

## THE 'LOVE OF VARIETY' AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

The concept of the love of variety as propounded by Dopamu vis-a-vis sustainable development is a topical issue in the global community. The love of variety depicts love for diversity or plurality. This forecloses that followers of religions should pursue a multi-religious agenda where theologians are discovering a God who resists domestication into any single theory of how the universe is. The absence of this has adversely affected unity let alone sustainable development. This study adopts historical and hermeneutical methods, leading to the fact that the twenty-first century global community stands in dire need of inter-religious dialogue and co-existence. Therefore, this great and sustained conversation will offer a modest and continuous contribution to peaceful co-existence and sustainable development in Nigeria in particular and the entire global community in general. The paper concludes that the love of variety would help to sieve the incompatibles as evident among Christians and Muslims, and utilize the areas of common interest as model for overall sustainable development in contemporary Nigerian Society and the world in general.

**Keywords:** Love, Variety, Sustainable, Development and Nigeria

## **INTRODUCTION**

The 'love of variety' as a concept was coined by Professor Dopamu as a great scholar of African and Comparative Religion. He believes that God is not confined to a particular religion or faith, rather God appreciates plurality or diversity. Dopamu believes as E.J. Sharpe attested that "he that knows one knows none" (Sharpe, 1987). Therefore, Dopamu gives prominence to tolerance, respectability, hospitality, communality, togetherness, we-feelings and corporate co-existence. He believes, and in fact demonstrates apodictically that religion should pursue a multi-religious agenda where theologians are discovering a God who resists domestication into any single theory of how the world works (Alamu, 2010). Thus, the absence of God's domestication makes Him enjoyed variety since Nigeria is a pluralistic society and a nation of diverse cultures and traditions.

As a matter of fact, the twenty-first century global community stands in desperate need of inter-cultural and interreligious dialogue, a great and sustained conversation which will offer a modest contribution to peaceful co-existence and growth in particular and the entire global community in general. In recent past, the Nigerian environment has been seriously and negatively jeopardized by the actions of our hands-all in the name of religion and the defence of God. Therefore, it is clear that God can no longer be localized or confined to a particular religion. Again, there is no claim to monopoly of truth as regards salvation. The thrust of this paper therefore is to examine the concept of the love of variety as a catalyst for sustainable development in Nigeria.

## **THE 'LOVE OF VARIETY': A CONCEPTUAL MEANING**

The 'love of variety' as a concept was coined by one of the doyens of African and Comparative Religion Professor Dopamu as earlier observed. He was led to coin this term by his lifelong commitment to the scholarly understanding of the myriad ways in which humans conceive of the divine, and by his personal and intellectual experience that led him to conclude that God hates monotony and enjoys variety (Adam, 2010). As a great scholar of African and Comparative Religion, he supports (Surah 10:99) to argue that God in His infinite wisdom would have made or created humans alike, to reason alike and established a single faith or particular religion as the only religion. This, He did not do because He enjoys different faiths, their worship and approaches. To him, there is plurality in the way of salvation.

The dexterity with which he pursued his philosophical study of African and Comparative Religion could leave no one in doubt as to the importance Professor Dopamu ascribed to religion as a global phenomenon. In his career, he embraced a multi-disciplinary approach to academic and life issues. In his view, God's impartiality is demonstrated by the divine love for variety rather than monotony... The issues raised herein are not merely academic, they also reflect the range of human understanding of God as known or revealed through the mirrors of different approaches to the puzzle of human existence. The puzzle of human existence challenges us to translate academic discussion into a form and a forum that addresses our lives as human beings who stands in relationship to God, to the societies that house, to our politics that ensure an orderly organization

of socio-political expression, and to our environment that has been seriously and negatively jeopardized by the actions of our species (Adam, 2010).

The above disquisition reveals that God can no longer be localized to a particular religion or with exclusivist confession. Dopamu has strongly argued that religion is holistic and life itself. Therefore, religion has not failed humankind rather the practitioners of religion have turned religion into two-edged sword- division and cohesion. He believes that no single religion can claim monopoly of truth. As Nigeria practises triadic religions of African Religion, Islam and Christianity, Dopamu believes that African Religion has created a new environment for global sharing of which its tradition is 'live and let live' which enhances peaceful co-existence almost certainly absent in many world religions(Adam, 2010). Again, he asserts that African Religion promotes life, humanity, embraces and tolerates Islam and Christianity. According to him:

Afrel has maintained a long history of co-operative interaction with Christianity and Islam in Africa. In the face of ever troublesome and discouraging history of contact between Afrel and the imported religions, Afrel was able to exercise itself in the style of activity for which it has existed from time immemorial (Dopamu, 2005).

Dopamu observes that Africans embrace Islam and Christianity with the mind that all the religions are not exclusive in themselves.

However, with the incursion of these proselytizing religions of Islam and Christianity, it has been religious violence and unrest. These religious crises have drenched human blood, destroyed human civilization, and sent whole nation to unprecedented agony thereby making development to be retarded for the past three decades (Alamu, 2010). In Nigeria, many factors have been attributed to religious unrest, some of which stem from exclusivity, particularity, fanaticism, fundamentalism and many others. It is sad to know that both Muslims and Christians have been lurking horn together for religious differences. Be that as it ay, Dopamu tersely asserts that God expects Muslims and Christians to serve Him in their various ways, that no religion is better than the other. Since God has demonstrated impartiality over times.

As an academic Professor, Dopamu has been promoting this philosophy of God loves variety and hates monotony in the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin and beyond. His philosophy has become the benchmark of the Department where you see both Christian and Muslim lecturers accommodate and respect one another and as well promoting co-existence. Not only that, he avers that religious truth stems from academic environment as the microcosm that rears or breeds human resources and man power that develop and as well rule the larger society as the macrocosm. He advises religious stakeholders to patronize the academic where religious objectivity is addressed and practiced. He is of the opinion that the academics should serve as a reference point, a model and a blue-print which would be rewarding and profitable to the entire society.<sup>8</sup> In which case, we should move the gown to town so as to understand the rudiments of sharing and staying together

in a universal setting like the university, where you have multifarious sets of people both black, white and yellow, East, West, North and South.

Dopamu becomes apposite when he states that religious co-existence, tolerance, respect, and accommodation should be the watchword of all the adherents of all religions. He thus quoted the words of Peter in (Acts 10:34) to support this claim.

‘Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to Him.’

Dopamu emphasizes that irrespective of one’s religion, we should not fight in the name of God, and we should allow God to defend Himself instead of us defending Him. Dopamu cheerily clamours for multifarious approaches to the worship of God as Africans cherish humanistic diversity in an attempt to live as neighbours from the same source- God with only different religious affiliations. He permits this in order to promote co-existence, religious interactions, and promotion of human welfare and environmental development (Adam, 2010).

#### **THE LOVE OF VARIETY AS THE PROVERBIAL SIX BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT**

The love of variety is also described like the story of the six blind men and the elephant. A kindhearted man led six blind men of Indostan to the Zoo that they might touch the elephant. However, because they were blind, the six of them touched various parts of the animal at the end, when asked to describe what elephant looked like; each man described the elephant variously. The first blind man, who touched the body of the elephant, stated, “The elephant is like a wall. The second person touched the tail, and said “An elephant is like a rope”. The third touched the leg and said “an elephant is like a stone”. The fourth touched the ear and said an elephant is like a fan”. The fifth touched the head and said the elephant is like a mortar”. Finally the sixth man touched the tusk and declared, “The elephant is like a flute.” (Awolalu, 2005).

The blind men touched and felt various parts of the same animal with different perceptions. However, we have just learnt that God can be felt or perceived anyhow, differently and He is invisible and inscrutable. Therefore, there are many ways that lead to God. Salvation is not linear in nature. The knowledge of God is relative and impartial. Since, the knowledge about God is relative, He expects human beings to worship Him variously and nothing satisfies God than varieties and species of worship. God accepts and loves variety where new innovations and discoveries are made.

#### **THE LOVE OF VARIETY AS AN EPITOME OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM**

As earlier noted, the love for variety suggests diversity or plurality. In this regard, the love for variety is equivalent to religious diversity or pluralism. The conceptual schemes of variety must be seen as the interpretation of human experience since it has been a recipe for peace, development, tolerance, accommodation, integration and among others. Religious pluralism does not pose any danger of syncretism or infidelity since understanding the belief-practices of others are significantly involved. Basye is of the opinion that religious pluralism holds or allows other faiths to be learnt about their paths or ways and how they want to be understood (Basye, 2012). They are means of building bridges and relationships that

create harmony, development and peace on our planet home (Basye, 2012). Gerald Lenski sees religious pluralism as “organized religious groups with incompatible beliefs and practices are obliged to co-exist within the frame work of the same community, or the same society (Gerald, 1965).” Pluralism is “a condition of society in which numerous distinct ethnic, religious or cultural groups co-exist within one nation or it is the belief that no single explanation or view of reality can account for all the phenomenon of life (Downs, 1999).” Umejesi and Igboin see that “pluralism implies sympathy, if our indulgence for differing or conflicting beliefs with one’s own. In other words, each religion is recognized as representing a distinctive, yet equal valid, grasp of some ultimate spiritual reality (Umejesi & Igboin, 2015).

As a matter of fact, religious pluralism is designed in a religiously organized group with the aim of peaceful co-existence having considered areas of common interest. Some see religious pluralism as a way of integrating, tolerating and accommodating other faiths. There is a general acknowledgment that plurality of faith is not evil or conflict centred. Schillebeeckx is apposite when he asserts that:

The multiplicity of religions is not evil which needs to be moved, but rather a wealth which is to be welcomed and enjoyed by all. There is more religious truth in all religions together, in one particular religion (Edward, 1990).

The above essay reveals the diverging view on religions as against the monopoly of truth claims. In spite of this, each religion should respect other faith or exist side by side with respect and objectivity.

## **THE LOVE OF VARIETY IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria as a nation is characterized by cultural diversity, ethnic heterogeneity and religious variety. Dopamu truly supports the fact Nigeria is a country of various cultures, traditions and faiths. But of all the diverse elements, religion has proved to be most sensitive and the one that often led to hatred and division (Dopamu, 2001). In the Nigerian society, the love of variety is permanently recognized as suitable for her. Because Nigeria is heterogeneous in nature and in terms of religion, Nigeria is a mainly practicing triadic religion of Indigenous religion, Islam and Christianity.

The history of indigenous religion according to Awolalu and Dopamu is as old as Nigeria herself. It is a religion handed down through our forebears from past generations and it is transmitted orally to the present generations. It is not a proselytizing religion nor does it guzzle for members, rather it is tolerant, it accommodates and remains autochthonous (Awolalu and Dopamu, 2005). Islam and Christianity are the proselytizing religions which had been imported to Nigeria at various periods in the history of the nation, and at the same time struggle for membership via evangelism. Thus, this membership drive at times lends credence to mutual suspicion and hatred.

Worthy of note is the fact that the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognizes pluralistic nature of religion and as such, Section 10 of 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria prohibits the adoption of a state religion both at the Federal and State levels and therein after declares, “The government of the federation or a state shall not adopt any religion as a state religion”. This expresses the fact that Nigerian government should not adopt or promote any particular

religious group at the expense of others. In the same development, Section 38 of 1999 constitution states that every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom... to manifest and propagate his/her religion or believe in worship. Apparently, the constitution formed the nucleus of pluralistic nature of Nigerian state.

Nevertheless, in contemporary Nigerian society, despite the advocacy of the love of variety, religious crises between Christians and Muslims are prevalent. Thus, the religious crises are occasioned by many reasons such as religious particularity, exclusivity, fanaticism, fundamentalism, religious superiority and monopoly of truth-claim. These corresponding challenges have severally led both faithful to religious conflicts. It has been argued that there is no parameter or calculus to measure the BEST religion in the universe and Nigeria in particular. Instead of these various religious adherents to practice their faiths as a result of the pluralistic environment, killings and destruction in the name and defence of God have occupied the beautiful and serene Nigerian environment. Of a truth, Alamu has rightly observed earlier that sheer sentiments, passion and emotion attached to religion makes Islam and Christianity to be a prey in the hand of religious fundamentalists and exclusivists, particularists, absolute monopolist and superior interest can protect only their bigoted position, which result in wanton destruction of lives and properties (Alamu, 2009).

It is said to note that irreligious activities sparked off in the past three decades, of which Kano and Jos have assumed a symbol and norm of religious fanaticism. Religious zealots have differently unleashed religious terror in these flash points. Again, Alamu has catalogued or stockpiled the various religious crises Nigeria has experienced so far. They include the maitatsine disturbance in Kano (1977, 1979, and 1980). Zana 1981, Maiduguri 1982, Kaduna 1982, Kano 1982, Ilorin 1986, Yola and Gombe 1988, Bauchi 1999, Kaduna 2001 Jos 2001, Kano and Abuja 2003, Sagamu 1996, Lagos 1999, Owerri 1996, Shagamu. 2001, Aba 2001, Wase 2002, Yeldam and Shendam 2002, Jos 2008 till date (Alamu, 2009). As a result, thousands of people have been sent to their unprecedented grave of which today, it is either Maiduguri or Jos. Jos which was known as a state of harmony has become state of cemetery for the innocent people. Indubitably, the indices of the several crises show the mixture of ethnicity and political grievances to interpret such disagreements as the genies of religious violence. Despite the pluralistic and secular nature of the Nigerian state, religion has been manipulated by religious zealots overtime. Bala Usman has clearly demonstrated the systematic manipulation of religion in its opposition to the oneness and unity of the Nigerian people (Bala, 1987). Even those who are stakeholders in the nation's religions are religious fanatic and actors in this direction. Olaniyi captures holistically the position of religious stakeholders. According to him:

They are dishonest because they call for peace on the pages of newspaper and other media but plant seeds of discord in their places of worship, inciting their follower to defend their faiths with their blood. During crises, they run into hiding and leave their unsuspecting followers to die (Olaniyi, 2001).

Despite that, Nigeria as a nation has various ethnic, religious and cultural groups deigned to co-exist within one nation. This makes Nigeria a pluralistic and secular nation with the love of variety.

## CONCEPTUALIZATION OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The concept of national development can be best appreciated through the understanding of development. In essence, national which is 'adjective' is thus derived from nation which means a country considered as a group of people with the same language, culture and history, who live in a particular government, an independent nation. While, the word 'development' is defined as a developing or being developed or a step or stage in growth, advancement (Machine, 1954). *Macmillan English Dictionary for advanced learners* defines development as a change, growth, improvement over a period of time (*Macmillan English Dictionary, 2007*). Development in human society has been seen to have many-side processes. Walter Rodney sees development on individual level as increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well being (Rodney, 1972). Amucheazi asserts that "development is a multi-dimensional process involving the totality of man in his political, economic, psychological, social relation among others (Amuchaezi, 1980)." Olomula sees development as advancement through progressive changes in economic, social, cultural, technological and political condition of a society leading to an improvement in the welfare of the citizens Olomula, 1997). For a nation to develop; she must experience all round increase in economic growth and economic development. National development is a process by which continuous increase in system's efficiency produces the condition which results to general upliftments. Bamidele also adds to the above when she observes that national development is a situation where people harness the resources at their disposal to have a meaningful development (Bamidele, 1998). No doubt, UNDP defines development by identifying three elements, which are: development of the people, development for the people, and development by the people (Igun, 2004).

## THE LOVE OF VARIETY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Indeed, Nigeria is known as a pluralistic nation and there is plurality in the way of salvation. The three main religions practiced in Nigeria are acceptable to God who is the source and goal of the religions. With this knowledge as the background, it behoves one to know that the love of God and neighbourliness is the area of common interest of these religions. As such, Dopamu who propounded that 'God loves variety and hates monotony' further buttresses that that with African background, the principle of brotherhood should be the focus of the two religions of Islam and Christianity. Dopamu strongly believes that Africans promote life, humanity, tolerance, hospitality, communality, togetherness, and we-feelings. In Indigenous religion, Dopamu asserts that the religion is anthropocentric, and humanity is at the centre of everything. Therefore, African humanism is not individualistic, rather it is communal humanism. The way Africans live, relate, shows concern for one another, help one another, share common burden, and do things together explicate their corporate existence and make them real human beings (Dopamu, 2005). This communality is further buttressed by Abakare when he observes that African brotherhood which Julius Nyerere called Ujamaa- cannot be over emphasized

(It) finds its roots in the traditional African societies in which everyone is his brother's keeper. The setting was devoid of capitalist tendencies. The distribution of wealth was such that there was hardly any room for parasitism. There was a universal hospital and sense of security. It was classless and things were owned in common. There was no room for laziness, as all contributed their fair share of effort towards the production of wealth. These were individuals within a

community. You takes (sic) care of the community as the community in turn the community takes care of you (Abakare, 2007).

According to Dopamu, African religion acts as a binding communal force; it gives promise of providing the power needed in our day to transform parochial consciousness into a global one. Its resources of moral principle, abundant communal life, and sacredness of life, humanism and human-centredness of the universe are well suited to the value requirements for just and sustainable world community (Balogun, 2012).

All these credentials pioneered by African religion can serve as a nucleus for Islam and Christianity in order to sustain continuity and development in Nigeria. The principle of live and let live demonstrated by the adherents of African religion with its encounter with Islam and Christianity can still be displayed by Muslims and Christians in contemporary Nigeria's society. Since culture is a strongly influential factor, both Islam and Christianity are expected to be influenced by African perhaps Nigerian communality rather than hostile terrain orchestrated by these two religions. So far, the adherents of Islam and Christianity are not significantly contributing to the growth and development of the Nigerian nation. Development can be ensured when there are various worships of God and respect for brotherhood. Then peace will be ensured and development will emerge without much ado.

In addition, when religious dialogue is also given a prominent place in the Nigerian nation, understanding and cooperation will emerge among the adherents of the proselytizing religions of Islam and Christianity. This will ensure greatly that Muslims and Christians respect one another's faith, understand their differences and as well appreciate their areas of common interest. When the three main religions practiced in Nigeria create an atmosphere to live together without sentiments and acrimony, accommodate, and respect each other faith and understand their varieties, sustainable development is near. The love of variety assures such correlation among the three religions practiced in this country with the view to seeing how helpful the exercise can be towards the long desired unity and progress so much talked about for in Nigeria. "The aim is to find out how the three religions can collectively help towards nation building, and drastically reduce, if not eradicate, the vices that abound in our society (Balogun, 2012)."

Since sustainable development is paramount in our heart, we should ensure that emphasis must be placed on aspects that would unite us and disregard those that may tend to divide us hitherto. Albeit, Nigeria is our common heritage, identity and nationality, therefore Muslims and Christians must refrain from religious bitterness in favour of understanding and harmonious co-operation because we belong to the same country Nigeria. Balogun warns that to safeguard the interest of the nation which is our common heritage is the best, because it will help greatly to bring stability, unity, peace and progress to the Nigerian nation more through religious understanding and co-operation than through religious bickering and wrangling. No religious group or element is left out of this call: be it Christian, Muslim or Traditional (Balogun, 2012).

## **THE EFFECTS OF THE LOVE OF VARIETY ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The love of variety has quite a number of consequences on national development. It affects national development in the sense that Nigerians practice religion of bitterness, acrimony and killings. For the past three decades, religion has marred instead of making Nigeria. Since the past three decades, human blood has drenched this beautiful environment, religious violence has sent innocent people in their thousands to early and unprecedented grave, and religious crisis has marred human civilization, and properties worth billions of naira destroyed thereby retarding the progress and development of the Nigerian nation. Religious particularity and exclusivity can be subsumed to have constituted an infringement on the parts of the adherents of Islam and Christianity. This is evident in the way the adherents react with hatred, suspicion and mistrust as if one particular religion is acceptable by God at the exclusion of the other. The end product is killings, maiming and insecurity with corresponding casualties on both parts.

An unsafe environment does not attract investors. So far, Nigerian environment in recent times is not safe for investors because of abduction, and Boko Haram. For the past decades, Jos had been visited by those who loved tourism. Today, Jos a former haven has become centre for cemetery as a result of an unending religious crisis. Today, Islamic militant sect of Boko Haram is the latest face of this bloody campaign in Nigeria. Boko Haram agitates for a government under Sharia law and they kill at the slightest provocation or offence, if it is not the publication of cartoons of Mohammed in Denmark, it is invasion of Afghanistan by American forces or the staging of the beauty pageant or the burning of the Koran, or the coming of an American preacher to the city of Kano (Igwe, 2012). As a result, development will be retarded in an atmosphere of rancour and acrimony. Once any particular statement is made in the US, which is against the Islamic world, such statement would be celebrated violently in either Kano or Jos. This would cause aspersion, tension, unrest, because of Islam and Christianity.

Even, NIREC which is the umbrella body or only organ of the government on religious matter is not capable of curbing or apportioning blame to any group during any religious crisis. Nobody has been brought to book because of the various religious crises. All these are counterproductive to the space of religious diversity in Nigeria. Recently, this Islamic sect has graduated to a point that it is clamouring for Islamic state or nation in Nigeria. This sect is hell-bent in entrenching this by force. Today, they do not only use explosives but also state-of –the-art weaponry to cow any regimented force. They kill innocent people in the churches. They act as if there is no law or constitution in the nation. They are coming up higher and stronger everyday instead of abating. The government is handicapped even to solve this problem once and for all. In essence, their threat is sending spine to the shock absolver of the people and people are living in perpetual fear and anxiety in Nigeria. People are relocating and migrating for their safety. In a situation like this, development is very difficult to attain.

## **CONCLUSION**

This discourse analyzed the love of variety as propounded by Dopamu vis-a-vis national development. In point of fact, it analyzed national development and argued the effect of love of variety on national development. It demonstrated that religious madness and bitterness on the part of Muslims and Christians have to be stopped. Indeed, for a sustainable

development to be attained in an increasingly pluralistic and secular society like Nigeria, Islam and Christianity should follow the positive values and credentials of African religion.

African religion is considered significant in the stimulus it accords issues like brotherhood, spirituality, respect, industry, communality, justice, love, loyalty, trustworthiness, and hospitality, as well as teaching against such negative issues like greed, laziness, hypocrisy, robbery, disrespect, crime, murder, corruption, and other evil practices (Dopamu, 2005). These negative issues retard the peace, progress and unity of the Nigerian society and there can be a lot of human good and sustainable development without them. The love of variety has helped us to sieve the incompatibles on the part of Islam and Christianity and equally found areas of common interest as well as African culture that would be most applicable to the eliminating of the religious cum social ills of the Nigerian society. With this, humanity, brotherhood and communality become paramount in the overall sustainable development in contemporary Nigerian society.

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