

# THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IN NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY MAKING

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## Abstract

*This paper posits that despite the neglect of religion in the discourse of international politics and policy-making, religion has come to be recognized as an influential aspect of public life globally. It is an important feature of foreign affairs whose traditions do not exist in isolation from the political, economic, social or cultural aspect of human existence. Nigeria, in her 58 years of nationhood is the most populated black nation comprising people of diverse ethnic groups, religious and cultural backgrounds, its written constitution presented it as a secular state with democratic governance. Having Christianity, Islam and traditional religions as most widely practiced faiths, Nigeria's foreign policies under the various administrators have been underlined by religious influences in varying degrees. Imploring interaction theory, which provides avenues for exchanges of non-material goods and materials, the study explores the impact of religion on Nigeria's foreign policy making in its context as a secular state. Observing that religion is capable of presenting both positive and negative values, the study recommends that the positive values of the existing diverse religions could be harnessed while the negative values of competition and exclusive principles be downplayed by the various actors of foreign policy making in Nigeria so as to maintain a stable and progressive international relations.*

**Keywords:** Religion, Nigeria, African Traditional Religion, Foreign Policy

## Introduction

Most discussions on international issues in the realms of academics and policy making generally ignore religion or at best refer to it as an appendage to the main issues for discussion. In spite of this apparent inexorable secularization, the World Value Survey still recognizes religion as an influential aspect of public life globally. Religion has been discovered to be occupying a crucial place in global politics. Since 2001, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of scholarly monographs dedicated to religion and foreign relations<sup>1</sup>. Many scholars and policy makers agree that religion is an important feature of foreign affairs, regardless of whether one believes it ought to be the case or not. Though some scholars often view religion as a single "lens" for understanding the world, it is important to realize that religious traditions do not exist in isolation from the political, economic or social and cultural aspects of life. Religion is a social phenomenon that pervades every aspect of human existence and human interactions, including governance and international politics.

In 2013, John Kerry, secretary of States in the USA government revealed that he considered sectarian strife to be one of the most pressing issues concerning diplomacy and foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is no gainsaying that religion presents major challenges to peaceful international relations in the contemporary societies. Different religious groups and their

adherents interpret their scriptures/beliefs and international events in different and competing manners. This has been the situation in Nigeria's pluralistic religious and political landscape. Religion's influence in the interactions of states is one of the great and least understood security challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (Warner, C.M & Walker, S.G. 2011:1B)

Several factors conditioned Nigeria's foreign policy positions. Among such factors are ethnicity and religion, Nigeria's legacy as an ex-British colony, Nigeria's membership and commitment to several international organizations such as United Nations, and above all Nigeria's perception of itself as the 'giant' of Africa and therefore the potential leader of the black race. This study will focus on the role of religion in the formulation and execution of foreign policy in Nigeria.

The ministry of External Affairs is usually directly responsible for the articulation and implementation of the foreign policy of Nigeria, making use of the foreign policy trust of the government in power. The foreign Minister and his officials craft and implement these policies. It is important to find out whether the content of these policies are dependent on the whims and caprices of the Minister and his team or they are influenced by other external factors. The answer to this inquiry will throw a reasonable light on the dynamics of foreign policy formulation in Nigeria.

The socio political circumstances of a nation will of necessity influence her foreign policy. So, we can say that the foreign policy of Nigeria is the product of her chequered socio political history before and since independence. The long involvement of the military in political governance with their dictatorial tendencies has influenced the concept of national interest and therefore the formulation of Nigeria's foreign policy. As a result of this, foreign policy positions are capable of changing from one government administration to another, depending on the orientation of the Head of state. Aside the minister and his officials, other agents that are capable of influencing foreign policy in Nigeria are some foreign policy elites who include, some other top government officials, interest group leaders, academicians, top military officers, religious leaders and journalists. These elites exert influence on the foreign policy through communiqués and press releases, as well as direct pressure on the government. For instance, in 1986 a conference was held to review Nigeria's foreign policy and to recommend broad policy frameworks for 1990s and beyond, and the delegates comprised every stratum of these elite.

It is however, important to state here that of all the factor that exert influence on the foreign policy of Nigeria, religion appears to be the most pervasive. The reason for this is not far-fetched. Apart from the pervasive influence of religion on whoever is the head of government, Nigeria and Nigerians are known for their religious fervor. Ever since independence religion has continued to play a major role in every important aspect of Nigeria's life, including her economic and political life. The two major world religions – Christianity and Islam are incidentally the most significant religions in Nigeria, and they have historically shaped and re-shaped the political environment of the nation. This situation is not without both positive and negative consequences on the politics and economy of the nation. Adding to the fact that religion and the politics of God constitute interesting topics in the global discourse today, examining the influence or the role of religion on the foreign policy of Nigeria is considered germane to academic and policy-making.

In this paper, references would be made to some major external relations as examples that would justify the extent to which religion has become a vital factor in Nigeria's foreign decision making process. The recommendations of this study is expected to enlighten the present and future leaders and policy-makers of Nigeria as to the limit of involvement of religion and religious leaders in governance and international relations.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Foreign policy has been variously discussed by different scholars, including, Tunde Adeniran (1983), Igwe, S. I (2007), Suberu, R. T, Osaghie, E.E, Anyanwu, U.D (2011), George Modeski (1962), Rodee, C.C, Padelford and Lincoln. Tunde defines foreign policy as the policies pursued by a state in her dealings with other states (1983:207). George Modeski speaks of foreign policy as the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behavior of other states and for adjusting their own operations (1962:6-7). In the words of Padelford and Lincoln, "Foreign policy is the key element in the process by which a state translates its broadly conceived goals and interests into concrete courses of action to attain these objectives and pressure its interests" (1926). Padelford and Lincoln have, in this assertion, explained two functions of foreign policy. Its first function is to attain its broadly conceived goals and second function is to pressurize the national interests of nations concerned to align with their own goals. In foreign policy or foreign affairs policy, a country employs some advantageous strategies to protect its national interest and achieve its specific national goals for the benefits of its citizenry and country generally.

The preferred conceptual framework for analyzing this study, however, is the Leadership Personality Model. Leadership Personality Model is central to the purpose concerning the problematique of foreign policy. According to Dipo Kolawole(1977), it is the leadership of a country that usually defines in broad terms the foreign policy directions of a nation. He further argues that the way our leadership defines it is usually based on his cognitive perception of the world events in relation to its own country's national interest. The character of individuals in leadership hierarchy of a country at any given time would influence and determine the foreign policy directions of such country. Thus Kolawole (2005) in Kunle Ajayi summarized succinctly that, the Leadership Personality Model is a framework for analysis of country's foreign policy, thus it is the leadership that gives both contents and directive to foreign policy.

Corroborating this opinion, Rosen and Jones (1980) posit that the quality of leadership orchestrates the other components of national power, defines goals in a realizable manner and determines the part of strategy:

...The same population with the same territory and endowment of natural resources, can be weak and disunited or strong and dynamic, depending on the quality of leadership...Leadership cannot create power out of the air, but it can dip into untapped resources of national creative energy (Rosen and Jones 1980).

In sum, foreign policies differ as countries differ. However, reasons for having foreign policies cut across nations and they include the following: to achieve national goals, promote economic interests of the country, to have defined approach towards other countries, tackle global issues through multilateral cooperation, protect the territorial integrity of the country

and to protect the interests of the citizens, both within and outside the country. It is obviously important for any nation to have foreign relations with other countries as no nation is an island, nor can any nation be self-sufficient.

### **Brief History of Nigeria**

Nigeria is rated the most populous African country and the most populous black nation of the world. She is also rated the 7<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world, only after China, India, USA, Indonesia, Brazil and Pakistan (Yusuf, 2016). It is located between Gulf of Guinea, Chad, Niger, Benin and Cameroun. Nigeria was amalgamated from its Northern and Southern protectorate by the Colonial administrator, Lord Lugard, in 1914; and his wife, Flora Shaw gave the nation the name, Nigeria from River Niger which flows through the country. Nigeria gained independence from the British colonial rule in 1960.

According to the CIA World Fact Book in 2013, the demographic nature of Nigeria was estimated to be 174, 507,539 which represents about one sixth of the African population and one fifth of the Sub-Saharan African population. The country also accounts for 2.59% of the world. It consists of more than 500 ethnic groups, the most politically effective among them are Hausa –Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, the Ijaw, and the Ibibio. (World's 50 most populous countries: 2014 <http://www.factmonster.com/world/statistics/mostpopulouscountries.html>).

Nigeria is endowed with one of the most favorable weather in the world which is considered suitable for all human and agricultural products of almost all the world known crops. This is due to the fact that Nigeria has diverse vegetation. In the Northern part of Nigeria, there are three vegetation zones- the Sahel Savanna, the Sudan Savannah and the Guinea Savannah; while the Southern Nigeria has two vegetation-the Tropical Rain forest and the Mangrove. The total landmass of Nigeria is 932,773sq KM.

Nigeria is the biggest African economy with 509.9billion dollars as GDP after overtaking South Africa in 2014. She is endowed with much natural resources in both land and waters. In addition to crude oil, it has a large volume of gas reserve, including other mineral resources and precious stones like granite, coal, iron, gold, silver and columbine. Nigeria is also blessed with fertile landmass for the production of different kinds of agricultural products.

### **Religions in Nigeria**

Nigeria population is majorly divided between two major world religions- Christianity and Islam. According to CIA, World Facts book, 50% of Nigeria's population are Muslims and 40% are Christians, while the remaining 10% is traditional religionists. The Muslims are mostly found in the Northern part of Nigeria, while the majority of Christians are found in the Southern part of the country. Within Nigerian Muslims there are diverse sects such as the Sunni, Shia, Selef Ahmadiyya and Quraniyun. Christians are categorized into Catholics, Protestants (Orthodox) and Pentecostal.

Besides the two major religious groups, there are some other religions being practiced in Nigeria, though on an unpopular scale. Among such are Judaism, Hinduism, 'Chrislam'(combination of the practice of Christianity and Islam) and Traditional religion. The ethnic and religious mix of the country required cautious positions on some issues.

Among such was the nation's policy towards Israel. Nigeria found it difficult to restore diplomatic ties with Israel because of Muslim opposition and sympathy with the rest of Arab Muslim world.

### **Continuity and Change in Nigeria's Foreign Policy**

Man is a social being, so friendships and relations have been in existence between humans since the beginning of creation. This, obviously is why the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle once said that man is by nature, a political animal. Human beings will always relate and interact with one another, at individual and at group levels.

On this understanding and going through the lanes of history, Nigeria's foreign policy did not just start at independence. It rather dates back to the history of Hausa Emirates, the Igbo kingdom, the Benin Kingdom and the Oyo Empires (Adebayo, 2017). These groups did not operate in a completely closed society. They related with themselves at various scales and to a considerable level. Diplomatic relations in Nigeria, however, were established with the advent of Colonial authorities through some establishments like the Consular Authority in 1847, and the famous Amalgamation in 1914. This implies that Nigeria, as a colonial state was introduced into the diplomatic world even before her independence. With the understanding that foreign policy is that action a state embarks upon in its interaction with other member states in the international environment while struggling to attain its goals and objectives. As we also know that the basic goal of a nation's foreign policy is to safeguard national interest (Adeibijola, Aderin O, 2013), Nigeria has been involved in the pursuit of foreign policy in various forms.

Since political independence on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1960, Nigeria has been governed by several regimes ranging from civilian to military. Each of these regimes has shown interest in the nation's external relations. In fact, the initial speeches of each administration give priority attention to foreign affairs matters. As both domestic and international environment continue to undergo changes, each regime in the Nigeria's administration tries to keep up to prevailing circumstances within the global system. In as much as they often ensure that some specific aspects of the country's foreign policy is retained, changes do occur because events do not remain constant and the orientation of the leaders are never the same. These often result to a shift in the behavior and progress of the nation. Albeit, there are principles and objectives enunciated by Nigerian policy elites even in the pre-independence era that are maintained. These revolve around multilateralism, non-alignment, Africa center-piece, non-interference in the internal affairs of states and legal equality of states (Olusanya, G.O and Akindele, R.A, 1986).

In this study, the extent to which these principles and objectives have been mutilated by religion or how far they have remained constant shall be examined. An assessment of continuity in Nigeria's foreign policy can only be made by investigating the extent of adherence to the principles and objectives guiding her external relations. Beyond having the principles and objectives of a nation as the sine qua non to her foreign policy, a state's national interest is a strong propeller to its foreign policy (Damilola, 2011). What constitutes Nigeria's national interest has remained a matter of intense disagreement among scholars. However, Aluko O, Olusanya and Akindele (1986) and Aforka Nweke (1986) provided a framework

with a fairly comprehensive detail and minimal argument regarding Nigeria's national interest. According to Aluko, the three main issues which constitute the vital elements of Nigeria's national interest are self - preservation of the country, the defense and maintenance of the country's independence and the economic and social wellbeing of the people. By extension, Nigeria's national interest constitutes other vital elements like defense, preservation and promotion of Nigeria's democracy, enhancement of the country's standing or public image in the comity of nations (especially among African countries) and promotion of world peace (Aluko, 1981:265). For Olusanya and Akindele Nigeria's national interest include defense of the nation's sovereignty, restoration of human dignity to the blacks all over the world, creation of relevant political and economic conditions in Africa and the rest of the world, promotion and improvement of economic wellbeing of Nigerian citizens and the promotion of world peace and justice. Looking at the submission of these scholars there are similarities in their analysis of what constitutes Nigeria's national interest. However, what constitutes a great concern is the changes these interests have undergone over time. At some regimes, some of these interests were being given prime recognition in the foreign policy of the country, while at some other times they were played down.

During the first republic, what was popular was pro-Western and conservatism. The British colonial heritage, the nature of domestic politics, the level of economic development and the character of the leaders, especially the prime minister, Tafawa Balewa shaped the pattern of Nigeria's foreign policy within the period. British personnel occupied prominent positions in Nigeria's foreign relations especially in the areas of trade, political ties and even the military. Even the eastern bloc was not given a space in Nigeria's foreign relations. This was clearly manifested when the Soviet Union wanted to have an Embassy in Nigeria after independence but they were turned down on the excuse that Nigeria does not have enough resources to reciprocate and open an Embassy in Moscow. Soviet Union was however brought to the forefront of Nigeria's foreign policy when Britain came to disagreements with Nigeria's government over some policies that were inimical to Biafra, and it was noticed that Britain took that stand out of self-interest. Britain's embargo on the sale of arms to Nigeria and Soviet Union's readiness to supply the same arms in 1986 further widened their relationship between Nigeria and Britain and at the same time brought Soviet Union to the fore front of Nigeria's foreign policy.

### **Focus of Nigeria's Foreign Policy**

Culling from Section 19 of the 1999 Constitution, the objectives of Nigeria's foreign relation include, to promote and protect her national interest, to promote African integration and support African unity, to promote international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations, and elimination of discrimination in all its ramifications, to respect international law and treaty obligations as well as the seeking of settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication, and to promote a just world economic order.

In order to achieve the above objectives, Nigeria has identified with many international organizations, among them are African Union, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), United Nations, Economic Communities of West African States

Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), African National Congress, African Development Bank, Commonwealth of Nations, Food and Agriculture Organization, Interpol, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Health Organization, World Trade Organization and a host of others.

### Challenges of Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Among the problems and challenges militating against the realization of Nigeria's foreign policy include,

- 1) **Security issues.** Over the years, Nigeria has had her fair share of security threats, ranging from political violence in Western Nigeria (*wetie*), to military coups, Ethnic pogrom in the North, Maitatsine Riots, the Niger Delta Militancy, Boko Haram and most recently the occupational conflicts (farmers and Fulani herdsmen from the Northern region). Foreign policy is all about having relations with other nations, such relations involve investments from such countries. Where security challenges exist in the country, investment by foreigners will be impossible.
- 2) **Economic instability.** This problem relates closely to security challenges discussed earlier. Nigeria is known to have signed many bilateral investment treaties that are not yet enforced. Without enforcement, there cannot be any foreign direct investment (FDI), responsible for such failure of enforcement include corruption, unstable and politicized economy
- 3) **Political instability.** Though treaties are signed on behalf of countries and not individuals, change of leadership and change of governments affect foreign relations dramatically.
- 4) **National image.** Poor image as a result of corruption and conflicts hinder good relations among comity of nations. The vices of greed, dishonesty and hate expressed by people of different ethnic and religious groups make the international communities to be relating with Nigeria with suspicion and distrust.
- 5) **Africanness of Nigeria's foreign policy.** Right from the time of the first foreign affairs Minister of Nigeria, Jaja Nwachukwu, Nigerian government has the philosophy of 'charity begins at home'. On this account, every Nigeria's foreign policy that is realistic must have the interest of African as paramount priority. Consequently, many African nations have received great support from Nigeria in their time of needs. Huge human, material and financial resources have been expended by Nigeria in her effort to uphold African brotherhood in her foreign policy. Among such African nations who have benefited from Nigeria's foreign policy are Mozambique, Angola,

South-Africa, Liberia, Namibia and many others. Lofty as this philosophy is, the African-centeredness of Nigeria's foreign policy has not really protected the national interest, especially with the reminiscence of the xenophobic attacks in South Africa and the slavery cases in Libya.

### **Influence of Religion on Nigeria's Foreign Policy**

For several years, religion has been an important factor in Nigeria's domestic and foreign politics, though she claims to be a secular state. Both Nigeria's domestic and foreign policies are being shaped by religion, in fact, Suleiman avers that religion cannot be ignored as it is a major tool in Nigeria's politics. Domestically, Nigeria's politicians make the masses to participate in politics on the basis of religious inclinations. Hiding under the guise of religion, they facilitate their grab and retain of power. Internally, the major breakthrough of religious intervention in the nation's policies were first witnessed in the establishment of Sharia Court of Appeal in 1978, despite its heavy criticism by Nigerian Christian Society. This was followed by an attempt to replace Islamic law with the colonial constitution. (Abubakar,2016) These two incidents resulted to serious tension in religio-political environment of the nation.

So much has infiltrated the religious landscape of Nigeria and has rendered most of the concrete domestic and foreign policies useless. For instance, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida registered the country in Organization of Islamic Countries(OIC), not just for religious reasons, but for economic reason. The membership was strategically obtained to facilitate loan-taking from Islamic Development Bank(IDB). These supposedly patriotic gestures were misconstrued as a result of religious bigotry that has infested Nigeria's polity. Religion is the third determining factor of Nigerian domestic and foreign politics, just behind economy and military (Abubakar, 2016:3). Though there is no place in the Constitution, or in any Act where religion is listed as a tool for foreign policy, yet it is secretly or indirectly used as a vital ingredient that determines the foreign behavior of Nigerian government.

Following Nigeria's independent in October, 1960, the country was divided into three major regions-north, south and west; each being under the control of a premier. The northern premier, Ahmadu Bello, having a Muslim population declared an Islamic mission across the zone and the entire West Africa. This did not come as a surprise as he was the great grand-son of Dandofodio, a pioneer propagator of Islam through Jihad in 1804. Thus Ahmadu Bello acquired religious foreign policy with Islam as the centre piece of northern Nigeria. Religion became a vital instrument that influenced Ahmadu Bello foreign policy agenda. In 1962, he became the second in command to the Organization of World Muslim Leaders, an organization that was headed by the king of Saudi Arabia. When the organization was later renamed Muslim League, Bello was elected the Vice President in 1964 at Madina, and he declared his religious foreign policy as follows:

I promise to commit myself to the propagation of Islam. I was able to convert more than 60,000 non-Muslims to Islam. Within my region and surrounding, I have constructed several mosques and Islamic centers. I hope to propagate religion of Islam to entire Nigeria and the rest of Africa. (Sic) (Abubakar, 2016:13).

Consequent upon this commitment, Islamic countries like Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Libya donated books, money and other gifts to Ahmadu for the propagation of Islam in Nigeria. To buttress his commitment, Ahmadu Bello refused any form of assistance from Israel in 1962, claiming that such assistance was a ploy to subjugate and dominate the northern Nigeria. And poignantly declared that "it is better that the northern region remained undeveloped than to accept any kind of assistance from Yahud of Israel" Thus religion negatively affected the general foreign policy of the country as the northern region's relations with the rest of the world was tilted or lopsided towards Islamic countries at the risk of whatever benefits that could be derived from the rest of the world.

Another case was the Arab-Israel war in 1967 which shook Nigeria foreign policy religiously, as Nigerian Muslims called for the support of Arabians and the cancellation of all diplomatic ties between Nigeria and Israel. Expectedly, Nigerian Christians vehemently refused such moves and the situation created serious diplomatic tension in the polity.

The Biafran/Nigerian war was seen as a payback period for Israel. The thirty month of war that lasted between 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1966 and 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1970 also had an indirect religious undertone. Biafran region was dominated by Christians and they were angling to separate from the rest of Nigerians. The state of Israel supported Biafra by supplying them with military training and financial assistance. Thus the Israeli foreign affairs Minister, Abba Eban noted "My country (Israel) gave greater support to Biafra, if other countries had done the same, the state of Biafra would have been realized". In reaction to the role of Israel towards Biafra, Nigeria had to seek closer relations and assistance from North African countries and Middle-East Muslim countries. The Nigeria /Israeli relations remained sour till 1992, when the Nigerian Christians claimed that the unfriendly relations with Israel is affecting their pilgrimage. This reaction compelled Nigerian government to renew its foreign relations with the state of Israel.

The assassination of General Murtala Mohammad on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1976 was given heavy religious implications. Many muslims thought that he was eliminated with the support of the West because of his Islamic faith. This insinuation arose because his assassinator, Colonel Dimka was found to have hidden in United Kingdom's embassy in Lagos and more so, London refused to repatriate General Gowon whom Nigerian government accused to have planned the abortive coup. Consequent upon this, Jumaatul Nasir 'al Islam, a powerful Islamic body in Nigeria called for the cancellation of all agreements and relations between Nigeria and Britain. Thus the relations between Nigeria and England was sour in spite of the fact Nigeria was her Colony. This diplomatic fuse between them became so severe that the successor of Murtala Mohammad, General Obasanjo, never paid any official visit to United Kingdom all through his military administration as the Head of State.

The emergence of Maitatsine, a fundamentalist Muslim organization headed by a migrate from Cameroun, Mohammad Marwa in 1980 was another religious factor that shocked Nigerian foreign policy. The Maitatsine agenda was to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria with the Quran as the legal document that will replace the existing Constitution. In December, 1980, they started a war like guerrilla activities, by attacking police and government

properties. Though the leader was killed On 29<sup>th</sup> Dec, 1980 by the military, its members continued to carry out rascal operations in the nation that claimed the lives of 4,177 people within a very short space of time. Mohammad Marwa, being a foreigner from Cameroun, was given a good attention and assistance from foreigners that were residing in Nigeria. This resulted in the Minister of Interior, Alhaji Ali Baba, ordered the expulsion of millions illegal immigrants in Nigeria. This diplomatic decision deeply touched the agenda of Nigeria's foreign policy as it negated one of the nation's diplomatic cardinal goals, which is the promotion of integration and support of African unity, as it is obvious that most of the illegal immigrants are from African countries. The international society considered the action to be inhuman. In Washington, the action was reported as a shock and a typical violation of human rights. President J.J Rawlings of Ghana asserts that the act was directly against his people, claiming that most of the immigrants expelled were Ghanaians. While the president of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), (President of Benin) tried to intervene by coming to Nigeria and intensely discussing the issue, Pope John Paul 11, described the action as an incredible drama of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Despite these reactions from the international communities, Nigerian government did not rescind on her decision, rather she gave a compensation of one million dollars to all the affected African states. This diplomatic fuse that ensued in the wake of Islamic fundamentalists' organizations diminished the good image of Nigeria before most African countries and before the world in general, thereby reducing the nation's foreign influence.

The role of religion in the Nigeria's foreign policy operations is extraordinarily complex, wrapped up as it is in political, environmental and economic issues in addition to the theological and cultural issues that naturally accompany religious diversity. The two major religions in Nigeria have always tried to outweigh the other in terms of taking control of major political positions in the country. A contest which has continually shaped and unshaped the political positions and the direction of foreign policies in Nigeria. Often such religion machinated steps are taken at the expense of the common good, at the jeopardy of national interest, at the neglect of public opinion and ignoring the rights of the minority, and classifying the spirit of togetherness and unity as absurd. There is a serious and urgent need to establish a sense of national identity that could bridge Nigeria's diverse religious, ethnic and linguistic identities. Currently an average Nigerian identifies first with his religion, followed by his family and ethnic group, and lastly with his country. Thus, there is a strong sectarian impulse towards religion and against patriotism in almost every Nigerian. This is contrary to what obtains in America. Patriotism is given the greater premium to religion by any American citizen. This disparity may not be far from being the reason behind America's unwillingness to ally with Nigeria over some important issues. As the world's sixth –largest oil exporter and a leader in the African Union, Nigeria is United States' most important strategic partner in West –Africa, yet American government is unwilling to involve Nigeria in monitoring her elections.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

It is a well-known fact that Nigeria is characterized by diverse religious inclinations. This has negatively affected her citizens in their struggle with unity issues and in the country's relation with foreign nations. Albeit, the truth still remains that the importance of religion in individuals and the society cannot be overstretched. Religion provides answers for the

complexity of the world around human beings to which we earnestly crave explanation. Human beings also seek purpose in life. Without understanding life purpose, man's existence is void, chaotic and frustrating. However, religion offers man that purpose and motivates him to pursue that purpose. It is a known fact that religion provides human beings with a moral or ethical framework, rules for living a good life and the consequences of living in the contrary. On a larger scale, religion acts as a glue that binds people in the societies and cultures with common beliefs, practices and rituals, thereby promoting cooperation, love and unity amongst people, including people of different cultures. No religion advocates hatred for humanity, rather love is the song of all religions. Through the message of love and cooperation, religions are expected to provide for a triumph of the whole over the individual, a principle that is a necessity for civilization. A recent archeological finding suggests to anthropologists and sociologists that civilization did not truly begin until man "found" religion (Lorraine Caplan, 2013). Thus religion is a nation-building mechanism. The Holy Roman Empire got to its enviable heights on religious principles. Europe grew on the religious principles of Protestantism.

However, most unfortunately, in Nigeria wrong application of religious ideologies has presented it (religion) as an agent of national disorganization and conflict. Religion is thus presented to be synonymous to hatred, conflict and madness. But in the actual sense religion is for the salvaging of humanity, religion remains connected with God who owns and created the earth and humans. Religion still characteristically represents peace and harmony.

This paper advocates the utilization of the positive values of religion in the building of a strong foreign policy in Nigeria. This can be achieved through the non-application of religious sentiments in the formulation and implementation of foreign policies in Nigeria. When religious sentiments are allowed to influence foreign policies, the results are usually divisive and counterproductive. The national interest has always been, and should remain the major consideration in the formulation of foreign policies. Any religious consideration that does not promote the national interest should be discarded irrespective of the population of the citizens that subscribe to it.

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