

JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE (JRSC)
**THE IMPACT OF RELIGION IN SHAPING AFRICAN SOCIETIES: AN
EXPLORATORY STUDY ON NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Religion has played a significant role in shaping African societies. The continent is home to a diverse array of religious beliefs, including Christianity, Islam, and indigenous faiths, each of these, influencing social structures and processes in unique ways. Religion, the social institution which deals with man's relationship with the supernatural, has so much force, that it has made meaningful contributions in shaping African societies. For thousands of years, various societies have had some form of religion at the centre of their cultural beliefs and practices. When people in a culture believe strongly in a given religion, it can have a huge impact on their culture. Their culture comes to accept only those behaviours and ways of thinking that are acceptable to their religion. This paper explores the impact that religion has played in shaping African societies. It will highlight how religion serves as a source of identity and mobilization and its impact on economic, societal and political reforms. Theories of social identity, functionalism theory and resource mobilization are used as theoretical framework of the paper. The study employs a qualitative research methodology, exploited data from books, journal articles and Internet resources are adopted. The paper concludes that religion, if given the pride of place, will help to transform Africa in the foreseeable future.

Keywords: African societies, Christianity, Diversity, Impact, Poverty Alleviation, Religion, Transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

African continent is home to a diverse array of religious beliefs, including Christianity, Islam, and indigenous faiths, each influencing political structures and processes in unique ways. When we think about the African continent, one of the first things that might come to mind is its rich cultural and religious diversity. With over 3,000 distinct ethnic groups and a multitude of religions, Africa is a continent like no other. However, what many people may not realize is the significant impact that religion has had in shaping African societies. Religion has played a pivotal role in African societies for centuries, and its influence continues to be felt in the political landscape of the continent. From the traditional beliefs of African tribes to the introduction of Christianity and Islam during colonialism, religion has been deeply ingrained in the fabric of African societies.

One of the ways in which religion has shaped African politics is through its ability to mobilize and unite people. Religious leaders have often been at the forefront of advocating for political

change and social justice. The power of religion to gather and mobilize large numbers of people has been seen in many African countries, where religious groups have played a significant role in mobilizing citizens to demand political change and hold their governments accountable (Smith, 2020). The general aim of this study is to examine the impact of religion in shaping African societies. Specifically, the paper seeks to discuss features and different religions in African societies. This study employs a qualitative research methodology and exploited data from books, journal articles and Internet resources to analyze the impact of religion in shaping African societies. Data collection includes critical analysis of primary and secondary historical sources such as archival documents, academic literature, complemented by qualitative content analysis of scholarly works and documented African oral histories where available.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following research questions;

(I). Does religion have impact on African societies?

(ii). Does religion serve as a source of identity in Africa?

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory refers to a socio-psychological theory which explains how people's sense of self is influenced by their group membership. It is a theory that has been used to explain a wide range of social phenomena including intergroup conflict, prejudice and discrimination. It provides a useful framework for understanding how religion can function as a source of social mobilization influencing collective action and shaping group dynamics. Tajfel and Turner (1979) asserts that religion plays a crucial role in the formation of social identities. It provides a sense of belonging and shared values, which contribute to the development of a religious group's distinct social identity. Propounded by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979, the theory has been used to develop interventions that helped to reduce intergroup conflict and promote social harmony. In Nigeria as well as Africa in general, religion has been used to foster intercultural cohesion and promote harmony amongst different groups. Ndukwe (2000) has observed that religion helps to improve social identity

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical framework, for the purpose of this paper, refers to a set of interconnected concepts, theories, and principles that guide the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon being investigated or studied. Polit & Beck (2017) agrees that "it provides a conceptual lens through which researchers can interpret and analyze their data, helping to develop a robust and structured research study". Creswell (2014) further states that theoretical framework serves to contextualize the research problem within an established body of knowledge and contributes to the generation of new insights or theories in the field. In this paper, three theories will be used. These theories are social identity theory, functionalist theory and resource mobilization theory.

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when it brings individuals together and they are more likely to engage in collective action, driven by a sense of duty and commitment to their religious community.

The Functionalist Theory

The functionalist theory sees religion as a system of interrelated systems that constitute the whole social system. Each unit or sub-system is interdependent on the other institutions of the whole social system. Changes in any part or sub-system affect the others as well as the total condition of the whole social system. This argument of the functionalist theory is that anything that has no function ceases to exist. However, since religion has continued to exist, it probably must have a function within the social system. The functionalist school of thought views the contribution of religion to human societies and cultures based on its general characteristics of contingency, powerlessness, and scarcity.

The functionalists assert that since human beings live in conditions of uncertainty and insecurity, all things are contingent and so devoid of any security. According

to functionalists, human beings are incapable of controlling and affecting situations within their environment such as suffering, decay, death, and so on. This exposes their weakness or powerlessness. Lastly, that human beings have to grapple with scarce resources to satisfy unlimited wants or needs, there is relative socio-economic deprivation. Based on these three characteristics of human existence, which have been described by Weber as breaking points in human existence, religion plays positive roles in society.

Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource mobilization theory (RMT) is a social movement theory that emphasizes the importance of resources and their effective use in the success of social movements. It posits that movements emerge not solely from shared grievances, but from the ability of groups to acquire and manage resources like money, manpower, and social networks.

Essentially, RMT focuses on how movements organize, mobilize, and utilize resources to achieve their goals. In 1977, John McCarthy and Mayer Zald published a key paper outlining the ideas of resource mobilization theory. This

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theory highlights the ability of religious organizations to mobilize their resources, including human, financial, and organizational to effect political change. According to McCarthy & Zald (1977), It examines how religion provides social capital, networks and organizational structures that can be utilized for political activism, advocacy and social transformation. Scholars agree that resource mobilization theory emphasizes the importance of socio-political contexts in shaping mobilization efforts. Factors like social networks and institutional opportunities provide an in-depth analysis of the external conditions that contribute to collective action. Meyer (2004) believes that the theory of mobilization highlights specific mechanisms that drive collective action, such as framing processes, recruitment strategies, or the role of leaders. These mechanisms offer valuable insights into the micro-level dynamics that mobilize individuals and groups to act in matters most favorable to their community.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that the theories of social identity and resource for mobilization are so intertwined that it

becomes evident that religion influences social dynamics, group cohesion and intergroup relations. While the theory of mobilization provides explanatory power and attention to contextual factors, social identity theory enriches our understanding of identity processes, intergroup conflicts and in-group favoritism. These theories are pertinent to this paper that they provide bases for interpreting the impact religion have made and will continue to make in the political transformation of Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

RELIGION AS SOURCE OF IDENTITY AND MOBILISATION

The intersection of religion and African societies has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry. A significant body of literature highlights the dual role of religion as both a unifying force and a source of conflict. For instance, Haynes (2007) argues that religion can foster social cohesion and provide a moral framework for governance, while also serving as a catalyst for political mobilization and conflict. Similarly, Mbeki (2010) emphasizes the role of religious institutions in promoting

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democratic values and human rights, particularly in post-colonial contexts. Several scholars argue that religion plays a crucial role in shaping political identities in Africa. For instance, Afolabi (2019) posits that religious affiliations often dictate political loyalties and voting behaviors, particularly in multi-religious societies. This is evident in countries like Nigeria and Ghana, where religious identity can overshadow ethnic and regional affiliations, leading to polarized political landscapes (Ojo, 2020). Similarly, Moyo (2018) highlights how religious leaders often serve as political actors, influencing public opinion and mobilizing followers during elections. According to Adebayo (2015), religion performs source of identity and mobilisation functions, some of which deserve a mention.

1. Religion promotes social cohesion. Religion inculcates shared values and beliefs that unite people from different backgrounds and this helps to create a sense of common purpose and identity, which can be especially important in diverse societies. Brown (2000) believes that religion helps to unite a society by

promoting not only the spiritual dimension of the society but also bringing about a unitize force to which every member of the society will subscribe and, in cases where the cultures are diverse, religion tends to provide a single canopy for all the members of that culture. Religious affiliations fostered a sense of belonging and community. Religious gatherings, rituals, and celebrations serve as platforms for social interaction and solidarity.

2. Provides a sense of community. Religion provides a sense of community and belonging to its practitioners especially for people who feel isolated or marginalized. This, according to Mamdani (2018), can be through participation in religious rituals, attending religious services or simply interacting with other members of the same faith.

3. Source of social support. Religion offers social support in times of need such as during a crisis or a period of hardship. This is usually through the provision of financial assistance, emotional support or simply a listening ear. This has led Agbiji (2015) to conclude that religion, which many have

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predicted would die off due to scientific revolution, will continue to exist as long as humanity exists. It gives solace to those who are going through hard times, creates hope for the downcast, mobilizes support for those in needs and, gives meaning to life.

4. Source of moral code. Religion furnishes the society with the moral code that guides people's behavior (Karanja, 2020). This invariably helps to promote social order and stability as well as protect people from harm. Many social scholars believe that without religion, morality, the principles which distinguish between right and wrong or good and bad behavior, will not be achieved in the society.

5. Sense of identity. Religion also provides a sense of identity for people who feel lost or confused about who they are. This can be through the adoption of religious beliefs and practices as well as the sense of belonging to a religious community. According to a study by Smith (2020), people who were religious were more likely to report feeling a sense of purpose in life than those who were not religious. The study also found that

religious people were more likely to have a strong sense of community and belonging than those who were not. In Nigeria as well as in Africa, religion has created a deep-rooted sense of identity which made it possible for people of diverse cultures and languages to come together as one entity. Jones (2019) agrees that religion can help people to cope with difficult life events. Religious people were more likely to report feeling supported by their faith when they were going through a difficult time.

6. Social Stratification: The research also revealed that religious identities can contribute to social stratification. Certain religious groups may hold more power or resources, leading to disparities within and between communities.

7. Lastly, Religion as a source of mobilization. Religion has the ability to stimulate people especially their members to oppose or challenge government or political decisions they consider inhibitive. This is evident in the proliferation of religious movements that have made great impact on political narratives across the continent. Religion plays a crucial role in political identity

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formation. In countries like Nigeria, religious affiliations can dictate political alliances and influence electoral outcomes.

FEATURES OF RELIGION IN AFRICAN SOCIETIES

Traditional indigenous African religions are lived religions, meaning they are not based on faith or a spiritual text (Moyo, 2018). Instead, they center around rituals, traditions, and practices passed down via oral tradition. Religion influences all aspects of daily life, such as diet, healthcare, work schedule, and dress. According to Jones (2019), some characteristics of traditional African religions include:

Monotheistic: Traditional African religions tend to be monotheistic, meaning they believe in one creator god. However, that god may rule over numerous lesser gods or semi-divine figures.

Ancestor worship: Many religions place a strong emphasis on ancestor worship and the spiritual connection between the living and the deceased.

Existence of spirits: African indigenous religions also often support a belief in the existence of both positive and negative spirits. These may be seen as the spirits of deceased ancestors who can either help or hinder the living, depending on how they are treated and honored. In this way, the idea of good and bad spirits in African indigenous religions is similar to the concept of angels and demons in Christianity.

Food: Certain foods may be avoided or consumed in certain ways as a form of spiritual ritual or to honor the ancestors. For example, the Maasai people participate in the ritual slaughter of a goat. This is typically done by a Maasai elder who suffocates the goat and then meticulously skins it, using all its organs. Goat blood is also consumed as a part of the ritual, sometimes mixed with milk.

Healthcare: In some African indigenous religions, the use of traditional medicines and healing practices is also common, and these practices may be guided by spiritual leaders.

Work Schedule: Similar to some Western religions, some African people observe a holy day (African Sabbath) at

the end of the work week. For example, the Bangwa people have an eight-day week. The eighth day is the Sabbath day during which people worship and offer sacrifices to their gods and ancestors.

Dress: Clothing is also often influenced by spiritual beliefs, such as the need to avoid certain activities or wear specific items as a form of spiritual protection. For example, a pregnant woman may wear specific charms around her neck to ensure the safe delivery of her baby.

RELIGION IN AFRICAN SOCIETIES

In Africa, religion has been an integral part of societies and has significantly had impact on political transformations throughout history. It will be pertinent, therefore, to outline some of the various religions practised in African societies:

1. Indigenous African Religions

Indigenous African religions have played a role in political transformations by shaping societal values, ethical systems, and modes of governance. For instance, African traditional spiritual leaders have often played influential roles in mediating conflicts, providing socio-cultural

guidance, and promoting collective identities. Kalu (2010), has argued that: The intrusion of spirituality in contemporary political dynamics is, firstly, given impetus by the claim of African politicians that African political ethics are rooted in an African traditional worldview. Secondly, religion is employed in the political and economic spheres by those who legitimate their power by appealing to ritual sources to be found in traditional religion and culture. These two factors enable traditional secret societies such as Ogboni, Nyamkpe, Owegbe, and Ekine to serve as instruments for mobilising economic and political power in contemporary African society.

2. Islam

Islam was brought to Africa through trade and conquest, and it has significantly influenced politics in Muslim-majority regions (Afolabi, 2019). In Islam, the Qur'ān is conceived by Muslims to be the word of God spoken to Muḥammad and then passed on to humanity in exactly the same form as it was received. Islamic scholars and institutions have contributed to governance systems, such as the

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establishment of Sharia law, which has had implications for political structures and legal frameworks.

3. Christianity

Christianity has had a profound impact on politics in Africa through colonialism and missionary activities. Christian churches have played a role in shaping political ideologies, human rights movements, and resistance against oppressive regimes. This has led Agbiji & Swart (2015) to conclude that Religion constitutes the main fabric of African societies, and is intertwined with their general existence, including their socio-political and economic development.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND AFRICAN SOCIETIES

Religion and Democratization

The relationship between religion and democracy in Africa is complex. Some scholars argue that religious institutions can promote democratic values and civic engagement (Kalu, 2010), while others highlight potential conflicts between religious authority and democratic principles (An-Na'im, 2008). Religion has

always played and will continue to play enormous role in the democratization process in Nigeria and Africa in general. Religious movements, for instance, have, at different times, effectuated political and social change by mobilizing communities and advocating for political reforms. Kagoro (2000) has observed that: Religion has intersected with the process of democratization in Africa. As countries transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic systems, religious organizations have played crucial roles in advocating for human rights, social justice and political reforms. In Uganda, the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) emerged as a significant force during the democratic transition in the 1990s. The IRCU, composed of leaders from various religious groups, facilitated dialogue, mediated conflicts and promoted peaceful elections. Their involvement ensured that religious values, such as justice and inclusivity, were integrated into the democratization process. Moyo (2018) further recalls that: Religious movements have frequently been at the forefront of political resistance and liberation struggles in Africa. Religious leaders, motivated by

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their spiritual convictions, have mobilized their followers to challenge colonialism, fight for independence, and advocate for social justice and human rights. One notable example is the role of clerics during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. Figures such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Reverend Frank Chikane utilized their religious platforms to condemn the oppressive regime and advocate for equality. Their moral authority and involvement in political activism influenced both local and international perceptions, ultimately contributing to the fall of apartheid in South Africa (Ojo, 2020).

In Nigeria, religious leaders have also been at the forefront of calls for political change. In 2012, according to Achimefu (2013), a group of Christian and Muslim leaders formed the National Peace Committee to mediate the political crisis that was unfolding in the country. The committee was successful in brokering a deal between the government and the opposition, and it helped to prevent a civil war. Ndukwe (2023), discussing the 2023 Nigerian general elections, recalls that: Many have argued that since Nigeria

is a multi-religious country and in order to avert a religious marginalization, a Christian or a practitioner of another faith other than Islam should be elected as the president of Nigeria come 2027. Furthermore, there are those who believe that Christians have suffered more marginalization in the present Buhari administration than the previous administrations and so should be allowed to accede to power with a view to correcting the imbalance. Ndukwe (2023) posits that religion often influences the political landscape of countries in Africa. The clamor for a religion-political shift in the 2027 Nigerian general elections goes to show the deep-rooted interposition of religion in the democratic process in Africa.

Again, during periods of colonialism and apartheid, religious movements such as liberation theology played significant roles in advocating for justice, human rights and political freedom. Religious leaders, acting as moral authorities, played a crucial role in mobilizing communities and resisting oppressive regimes. Okeafor (2018) notes that religious institutions have provided social

services including education, healthcare and welfare, filling gaps left by the government. And, religious leaders have acted as moral compasses and mediators offering guidance and conflict resolution mechanisms in times of social or political crisis.

Religion and Conflict

The relationship between religion and conflict in Africa is another critical area of study. Various scholars, including Tschirgi (2017), have explored how religious differences can exacerbate existing tensions, leading to violence and civil strife. The case of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria exemplifies how religious extremism can destabilize regions and challenge state authority. However, it is essential to note that religion can also serve as a peacebuilding mechanism, as seen in the efforts of interfaith organizations to mediate conflicts in places like Kenya (Karanja, 2020). Religion has also been a source of conflict and political instability in some African countries. Examples include: The civil war in Sudan, which had religious dimensions and Religious tensions in Nigeria between Muslims and Christians

Religion as a Tool for Governance

Religious institutions and faith-based organizations play a significant role in development efforts across Africa, often influencing policy decisions and resource allocation (Kalu, 2010). Religion has also been examined as a tool for governance in African states. Some researchers argue that political leaders utilize religious rhetoric to legitimize their authority and policies. For example, Chitando (2021) discusses how Zimbabwean leaders have invoked religious narratives to justify their rule, framing their governance as divinely ordained. This phenomenon raises questions about the separation of church and state and the implications for democratic governance. Many African political leaders have used religion to legitimize their rule and policies. According to Obadare (2006), this can take various forms:

- a) Invoking divine right or spiritual authority
- b) Aligning with religious institutions for support
- c) Incorporating religious symbols and rhetoric into political discourse

Religion as an Instrument for Poverty Alleviation

Poverty is a global problem that affects billions of people. According to the World Bank (2016), about 736 million people lived below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day in 2015. This number is expected to decrease to 689 million by 2030, but even this number is still too high. Unfortunately, Africa is one of the worse hit continents due to many factors such as war, economic inequality, drought, political instability, unemployment and, sad to say, the prosperity sermons of the religious clerics which tend to make the youths in Africa to become indolent and expect manna to fall from heaven.

To define poverty, Townsend (2006) states that people can be said to be in poverty when they are deprived of income and other resources needed to obtain the conditions of life--the diets, material goods, amenities, standards and services--that enable them to play the roles, meet the obligations and participate in the relationships and customs of their society. Jones (2019) further defines poverty as: In terms of basic needs and he

distinguishes between absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to the inability of an individual, a community or a nation to meet basic needs such as the need for food, shelter, potable water, healthcare and education. Relative poverty refers to conditions where basic needs are met, but where an inability persists to meet perceived needs and desires. Most African countries fall within the absolute poverty category. To help alleviate poverty in Africa, religious organizations need to:

1. Provide common services to their members or communities. Such services will include food and shelter, education, healthcare, micro-financial help such as loans, job training and community development.
2. Promote social justice and economic development of their immediate environment. Agbiji (2015) laments that religious practitioners have often encouraged "God-talk" that weakens the resolve of the masses to rise up against unjust political and economic systems in Africa. Much of this nonchalance with regard to public issues is initiated by the political elite and given impetus by

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religious leaders and by the faithful. In the face of socio-political and economic challenges on the continent, instead of Africans rising to the challenge, they resort to prayer. While praying over issues of socio-political and economic importance is necessary, prayer should not replace responsible actions that are geared towards fighting unjust systems.

3. Provide a sense of community to the poor, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

4. Encourage hardwork in their communities. St. Paul instructed Timothy to encourage members of the church to work for their provisions thus "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially his family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel" (1 Timothy 5:8; New King James Version). The Holy Quran also says "man will not get anything unless he works hard" (Surah al-Najm, 53:39). This implies that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for, there is no doubt about the fact that man cannot make any progress without effort and hard work. Religious leaders should avoid the get-rich (prosperity) sermons of today's messages

and emphasize more on hard work which brings about God's blessings.

5. Avoid the politicization and radicalization of religion. This has, unfortunately, led to violence, deaths, injustice, poverty and hardship which will be very difficult to eradicate from the continent. Kalu (2010) believes that Religious riots and Islamic terrorism in Nigeria, Kenya, Libya, Egypt and other parts of Africa all demonstrate the negative impact of religion. These negative trends have not only claimed hundreds of thousands of human lives but are also responsible for the enormous destruction of resources that could have been used for the development of African nations.

The Impact of Religion on African Societies

Religion in Africa has deep historical roots. Indigenous religions have been practiced for centuries, with a strong emphasis on the connection between the spiritual and physical worlds. These traditional beliefs often involve a reverence for ancestors, nature spirits, and the belief in a supreme creator. The arrival of Islam in the 7th century and

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Christianity in the 15th century brought significant changes to the religious landscape of Africa. Both religions spread through trade, colonization, and missionary activities, deeply influencing African societies.

Religious Influence on Cultural Practices

Religion is intricately woven into the cultural fabric of African societies. Festivals, rituals, and ceremonies are often religious, celebrating important events such as births, marriages, and harvests. These practices foster a sense of community and continuity, passing down traditions from one generation to the next. Religious art, music, and dance are also prominent in African culture. For example, gospel music, which originated in African American churches, has a significant following in many African countries. Similarly, Islamic calligraphy and architecture have left their mark on the continent.

Religious Influence on Social Lives

Religion in Africa often serves as a source of social cohesion and moral guidance. Churches, mosques, and other

religious institutions provide not only spiritual support but also social services such as education, healthcare, and charity. Many religious organizations play a crucial role in addressing societal issues like poverty, HIV/AIDS, and conflict resolution. However, religion can also be a source of division and conflict. Religious tensions have sometimes led to violence and discrimination, particularly in regions where different religious groups coexist. Nigeria, for example, has experienced conflicts between its predominantly Muslim North and Christian South.

Religious Impact on Politics

Religion significantly influences politics in many African countries. Religious leaders often wield considerable power and can influence political decisions. In some countries, religious affiliation plays a crucial role in the political landscape, with parties and politicians aligning themselves with particular religious groups to garner support. In countries like Sudan and Somalia, Islamic principles heavily influence the legal and political systems. In contrast, countries like

Uganda and Zambia have seen significant Christian influence on their politics and policies

The Way Forward

To sustain the transformational change in African societies, the place of religion and its impact in helping the transformation process should not be pretermitted. This paper believes that the following factors will invariably help to move Africa forward positively in the foreseeable future:

1. Avoid Religious Leaders Paley with Politicians

The Paley between religious leaders and politicians has been criticized in many forums, scholarly works and other forms of discourses. They are often seen as being too closely aligned with the government or the opposition and it makes it difficult for them to maintain their credibility and to build trust with the people. It is, therefore, incumbent on the religious leaders to focus on people, develop and inspire trust, have a long-term perspective, show originality and challenge the status quo and, of course, dissociate themselves from the political class.

2. Reorientation of Religious Ideology

Religious leaders' inability to contribute to positive social transformation in African society was to a great extent the result of a negative leadership ideological orientation that has shaped the mind-set of the religious and political leadership for centuries. Agbiji (2015) has, therefore, cautioned that African religious and political leaders should be reminded that they are not simply [spiritual or] political heads [respectively]: they are the divine symbols of their people's health and wellbeing. Christian religious leadership ideology should be reorientated towards the wellbeing of the African populace, who find themselves engulfed in poverty and deplorable living conditions. This should be seen as a sacred responsibility that should be diligently carried out. As leaders, the office is the link between human rule and spiritual rule. Christian religious leaders should re-orientate their leadership ideology and practice based on the conviction that their prophetic voice and engagement are both a social and spiritual contract for which they are accountable to God and to the people of God.

3. Encourage Good and Accountable Leadership

It is obvious that one of the banes of African positive transformation is poor leadership. Agbiji (2015) opines that Christian religious leadership has a responsibility to rise to the challenge of addressing the scarcity of credible leadership in Africa so as to be able to engender sustainable transformational development. Most of the leaders in African states identify with both the church and with other religious entities. Nigeria, for example, boasts a large Christian population in Africa which is enough to transform the society. This implies that a well-mobilised Christian fold with the desirable leadership and development ideology could effectively contribute towards the socio-economic and political transformation of African states.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The impact of religion in Africa is multifaceted, shaping the continent's culture, society, and politics. While it provides a sense of identity, community, and moral guidance, it can also be a

source of tension and conflict. Understanding the role of religion in Africa is essential for comprehending the broader socio-political dynamics of the continent. Overall, religion remains a powerful force in Africa, guiding the lives of its people and shaping the future of its societies. As Africa continues to evolve, the interplay between traditional beliefs and modern influences will undoubtedly continue to shape its religious landscape.

It is the utmost belief of this paper that, to help entrench a societal transformation in Africa, the following recommendations can be considered:

1. Religious leaders need to deal with internal divisions within their own communities. This, according to Haynes (2015), will help make it possible to speak with a united voice on political issues in Africa.
2. The religious leaders can use their moral authority to speak out against injustice and to promote peace and democracy in their domain.
3. They can also work to build bridges between different socio-religious and political communities and to promote

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tolerance and understanding amongst different faiths.

4. Religious leaders need to be willing to engage in the political process; work with other stakeholders including the government, the opposition and civil society organizations. They also need to be willing to tolerate others and to build consensus.

5. Lastly, they should divorce themselves from unnecessary relationship with the government and politicians which normally lead to unfair compromise.

6. Religious organizations should also promote social justice and economic development in every part of the African continent.

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