Ethical Imperatives for Current Religious Practices in Africa for Sustainable Development

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Abstract. The fact that Africa is incurably religious has been variously re-echoed by scholars since it gained prominence with John S. Mbiti. This need not be overemphasized as religion is almost an identity definer in key societal matters. As most critical minds continue to berate religion as the factor responsible for the underdevelopment of the continent, many others surging for best ways to make religion the important factor that it should be to Africa's development. There is no gainsaying that religious practices in Africa have left them with the ethical challenge to reckon with. This discourse contends that there is a dire need for ethical expression of religious practices in Africa to ensure that the goal of sustainable development is not negatively impacted. Using the exploratory approach, the discourse shows that religious activities in Africa today portray unethical practices that make caricature of religion and what contribution it can bring to sustainable development. It concludes that religious bodies in Africa must be guided by ethical principles in the display of their spirituality to guarantee sustainable development.
Key Words: Ethics, Religion, Spirituality, Sustainable Development

Introduction
The concern of this discourse bothers to a large extent on the heated debate on the relationship between morality and religion. Different intellectual dispositions have showcased in the history of thought as to the best way to couch this relationship. At some point, religion has often been reckoned as the origin of morality. Those on the other side of the debate underscore that this is far from the truth because even atheists do have a sense of morality. The debate as to which of the two gives rise to the other is not the concern of this present work. On a common ground between these two spheres is the fact that they overlap and are bonded with each other. Morality is shaped by one's religious convictions and any authentic religion encourages moral uprightness. It could be said that religion without morality is empty and morality without religion is worldly. Indeed, morality has so much to benefit religion especially as it is practised in Africa. The current African spiritual realities seem to project the view that morality and spirituality are opposed to each other. This is why many spiritual happenings in Africa have negative moral implications when considered within the prism of ethics. The confusion the breeds from this is that people are confused as to the kind of God worshipped in terms of His moral acuity. Unfortunately, this unethical spirituality throws doubts as to whether religion can contribute to development or not. Should this be the case, then the African continent will wallow in underdevelopment because of its "bogus and empty spirituality" (Otonko, 2015) will continue to be a clog on the wheel of sustainable development. Indeed, a lot of immoral things have happened under the guise of religion; and allowing them to sway unquestioned will only keep confirming the insinuations that religion is a deceit. It is against this backdrop that this work seeks to make a clarion call for moral caution upon African religious practices in order to check the scandal therein. The result of this pursuit is that religion in its robust form in Africa will continue to play its role in helping society attain sustainable development.
There are key concepts that underpin this work, namely, ethics and religion. Ethics as a discipline has become difficult to define because of its broad scope. Indeed, moral standing

has gone beyond human beings to cover every being in the ecosystem. This is the concern associated with environmental ethics, an emerging area of intellectual discourse. In its beginnings, ethical responsibility was limited to only rational beings where ethics was simply considered as the science that studies the rightness or wrongness of human actions or behaviour. This made ethics a strictly human-centred concern. However, with environmental ethics, moral considerability has transcended human beings to include every component of the ecosystem which is considered as an end itself and not just a means to an end. In spite of the expanded interpretation of ethics which this work takes cognizance of, the understanding of ethics employed here focuses on the morality of human beings in their religious expressions or practices. Thus, the concept of unethical religious practices connotes the wrong practices that are laden within religious acts or actions.

Religion on the other hand is not an easy concept to define. However, it emphasizes the relation between humans with the supernatural being(s) and how this relationship impinges on their relations with one another. It expresses the way one communes with the Supreme Being and how this communion influences the person's life with those around him/her. There are often distinctions between religion and spirituality among most scholars. This is what we find in the three models of the relationship between religion and spirituality laid out by Schneiders (2000) namely: first, there are those who consider the two as separate enterprises with no necessary connection; second, some consider religion and spirituality as conflicting realities, related in inverse proportion; and finally, some see religion and spirituality as two dimensions of a single enterprise which, like body and spirit, are often in tension but are essential to each other. Be that as it may, within the purview of this work, spirituality understood to cover what happens during worship in religious centres and how this influences the societal life in general, is used synonymously with religion and spirituality referred to here is what is associated with religious activities and practices. It is worthwhile to emphasize here that spirituality as understood here is not the Fluker (2008) vertical type – a way or ways of seeking or being in relationship with the other who is believed to be worthy of reverence and highest devotion – but one that is also horizontally inclined.

Ethical consideration of religious practice is a necessity because of the interesting relationship that ethics and religion share as will be discovered later in this work. The complementarity between the two spheres is capable of saving religion from being wrongly expressed by adherents who often give it a negative public image within scholarly circles. At the end, the work will be affirming the positions of many pro-religious scholars that religion is not intrinsically evil, but the way it is expressed. Within the is framework too, it is possible to question religious adherents that are guilty of excesses in their religious expression without being antagonistic to the role of the religious in ensuring sustainable development in society.

The Relationship between Ethics and Religion

The question of the nature of the relationship between morality and religion has been a perennial one in the history of thought. Scholars have often pitched themselves on two extremes which this work labels as compatibility and non-compatibility poles. The compatibility pole holds that religion and morality are grossly related and the roots of morality are found in religion. Thus, a religious person is a moral person. At the other extreme are scholars who hold that religion and morality are not related and that morality has no source in religion. Thus, religion and morality are two distinct spheres as it is possible to be religious without being moral and moral without being religious. There seems to be a mid-point in this debate as it has been proposed that religion and morality may be two distinct spheres, but it is pertinent for the religious to be moral and the moral religious. These shades of interpretation of the relationship are confirmed by Childress and Macquarie (1986) thus:

…for many religious people, morality and religion are the same or inseparable, for them either morality is part of religion or their religion is their morality. For others especially for non-religious people, morality and religion are distinct and separable; religion may be immoral or non-moral and morality may or should be non-religious. Even for some religious people the two are different and separable, they may hold that religion should be moral and morality should be religious, but they agree that they may not be (Uche, 2008, p. 400-401).

Iwuagwu (2018) suggests a three-way relationship between religion and morality, namely, religion is harmful to morality; religion has little to do with morality; and religion and morality are complementary, that is, are of great importance to each other. In the first, it is argued that most religious teachings and practices are opposed to sound ethical principles as they show features that are inimical to morality. The second category argues that religion is morally indifferent as it has very little substance and on its own account has been historically irrelevant. Those in the third and last category hold a complementary relationship between religion and morality with a number of convictions: religion is nothing but ethics, and that ethics is part and parcel of religion; religion provides the foundation of ethics which depends wholly on religion; and religion and morality assists each other in promoting their values and both are engaged in the same purpose of positive character formation of the individual and to achieve a harmonious and peaceful co- existence of people in a just and egalitarian society (Iwuagwu, 2018).

Following the above categorization, it is pertinent that whichever pattern of relationship has its implication which impinges on the construction of religion in society. For the first and second levels of relationship, religion is irrelevant to society since it harms or adds nothing good to the relationship among human beings. In the light of that, religion alongside the many challenges associated with it is only one of the evils in society which efforts should be made to be eradicated. The implication of the third level of relationship projects the significance of religion in human society and how the moral pillar of the society depends on it. This implication gives meaning to this treatise and forms the basis for questioning the religious activities in society in line with the moral integrity.

This work takes sides with the third level of relationship that considers a compatible relationship between religion and morality. However, this relationship is not a one-way type in which morality heavily depends on religion. Courting such a relationship has multiple implications as:

… we will be forced to accept some offensive and morally reprehensible religious beliefs, teachings and practices as moral;… we will be freeing non-believers (atheists) from every moral obligation;… the question will arise as to which religious doctrines and practices ethics should be based on, in so far there are many religions;… some moral or legal codes which conflict with religious beliefs and practices will be considered morally wrong because of their lack of religious backing; … it may be argued that moral principles are not the sole prerogative of religious people. if not or anything, for the fact that there are diverse religions which have no common doctrines and practices (Iwuagwu, 2018, p.48).

To avoid the above consequences, a complementary relationship of interdependence is pertinent because it allows either of the spheres to question and influence each other as the circumstances demand. Thus, morality should be able to question religious beliefs and practices as to whether they are good or evil and religion should aid people to distinguish that which is good from bad and encourage them to do good and avoid evil. It is only through prism that the relationship between the two will not be lopsided and it is on that basis that the concern of this discourse finds relevance.

The Connection between Religion and Sustainable Development

Scholars are divided on the nature of the connection between religion and sustainable development. On the one hand are those that consider this relationship as negative. Within this group are those that hold that religion is antagonistic to development because historical records of crises arising from the domain of religion have crippled society's efforts at development in a variety of ways. Uche citing Dzurgba argues in this direction when he cites posits: "Religion has a high capacity of causing, fueling and committing unimaginable barbaric atrocities in the name of religious worship" (Uche, 2008, p.398). Such people will quickly dismiss any possibility of building sustainability on religious foundations or appropriate the sociologist Kurt Allan ver Beek words that "religion seems to be a development taboo" (Tveit, 2016, p.4). On the other hand are those that view this connection in a positive light by making historical references to the contributions religion has made in building world civilizations. For those in this camp, it is impossible to jettison religion in matters of development. As a matter of fairness based on the above contentious positions, before taking sides, it is worthwhile to take seriously the observation of Basedau, et al. (2017) state "indeed, religious ideas and practice, religious identities and actors, and the organisation of religious groups can significantly promote or hinder the process of sustainable development".

In spite of the risk associated with the positive dimension of relationship between religion and sustainable development, this work aligns with it and projects the view that religion remains indispensable in the pursuit of sustainable development. Indeed, the recognition of this important fact is the establishment by the United Nations (UN) of a special commission to court out ways religions can contribute to sustainable development. The findings of Gas-Aixendri and Albareda-Tiana (2019) concerning religion's contribution sustainable development goals are edifying. According to Gas-Aixendri and Albareda-Tiana (2019) religion contributes to solving human problems such as

> … reducing poverty (Goal 1); ending hunger (Goal 2), ensuring healthy lives (Goal 3), ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education (Goal 4), achieving gender equality (Goal 5), promoting decent work for all (Goal 8), reducing inequality (Goal 10), promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (Goal 16) and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development (Goal 17) (Gas-Aixendri and Albareda-Tiana, 2019, p. 17).

Religion has remained linked to different dimensions of development in spite of the skepticism that has trailed its potentials for sustainable development either in the form of it being outdated or being irrelevant. Thus, Tomalin et al. (2018) underscore religion is a major cultural, social, political, and economic factor in many official development assistance (ODA) recipient countries and understanding religious dynamics and the role of faith communities and actors is crucial for sustainable development. Emphasizing the important connection between religion and sustainable development, Altmann, et al. (2012) note the concept of sustainability is found in the scriptures of all world religions though there is no universal name for it. Indeed, religious communities remain key to fighting indices in society that act as clogs to sustainable development by acting as watchdogs for the affairs in society. It is on this basis that religious communities and leaders stand up against social, cultural, economic and political structures that are opposed to values that ginger development. Tveit (2016) reasons this way when he says that at their best, religious communities and religious leaders have raised their voices in the context of economic injustice and rampant inequality, the misuse of political power, the ugly face of racism or of violence against women and children. These are all indices that impact negatively on sustainable development.

Following the above excogitations, it is clear that religion has a key role to play in sustainable development. Narayanan (2013) has found a three-way interpretation of this role,

namely, through the values it offers, through its potential for ecological, social and political activism (based on those values) and through its capacity to enable self-development. In the first, religion offers a wealth of universal values, which lends itself to interpretation and practice by individual seekers and practitioners, both religious and secular, to inform their sustainability practice. Secondly, religion can be helpful in influencing ecological and social activism, which may be quasi-religious nature. Finally, it can help in the more personal realm of self-development since the human self, and the development of the self, has become a source of preoccupation for many development (Narayanan, 2013).

Current Religious Realities in African Societies

Beyond the declaration that Africa is the religious centre of the world, Africa could be considered as the hub of spiritual peculiarities. The emergence of religious movements in the 20th century through the 21st century has come with an array of spiritualities. These spiritual realities have left so much to be desired as critical eyes keep looking at them. Indeed, there are ethical absurdities that call for serious attention in order to avoid the consequence of counter-productivity. Oderinde seems to have captured the whole scenario when she laments about Christian religious leaders as follows:

There are scores of one misconduct or the other about ministers of the gospel in the recent time, if it is not a Pastor burning the hand of a child suspected of having a witchcraft spirit, it would be another Pastor in a sex scandal with a member's wife, if it is not a Rev King (2009) treating his Parishioners in a dehumanizing manner, it would be another Pastor stealing or diverting Church money for his personal pleasure and luxury at the Parishioners' expense; if it is not a Pastor patronizing an herbalist who uses human parts for spiritual power, it would be another Pastor faking a miracle (Oderinde, 2014, p. 29).

The same could be said of religious leaders in other religions. Africa has had to battle with religious spiritualities that are opposed to community life. This is exactly where fanatical spiritualities are in vogue; spiritualities that are antagonistic to others. Typical examples of these could be seen in terrorist religious groups such as the Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Al-Shabaab in East Africa among others that have destabilized the peace and security of Africa over the years to the present time. The character of these religious spiritualities is that they are intolerant of other religious spiritualities and hold their own spirituality to be the only authentic one there is. Consequently, people who have refused their beliefs and practice have been slaughtered in thousands. This is where religious spiritualities in Africa are guilty of the violation of human life. Authentic spirituality should be promote and defend human life and not destroy it. Thus, in Africa, there is wanton destruction of human life in the name of religion. Other aspects that human life is violated are in the activities of pastors and prophets who have often been engaged in human sacrifice for spiritual powers. At some points, human beings have been used as foundation for their places of worship. The experience of Prophet King of Nigeria already hinted above that was given death sentence remains a clear reference point. Other clear examples abound in different social media outlets where these pastors and prophets are caught red handed violating human life for enhancing spiritual strengths.

Moreover, African spiritual landscape is permeated with an array of religious leaders who are guilty of sexually immoral offences. According to Otonko (2015) there are cases where religious leaders have been guilty of one crime or another ranging from financial crimes, sexual crimes, and ritual killing to deception. Many religious leaders have been accused of sexually abusing their clients, sometimes, under the guises of offering them spiritual assistance. Women have been the victims of this problem as every now and then there are cases of rape and sexual molestation. Spiritual leaders have often been engaged in

the act of anointing the private parts of women in the name of curing them of their barrenness. At other times, they engaged in sexual intercourse with them in the name of allowing the anointing of God penetrate their victims for their emancipation. Beyond that religious leaders endorse sexual orientations that the Holy Scriptures of the religions they represent condemn. There are spiritual leaders that have endorsed homosexuality and gay marriage or unions. They have also downplayed to some extent the sexual principles that societies have held. One case that has shaken people to their bone marrow is the news associated with a female spiritual leader by name Veronica who has taught that it is not evil for a brother to engage in sex with his brother's wife. She is also said to have called on men to have sexual intercourse with her to be healed of their infertility. This is sure a surprise to many who find that as an offence in the sight of God and society.

Human rights violations are common in most African spiritual or worship centres. In this light, Essien (200) laments in the name of religion, the most ignominious acts that are against human rights have been perpetuated. Unfortunately, the violators and the violated hardly understand this correlation. Every expression of spirituality is supposed to promote the dignity of the human person in all ramifications. This is often not what obtains in most religious centres. There are religious settings where vulnerable members seeking solutions to their myriad problems have been abused in the name of deliverance. Many have been made to take into their systems substances that are harmful to their health and lives; others have been made objects of entertainment. Cases of some ministers trampling, beating and flogging their members in the name of deliverance are common. Today, many religious leaders go are guided by security personnel who are brutalise people. Often, religious leaders go out on convoys like the politicians do and deprive others of the free use of the road as their security personnel follow them with whips (*kobokos*) as though they were military officials on rampage. In other cases, religious bodies have joined others to deprive the weak of their property such as land and so on. False accusations from ministers especially bothering on witchcraft have also led to many members being treated as evil. Never to be forgotten is the blatant violation of the fundamental right to freedom of worship as most religious bodies will even kill people who decide of their own accord to change their religion. As Obioha (2009) has rightly observed, these are viable pointers to the fact that religion has been used as an instrument of oppression and exploitation. Such violations among others have left people bereft of their dignity as human beings and consequently their fundamental human rights.

The materialism that is promoted in most religious bodies is another peculiarity with current religious spirituality in Africa. Religious bodies have never celebrated the inordinate accumulation of wealth as this is opposed to the otherworldliness that religion promotes. Unfortunately, this is what is common with African religious leaders. Obioha (2009) decries this development when he notes that religion, which is supposed to be an antidote for atrophied materialism, has been overpowered with the lobotomy of secularization. Often the accumulation of wealth or the drive to acquire wealth has made many of the African religious leaders to compromise their teachings. The words of Otonko (2015) are relevant here when he emphasizes many of them sacrifice their prophetic voices on the altar of wealth. They are the ones who wear most expensive clothes, drive most expensive cars and own mansions. In short, they live most ostentatious lifestyles. Being guilty of this, they are slow at questioning members of their religious bodies especially those who acquire wealth through fraudulent and evil means. Their major concern is that this wealth in whichever form it comes (either as material things or money) is offered to them. Little is done even in their teaching to prick the individual consciences of members as long as they have a considerable share in the proceeds through whichever means. This too has influenced the teaching of these religious leaders as most of them only emphasize the acquisition of wealth often at the expense of hard work.

Commercialization of religion has become a permanent normal in Africa. Bellar (2012) is right to have observed judging from today's experience that spirituality and religion are not just part of people's lives, they are products that are sold and bought on a daily basis. Ekwuru (1999) is right to have observed that the two flourishing business institutions today are the commercial banks and the religious commercial institutions. Religion has become a commodity that is sold for monetary gains. Commenting on what happens in religious centres, Oke (2012) underscores there God is haggled and sold, His word is sold, so also His power. It is here that religious leaders have adopted the strategy of deception in whatever form to make their trade blossom. Thus, they often stage-manage miracles, make wrong prophetic discharges that often contradict one another and lead to chaos within the polity.

The fraud and criminality associated with African spirituality are commonplace. In the name of religion, many have been exploited by their religious leaders in the name of doing God's will. Expressions of spirituality in Africa have often resulted in violence of different shades leading to the loss of lives and property. Most expressions of spirituality appear to be intolerant in a society of diverse religions. It is common to find an exhibition of Spartan kind of spirituality in which any evil done to people of other religion is considered a good act. This is a common phenomenon in African spiritual expression.

Religious practices in Africa are full of deception as often religious leaders lie in the name of God. The cases of fake prophecies, revelations and miracles abound on social media. This act of religious deception is permeating every facet of society as religious leaders also prophecy on who wins a football match and even an election. The disturbing aspect of this development is that most of these prophecies are contradictory, leaving the public with the impression that the Supreme Being these leaders all pay allegiance to is divided and contradicts Himself. Aneke (2016) argues in this line that one striking thing about these prophecies and claims of revelation is their sheer inconsistencies, incompleteness, contradictions and even attacks on one another. … if all revelations come from God, why would there be contradictions among them?. Pinpointing the issue of fake miracles and its effects, Gwamna (2014) notes that we have miracle merchants, magicians and charlatans who in the name of 'anointing' have cheated an unsuspecting public. All this has compounded people's problems, making religion appear unreliable in contributing to sustainable development.

Factors Responsible for Unethical Religious Practices

Poverty: Africa has been rightly described as the poorest continent in the globe. This description is based on a number of indices such as per capita income, unemployment rate and the like. As a result of poverty, people are looking for every avenue possible to get out of their miserable state. Given the force that religion has in Africa, many have seen in it an escape route from poverty. Thus, all sorts of people have made their way into the *divine industry.* Such persons, especially religious leaders, are ready to do whatever possible for their trade to bloom. Consequently, they engage in all sort of moral acts in order to win the minds of their followers or to excel. It is for this reason that ritual sacrifices and all manner of crimes are committed by religious leaders.

Ignorance: The ignorance of the religious leaders and followers has allowed immoral practices to trail the spiritual practices in African religious centres. Given that people are ignorant of the ideals of their religion and what is expected of them, they give into the whims and caprices of their leaders who often cajole them into immoral acts. Such ignorance is what makes a married woman or man who has not borne children to yield to the religious leaders' claim that the only way to open her womb or make him fertile is for her or him to have sexual intercourse with the said leader. The same ignorance makes people to take in dangerous substances under the guise of deliverance, and also for the same reason that people will allow

themselves to be trampled upon during religious services in the name of receiving God's anointing.

Poor Leadership: Leadership failure can be a malaise with many consequences. Lack of proper training for religious leaders has often led to an increased level of immorality within spiritual centres in Africa. Most spiritual leaders were self-made and others never received adequate training to enable deliver spiritual goods to their followers. Consequently, they are quick at endorsing and fanning immoral acts even within their gatherings. The aftermath of this is the reformulation of doctrinal beliefs and practices with reprehensive moral contours. Thus, within religious centres, leaders are able to justify even against the dictates of their Holy Books, practices that God forbids. In recent times, there have been spiritual heads that have taught that abortion, homosexuality, incest and the like are morally good acts. There is no religion that ever approves such acts as ethical.

Unhealthy Competition: The proliferation of religious movements and denominations has added insult to injury as far as spiritual practices in Africa are concerned. Since religion has been commercialized, the quest for boom has made spiritual centres to compromise standards. It is within this framework that most spiritual centres hardly prick the moral consciences of their worshippers, but allow immoral acts to thrive. This is because many people drive joy in identifying with groups that do not challenge their way of life. Thus, most spiritual heads will promote the idea that God does not look at appearances, but the heart. In view of this, indecent dressing has become a permanent normal in most spiritual centres.

Fanaticism: Religious fanaticism has often been the cause of conflicts and crises in Africa. Adherents of different religious can sometimes take no cognizance of the multi-religious nature of the continent and tend to consider their own religion as the only true and authentic one. This attitude is the seat of intolerance and a precipitating factor for crises and conflicts. The foregoing is confirmed by Obioha (2009) that our so-called religious leaders are often involved in setting one religion against the other. This they do by claiming that their own religion is the best and the only true religion. This is a manifestation of intolerance, the 'Us against Them' philosophy". The history of most African societies is punctuated with many occasions of crises as a result of fanaticism. Obviously, fanaticism which often results in the loss of human lives tempers with the dignity of the human person which is a serious moral problem. It rates a mention here that because of fanaticism, even when religious leaders enter into dialogue, the exercise is often fruitless as a result of the insincerity that trails the effort. Thus, Gwamna (2014) observes that religious leaders have been alleged to be insincere in their proclamation and commitment to inter-religious dialogue... Such an unethical act which is equivalent to deception cannot support religion in contributing to sustainable development.

Ethical Imperatives for Religious Practices for Sustainable Development

The place of morality in achieving sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. This is because morality guides the way things are done within society. Thus, for efforts supportive of sustainable development to be carried out, there is need for an appreciable level of moral uprightness. This moral uprightness must reflect in all facets of life. The spiritual centres must remain leading examples of morality since it has been advanced that morality and spirituality go hand in hand. In fact, Obioha (2009) was right to have noted in reference to the relationship between ethics and religion that morality is the foundation upon which any meaningful religion is grounded. It also shows that religion well practiced is and should be a powerful contributor to the flowering of human society. Sustainable development has a religious undertone and so spiritual centres must become ethical centres to foster this cause. Consequently, there is need for moral awakening in a number of ways to ensure sustainable development.

Proper Training of Spiritual Leaders: The role of proper training for spiritual leaders is a necessity if immoral practices must be check in African spiritual centres. Training of leaders will expose them to the ideals of their religions and guard them against excesses. Authentic religious leadership does not sacrifice the truth on the altar of falsehood. There is also no danger of compromising the ideals of spirituality for personal and selfish gains. A true spiritual leader sees himself or herself as acting under God's authority and never manipulates people to display his/her spiritual relevance. Most immoral acts are carried out because at some points, spiritual leaders usurp the powers of God and claim to offer what is beyond them. Proper training of religious leaders is also a medicine for the virus of compromising ideals of one's faith just to enjoy popularity and patronage.

Proper Education of Followers: The ignorance of followers should be checked by proper education on the ideals of their faith. An informed followership can make religious leaders who act in their name and authority to be irrelevant since adherents already know their left from their rights. Thus, they are able to reason out areas their leaders are stepping their bounds and call them to order. Through proper education of the followers, religious adherents will be able to discern that God cannot employ immoral means to reach out to them. How can the same God allow a married man or woman to bring in a third party in their marriage when such is adulterous and capable of causing chaos? How can the same God who condemned acts such as homosexuality, consider it an acceptable behaviour? Informed followers can raise such questions and save themselves from the evil traps of their religious leaders who are using them as means to achieve their selfish and ungodly ends. Religious leaders must also contribute positively to making their followers knowledgeable of their faith. By so doing, indices such as fanaticism and intolerance could be checked. This is what Lere (2011) projects when he admonishes that religious leaders must go the extra mile to foster tolerance and mutual respect for all in the society. When the followers are well-informed of their faith, they will only support the ideals that their religions project.

Proper Regulation of the Activities of Religious Groups: The need for regulation of the activities of religious groups cannot be overemphasized. Of course, doing that may be falsely interpreted as persecution for the religious groups. However, cases of persecution are not easy to discern. The nature of African spiritual climate calls for religious bodies to be questioned for immoral acts they engage in. There are occasions where supposed religious leaders have been involved in criminal activities such as killing human beings for rituals to gain spiritual powers, sleeping with others' spouses and dividing homes in the name of deliverance, extorting members in the name of making them sow seed in the house of God and even indoctrinating their members with teachings that are opposed to community life and development. Such require proper legislative regulations with punitive implications.

Encouraging Sincere Dialogue: The multi-religious dimension of Africa has made it pertinent to engage in fruitful and sincere dialogue. Dialogue is necessary because different religions hold different beliefs and promote different practices. Fortunately or unfortunately, the adherents of these different religions live in the same society and relate with one another. Thus, dialogue makes it possible for them to live with their differences. In other words, it evokes in them the spirit of tolerance by emphasizing values that promote peaceful co-existence among them. There is emphasis on sincere dialogue because the actors or agents of dialogue often engage in it with suspicion. This has often led to more severe conflicts which make a caricature of the venture. When all the principles that involve sincere dialogue are employed, religion will be better positioned to make meaningful development to African sustainable development.

Conclusion

The rich religious heritage in Africa must be employed in transforming the continent; otherwise, the African situation will only be a confirmation of the allegation that religion is deceit and antagonistic to development. Although the relationship between religion and development may be complex, amidst the complexity, there is need to properly court religion to deliver its good for society. This exercise is most pertinent now that religion has become a recognized agent for development even within circles that hitherto were opposed to it. Religious ideals in religion which are evident among all the religions in Africa provide necessary checks for excesses in religious practices. The complementary relationship between ethics and religion is the force that can benefit religion in the face of the dangers it is exposed to. Going by many unethical practices evident within religious circles, it is worthwhile for an ethical sensor to probe them in order to ensure that the ideal of sustainable development is not hampered.

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