insurgent activities of the Islamic sect Boko Haram. These Islamic fundamentalists' activities started in the northeastern Nigeria around 2009. According to the Aljazeera News timeline of 26 December, 2010 quoted above, in July 26, 2009, the Boko Haram, an organisation that opposes to the Western education and demands the adoption of Sharia across, Nigeria staged attack in the northeastern city of Bauchi after the arrest of some of its members. More than 50 people were killed and over 100 were arrested. In July 27, 2009, Police in Maiduguri, home of the Boko Haram's leader Mohammed Yusuf, said security forces killed

90 sect members in July 27. In neighbouring Yobe state, police recovered the body of 33 sect members after a gun battle near the town of Potiskum on July 29. In July 30, 2009, Boko Haram leader Yusuf was shot dead while in police detention in Maiduguri. Meanwhile, Red Cross and defence official reported that more than 700 people were killed during the five-day Boko Haram uprising. Again, in December 2009, at least 40 people were killed in clashes between security forces and members of an Islamic sect armed with machetes in the northern city of Bauchi. In January 2010, hundreds of people were reportedly killed after clashes between Muslim and Christian gangs in Jos. The violence abated after military officers were sent to the area and a curfew was imposed. Also in July 17, 2010, a church was burnt and eight people were hacked to death in an attack by Muslims in Mazzah village located 14km from Jos. In December 31, 2010, a bomb exploded in an open-air beer garden and market in an army barracks in Abuja, killing at least four and wounding at least 21. In January 2011, fresh sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims flared up in central Nigeria, at least 35 people were killed, and various places of worship were targeted while religious rioting and arson attacks continued on the street in the city of Jos and Tafawa Balewa. In June 16, 2011, Boko Haram claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in the car park of the police headquarters in the federal capital Abuja. At least two people were killed, including the bomber. The attack was reported to have been Nigeria's first suicide bombing attack (Aljazeera News: 26 December, 2010).

The list of the various religion-induced tensions occasioned by the rivalry of the major religions in Nigeria, which have continued to threaten Nigeria's existence, is inexhaustible, and it has continued unabated till this present time. A very much recent experience is the case in Ire-Ekiti, in Oye Local Government Area of Ekiti State in the year 2020, in which two persons were gruesomely murdered and several others sustained varying degrees of injuries, in a violence that broke out as a result of the step taken by the state government to check the spread of corona virus in the state. According to the New Telegraph of 11th of August (2020: p.6), the violence broke out when the adherents or worshipers of Ogun- (the Yoruba god of iron) protested against the cancelation of the annual Ogun Onire festival because of Covid-19. The governor of the state- Kayode Fayemi had stopped the celebration of all traditional festivals across the state because of the ravage of corona virus. In order to enforce the directive, the traditional ruler of the town- the Onire of Ire-Ekiti, Oba Victor Bobade told the Ogun

adherents to shelve the year's celebration. This did not go down well with the worshipers who claimed that both Christians and Muslims in the town and perhaps across the entire state were being allowed to worship in their various worship centers, though with subtle measures put in place to guide their activities by the state government despite the purported Covid 19 saga. In the violence that erupted on Sunday 9th of August 2020, a car belonging to the monarch was set ablaze, two persons were shot dead, many were injured and valuable properties were destroyed. So, the abduction of God through the claims and counterclaims of monopoly of God's truth and religious absoluteness by the major religions in Nigeria is partly responsible for the rivalry of the major religions in the country and the resultant incessant religious violence experienced in the country. The next section of this study therefore pays attention to the implication(s) of the incessant religious conflicts experienced in Nigeria for the quest for sustainable development in the country.

5. The Impact of the Abduction of God's Induced Inter-Religious Rivalry on Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Sustainable peace is not only one of the pertinent projections of sustainable development, it is also an important ingredient for the attainment of agenda 2030 i.e. sustainable development. This is sufficed to say that peaceful environment is an indispensable requirement for the achievement of sustainable development. This invariably implies that socio-economic progress, including natural environment, suffer in a society like Nigeria where recurrent religious violence is the order of the day (Ogunbadejo 2020:379)

Incessant religious violence is akin to having a society in a state of war. The war zone situation engendered by incessant religious violence is particularly debilitating to social-economic development as no meaningful development projects could really thrive under such circumstances. Religious violence discourages economic growth in the sense of industrialization and modernization as it causes foreign capital flight since no businessman or industrialist want to invest where the safety of their investment is not guaranteed. What is more, by local businessmen always fleeing from areas of high religious violent, like Northern Nigeria for instance, a corresponding local flight or dispersal of capital would occur, denying the region, and indeed, the entire country, the economic development that is sure to kick-off from concentrated economic activities in an area (Arukwe, 2004: pp. 180-181)

Eradication of poverty is a specifically pinpointed projection of the agenda 2030. But It is however unfortunate that less than a decade to the projected deadline for the attainment of the agenda 2030, many Nigerians are still living in abject poverty as a result of the impact of religious tension occasioned by forceful attempts by the dominating religions in the country to confine God within the ambient of their tradition. The primary source of economic life of most rural dwellers in Nigeria is agriculture, and it is these rural populations that produce the bulk of the foods that the entire country feed from, including industrial raw materials. Meanwhile, the agrarian activities of rural dwellers, especially in the northeastern parts of the country that is mostly ravaged by the activities of the Boko Haram fanatics since 2009, for instance, have been put on hold, with many of the farmers being killed, maimed, and in the worst case, kidnaped. The survivors are being chased away from their ancestral homes. Many of these people now live outside their ancestral villages/homes as IDPs in uninhabitable environments without requisite life supporting amenities. Adegoke (2006: p.209), submitted that in Nigeria, widespread and severe poverty is a reality. It is a reality that depicts a lack of food, clothe, education and other basic amenities. Severely poor people lack the most basic necessities of life to a degree that it can be wondered how they are managing to survive. There are several effects and deficiencies associated with poverty in Nigeria. One of the main effects of poverty is poor health, as is reflected in Nigeria's high infant mortality and low life expectancy. Most children do not have the opportunity of being immunized and this leads to certain physical defects in some of the children. Their health has become low priority as they have little or no choices, they depend on whatever they are provided with, whether healthy or not.

Idika-Kalu (2020: cited by Ogunbadejo 2020: pp.385) found that in the Lake Chad Basing, the inhabitants live with relatively high poverty rate and population pressure, with about 50 people per km². The human population in the area is expected to grow annually by estimated 2.5-3.0%. The area is also prone to intense water scarcity with access to less than 550 m³ water per year. Their challenges include poor medical facilities, human literacy and inadequate water supply. According to him, and as indicated here earlier, the critical factor to the economy of the region is the level of displacement resulting from the conflict and the consequent unemployment and deprivation. As Boko Haram continues its attack in the area, thousands are forced to flee across the borders between the countries

around the LCB, and within the states. It is on record thousands of refugee flee Nigeria to Cameroon when insurgents ransacked any of the border towns. The same was the case with over 5000 inhabitants of Baga, another city on the border of Chad, fleeing across the Lake into Ngouboua village in Chad. This new demographic is dependent on aid and accounts for a swelling vulnerable population and fragile economy in the LCB.

The main points for trade and access to local markets for inhabitants, which are the borders, are mostly closed for security. Some livestock farmers move their herds through longer routes passing Niger, from Chad to sell at higher prices at the border markets. The commercial activities from fishing and agriculture have become restricted. Counter-terrorism endeavor by joint task force has been recorded to involve “clearing out” areas around the border, surrounding forests, and the lake shores. This military style operation targeted at flushing out insurgents has the side effect of destabilizing the lives of local fishermen and farmers. Maiduguri, in Borno State, Nigeria, has an ancient history of serving not only as a cultural and religious hub, but as the commercial heartbeat of the LCB region. Going back to thousands of years culturally, the Kanem-Bornu Empire and Kanembu of Chad are akin to the Kanuri in Nigeria in the way of life and language. The threat of constant Boko Haram activities over the last few years in the area has negatively affected business in the region and the rest of Northern Nigeria.

The violent activities of Boko Haram have brought a serious paralysis to business, the banking sector, markets, tourism, the transport system, hospitality, internal and external investment, companies and other economic activities. Okereocha (2012, cited in Aduku & Benjamin 2019: p.22), submitted that because of attacks on banks, markets, parks and government departments in Northern Nigeria, human capitals and investors have collapsed and people have migrated to other parts of the country. Economic backwardness, poverty, unemployment, insecurity and failure in sustainable human development have increased, not only in the northern parts, but in the entire country as well as neighboring countries like Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Benin.

Another dimension of the implications of the rivalry between Christianity and Islam on sustainable development in Nigeria is the shattering of public spaces in the country as a result of the proselytizing efforts of the two religions. The attitude of contestation for space that emanated from the rivalry between Christianity and Islam has also led to the

desecration of the public spaces as evident in the indiscriminate siting of Churches and Mosques on every Nigerian streets and residential areas. This act ultimately violates town planning protocols and destroys the aesthetics of the environment through littering of public spaces like banks, post offices, motor parks with religious billboards and posters. This singular fact raises the issue of social and moral responsibility on the part of the religious organizations that teach the duty towards environmental sustainability. Abuse of the environment is also evident in the use of drum-sized loud speakers, during morning, afternoon and evening religious services taking place in the public spaces. This often results in air pollution and social noise, which negatively affects the neighborhoods of the culpable religious centers, including the infants and the sick on admission in hospitals that ordinarily might be expected to be on bed rest. On the menace of noise pollution in Nigeria, Sony-Ehi (1984, quoted in Ayantayo 2018: pp.16-17) observed that:

Residents of big cities are increasingly going through partial deafness. Their sensitive eardrums are daily being bombarded by a continuous barrage of environmental noise overflowing from ear shattering drum-sized speakers of markets, mosques and churches.

The implication of this is that most public spaces, including residential environments in Nigeria have become uninhabitable due to the activities of religious organizations, stemming from their scramble for membership, and as a result of the mentality of monopoly of religious or God’s truth by the two proselytizing religions i.e. Christianity and Islam. Whereas, the projected deadline for the attainment of agenda 2030 in which the imperative of sustainable environment is emphasized, is now less than a decade.

Finally, the financial implication of the various religious violence in which economic properties are destroyed or burnt down in Nigeria cannot be overestimated. The resources that governments ordinarily would have invested on industrial and infrastructural development of the country is most of the time diverted to rebuilding or reconstruction of the damaged properties and this partly accounts for the infrastructural deficit in the country today. Both government and NGOs expend lots of money on the rehabilitation and resettlement of the victims of religious insurgent activities in Nigeria. All these account for the socio-economic including natural environment’s sustainability retrogression in Nigeria even while the projected deadline for the attainment

of agenda 2030 remains less than a decade. This is regrettable.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the influence of the attempts at forcefully confining God within the ambient of a particular religious tradition which is exhibited by the major religions in Nigeria, and which the paper tagged “God’s abduction” on inter-religious relation and its implication for the quest for sustainable development in the country. The dominant religions in Nigeria each try to confine God within the ambient of its tradition, and deny other religions and their adherents access to God against His will by making claims and counterclaims of monopoly of God’s truth and doctrinal absoluteness, while at the same time attributing falsity to other religions and their religious ideologies. This attitude however degenerates into religious fanaticism on the parts of the adherents of these religions, and this thus transmutes into the attitude of religious exclusivism among the people of different religious persuasions in the country, hence the recurrent interreligious conflicts that have continued to interdict the attainment of sustainable development despite the fact that the year 2030 projected deadline for the achievement of sustainable development is now less than a decade.

7. Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, this study prescribes the preclusion of the attitude of monopolising God’s truth by the adherents of the major religions in Nigeria towards engendering the attainment of sustainable development before the stipulated deadline of year 2030. The members of these major religions should rather leverage on the prescriptions of their religions on inter-personal relation to create a peaceful environment where religious values will be harnessed towards building environmental friendly society for socio-economic development. Without any iota of doubt, God belongs to everybody.

There is need for religious education that is built on the principle of objectivity, reverence for other people’s religion and religious ideas. Religious education offered by both Seminaries and Qur’anic schools should emphasize objective study and sound understanding of scriptural hermeneutics so as to facilitate sound understanding of the unique meanings of scriptures and their applicability.

The imperative of peaceful interreligious and interpersonal relation in a pluralized society like ours should be made part of religious and moral education

curricula taught at different levels of education in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, the “peace and conflict studies” general studies course that is offered in Nigerian universities today that is design specifically to contain the social menace of conflict and violence, should also incorporate interreligious relation in a pluralized society, factors of different forms of religious relation and religious dialogue because religion constitute one significant factor of social unrest in today Nigeria. And that aspect of such course of study must be handled by experts in the relevant field of Religious Studies.

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