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Research Article


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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of traditional religion in sustainable democracy and good governance in Nigeria. It first of all defines key terms used in this paper. The paper also makes an overview of Nigerian Democratic experience since independence in 1960. Furthermore, the paper discusses the place of Traditional Religion in Nigerian society. Finally, the paper treats the role of Traditional Religion in sustaining democracy and good governance in Nigeria. It adopted an interdisciplinary approach in gathering information. Finding from the research revealed that Nigerian democracy has experienced many challenges that make the country un-governable. The persistence religious violence and terrorism in the country have raised many unanswerable questions among patriotic Nigerians. The paper recommends among others, that traditional religion should be emphasised to enhanced good democracy and governance in Nigeria.

Key Words: Indigenous, Religion, Democracy and Good Governance

INTRODUCTION

Since independence in Nigeria, attempts to entrench democratic rule and good governance have been truncated prematurely over the years. The reasons are not far fetched. For instance, the attitudes of the political class are often devoid of basic religious moral principles which are pivotal for democracy and better initiative for good governance to flower. Religious moral principles are inevitable for or present nascent democracy and good governance to strive as it is in advanced democracies of the world (Akintola, 2007). Democracy and good governance have become a household name in Nigeria but it is very clear that our understanding of the concepts is very narrow. Orhungur (2005) opines that a civilian government cannot claim to be a democracy unless it produced truly good leadership that offers freedom for the citizenry to elect their leaders. When this is denied, any nation that truly aspires to practice democracy must, as a matter of urgency, revisit its religious values to make sure that it is in line with the dictates of democracy. In other words, without these religious values and conditions, the dream of free and fair elections, justice and the rule of law will remain a distant illusion (Ekpo, 1999).

Democratic culture all over the world, an important ingredient of political life of every nation, good governance is also serious pre-requisite of political governance and the sustenance of democracy. For Nigeria to achieve sustainable democracy towards the realization of the importance of democratic good governance, indigenous religion must be involved in order to achieve the national goals. These national goals can positively help in translating democratic dividends and good governance to all and a sundry in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

For us to better understand the issues under discussion, some key words needs to be clarified. These are Traditional religion, Sustainable Democracy and Good Governance.

Traditional Religion

Religion is a difficult subject to inquiry due to its complex nature. The attempts made at defining its conception have not been easy. However, Egwu (2001) sees religion not only because of the problem of objectivity one encounters in defining but is emotion laden, even more so because of the difficulty of penetrating the “inner essence” of religion. Thus, Orhungur (2005) listed seventeen definitions of religion which can be organized into theological, moral, philosophical, psychological and sociological perspectives. Pratt (1947) described religion as:
The attitude of self focus towards an object in which the self genuinely believes what is true; a serious and social attitude of individuals or communities towards the power or powers which they conceive as having ultimate control over their interests and destinies. This attitude is mechanical, coldly intellectual, or faint touch of social quality which we feel in our relations towards anything that can make response to us.

Ekpo (1999) posits that religion is the attitude of the mind which covers motives and beliefs that are expected in acts of worship such a prayer and ritual. Nigosinan (1975) defines religion as the feeling, conduct and belief which are essential in all adorations in human morality. Its essence is the means by which God as spirit and man’s essential -self communicate. Idowu (1973) adds that religion is man’s intuition of the ultimate reality and expression of that awareness in concert life. For Bilton (1977) religion is a system of belief about the individuals who provide order and reason for existence in the world. It is the only way by which people comprehend reality. Thus, Adegbesan (1987) opines that religion is a system which relates man to ultimate value epitomized in God and embodying worship or communion. In the context of this study therefore, traditional religion simply refers to “Institutionalized patterns of beliefs and worship practiced by various African societies from the time immemorial in response to the supernatural as manifested in their environment and experience” (Ushe, 2010).

Sustainable Democracy

Democracy may be a word familiar to most, but it is a concept still misunderstood and misused in a time when totalitarian regimes and military dictatorships alike have attempted to claim popular support by pining democratic labels upon themselves. Yet the power of the democratic idea has also evoked some of histories most profound and moving expressions of human will and supreme power vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system. Lincoln, in (Diamond, 1999) defines democracy “as a government of the people, by the people, and for the people”.

The word “Democracy” is coined from Greek words: “demos” (people) and “Kratos”, meaning “people’s rule”. It is said to be one of the concepts in political science in which there is no agreement on definitions. According to Diamond (1999), Joseph Schumpeter defined democracy as a system “for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquired the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people vote”. Yusuf (2002), quoted Abraham Lincoln’s definition of democracy as “...government of the people, by the people, and for the people”. According to him, democracy is government by the people in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system.

This means that in democratic government, the masses determine who should govern and have a say in the governance of their country by their elected representatives. They have a say in the passing of the laws of land and canto some extent control and contribute to the decision taken by their elected leaders. Consequently, in a democratic setting, there should be freedom of speech, of the press and of opinions, as people are used to expressing their views and to questioning decisions taken by their leaders.

Akubor (2010), asserts that freedom and democracy are often used interchangeably, but the two are not synonymous. Democracy is indeed a set of idea and principles about freedom, but it also consist of a set of practices and procedures that have been moulded through a long, often tortuous history. In short, democracy is the institutionalization of freedom. For his reason, it is possible to identify the time tested fundamentals of constitutional human rights, and equality before the law that any society must possess to be properly called democratic. He maintains that democracies fall into two basic categories, direct and representative. In a direct democracy, all citizens, without the intermediary of elected or appointed officials, can participate in making public decisions.

Such a system is clearly only practical with relatively numbers of people in a community organization or tribal council, for example, the local unit of a labour union, where members can meet in a single room to discuss issues and arrive at decisions by consensus or majority vote. Today, the most common form of democracy, whether for a town nation, is representative democracy, in which citizens elect officials to make political decisions, formulate laws, and administer programs for the public good. Whether the method used, public officials in a representative democracy hold office in the name of the people and remain accountable to the people for their action.

Olanipekun (2007) also opines that the common definition of democracy is that “it is the government of people, by the people for the people”. According to him, this definition is of universal applicability. Both mighty and lowly make it their anthem. This notwithstanding, it can be argued that the term “democracy” may not lend itself to an easy definition, as it has been ascribed different meanings and interpretations. Olanipekun (2007), drawing inspiration from Thomas Jefferson says “Democracy is cumbersome, slow and inefficient, but it is due in time. The voice of the people will be heard and their latent wisdom will prevail”. Thomas Jefferson in a speech delivered in Maryland in 1809 said that “the care of human life and happiness and not their destruction is the first and only legitimate object of good government”. He further argued that Plato in his book, “The Republic”, says that “democracy is charming form of government, full of variety and disorder and dispersing a kind of quality to equals and unequal alike".
One basic truism that permeates each of these definitions or any definition of “democracy” is that if truly analyzed and practiced, it should be a “government in which the people through elections freely choose their leaders who will represent and govern them well”. Thus, “democracy” is a philosophy of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly. Kaur (2002) asserts that, etymologically, “Democracy” means government by the people”, and therein lies the big problem. According to him, today there is no country that can make public statement that is not government by the people. However, the question is, what do we mean by people? There is not and there has never been a state or city where “the people” means every individual in the state because of either social economic, religious and political factors. Even in Athenian city direct democracy did not mean every person in the city had the right to participate in decision making. According to Salim (2002), in a public lecture, he asserted that:

Democracy is a country that has government which has been elected by the people of the country...It is a system in which everyone is equal and has the right to vote and make decisions. The rise and widespread acceptance of democracy as a universal system of governance is largely as a result of the 20th century enlightenment and its growth was fascinated by the final collapse of communism. It is obvious that people from various cultural backgrounds have come to admit democracy as “government of the people, by the people, and for the people” (Olanipekun, 2007). It is a way of life that concerns itself with how power is acquired and lost, exercised and shared. It ensures social, political and economic equality, periodic elections, freedom of the press, participation of people in social and political activities, enjoyment of fundamental human rights, rule of law, respect for government opposition and free judiciary which are basic features of true democracy. Jason in Nigosian (1975) defines democracy all “the rule of the people, by the people, for the people”.

By “the rule of people”, he meant that “the people are supreme and sovereignty resides in them always” (Kukah, 1999). Democracy involves a social process which means people-centered system of rule. Awolowo in Ishaya, Pratt (1947), Opines that democracy exists when the adult citizens of any state freely elect a group of people from among their members to represent them or be their agents for the purpose of administering public affairs for the benefit of the entire populace. Jere (2001), notes that democracy is a system of government in which every citizens in the country can vote to elect its government officials. He states:

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Della’s presupposes above ramifies with Diamond (1999), who agrees that the central tenet of democracy is the active participation of people in governing themselves. A civilian government cannot claim to be a democracy unless it is produced truly as the choice of people and there is respect for the rule of law. Sholdfield (1975) affirms that democracy is a system based on comparative-parties in which the governing majority respects the rights of minorities. Salim (2002), further states that democracy is a particular type of political process in which power its conduct and the limitations are determined by the majority of the citizens of the state through the established political institutions, democracy implies that there should be a sustained degree of equality among men in the sense that all adult members of a society ought to have that measure of equality as far as possible.

Good Governance

The word governance refers to the democratic manner of governing, guiding or directing people. Thus, good governance in the context of this paper refers to the conscientious manner of governing, guiding or directing people.

The Nigerian Democratic Experience

Since independence in 1960, we have witnessed different unsuccessful attempts to democratize. This was a proof that Nigeria was not insulated from the prevailing democratic aspiration of those days. This is largely because, since the collapse of communism, democracy has become fashionable in almost all the parts of the world and a measure of progress in most African countries and Nigeria was not an exception. However, our collective experience shows that we are still far away from a truer democratic culture. Some recent experiences in the African continent seem to suggest that we are one step forward today and ten steps backward tomorrow. Examples are not farfetched. Kenya and Zimbabwe quickly come to mind. The attempt to democratize is either a farce or an attempt to take leadership by hook or by crook, which has been often resulted to wanton destruction of lives and property. This has been the tale of some many communities in the Nigerian State. O’Neil (2006) notes that:

With regard to the failure of democratic advancement, Nigeria appears to be in a class of its own. Here in a country, which as far back as 1979, when large sections were under various kinds of dictatorship, organized a free and fair election which successfully transferred governance from the military to elected civilian rulers. Before the applause of such a singular event died down, the Nigerian military decided to plunge the country into diehard obscurantism. Democratic concern among the military has all but completely atrophied with postponements and
cancellations of elections which are perceived as mere ploys to perpetuate incumbents in power. Nigeria was at the forefront of the liberation of South Africa from the darkness of the apartheid system to a modern democracy. Today, the democratic credentials of South Africa are a distant dream of many well meaning Nigerians. In the sixties and seventies, when dictators of various shades and colours were having a field day in Africa, Nigeria was among the few African countries in which continuous change of government (even though mostly through military coup) was a constant feature, and in which no self-perpetuating oppressive ruler could take root.

The failure of democracy to take root in Africa and the Nigerian inability to transit from one democratically elected government to another until of recent, have resulted to frustration, cynicism fatalism and lack of confidence in democratic process. Kukah (1999) notes that:

If one were to conduct a survey on what ordinary Nigerians imagine democracy means to them, there are many chances that the researcher will be met with great derision. Thus is irrespective of whether it is on the streets or the classrooms. Most of the respondents will, proverbially, do what Nigerians love doing best: answering questions by asking other questions. Thus, in responding to a question like, what is democracy, most Nigerians would simply shoot back, na democracy we go chop? Can democracy feed us?) or wetin be dat? (What does that means?).

He (1999) further states that: the tragedy of this lies in the fact that this climate of cynicism has become an all-encompassing phenomenon. For example, even among the so-called politicians themselves, there is so much self-deprecation, self-immolation, stone-throwing, name-calling, back-passing, bickering, treachery, blackmail and wangling that there are many who would argue that it is their incoherence, more than anything else, which has made the epileptic military interventions become so much part of our nation’s life.

From the annulment of June 12, to the sacking of the Interim National Government, the fall Abacha transition programme and our current democratic experience teaches us that democracy is an expensive project, in both human and material resources. It requires discipline, patience, vision and commitment. Kukah (1999) observed that; “so many years of experiencing the traumas and layers of oppression from the colonial and the neo-colonial states rendered many an African too weak to fight both in defence against and for democracy.

As such, no sooner had new democracies emerged in African that they began to crumble with ease, threatening to return to the state of nature for many”. However, the Nigerian case seems to be unique. The frequency with which and the manner in which one government is replaced by other in a class of her own leaves must to be desired. Democratic processes have been brought to an abrupt end by military coup and counter coup. Meanwhile, the politicians manipulate their way to power only to be manipulated out again. The first Republic took off on the 1st of October 1960 and came to an abrupt end by the infamous military coup of Major Chukumah Kaduna that eventually brought Aguiyi Ironsi to power from 1966-1967. His reign was short lived and he was ousted by General Yabubu Gowon. Only to be purged away by Murtala Mohammed. Like Aguiyi Ironsi, his reign was a matter of months from 1975 to 1976. He was murdered in a coup attempt led by Dimka Suka.

The drama eventually led to the enthronement of Olusegun Obasanjo as a military head of States. Olusegun Obasanjo tactically handed power to a civilian administration in 1980 and gave Nigeria her first executive President in the prison of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. The situation took on a dramatic turn with the re-election of Shehu Shagari in 1983. He was barely settling down when Major General Mohammed Buhari in another military coup chased him out of power. Within two years of his reign, General Ibrahim Babangida in 1985 toppled Mohammed Buhari. As the drama unfolded, this led to Babangida’s controversial “stepping aside” on 23rd August 1993 to make room for the Interim National Government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan. General Sani Abacha cashed in at this confusion resulting from the nullification of the presidential election of June 12 (alleged to have been won by Chief M.K.O Abiola) and the illegitimacy of the Interim National Government and sacked the Interim Government.

He was still pursuing and perfecting his self-transition programme when death stroke. This saw the emergency of the child of necessity staged by General Abdulsalami Abubakar. Abdulsalami Abubakar eventually handed over leadership to another ex-military head in the person of Olusegun Obasanjo through the ballot. With Obasanjo we have at least past the first hurdle that is transiting from one civilian administration. The fact that Christianity is one of the main religions in Nigeria makes it pertinent to ask what role can and should the Christian leader play in the sustenance of democratic culture in Nigeria. But before we answer the question on what role should the Christian leader play in the sustenance of democracy; let us first of all understand what a Christian leader should be.

### Nigerian Democracy and Leadership Crisis

The past independence political history of leadership experiments has shown that democracy is viewed by most people as a “game of smartness”. The prevalent Michavellis philosophy held by many Nigerian politicians who tried to separate morality from politics informed the negative attitude with which they go into politics. Thus, the view widely held by Nigerians today is that politics is a “dirty game”. This presupposes that there are no moral laws governing politics, if there are, they are not meant to be observed by those who practice it. Thus, the history of political philosophy right from Plato in the 4th century BC to John Rawts in the 20th century AD, philosophers...
and political scientists have tried to show that justice and the rule of law are the most essential ingredients of good governance. Although many Nigerian political scientists and politicians seem to disagree with the negative philosophy of the Italian pragmatic political thinker, Nicho Michiaveli, who tried to separate morality from politics and advised rulers to ignore morality and the rule of law if they want to be successful in their political game; his grabbing of it by all means becomes justified.

Many Nigerian ambitious leaders still behaved as if this is the best way of perceiving the game of politics in Nigerian society. For them, the most important thing in politics is to grab power by force and once one has succeeded in doing that, his grabbing of it becomes justified. In this case, “the end justifies the means” (Aristotle quoted in Ushe, 2010). It is a pity that cultural factors have also contributed to the apparent lawlessness democracy in Nigeria in the face of demand for an ideal political leadership. Corruption is endemic in Nigerian democracy. The attitude of the average Nigerian towards money, fame and leadership is questionable. These values are often constituted into ends rather than means to the end. Consequently, it becomes a case of “the end justifies the means”. It does not matter whether you kill or dupe to become a political leader or rich over right (Kukah, 1999).

What counts and makes your act noble is that you attain your end. This obviously demonstrates crises of values and calls to question one's whole understanding and appreciation of the meaning of life and political good governance. The Nigerian political game and leadership crises, therefore, is a reflection of the cultural and moral situation which hinders political leaders from meeting up with the demands of an authentic good governance in Nigeria. Many Nigerians have a deep conviction that you must be a cheat in order to succeed or bribe your way to get what you want. The philosophy prevalent in Nigeria today is that “if you cannot beat them, then join them” (Akintola, 2005). This kind of philosophy at best heightened materialism and secularism as counterproductive. It does not certainly bring any sanity to national life and political governance. Since Nigerian politicians live and breathe in Moral Ocean, they are invariably influenced by the machiavellian ethics which dominate national political life and leadership.

The high rates of political ills and lawlessness have resulted to the breakdown of laws and order in Nigerian society in contemporary times. The uneasiness of Nigerian political leaders to fully implement constitutional prescriptions for sustainable democracy and good governance has put to jeopardy the very relevance of the rule of law to the existential situation of contemporary Nigerian citizenry. By implication, it follows from the foregoing that Nigerian politicians who are part and parcel of the socio-political experience, should actively participate in the tasks of nation-building through “federal servant” model of leadership in democratic dispensation.

Democratic good governance enables citizens of any nation to achieve their set objectives, goals, values and aspirations that help them in building forward their country. And for them to achieve this, the leadership must be knowledgeable, pragmatic, responsive, emotionally mature, diligent, committed, accountable, consistent, prudent, and God fearing. The allowed mission of moral governance to deliver dividends could end up in sheer hypocrisy if it only pontificates on the ideal leadership while the members are not political arena where they can wield power for the organization of the society. Since the crises of political leadership in Nigeria are not necessarily an epistemological inadequacy but an indication of a moral malady, there is need for a re-conceptualisation of sufficient solution to the nation’s problem.

What is needed now is not sermonizing on what ideal political leadership entails, but rather putting into action what is conceptualized. It seems reasonable also to suggest that if the record sheets of Nigerian politicians and elected leaders must resolve to make the moral values their guide of life. This is the only way that the crisis of political leadership in Nigerian society can be resolved.

The Role of Traditional Religion in Sustaining Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria

One can adequately discuss the role of Traditional Religion in sustainable democracy and good governance without first treating the place of Traditional Religion in Nigerian society. This is because religion and democratic leadership has to be established before one can talk of the contributions traditional religion can make in sustaining democracy and good governance in Nigeria. Traditional religion is a phenomenon that resides whenever people are found (Ushe, 2010). It is a phenomenon that is vital for social maintenance and regulation of life-style of members in Nigerian society. O’Neil (2006) posits that the tendency of traditional religion has opened many fields of study that correlate the human behaviours with the value system of the society. This correlation is dependent on shared system of governance that reinforces, reaffirm and maintain moral development of any nation.

Traditional religion performs major functions in sustainable democracy and good governance in Nigeria. These functions include: (1) To provide support for social norms in the society (2) To enhance social integration in the society (3) To provide stability in the society and (4) To provide motivation and interpretation of important life-cycle in the society. These roles help the citizenry to define what democracy is and help in sustaining good governance (Goring, 1992). Warren (1998) posits that traditional religion possesses moral authority and ethical
sensitivity which complements the role of good governance for effective national development (Ikenga-Metuh, 1985). It enables citizens to exercise stability and conserving functions which make them to resist change both in their doctrines, policies and secular affairs, having relevance in development of moral standard approved by the society.

This indicates that traditional religion is tagged to forces which mobilize the hearts and minds of people towards better initiatives for good governance in Nigeria (Dopamu, 2000). Akubor (2010) lamented that the advent of foreign religions (Islam and Christianity) in Nigeria have threatened the religious landscape for sustainable democracy rather than promoting better initiatives for good governance in Nigerian society. Democracy and good governance can be viewed as two sides of the same coin. Nigerian society needs democracy and good governance to function effectively. Adegbesan (1987) asserts that traditional religion is a potential force for mobilizing, reshaping and inducing moral actions which guides people to define democratic values and good governance in Nigerian society. He states:

The norms, laws, values, traditions and taboos human beings observe, keep, forbid as moral standard and values come from God Himself. They are fruits and offspring's of tradition put in human hearts to enable them do just things according to the approved standard of moral norms in the society.

Orhungur (2005) corroborated that morality acts as powerful aid of social and moral integration enforcing good governance in the society. It has moral codes to energize and motivates people in seeking for democratic good governance as well as in making moral decisions in Nigerian society. Traditional religion not only functions as a tremendous force of vindication, but also enforces and perpetuates various other institutions of governance in Nigeria. Ushe (2010) affirms this thus:

Traditional Religion relied on cultivation of emotional feelings of identity and harmony with sacred values with the view of turning one to the past more than the future. This tends to integrate indigenous moral values which have suddenly become unacceptable in the wake of modernism into western oriented ones. Traditional Religion enables Nigerian citizens to accept societal values such as interdependence of other people, cooperation, justice, fairplay, good governance and honesty for the development of democracy in contemporary Nigerian society.

**Democracy and Governance in Nigeria**

In the world today, democracy and good governance are topical issues which occupy central place in contemporary debate (Haar, 1998). In Nigeria, democracy and good governance have created a vacuum in human relations which makes the history of political leadership to be incomplete without mention of the periods of disagreement, discord and war. There have been different unsuccessful attempts by European to democratized Africa as proof that Africa was not insulated from the prevailing democratic aspirations of those days. This is largely because, since the collapse of communism, democracy and good governance have become fashionable in almost all parts of the world.

Democracy came with new game of western political democratization, which in the worlds of Jere (2001) can be described as “liberal democracy”, based on western culture as opposed to African multi-cultural society. African political and democratic developments can be traced as far back as when the different kingdom leaders governed the whole of African continent. There were numerous kingdoms in Africa such as the kingdoms of Egypt, Carthage, Kush, Axum, Songhai, Ghana, Mali, Benin, Mwenematapa, Zulu, Bamba and Chewa, just to mention a few. These kingdoms were represented and governed by leaders who were freely elected by the people to lead them.

Between 14th and 17th centuries AD, the entire land of Africa was bombarded with intrusion of foreign ideologies following the many European Voyages of discovery and exploration. Some of the people who had great influence on the whole discovery journey around Africa include: Prince Henry the Navigator and Vasco Dagama, Bartholomew Diaz (Warren, 1998). In the hinterland, missionary explorers included people like William Murray, Richard Lander, Henry Molton Stanley, Robert Moffat, Dr. David Livingstone, John Speke, Richard Burton, among others. These people made great impacts in the spreading of what could be called the “new western culture”. Some of these people came to Africa as Christian missionaries and later worked for their government (Sholdfield, 1975). It was this inland exploration and the western influence upon the entire people of Africa that led to the partition of the continent in 1885-1888 (Jere, 2001).

This partition of Africa brought about the dividing up of African land among various European nations, such as Britain, France, Belgium, Italy and Germany. Each of these nations that took control of one part of Africa or the other established their own political administration. Thus, the governments in Europe took control of the continent of Africa. British colonies for example were controlled in London, while all French colonies were controlled in Paris. The partition and colonization of Africa led African continent into a period of political struggle and democracy. The desire for Africans to rule themselves brought the strong idea of African nationalism. This resulted in the independence struggle from the white colonialists. The struggle for independence finally paid up because all African nations got their freedom with the exception of South Africa who because of apartheid. Thank God independence issue of South has gotten their freedom recently.
The last move of western democratization was seen from the late 80’s and the middle of 90’s when the western rich nations forced many African nations to adopt the western form of multiparty democracy if they were to receive any economical support. No wonder, Wamthallila (1995), blames the western colonialists for the destruction of African economy, culture and democracy. The adoption of western form of multi-party democracy by many African nations’ witnesses different unsuccessful attempts to democratize the citizens. This was a proof that Africa was not insulated from the prevailing democratic aspiration of those days. This is largely because, since the collapsed of communism, democracy has become fashionable in all most all parts of the world and a measure of progress in most African countries was not an exception.

However, our collective experience shows that we are still far away from a truer democratic culture. Some recent experiences in African continent seem to suggest that we are one step forward today and ten steps backward tomorrow. Examples are not farfetched. Kenya and Zimbabwe quickly come to mind. The attempt to democratize is either a force or an attempt to take leadership by hook or by crook, which has resulted to wanton destruction of lives and property. This has been the tale of so many communities in African continent. Oguriofor writing about situation notes that:

…with regard to the failure of democratic advancement, Nigeria appears to be in a class of its own. Here in a country, which as far back as 1979, when large sections were under various kinds of dictatorship, organized a free and fair election which successfully transferred governance from military to elected civilian rulers. Before the applause of such a singular event died down, the Nigerian military decided to plunge the country into diehard obscurantism. Democratic concern among the military has all but completely atrophied with postponements and cancellations of elections which are perceived as mere plays to perpetuate incumbents in power…Nigeria was at the forefront of the liberation of South Africa from the darkness of the apartheid system to a modern democracy. Today, the democratic credentials of South Africa are a distant dream of many well meaning Nigerians. In the 60’s and 70’s, when dictators of various shades and colours were having a field day Africa, Nigeria was among the few African countries in which continuous change of government was a constant feature, and in which no self-perpetuating oppressive ruler could take root.

This failure of democracy to take root in Africa and Nigerian ability to transit from one democratically elected government to another until of recent, have resulted to frustration, cynicism, fatalism and lack of confidence in democratic process (Kukah, 1999). Many years of experiencing the traumas and layers of oppression from the colonial and neo-colonial states rendered many an African too weak to fight both in defence against and for democracy. As such, no sooner had new democracies emerged in African than they began to crumble with ease, threatening to return to the state of nature for many. The fact that traditional religion, Christianity and Islam are three major religions in Africa makes it pertinent to ask what role can and should religious leaders play in the sustenance of democracy and good governance. But before we answer the question of what role should religious leaders play in the sustenance of democracy and good governance, let us first-of all understand what a religious leader should be.

CONCLUSION

From the above considerations, it has been observed that for sustainable democracy and good governance to be achieved in Nigeria, the role of traditional religion cannot be waved aside. Traditional Religion has a great deal to contribute to moral rejuvenation of the citizenry in Nigeria. Good moral promotes fertile soil for democracy and good governance to germinate, grow, flower and bear lasting fruits. Traditional Religion is an indispensable instruction for the promotion of moral values that will help the nascent democracy and good governance to grow like other advanced democracies all over the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In a panoramic view, the paper recommends among others, that:

(i) There is need to overhaul the traditional religion to make it more repulsive to inculcate moral ethos for sustenance of effective democracy and good governance in Nigeria.
(ii) The Nigerian citizen’s religious institution and teachers should uphold moral religious values and be disposed in sustaining democratic culture and good governance in Nigeria.
(iii) The moral sanctity should be one of the indispensable qualifications for selecting democratic leaders in Nigeria.
(iv) The government should promote the rule of law as one of the means of trading vices in Nigeria. This will contribute greatly in sustaining democracy and good governance in Nigerian society.
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