

## **THE INTERFACE BETWEEN SECULARISM AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN NIGERIAN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Abstract**

Nigeria is a heterogeneous society comprising people of different religious and cultural affiliations. It is the most populous black nation with a constitution which portrays it as a secular state. Ideally, secularism depicts the separation of politics from religion for effective governance. Ironically, the three principal religious groups in Nigeria: African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity, and Islam tend to meddle with the political affairs of the country due to their dogged nature. Obviously, as a faith-based process, religion has the capacity to influence its adherents, but that precludes violation of stipulated regulation. This article therefore explores how religious pluralism constitutes an impediment to effective operation of secularism in Nigeria, which in consequence impedes the development of the nation. The significance of the study is to enhance unity in diversity through religious tolerance, for economic, political and all-round development in the country. The research adopted historical and descriptive method. It discovered that the collaboration between state and religious groups have often resulted in the domination of state affairs by religious sycophants. Consequently, there has been the emergence of religious fundamentalist groups fermenting religious crises and indiscriminate destruction of lives and properties. The study advocates the amendment of the constitution and the removal of the ambiguities that obstruct the full implementation of secularism in Nigeria. Also, effort should be made to dissociate religion from politics for effective governance, peaceful coexistence and growth of the nation.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Secularism, Religious Pluralism, Constitution, National Development

### **Introduction**

Secularism in Nigeria has been under threat from inception. Nigeria is a heterogeneous society which comprises indigenous ethnic nationalities ranging in scale

from smallest autonomous rural communities to the largest kingdoms and empires of pre-colonial Africa. There are varieties of religious sects within the country namely, African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity, and Islam. The British colonial master proclaimed Nigeria as her Protectorate in 1900, amalgamated her into a political unit in 1914, and subsequently introduced a secularist approach as the country's system of government without reference to state religion (Akpanika, 2017). However, the 1979 constitution went beyond silence on religion, and unequivocally asserted, that "there would not be any State Religion", which automatically declared Nigeria a secular state (Atanda, 1989). Correspondingly, Nigeria's secularism further drew its root and strength from section 10 of the currently operative 1999 constitution which stipulates that "The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion" (Ikogho, 2006). Obviously, in a religiously pluralistic nation, such as Nigeria, with three major religious groups, there seems to be no better alternative than state secularism, which prohibits integration of religion with politics. Inadvertently, this excludes politicization of religion and forestalls conflicts.

As a faith based process, religion has the capacity to influence its adherents, but that precludes violation of stipulated regulation. Ironically, the three principal religions in the country tend to meddle with the political affairs of the country due to their dogged nature of intolerance. The current climate of religious interference in the political activities of the nation should be checkmated to avert religious sectionalism, rivalry, favouritism, and crises which undermine secularism and national development. Sadly, some scholars' miss-interpret the policy of state secularism as an anti-religious policy, rather than consider it as that which is capable of upholding justice, peace, unity, and social progress. Ideally, secularism depicts the separation of politics from religion for effective governance. It does not in any way insinuate the absence of religion in a state. Rather, it implies that human actions and resolutions, especially on political basis should be unprejudiced by religious manipulation (Ogoloma, 2012). Invariably, the state does not sponsor any particular religion, but permits its citizens to adopt a religion of their choice. Thus, people are at liberty to practice any religious tenet that appeals to them, without any iota of fear, intimidation, victimization or favour.

Although, three major religions exist in the country, but the adherents of the imported religions, Christianity and Islam seem to undermine the traditional religion which is more tolerant and less politically active, and have often engaged in recurrent competition for control of political power pitched between the Northern and the Southern Region of the Federation. Meanwhile, the minority groups are not left out of the fight based on the fear of being dominated and marginalized by the majority group. The resultant has been segregation, sectarian violence, corruption, fierce parochialism, sectionalism, tribalism and other negative tendencies. This selfish and overambitious attitude was the bane of numerous coups and the long tenure of the military regime which encroached into the democratic dispensation of the nation (Ogoloma, 2013). These observed problems which have ushered Nigeria into a war zone and a state of dilemma are imbued with religious undertone. There is therefore the necessity to strengthen the secular character of the nation which has been weakened by these incidents. The

emergence of Boko Haram, an Islamic sect, (which means Western education is forbidden), aided by the Al-Qaeda with the sole agenda of Islamizing the nation is questionable. Their determination to abolish the secular system of government and establish Sharia Law has been attributed to the dominance of Islamic religion over other religions that exist in the country. Besides, it reflects the political rivalry between the North and the South towards controlling the nation's political power.

However, in recent times this hydra headed monster has reflected its myriad hidden scheme ranging from killing innocent people including Youth Corpers on national assignment, burning of Churches and a host of others. The unimaginable atrocities perpetrated by this Islamic sect in an acclaimed secular state sound unbelievable. Besides, it has negatively affected the political, economic, social and environmental situation of the region and by extension Nigerian economy. Many lives and properties have been wasted and in consequence, businessmen, companies both local and foreign have left those 'worst hit' states depriving government millions of tax revenue that would have been collected for upward development of the society (Ajayi & Oluwafemi 2014). The past president of Nigeria, Obasanjo (2006) emphatically declared that "Nigerians must develop a supra-national consciousness and shift their loyalties from their ethnic and regional cum religious groups to a new Nigerian nation. This does not in any way imply a strategy that denies the socio-cultural or ethnic roots of Nigerians, but taking advantage of our multiculturalism, multi-religiosity and multiple identities, all Nigerians must contribute to create one nation which all nationalities (majorities, minorities and sub-minorities alike), can identify with and collectively develop". This paper intends to investigate whether ideal secularism is practiced as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. It also seeks to ascertain how religious pluralism constitutes an impediment to the effective operation of secularism for national development. The methodology of the research is historical and descriptive approach.

### **An Overview of Secularism, Religious Pluralism and National Development**

The perception of separating religion from politics is a splendid initiative, particularly in Nigeria where there are conflicts between tradition and modernity, as well as heterogeneity and pluralism which defines social relations. It is imperative to clarify the key concepts — Secularism, Religious Pluralism and National Development conceptually, and in relation to politics and society.

**Secularism**—Secularism is rooted in various historical contexts that make it highly controversial (Lyon, 1998). The reason could either be lack of knowledge of its actual history by several scholars, insincerity or religious prejudice. The inability to describe the concept adequately has been an impediment to an objective assessment of what secularism entails. Secularism can be traced to Greek and Roman philosophers such as Marcus Aurelius and Epicurus, Medieval Muslim polymaths such as Ibn Rushd, enlightenment thinkers like Denis Diderot, Voltaire, Benedict Spinoza, John Locke, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine, and modern freethinkers, agnostics and atheists such as Bertrand Russell and Robert Ingersolli (Ogbu, 2014). In Nigeria, secularism was adopted and entrenched from chapter one and article 10 of the

1999 constitution which states that, “The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any Religion as State Religion” (FRCN, 2004). Be that as it may, the term secular was from a Latin word *secularis* and this signifies ‘an age of time, non-involvement in religious or spiritual matters’ and segregation of religions from public domain. Etymologically, the term “secularism” comes from the Latin word *saeculum*, which refers to “this world, as different from the other world”. Thus, secularism depicts interest in worldly affairs (Onaiyekan 2013).

In effect, it does not rule out the awareness of other world; but simply accentuate the present world. Politically, it presupposes the notion of the state ruled without reference to religious ideas, and rulers (Onaiyekan 2013). In 1851, secularism was invented by the British writer George Holyoake and was centred on free thought which had long existed in history. In Holyoake’s view, secularism depicts an idea of endorsing a social order separate from religion, without deliberately undermining religious belief. He contended that, *secularis* is not opposed to Christianity or any other religion, but independent of it. Secularism emphasizes enlightenment in secular truth, whose circumstances and approval exists separately, and operates ceaselessly (Ogoloma, 2012 ). Generally, secularism relates to politics and religion with respect to nationalism and rationalism, but people’s perception and experiences concerning it differ. For instance, French secularism, or *laïcité*, refers to the separation of politics from religion through the French Revolution which abolished the monarchical character of the Church. Secularism was thus, a political measure with the Law of 1905 that enshrined the separation of Church and State. A new government was established hence, "the Republican State, emerged the democratic ideal, and automatically replaced the Catholic Church and assumed her function on a temporal capacity" (Bencheikh 2005). Basically, religion, was not ejected from the State, but separated from the official activities of the State.

Dickson and Chujor (2017) remark that secularism is the process by which religious elements and dimensions are isolated from the political affairs of the State. Thus, a secular state is a state in which the constitution surpasses every person, group and other institutions. It is mostly adopted among pluralistic and heterogeneous societies to enable various groups have a sense of belonging, self-expression, freedom and unity. In a secular State, citizens are permitted to practice the religion of their choice. The constitutional emblem of secularism conferred on the Nigerian state over other institutions is constantly rendered ineffective, due to cultural and religious diversity and interference. Aside justice and equity which are major features of secularism. It also creates a sense of harmony and stability among diverse groups (Gofwen, 2010). The place and position of religion has continued to compete with secularism in Nigeria and the aftermath of their clash is violent conflict, corruption and sectionalism (Igwara, 2007). This pathetic situation forced Adeoye (2018) to exclaim that Nigeria is a secular country on paper, but multi religious in practice.

Chaturvedi (2006) defines secularism as the suppression of religious feeling and thought in the normal day to day interaction in the society. This implies that an individual may be an adherent of a particular religious sect, but those beliefs do not reflect in his

communication, or influence his social behaviour with others. In this case, religion remains subjective, not objective. It guarantees individuals corporate freedom of religion, and deals with the individual as a citizen, irrespective of his creed or faith. Secularisation has also been linked to the modernisation of societies. Essentially, secularism refers to the neutrality of religion in the management of the country and its politics. Secularism stands for the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, and the right to freedom from governmental imposition of religion upon the people within a State.

**Religious Pluralism** refers to the existence of different religious persuasions within a given societal structure. Invariably, a religious pluralistic society is a multi—religious society, where the different religious groups have diverse principles of salvation and worldviews which ultimately dictates the mode of life, values and eventual goal of each group (Beneke, 2006). Religious Pluralism can be said to be supervised by the secular State, which ensures the equality of these religions under the law, whether they have a handful or multitude of devotees. The State also guarantees the freedom of those who choose not to belong to any religion (Hutchison, 2003). The founding fathers of religious freedom and equality associated with religious pluralism are protestant and free thinking philosophers like John Locke and Thomas Paine. They were very influential and advocated for tolerance and moderation in religion. The modern religious freedom and equality underlying religious pluralism in the United States are guaranteed by First Amendment to the United States constitution, which states; “Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof... in the united states (Ogbole and Ogunrinade, 2013 ).This assertion clearly depicts that various religious affiliations within a society, are subject to state secularism, yet, the state should not encroach in the affairs of these religious groups as long as their operation is in accordance with the stipulated regulations. Moreover, the freedom of expression of these religious groups is not a license for interference in political matters of the State. Ostien and Gamaliel ( 2004) accentuate that this America’s model is not different from Section 10 of Nigeria’s Constitution which proclaims that the Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any Religion as State Religion. Freedom of Religion encompasses all religions acting within the law in a particular region, whether or not an individual religion accepts that other religions are legitimate or that freedom of religious choice and religious plurality in general are good things.

**Development:** The term development is multi-dimensional in nature. Generally, it involves economic and social change that is rooted on multifaceted cultural and environmental relationships. This means that development deals with re-arrangement and re- orientation of the entire economic and social structure for the advancement of individuals or a society. Seer (1979) regards development as the absence of poverty, unemployment and inequality in a society. It follows therefore that for a country to be classified as developed, there are parameters to be considered such as: the level of poverty, unemployment and disparity among the citizens. Rodney (2005) defines development as the procedure which embraces physical growth such as material goods manufactured through technological means; cultural development which comprises values, norms and traditions of a society; and personal advancement which includes

psychological directions of individuals. Ekwunife (2007) also defines development as that natural improvement within societal cultural experiences through which resilient traditional values of the people are brought to bear on the present environmental experiences through the processes of continuities and discontinuities for coping with the realities of existential living. On his part, Okoli (2012) asserts that development encompasses greater human dignity, security, justice, equity, transparency and accountability on the part of the government to accomplish the desirable economic, social and political growth and development.

**National Development** therefore refers to a regular and sustainable growth of the nation in all spheres namely, economic, social, political and the overall wellbeing of the people which makes the nation stronger and progressive. Okechukwu (2012) avers that the development of a nation reflects through portable water, medical care, transportation, infrastructural facilities, social amenities, employment, quality education, provision of security and a host of others.

### **Secularism and Religious Pluralism in Nigeria**

Nigeria is a secular state bedevilled with the problem of ethnicity and multi-religiosity. The only symbol that empowers the state over the various groups and institutions is the secular outlook as enshrined in the constitution. The effect of pluralism on our contemporary society is alarming, especially with the interference of religion on politics. Despite the problems posed to mankind by the modern pluralistic society, the revival of political radicalism motivated by religion and expressed in religious terms in the last couple of decades has broadened a fresh consciousness and experience of destructive inter-religious relations among peoples in all continents of the world, particularly in Nigeria. Ideally, secularism creates a platform for freedom of worship and expression for religious groups in its sphere of influence. Thus, there can be no religious pluralism where there is no freedom of religion. This presupposes that different religious organizations must then acknowledge the interdependence of one another for effective operation of secularism in Nigeria. In this regard, tolerance, dialogue and harmony are very crucial in a religiously pluralistic society. Essentially, the three prominent religious groups in the nation should deliberately desist from interfering in state administration. For us to reach a situation where we can respect ourselves and the standards highly honoured by others; without having to surrender our unique values which we esteem in a religiously pluralistic society, secularism is inevitable (Ogoloma, 2012). There is no gainsaying that the birth of extreme practice of African traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity ushered in a severe challenge to the act of governance. There has always been the concern of who represents the majority group and the preference of their interest has continually generated controversy in the country. Ethnicity and religion are closely related in Nigeria but religion is more of a unifier of groups than ethnicity. It generates sympathy, mass participation and also transcends ethnicity but tends to compete with the State in its act of governance (Cinjel and Joseph, 2015). This can be seen in the violent conflicts in the country that showcase religiouspolitics and the discrimination among citizens on the ground of religion. This explains the reason religion

dominates the political spectrum in Nigeria. The Nigerian constitution solely adopted secularism for the purpose of neutrality and to foster unity, balances and the superiority of the state over all other institutions in the state (Bello, 2013). The mutual operation of governance and religious practices constitute a great danger to the Nigerian State and its constitution. The incursion and intense exercise of religion in Nigerian politics created avenues for societal perils which include ethno-religious conflicts and discriminations among citizens, religious sentiments and a host of others (Dickson & Chujor, 2017).

The challenge from different angles like the movement and the establishment of Sharia Law among Northern States during the second tenure and reign of Olusegun Obasanjo is an archetypical example, the clash of the Islamic movement of Nigeria with the Nigerian military in recent times, the homage of the country's leaders to religious leaders and the incorporation of the place of Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N) and Islamic Association of Nigeria (I. A.N) in Nigeria is a visible feature of the confusion. What seems sympathetic is that plethora of the country's population are wallowing in abject poverty while government is busy channelling funds to support religious institutions which have constantly become a threat to State cohesion and peaceful co-existence of the country. Espousing a similar view, Igwara (2010) asserted: Nigeria is a confused and a fail state with a constitution that is loose and only applicable to the poor. Secularism is merely in a written form than in practice and if care is not taken, religious apparatus would one day dominate the State.

In his research titled "The Controversy on the Constitutionality of Nigeria's Secularity". Adegbite (Internet, 2012) contends that Nigeria is a Secular State based on the Section 10 of the Constitution which states thus: "The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any Religion as State Religion". Although, there was no specific reference to the phrase, "Secular State", yet the margin note to the section reads "*Prohibition of State Religion*" which implies that the drafters of the constitution deliberately purposed to separate State from Religion. The essence was to guarantee that religion as a private matter does not stray into public affairs. On no account should the state approve any religion to influence its official decisions or be sponsored with state funds. Secularism does not insinuate denial of God or religion. Fundamentally, secularism seeks to preserve the neutrality of government for effective and unalloyed service to the citizens. Certainly, imperialistically-minded politico-religious leaders often capitalize on religious sentiments to resist State Secularism under the guise of being serious Christians or Muslims. They consciously and persistently endorse religious bigotry, rivalry, and attendant violence to keep them afloat. This abnormality propelled France to eliminate the involvement of politico-religious leaders through revolution, before she could institute and benefit from her secularity status.

According to Ake (2003) the French Revolution was an exceptional struggle for emancipation which marked the inauguration of the modern polity and world respectively. That unparalleled process overwhelmingly transformed the universe and heralded remarkable innovation such as universal citizenship and the notion of incontrovertible rights of humans and citizens. It is high time the Nigerian leaders take a decisive step as France did several years ago to redeem the nation's secularism from religious encroachment and

dominance. He argues that there is no ambiguity in the constitution to warrant baseless arguments on State Secularism. Rather, disgruntled elements distort the constitution to serve their selfish interest and to deny Nigerians the dividends of State Secularism such as equity, justice, and peace which heralds development. Beyond that, the wrong picture of State Secularism as atheism should be discountenanced, since there is no such allusion in Nigeria's Constitution. Furthermore, Wikipedia (2012) reveals that not all legally Secular States are completely secular in practice. The example given is that of France, where "many Christian holy days are official holy days for public administration, and teachers in Catholic schools are salaried by the State". Probably, they are not profit-making schools, compared to the schools owned by religious bodies in Nigeria. However, the indiscriminate use of religion as a means of divide and rule, which is generating violence and bloodshed in Nigeria, is very rare in serious secular states. Abioje (2013) observes that in India, airfare subsidy is given for Muslims going on Hajj, but the government considers it a great financial burden, and has resolved to restructure the system. Henceforth, it will become the responsibility of the richer Hajjis to be paying "a premium for the poor pilgrims."

Most Nigerian government, both military and civilian usually maintain and enunciate secularism whereas, it is only applicable in writing and not in practice. They often incorporate this policy, but with some adjustments (Adeoye, 2018). Beyond that, General Babangida's administration, registered the country as a member of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OICs). That is tantamount to preferring a religious sect over the others. Such position creates fear among other religious groups who live in fear and in a state of marginalization (Huntington, 1999). Incidentally, the Nigeria government at all levels sponsor some Christians and Muslims on pilgrimage annually. The billions of naira that is often disbursed by the government for pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, Israel and Italy, indicate misplacement of priority since Hajj and Christian pilgrimage is only an obligation for those who can afford it (Jibril, 2009). Besides, it is a principal means of violating State Secularism. Political leaders adopt such strategy and many others as different forms of "gratification" to entice many prominent religious leaders. Moreover, public funds are spent on religious festivals of various kinds; some public officers even erect places of worship for some religious denominations or communities. This act of sectionalism and misappropriation of public fund portrays a vivid politicization of religion which impedes development. For secularism to succeed in Nigeria there should be removal of the ambiguities in the constitution through its amendment. Undoubtedly, State Secularism devoid of religious interference is faultless, and the best alternative measure for the development of Nigeria if properly applied.

### **Implication of the Interface between Religion and Politics on National Development**

The collaboration between the State and religious groups has often resulted in the domination of State affairs by the religious leaders in some African states, particularly Nigeria. This is the basis for the acceptance of secularism by its proponents. Secularism has been portrayed as a path to modernity in the West, but can Africans affirm that

Westernisation is the exclusive corridor to modernisation (Igwe, L. 2017)? The opponents of secularism tag it Western/Christian imposition on a multi religious nation. Nigerians are said to be notoriously religious, but their actions reflect “profane spirituality” (Basedau and de Juan, 2008). It is public knowledge that religion serves as a channel for social cohesion in a social environment. Religion has positively influenced the social and economic lives of Nigerians through its teachings and manifestations. People are educated to believe in their capability to create wealth and have a fulfilled destiny. Jobs have been created both directly or indirectly by religious organizations, thereby reducing unemployment level and crime rate. Taxes from investments are paid to the government and this helps to boost the economy of the country, thus, improving the standard of living of the people collectively. Sadly, due to intolerance, the practice of the similar teachings of love, peace, unity and brotherhood that the three principal religions in the country profess becomes a dirge and mirage.

The economy of a nation can be positively and negatively influenced by religion. When positively affected it results in the transformation and development of all the structures within the system and the effect will be felt by an upward increase in the standard of living of the majority of the people. This was confirmed by Max Weber’s work on the protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism. Besides, the negative effect of religion can be noticed in the fundamentalist’s assault on the state. The Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria today which has completely devastated the nation economically is a typical example. Over the years in Nigeria; religion has severely generated persecution, torture, wanton bloodbath and destruction of social and economic materials (Ajayi and Oluwafemi (2014). This inconsistency has propelled Basedau and de Juan (2008) to allude that despite the significance of religion, it has become the “maker and/or breaker” of the African continent”.

The Nigerian political elites exploit the powerful tools of religion, ethnicity and other sectarian differences to accomplish their political ambitions, and to vindicate themselves for their failure to create development. Lamenting on this anomaly, Toyin Falola, a historian, avers that nobody can aspire to, or hold political office in Nigeria without pretending to be religious (Kukah,1993). This hypocritical religious attitude of Nigerian politicians was tagged “tribalism of the Nigerian bourgeoisies” (Kukah, 1980). They scrupulously manipulate religion in the bid to remain in power to control the nation’s economy, while the confused masses wallow in abject poverty. They mastermind religious violence through the gullible youths and the Almajiris, yet their biological children are secured abroad studying in air conditioned schools. There is no gainsaying that some of the crises across the nation from the Boko Haram outfit, Niger Delta militant group and others are exhibitions of poverty induced frustration experienced by the populace. These underprivileged citizens observe with dismay, the discrepancies between dwindling social and material conditions of the poor, and the dishonest and conspicuous expenditure of the Nigeria political bourgeoisies. For example, employment, or key appointment to armed forces, police, judiciary and various political offices are usually justified on the basis of religious or ethnic composition. Such exercises usually end with wails of marginalization from different sections of the country (Tar &Shetima 2010).

Equally, admissions into institutions of learning, particularly Federal Universities, Polytechnics and colleges of education are strictly based on quota system. This usually involves special admission from applicants from “catchment’s areas” of the institution, coupled with “educationally less privileged states. The latter admission requirements are usually set below the merit quota, which is open to all applicants, irrespective of state of origin.

Generally, marginalization and discrimination are replete in all spheres across the country. This dichotomy, even reflect in situations where some operate a regime of discriminatory, higher school fees, for none “indigenes” studying in such institutions of learning. The indigene bias replicates in employment, paying of taxes and others. This discriminatory practice reflects in virtually all States of the Federation. Thus, the Nigerian Federation is highly contested, and the contours of the dispute are often pinched along religious and ethnic divides. It is an indisputable fact that the romance between religion and politics in Nigeria is a demonstration of religious terrorism where hypocritical religious leaders/ members mingle political and religious issues for their selfish interest. These imperialists skilfully strategize to attract the sympathy of gullible and uninformed individuals especially the youths, whom they have indoctrinated and rendered futureless. Consequently, they breed religious fanatics who focus their accusation on the politicians in their own country, but later transfer their aggression on foreign influence, such as secularism or modernization. They deliberately dwell on blame game to perpetrate their nefarious act thereby bastardizing the essence of religion.

Lamenting on this contradiction, Ajayi & Oluwafemi (2014) posit that “Religious terrorism in Nigeria poses a significant threat to national development as it is evident in Northern Nigeria where economic and social activities in some of the highly volatile States (Jos, Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi, Yobe and Borno) have almost been grounded by Boko Haram upsurge. The stream of killings, destruction of basic means of livelihood of the people and truncating of foreign and local investments; living people stranded, jobless, homeless and as refugees in their homeland thereby becoming a cog on the wheel of development of the States and Nigeria at large. It is generally accepted that development is critical and essential to the sustenance and growth of any nation. Thus according to Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2012) in an online Journal article, a country is classified as developed when it is able to provide qualitative life for her citizenry. They further noted that the pride of any government is the attainment of higher value level of development in such a way that its citizens would derive natural attachment to governance. However, according to them, Nigeria in the last fifty years has been battling with the problems of development in spite of huge human, material and natural resources in her possession. There had been series of development plans in Nigeria and the country is permanently hunted by the spectre of development. Citing Aremu (2003), the duo referenced above noted that the myth of growth and development is so entrenched that the country’s history passes for the history of development strategies and growth models from colonial times to date. Thus no term has been in constant flux as development and this seems the only country where virtually all notions and models of development have been experimented.

Religiously instigated violence fostered by religious fanaticism in the guise for politics and intolerance, has inflicted grave damage on the nation and continues to retard the pace of development of the Nigeria in all ramifications. The implication on the economic development of the nation is that the instruments which ought to be used for sustainable development are now being wrongly used for destruction of lives and properties. Unfortunately, the nation's scarce and hard earned resources which would have been judiciously utilized for developmental projects, are redirected both to fight the wars and to replace the numerous facilities which were destroyed in the course of the incursion. In most cases virile young men of the nation are maimed or killed; many internally displaced persons (IDPs) are created and government expends huge resources in taking care of such displaced persons; government compensate victims of these crises and this gulp millions of naira, which could have been used to develop the economy. This implies that foreign investors would not invest in the country for fear of molestation or being kidnapped (Ebony, 2009:17). Obviously, no meaningful development, whether economical, social, infrastructural, educational, political or otherwise can thrive in an atmosphere of fear, anarchy and insecurity.

### **Conclusion**

From the above, we have deduced that secularism is one of the basic elements in the process of modernization and it is the spirit which informs the constitution of Nigeria. Secularism will promote effective governance, justice and equity, stability of the nation, and the integration of the people of various religious and ethnic groups. For rapid and sustainable development in Nigeria, state secularism should be respected by the prominent religions in Nigeria, while the adherents of different religious groups should imbibe the culture of tolerance. It appears that Nigeria's political class – including the religious aristocracy – employ religious discourses and dogmas often to its advantage to mobilise and divide the people, and legitimise its hegemony over the society. Thus, the use and abuse of religion and politics is responsible for religious crises, emergence of various insurgent groups, such as the Boko Haram in the guise of religion, and instability in the nation. In a multi religious society, such as Nigeria, state secularism is seemingly essential to forestall conflicts and maintain social cohesion and growth in various sectors of the federation for speedy and sustainable national development.

### **Recommendations**

The paper proffers the following recommendations:

- i. Nigerian constitution should be amended for the removal of the ambiguities that obstruct the full implementation of secularism in the country, without the interference of any religious group. This will go a long way to strengthen the secular character of the nation and reflect the potency of secularism in the act of governance.
- ii. State machinery should also desist from incorporating religious activities in the act of governance, or interfering in religious affairs, such as expending to fund

- pilgrimages, or building of places of worship for various religious groups in Nigeria.
- iii. Neutrality and non-involvement of government in religious matters should be the dictate of every State, machinery of government and political parties in Nigeria. While the government should allow the dictates and provisions of the constitution to prevail.
  - iv. Government should desist from imposing a particular religion on the nation. This is because Nigeria is a heterogeneous society with diverse religious groups, attempting to apply or flow with a particular side would mean igniting animosity with the other sects.
  - v. Nigerians should endeavour to put the interest of the country first before their parochial, tribal, ethnic or religious interests because the country is for all of us. Moreover, all religions should be regarded as equal before the eyes of the government.
  - vi. No religion in Nigeria preaches violence. Therefore, any religious sect that is found resorting to violence in resolving of issues should be dealt with decisively.
  - vii. Any political outfit or organization in the country no matter how sacrosanct they may be, trying to use religion to garner votes during election time should be proscribed for ten years as a deterrent to others.

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