



# The Sinaitic Covenant, Organized Religion and Nigeria's Development

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**Abstract:** This article examines how positive role of religion could foster development in Nigeria. Recourse was made to the Sinaitic covenant in the Old Testament that calls on religious adherents to practice love, peace, justice, fairness and equity. In the analysis of the text, this study utilized content analysis. Religion since inception has been the bane of Nigeria's development. Religious fundamentalists and political bigots have been hiding under the guise of religion to gain cheap political points and achieve their selfish purposes. When they feel that their aim is about to be thwarted, they instigate conflicts under religious basis. This is the reason for the day to day conflicts all over Nigeria, especially in the northern part of Nigeria where religion and politics are difficult to separate. Findings reveal that underdevelopment and poverty will continually be sustained as far as religion is negatively used. The recommendations given are strongly believed to speak anew to this sad development, especially as the recommendations emanated from the point of view of the Sinaitic covenant of the Old Testament.

**Keywords:** Sinaitic covenant, religion, Nigeria, poverty, development, Love, Conflict

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## 1. Introduction

Nigeria is a country made up of different religions. The three major religions in Nigeria are Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. Just as in other parts of the world, religion has played roles in many wars in Nigeria. This is because religion is the most easily maneuvered by Nigerians seeking for personal and group gains. It is also important to state that if there was nothing like religion in Nigeria, Nigerians would still find something to hold to as a fulcrum in destruction of lives and property. These destructions have led to

increasing poverty level all over Nigeria. In Nigeria, about 86.9 million people live in severe poverty, which is about 50% of its entire population (Panchal, 2020). Nigerians have so far successfully embraced the negative side of religion, with near neglect of the positive roles of religion in national development. In practice history and religious education were used to promote war rather than peace in Nigeria (Abbas, 2020).

For understanding purposes, religion is a system of symbols that function to produce powerful, widespread, and long-lasting sentiments and motivations in mankind by forming conceptions of a general order of existence and cloaking these concepts in such a veil of factuality that the moods and motives appear singularly realistic. (Peter 1998: 10-17). Religion is a social control mechanism that regulates man's activities for harmony in the human world. Unfortunately in Nigeria, this social control mechanism has regulated the activities of Nigerians causing disharmony among Nigerians. Thus, Nigeria is enmeshed in religious crises on a month to month basis.

It is of no news that the dominant religious groups in Nigeria threaten and kill each other systematically (Golub, 2019). This is because of the fight for superiority. Also, politicians and religious fundamentalists have continually capitalized on this ideology to engineer hate amongst the two religions and their votaries. When one of the major religious organizations notices that another is gaining ground in a given location, it employs a variety of strategies to reduce the power of the opponents to a bare minimum (Golub, 2019).

Religion in Nigeria is rather seen in the negative light. Nigerians see religion as a cause in the slowing growth and development of the country. Most of the crises have religious undertones. Even when a conflict is between people of the same religion, in a short time, it metamorphosed into a full scale religious conflict majorly between Christians and Muslims. Content analysis was used to analyzed the data. The aim of this research is to look at some passages in the Old Testament which are normal and non-violent and which have no inspiration to some fundamentalists to commit crimes against humanity in the name of religion.

## **2. The Sinaitic Covenant**

The Ten Commandments are the universal basis of all things: the fundamental precepts governing human behavior in society and the cornerstone of community existence (Barclay, 1998). The Ten Commandments could be considered a gain because they contributed to moralism and legalism; and the loss of knowledge of the Ten Commandments means a loss in understanding

what human liberty is, what spiritual freedom means, and how freedom is to be preserved in the universe (Harrelson, 1997:1). Sinaitic covenant was a covenant between God and the people of Israel, including non-Israelites. It was in the Covenant ceremony at Mount Sinai, that the Ten Commandments were given. The covenant shows the *modus operandi* for Israel's community's religious and civil traditions. The covenant concerns religious life, moral concerns, and social ethics (Beegle, 2021).

According to Wilson (2021), the Sinaitic covenant define the covenant people and is a kind of identity statement which makes the people of Israel God's special, personal possession, and priests to God who form the basis of his kingdom and a holy nation, set apart for his service exclusively (Wilson, 2021). The Ten Commandments were given to regulate the Israelites' conduct, and are applicable to Nigerians today. Human life and personal relationships, particularly within families, are of the utmost importance to God. After all, He created us "in His own image" so He could interact with intelligent, worshipping beings, which he couldn't do with fish, birds, or animals (Livingstone, 2010).

God expects his creations to experience incredible, life-changing love, mercy, and compassion not only from him, but from those around him. Consequently, he wants human beings to show that love and help to others (Davis, 2021). The Ten Commandments are the supreme expression of God's will in the Old Testament and merit our close attention (Brueggemann, 1994).

### 3. Religion and National Development

Although religious leaders, adherents, and politicians have all used religious dictums to encourage communities to actively develop inter-religious relationships for peace and action for social justice, religion is now being used as a vehicle for spreading violence, deception, and encouraging the destruction of lives and property (Apyewen, 2020). Religion in Nigeria is being abused to perpetuate a cycle of division in Nigeria, and it is twisted to create a world where intolerance is placed above unity (Apyewen, 2020).

Nigeria is divided into northern and southern Nigeria. Northern Nigeria is majorly a Muslim dominated area, while southern Nigeria is majorly a Christian dominated area. In Northern Nigeria, there are religious sects. Garba (2020:57) explains that

...38 per cent of Muslims are Sunni comprising of 19 per cent Tijaniyya, 9 per cent Qadriyya and the Salafists such as the Izala, (*Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'a Wa'ikamatis Sunnah*) often also called JIBWIS and the Radicals such as the *Boko Haram* and *Ansaru* who are hardline terrorist groups. Among the non-Sunnis

are about 12 per cent Shi'a whose several clashes with authorities caused the death of many innocent people, 3 per cent Ahmadiyya and Maitatsine/Kala Kato, best known for their clashes with the authorities in Kano in 1980s and subsequently in Borno, Kaduna and Adamawa states, also resulting in the death of more than 5000 Nigerians.

In Southern Nigeria, Christians have sects such as the Roman Catholics, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodists and Pentecostals. Others include Latter-day Saints Church (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses (USCIRF, 2018). This makes Nigerians notoriously religious, because religion affects everything they do including the when they commit crime. The constitution of Nigeria allows for freedom of religion, association and worship (Oluabunwa, 2018), but it is often relegated when matters of religion is part and parcel. This is one reason that people tend to kill at will under the form of Islamic religion.

In Nigeria, religion is being cited to perpetuate the destruction of lives and property, while in other countries, religion is used for growth and development. Thus:

There is ample evidence that their religious practices have been positive to their economic growth and orderly development of their societies. You can say similar things about Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Dubai, Turkey, Egypt and a few of such countries that have adopted Islam as state religion, even within the context of belonging largely to developing nations' categorization (Oluabunwa, 2018:1).

Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the political class has hidden under the cover of Islam to achieve their aims. They used thugs to destroy lives, under the guise of religion so as to gain sympathy from the members of the Islamic faith, for political relevance. Islam is frequently misinterpreted as a sword religion that endorses the use of violence to spread the faith, despite the fact that Islam's nonviolence ideals are not fully developed, thus, peace concepts are at the heart of Islamic beliefs. (Abbas, 2020)

According to Kukah (1993:42), "they now also had to create institutions to control religious affairs, while the ruling class in the north of Nigeria had to be seriously subsumed into the mould of the Islamic faith as a way of protecting her Islamic and political interests". Thus in Nigeria, it is difficult to separate Islamic religion from politics. This is one major achievement of the political class. Lamenting further, Yesufu (2016:1) explains that "The impact of religion in a secular state seems to have played out negatively in Nigeria, as politics and religion are mixed in the attempt to gain political hold on the population".

Nigerian underdevelopment is strongly attached to religion. Each government in Nigeria finds it difficult to provide infrastructural development or industrialization due to the fact that each policy of the government is queried as having a religious undertone. Unfortunately, the current government in Nigeria have shown hatred for people of other religions except those of Islamic faith. The government is accused of sponsoring Fulani herdsmen to kill and destroy lives and property. Government has not arrested any of these herdsmen which makes Nigerians to suspect that the government is only keen about the development of the Fulani race (Islam) compared to votaries of other religions. Shedding more light, Fox (2021:1) reveals that

The religious element of this conflict and the rise in extremist Islamic ideology is often not given enough emphasis. . . .A faction of the Fulani are adopting similar terror strategies to Boko Haram, including targeting Christian leaders, communities and churches, as well as expelling Christian farmers from their land. Whole communities have been massacred or displaced as a result. While Muslims can fall victim to radical Fulani attacks, the vast majority of victims are Christians.

The two major religions—Christianity and Islam—struggle for superiority. This has led to current state of underdevelopment in Nigeria. In fact, since 2018, Nigeria has remained the poverty capital of world. So many Nigerians do not have money to buy food and also cannot afford accommodation. In Nigeria, “40.1 percent of total population were classified as poor. In other words, on average four out of 10 individuals in Nigeria has real per capita expenditures below 137,430 naira (\$352) per year” (Aljazeera News, 2020).

Furthermore, the negative use of religion has led to high rates of unemployment in Nigeria. Most businesses have been destroyed during religious crisis. Most companies have shut down due to insecurity caused by religious extremism. Workers are left to their fate. Supply chains have been distorted due to insecurity of personnel. There is rising inflation due to the scarcity of goods and services. These religious crises “inflicted untold hardship on both the individuals, in term of loss of lives and property and on the Government in terms of occasional provisions of relief materials for the victims of religious disturbances”. The government finds it difficult to a maintain peaceful environment. The members of the two groups tend to ensure that the government in power favours them at the detriment of the other ethnic groups. Thus, “when people with different religious views start defending their rights, it may cause conflicts, social harassment, and violence” (Golub, 2019:1).

The frequent battles that erupted as a result caused tremendous hardships on both individuals and the government, resulting in the loss of human lives and the occasional provision of relief items for victims of religious disturbances respectively (Sulaiman, 2016:85). Though religious violence has a variety of repercussions, the most evident is the loss of lives and property (Sulaiman, 2016:85).

Today, there is suspicion between Muslims and Christians. Muslims see Christians as their problem, and Christians see Muslims as the problem of Nigeria. The Government is confused on what to do so as not to arouse the anger of any of the tribes. Nigeria is in a confused state. The government (federal, state, local) is in a confused state. The Nigerian state is looking helpless, yet religious centres continue to increase with an attendant increase in religious tolerance or love. One begins to wonder what religious adherents are being taught in their worship centres. It is more likely they are taught hate towards other religions, with the result seen in the destruction of lives and property. The majority of the violence, which is mostly religious in nature, has exacerbated existing religious tensions, leading to significant mistrust and suspicion between Muslim and Christian populations (Fox, 2021).

#### **4. The Sinaitic Covenant, Organized Religion and National Development**

Organized religion is “a belief system that has large numbers of followers and a set of rules that must be followed” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). God “organized” a religion for Israel in Exodus chapter 6 and subsequent chapters. God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments, tabernacle laws, and a sacrificial system to obey (Gotquestions, 2021). The positive roles of religion cannot be overemphasized. These roles are what the Nigerian society has neglected. In fact, religion “brings together a community, who might then form a hunting party, raise a temple or support a political party” (Sumit, 2019:1). The Sinaitic covenant teaches love for one’s life, people’s property, true witness (no false accusation), no coveting of people’s property, tolerance, and selflessness.

Progressive religion establishes and legitimizes forms of social order by prescribing the norms, practices and behaviours that actuate shared identities (Light, Keller, and Calhoun, 1989). Furthermore, progressive religion provides the moral, psychological, social and spiritual infrastructure on which human and societal development could be based. According to Jain (2013:1), in Christianity, God just wants us to feel love and be love. He never wants us to fight, and he is the embodiment of love (Jain, 2013). If we truly know God, we



will understand love, and there will be no room for arguing. Because we don't know God, there are fights. Do not battle for the sake of establishing your own ego in the name of God. If you truly wish to follow any religion, you must first practice love (Jain, 2013). Propagate love if you wish to spread your religion. Love is the religion to follow if you wish to follow any religion (Jain, 2013).

With regards to Islam, Abbas (2020:1) reveals that "Islam is a religion of universalism, tolerance, peace, and reconciliation. Islam teaches that life is sacred and that the believer has a duty to uphold truth and justice. Social justice is the a central principle of Islam. Human life is important to Christians, and it is a gift from God that must be honored and protected. The sanctity of life is the name given to this principle. Human beings were made in the image of God, according to the Bible. It also teaches the prohibition of murder. Jesus reminded his people that God values each and every one of them so highly that he has counted every hair on their heads (BBC, 2021).

## **5. Recommendations**

In order to achieve the needed national development, the following road maps could be considered.

1. There is the need for education and re-orientation of religious votaries on the ethics of the various religious. This could be done through the sermons by the Christian clergy and the Imams. Abbas (2020:1) reveals that "education plays a key role in the cultivation of knowledgeable people and in the development of culture, social order and cohesion, the development of civic institutions and thus the development, progress and excellence of society".
2. There is the need for the government to be neutral in the policy administration and practice. The government in power should show equity in the distribution of resources to the Christians (south) and Muslims (north). This will, in the long-run, ensure trust amongst the various religious adherents.
3. There is a need to create more job opportunities for the teeming youth population especially in northern Nigeria. This will make them difficult to use by religious fundamentalists and political bigots.
4. The government should show seriousness in the prosecution of those who are caught sponsoring religious violence. This contemporary nature of the federal government of Nigeria of militarizing the south and demilitarizing northern Nigeria sends a negative signal to the

minds of Nigerians. It breeds suspicion in the minds of Nigerians in the south. The government should show equity in justice administration.

## 6. Conclusions

The impact of the Sinaitic covenant on Nigeria's development cannot be underestimated. It will drastically reduce the escalating rate of religious conflicts in Nigeria. With religious conflicts reduced, development will be easily attained. Religion, as discovered, is a double-edged sword—the positive and negative side. Unfortunately, Nigerians have been good at using the negative side. This article calls on all stakeholders and those interested in the development of Nigeria to inculcate the positive values of religion as proffered by the Sinaitic covenant such as love, tolerance for life, disdain for stealing people's property, justice, equity and fairness. If these values are imbibed nationally and at state levels, the problem of national underdevelopment caused by religious conflicts will be a thing of the past.

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