

## Religious Fundamentalism and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Understanding the Intricacies

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### ABSTRACT

Religious fundamentalism and sustainable development are inextricably linked. The understanding of these linkages is important, in order to correct public misconceptions as well as reveal the inherent power(s) in religious fundamentalism that are development driven. Fundamentalism is essentially about conformity; it fosters unity and abhors distinction. It draws its power(s) from its ability to provoke change in the minds of adherence to any particular belief system. With the high rate of corruption in governance and the failure of government institutions to provide the human good to its citizens, strict adherence to the tenets of the various religious beliefs could help in addressing this problem. This paper evaluates the intricacies surrounding religious fundamentalism and its place in bringing about sustainable development in Nigeria. Functionalism theory was adopted. Indeed, it has often been reiterated that if Nigerians live by the ethics and doctrines of their various religious groups, several societal problems would be averted and a holistic sustainable development would be a reality. The paper suggested that religious groups across the country should encourage obedience and compliance to the tenets of their various belief systems. **Keywords:** Sumer; Memphis; Kôngo; cosmology; religion; theology; natural theology.

**Keywords:** religious, fundamentalism, sustainable development, understanding, intricacies

### INTRODUCTION

All through human history, religious fundamentalism has proven to be the principal force behind human development. Adherers are motivated by religious teachings, ethics and beliefs to develop spiritual qualities, that empowers them to sacrifice for others and to contribute to the development of their community. Religious fundamentalism and sustainable development are inextricably linked, such that the formal exert strong influence on the later. Religion according to Agbiji and Swart (2015), constitutes the main structure of the black race, and is connected with their general existence, including their socio-political and economic development. Mbiti (1999) observed that religion has pervaded all aspects of human life, to such an extent that it is not easy to separate man from it.

However, fundamentalism has come to be applied to a tendency among certain groups, mainly, though not exclusively, in religion, which is characterized by a markedly strict literalism as it is applied to certain specific scriptures, dogmas, or ideologies.

According to Ekeopara and Ekpenyong, (2016), religion generally, teaches its adherents that evil, bribery, violent crime, corruption, hate speeches, ethnicity, tribalism and nepotism is proscribed while fundamentalism emphasis practical adherents and loyalty to these teachings. The later describes strict adherence to the tenets, rules and regulations of a particular group. Ekeopara and Ekpenyong, (2016) posit that strict adherence to the values and morals belief system of various religious organisations is a catalyst that could bring about change in human characters and attitudes and consequently result to sustainable development anywhere in the world. They argued that the moral salvation globally, lies only in their immediate return adherence to religious values and morals system, which is the foundation for genuine conscience and sustainable development (Ekeopara&Ekpenyong, 2016).

Strict obedience to universal spiritual principles such as forbearance, kindness, compassion, love, integrity, fairness, humility, sacrifice, honesty, sincerity, dedication to the well-being of others, keeping of promises and agreements, as well as truth are the core values emphasised

by religious fundamentalism, which is the hallmark of any sustainable development (Aminu, 2003). This core values regulates the behaviour, conduct, and actions of individuals, religious leader and practitioners, as well as government. Ekeopara and Ekpenyong (2016) observed that this spiritual virtues, if strictly obeyed can be the source of social order, peace, harmony, stability, and discipline in the society. Genuine and firm commitment to these values and morals according to Aminu, (2003) determine the political and socio-economic behaviour of a people as well as the stability and development of such society. It is against this backdrop that Mbon (1991) asserts that, the development or otherwise of a nation to a very great amount depends on the moral and intellectual development or otherwise of its people. Similarly, Sunday and Mordi (2017) noted that religious values if courageously adhere to, translate to high moral and ethical values that all faiths aspire to achieve. In this way, religions can serve as a catalyst for the teaching and advancement of ethical principles, which are essential in the development of strong character particularly as it affect sustainable development and nation development.

The application and utilization of religious principles, beliefs and precepts by the three main religious adherents (Christianity, Islam, and Africa Traditional Religion), which are quiet similar, can result into the development of physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual potentials of man, which could facilitate sustainable development and national development in all spheres. According to Ademu (2011), Nigerian religions have a lot to contribute to the development of ethical values, which are greatly needed in the decadent contemporary society. In spite of it prospect to promote progress and sustainable development, perversion of religion in Nigeria have negatively affected sustainable development. This has been demonstrated by the incessant conflict between Christians and Muslim that has led to the loss of lives and destruction of properties. This paper is design to correct some of the misconceptions about religious fundamentalism as well as highlight the inherent powers in religious fundamentalism that can bring about sustainable development in Nigeria

### FUNDAMENTALISM: AN OVERVIEW

Fundamentalism is a term that is widely used in different contexts such that its origins have been obscured (Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2003). In a

technical sense, fundamentalism was first used in North America in the early decades of the 20th century. It was used by a Protestant Christian Movement to refer to their commitment to the fundamental teachings of Christianity (Karunadasa, 2013). The term usually has a religious connotation that indicates unwavering attachment to a set of irreducible beliefs. It is usually used, in secular intellectual parlance, to refer to religious cultures or communities characterized by intolerance towards those who depart from a strict version of one or another religious tradition (Almond; Sivan & Appleby, 1991).

Fundamentalism arose out of an internal conflict in American Protestantism often referred to as the Modernist Controversy, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's. According to Karunadasa (2013), this movement arose as a reaction against the secularization of society due to the impact of science and technology. The movement wanted to preserve and consolidate the Christian World-View against the emerging scientific World-View. The Protestant denominations gradually separated into two tendencies: 'Modernists' or 'Liberals', who argued that believers needed to adapt to the findings of science and scholarship; and 'Traditionalists' or 'Conservatives', who insisted upon maintaining older views of revelation and biblical inerrancy (Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2003).

This process of polarisation led to a series of intra-denominational power struggles. As they progressed, the views of the anti-modernists were articulated in a set of pamphlets published between 1910 and 1915 under the title of *The Fundamentals*. Those who supported the booklets' positions began to use 'the Fundamentals' as a catch-phrase for anti-modernism, and by 1920 termed themselves 'Fundamentalists'. By the mid 1920s, however, it became clear that fundamentalists were losing the battles (Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2003). In one denomination after another, modernists assumed control. The 1925 Scopes Trial was merely a national symbol of declining fundamentalist influence, as well as of fundamentalism's isolation from mainstream American culture.

As it became clear that fundamentalists were losing ecclesiastical power struggles, they responded by creating their own parallel institutions. These included publishing houses, religious conferences, denominational structures and educational institutions. This was in part a

function of their rejection by other Protestants, but it also symbolized the fundamentalists' own conviction that the larger society was pervaded by sinfulness. For fundamentalist withdrawal meant not only separation from other Protestants, but also self-imposed isolation from the political process - an isolation that encompassed not only fundamentalists but many of their related evangelical brethren. As the majority of Protestants opted for a politics dominated by secular issues and social reform, religious conservatives became ever more marginalised. The fundamentalist belief usually means staying within the confines of the standard belief system, adhering to the provisions of the belief system, and clinging to what has worked over time in a safe and comfortable manner. A fundamentalist is someone who believes in a specific interpretation of their holy text and strictly adheres to its tenets. Many religious fanatics are fundamentalists, but not all fundamentalists are fanatics. Religious fundamentalism because of belief system defines people by what unites them. It focuses on what unites humankind, rather than what divide them.

### UNDERSTANDING THE LINKAGES BETWEEN RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Religious fundamentalism is the backbone of sustainable development and it has transforming power if there is sincere commitment to religious values and principles. In other words, religious fundamentalism inculcates spirit of hard work and industrialization, which is the foundation that brings about sustainable development. People, who adhered to religious precepts, beliefs, participations, practices, rituals, behaviours, etc, often drive development activities. According to Ogbonnaya (2012), strong commitment to religious principles has the propensity to facilitate global development. Religious teachings promote common belief in the dignity of the human person under God, and emphasises committed to the promotion of the human good so as to provide basic human needs, guarantee protection of human rights and promote integral development globally. In the same vein, Stackhouse (2009) noted that the neglect of religion as an ordering, uniting and dividing factor in a number of influential interpretations of globalization is a major cause of misunderstanding.

However, proper adherence to religious values and principles in any society will immensely

lead to tolerant, trust, hard work, honesty, hope, courage, peace and love which bring about sustainable development of that society. Relatedly, religious and sustainable development are incontrovertible connected. Thus, proper adherence to religious values and principles provides the unifying foundation that brings peace, socio-economic, political, education and technological development. Similarly, James D. Wolfensohn former President of the World Bank as recorded in Ogbonnaya (2012:4) noted that:

Religion is an omnipresent and seamless part of daily life, taking an infinite variety of forms that are part of the distinctive quality of each community. Religion could thus not be seen as something apart and personal. It is, rather, a dimension of life that suffuses whatever people do. Religion has an effect on many people's attitudes to everything, including such matters as savings, investment and a host of economic decisions. It influences area we had come to see as vital for successful development, like schooling, gender quality, and approaches to health care. In short, religion could be an important driver of change, even as it could be a break to progress.

According to Agang (n.d), 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 the same vein, a healthy religious perspective provides a narrative that is necessary for the creation of not only a community of moral character, moral conscience and moral conviction but also a community of social resilience. Such socially healthy community facilitates active commitment and also participation in economic activities, resulting in a well informed radical social thinking and action. 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: humans and the rest of creation through good stewardship of the environment.

In Nigeria, religious fundamentalism is not only indispensable for sustainable development but also, it is the architecture that breeds sustainable development. Apart from being the stepping

stones to sustainable development, religious fundamentalism promotes love and happiness. It is in this regards that Ogbonna (2014) noted that in the face of the weakness of the Nigerian state and the inefficiency of its institutions to provide the human good to its citizens, the Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) supplement and complement government's efforts towards improving the standard of living of Nigerians. These Faith Based Organizations in Nigeria which number over 46,000 are involved in pro-poor, charitable works which alleviate poverty, promote progress, and serve as agents of development.

### FACTORS THAT CAN PROMOTE RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM IN NIGERIA

- The quest for holy living: the desire to be pure and holy is one of the biggest factors that could encourage religion practitioners whether Christian or Muslim to adhere to religious principles and ethics. According to Kumuyi (2017), God requires that every believer should desire to live a life of purity and holiness. He maintained that the holy books charge religious faithful of all ages that it is the will of the creator that His children work in purity and holiness. He argued that God created man to be holy in heart, nature and spirit, to be pure within and without. It is this desire to be pure and holy that drives religious fundamentalism.
- Regeneration of the human heart: the renaissance of the human heart is a strong force that can aid an individual to practically comply with the teaching, principles, and precepts of the holy book. For instance, in Islam, renaissance is achieved on the basis of good works. These works include doing honourable deeds plus keeping five requirements, or pillars of Islam: witness ("There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet"), ritual prayers five times daily (Salat), alms giving (zakat), fasting during Ramadan (Saum), and a pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj). On the day of judgment Allah will have a set of scales to weigh one's good deeds against his bad deeds (Sura 21:47). Regeneration of the human heart empowers an individual to think, act, and behave in such a manner that pleases His creator and promotes the well-being of people around him.
- Constant desire for Peace and Harmony: the desire for peace and harmony can

promote strict adherent to religious norms and values. According to Olawale and Yemisi (2012), no religion preaches violence and conflict or militancy. Every religion advocates and preaches peace and peaceful co-existence of all citizens. In Christianity, Jesus Christ is known and referred to as the prince of peace. He taught, commanded and demonstrated the significance of peace throughout His sojourn on earth. Throughout Jesus earthly ministry, he demonstrated his love and maintained peace with all men. Also, in Islam, there is call for peace, tolerance and kindness which is a state of physical, mental, spiritual and social harmony. Other virtues of Islam are that Muslims were urged to imbibe the spirit of kindness and forgiveness. (Q3:124) and further enjoined to live in harmony and peace with fellow human beings, Repel evil with that which is better and show perseverance with patience (Q 3: 200).

- Strong passion for progress: desire for progress is influencing factor that drives religious fundamentalism. According to Ogbonnaya (2012), religion can be involved in influencing the progress of our world. As a result of its large congregations and its common belief in the dignity of the human person under God, religion is committed to the promotion of the human good so as to provide basic human needs, guarantee protection of human rights and promote integral development of the globe.
- Economic Transformation: according to Agang (n.d), religion is the foundation for a just 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, if wholly understood in all its truth, encourages justice, love and peace in all human relationships.

### INGREDIENTS AND FEATURES OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

Religious fundamentalism is a distinctive set of beliefs and behavioural pattern in the religious circle. It is a religious way of being that manifests itself as a strategy among the



believers to preserve the authenticity of their identity based on doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past (Hassan, 2016). According to Rothgangel (2010); Karunadasa, (2013), some of the basic ingredients, and features of religious fundamentalism are as follows:

- Ultra-orthodoxy: the recognition of the absolute accuracy of the holy book based almost on a very literal interpretation of the ethics, principles and precepts of the holy book.
- Ultra-orthopraxis: the practice of religious life strictly according to the religious rules and regulations.
- Messiahism: the belief in a Messiah or Saviour, an all-powerful mediator who will usher in the ideal spiritual society.
- Reactivity: Fundamentalists react to processes and consequences of secularization and modernity, which have penetrated the larger religious community.
- Moral Manichaeism: For fundamentalists, a Manichean worldview is fundamental that is, the world is divided dualistically into a realm of light (a spiritual world of good) and into a realm of darkness (a material world of evil). In the end, good will triumph over evil.
- Authoritarian organizational structure: As a rule, membership in fundamentalist groups is voluntary and unbureaucratic, resulting principally in equality among the members. Despite this, fundamentalist forms of organization follow “the charismatic leadership principle”
- Strict rules of conduct: Elaborate rules of conduct with respect to dress, partner selection, etc. ensure strong affective ties. Sinful behaviour, meanwhile, is prohibited in detail: “Rules about drinking, sexuality, appropriate speech, and the discipline of children abound. Likewise, there is censorship of reading material, and close supervision and viewing practices.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Structural functionalism theory propounded by notable scholars is adopted for understanding of the intricacies of religious fundamentalism and sustainable development in Nigeria. Ajah and Nweke (2017) noted that structural functionalism is an approach in Sociology

which was developed at the wake of 19 century's industrial revolution. The theory was developed as an adequate tool for dealing with the interrelatedness of various traits, institutions, groups, and so forth, within the social system. Structural functionalism is as old as the history of sociology. This is evident in the works of the founding fathers of the discipline like Auguste Comte (1798- 1857) and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Coser (1976) as recorded in Ajah and Nweke (2017) attempts a definition of structural functionalism. He saw structure as referring to a set of relatively stable and patterned relationships of social units, while he perceived as referring function to the consequences of social activities, which makes for adaptation or adjustment of a given structure or its component parts.

The functional approach in Sociology was borrowed from the analogy of organism in the biological sciences in which it is known that all the body organs, in any living organism, have a kind of interconnectivity which links them together. Each of these organs plays a crucial role for the survival of the organism. In any situation where any of the organs malfunctions, it is believed that this malfunctioning might affect the life of the organism. The functionalists, therefore, argue that the society is made up of groups and institutions, which constitute the whole. They state further that each of these institutions that forms the society plays a part for the survival of the system (Ajah and Nweke, 2017). From the foregoing, therefore, functionalists view society as a system, a set of interconnected parts which, together, form a whole. This makes society the primary unit of functional analysis. The focus of attention is how the basic parts of the society, that is, the various institutions, such as the religious, family, political, economic, legal, and educational institutions co-relate together and functions for the survival of the entire society.

In applying this assumption to understand the intricacies of religious fundamentalism and sustainable development, religion is committed to the promotion of the human good so as to provide basic human needs and promote sustainable development. This implies that religious fundamentalism inculcates spirit of hard work and industrialization, which is the foundation that brings about sustainable development. Proper adherence to religious values and principles will immensely lead to tolerant, trust, hard work, honesty, hope, courage, peace and love which bring about

sustainable development. In addition, strict adherence to religious values and principles provides the unifying foundation that brings peace, socio-economic, political, education and technological development.

### CONCLUSION

Religious fundamentalism is concerned with the whole essence of religion in people's life, it emphasises religiously defined behaviour of "good" and "evil", and build confidence, trust, and swift remedy to the most complex human challenges. Beyond this, it promotes unique sense of identity, association, and meaning, which fill the social and existential needs of practitioners. Fundamentalism, a belief in an absolute religious ideology proscribes acts such as social disintegration, hate speeches, intolerance, hatred, immorality, oppression, and fanaticism. However, firm and unalloyed commitment to these religious ethical principles translate into development and sector reforms in any human society. Anyanwu (2004) observed that, we are not quite aware that any society can afford to exist in the absence of strict compliance to morality, trust, justice, liberty, truth, goodness and faithfulness. He maintained that all these virtues could only be found in religion. Considering the above assertion, it would not be out of place to state that this phenomenon is indeed capable of forming a good character, which is a necessary tool for a sustainable development.

The misinterpretation and wrong application of religious teachings, principles, and ethics is responsible for all sorts of religious restiveness and insurgencies, which has truncated all efforts and policies geared towards sustainable development in Nigeria. The fact remains that religion is not and can never be a tool of intolerance and instability. However, the place of peace in bringing about sustainable development cannot be underestimated, hence religion has a crucial role to play in this regard by inculcating in their adherents the values of tolerance and good neighbourliness. Ojoajogwu (2014) noted that the three major religions in Nigeria have many common values to make them serve the purpose of the nation. Each of these three religions has their various values and these values serve as a guide to human behaviour, dictating right from wrong and this is the most important aspect of religion, that is capacity to shape honourable human personality (Imaekhai, 2010). In the words of Ojoajogwu (2014), each of these religions has norms

which are similar and which if sincerely observed, can nurture and strengthen the development of the nation.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is need to understand that peaceful coexistence with other religious groups brings about sustainable development.
- There is need to adhere to the tenet of religious values and moral teachings which will not only bring honesty and integrity, foster peace and reduce corruption but leads to sustainable development.
- There is need to monitor, regulate and sanction religious preachers that preach religious hostility, hate and violence since religious hostility and violence undermines sustainable development by driving away local and foreign investors.
- There is need for religious worshippers to pursue religious righteousness that can bring love, justice and peace in the society.
- There is need to connect religious beliefs with our everyday life since sustainable development and religious fundamentalism are indispensable.
- Finally, there is need to be truthful when dealing with one another because it will ensure trust and dependence on each other which will encourage respect for the God-given human dignity and human rights of each other, and also bring about the pursuit of the common good, love, justice and peaceful coexistence

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