

A HISTORY OF NIGERIA'S FOREIGN RELATIONS WITH THE VATICAN, 1975-2021

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Abstract

Since 1975, the Federal Republic of Nigeria has enjoyed good and cordial diplomatic relations with the Vatican, the central government of the Roman Catholic Church and the home of the Pope. It is argued that Nigeria had extensively worked with the Vatican on global issues that were paramount to Nigeria as an African country. Nigeria's diplomatic ties with the Vatican has been much debated and discussed among international relations scholars and historians in the 21st Century. It is obvious that the Vatican is a key player in international relations and has cordial relations with many African countries, especially the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This relation has assumed both political and economic dimensions. It is, however, important to find out how this relation has impacted Nigeria. This paper explores the history of Nigeria's diplomatic relations with the Vatican and examines the extent to which the relation has profited the country. This paper also explains the key principles that shape Nigeria's foreign policy towards the Vatican. In addition, it provides a thorough critique of Nigeria's continuous diplomatic ties with the Vatican.

Keywords: Diplomacy; Foreign Relations; Nigeria; Pope; Vatican

Introduction:

The late South African anti-apartheid activist, traditional leader and politician, Inkosi Albert Luthuli (1898-1967) once said, *You have to learn the rules of the game. And then you have to play better than anyone else*¹. This simply rings true in Nigeria's diplomatic engagements with the Vatican. As an African country, Nigeria has transcended its foreign interests in many parts of the world and has been very fundamental about her foreign policy towards the Western world, particularly the Vatican. The Vatican considered as the central government of the Roman Catholic Church and home to the Pope, has a very dynamic and profound influence on global affairs and tends to be pragmatic, spiritual and dimensional with its foreign diplomacy with the African continent. It is unclear that the Vatican's diplomatic intentions for Nigeria are dogmatic, materialistic and self-achieving but it is very possible that the Vatican seeks to promote a sense of mutual respect for Nigeria and a mutual co-operation with the country for diplomatic reasons and purposes best known to the Vatican. Nigeria, on the other hand, is an African nation with many aspirations and dreams that are nationalistic, self-driven, pragmatic and socially radical for her peoples and institutions. Nigeria's foreign relations with the Vatican are a multi-dimensional political one with many goals and objectives that seem to be realistic, self-achieving and people-oriented for their time. When Nigeria established diplomatic ties with the Vatican on November 20th, 1975, the ground was set for Nigeria to begin a new approach to international politics and a new global objective that would seek to achieve mutual co-operation with the Vatican and the Pope.

It is understandable that Nigeria's foreign policy objectives towards the Vatican are somewhat nationalistic and realistic but many critics argue that Nigeria's foreign diplomacy with the Vatican is somehow weak, counterproductive and undermined by several factors that militate against Nigeria's sovereignty, national interests and cultural identity. Despite these criticisms coming from many opposing voices against the Vatican's global presence in Nigeria, it is necessary to understand the dynamic relationship that Nigeria has with the Vatican and fully

analyze the gains she has made from those diplomatic engagements with the Holy See. It is also fundamental to emphasize the losses of the country as a result of her relations with the Vatican and the negative effects those losses have on the social, economic and political aspects of Nigerian life. Such relationship is a political pitch of national understanding and discussion for the whole country to appreciate and loathe at the same time.

The political nature of the diplomatic friendship between Nigeria and the Vatican are somewhat imperative due to international events that have helped to benefit both nations. Nigeria is itself a political player in international politics but she is a political spoon that scoops the remaining food on the plate for her own political and economic survival in the international world. Nigeria, in its dealings with the Vatican, has scored numerous achievements for her peoples and institutions as a result of her unwavering ties with the Vatican but along the way, has sacrificed her pride, sovereignty, cultural roots and identity as a result of such relationship. The paper commences with the historical background of the Nigeria's relation with the Vatican. The second section examines the key principles that guide Nigeria's relations with the Vatican. The third section critically analyzes the pros and cons of this relationship.

Literature Review

This paper attempts to review diverse books and journal articles which are related to this study. These literatures provide valuable insights into the nature and trajectories of this paper, A History of Nigeria's Foreign Relations with the Vatican, 1975-2021. Therefore, some academic books and journal articles which have great relevance to this thesis are reviewed below. Jodok Troy's *The Catholic Church: An Underestimated and Necessary Actor in International Affairs* presents a vivid understanding of the Church's role in international politics and how the Vatican uses its foreign policy which is soft power in nature to impact nations and global cultures³. The paper examines the Vatican's responsibility in promoting social and religious values that are compatible with Western culture and philosophy. His paper asserts that the Vatican is a fundamental promoter of global change, peace, and solidarity which serves the purpose of the Roman Catholic Church and at the same time, a strong advocate of human rights and religious freedom in the world. The paper strongly paints the Holy See as a defender of a new world order which seeks to bring world peace, harmony, and tolerance. However, Troy's work fails to emphasize on the Vatican's role in African politics and its role in re-shaping Nigeria's foreign diplomacy in the 21st Century.

Phillip Arceneaux authored an article entitled, *Popes as Public Diplomats: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Vatican's Foreign Engagement and Storytelling*⁴. This article broadly examines the roles of the Pope throughout the 20th Century have played as a foreign diplomat and an international stakeholder in international politics and the rhetorical means through which the Catholic Church has used the pope as a public diplomat to engage with a modern and increasingly secular world. The article specifically points out the ways papal engagement has evolved throughout the years and how the papal engagements of past popes helped in transforming and shaping diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the globe. It also points out that papal speeches made in different parts of the world tend to either brighten bilateral relations between the Vatican and non-Catholic Countries or diminish such relations overtime. The article lacks the depth and seems to leave out Nigeria in its emphasis of the Popes and their foreign engagements and storytelling in different parts of the world. On the flipside, the article lays no emphasis on the Vatican's Foreign Engagement and Storytelling in Nigeria and the roles they play in shaping and transforming bilateral engagements between the Vatican and the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the 21st Century.

A Historical Account of Nigeria's Foreign Relations with the Vatican, 1975-2021.

On November 20, 1975, Nigeria established diplomatic relations with the Vatican fifteen years

after her independence from Great Britain². Previously, the Nigerian government under the leadership of General Murtala Ramat Muhammad had signed a joint communiqué with Cardinal Jean-Marie Villot, the Vatican's Secretary of State on June 10th, 1975 which helped to formalize the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican five months later. The joint communiqué contained several elements of great importance which are:

- a) Expression of mutual desire to establish diplomatic relations.
- b) Agreement to exchange diplomatic missions (Ambassador/*Apostolic Nuncio*).
- c) Statement on the importance of promoting mutual understanding, peace, and co-operation.
- d) Acknowledgement of the significant role of Christianity in Nigeria and the Catholic Church's contributions to education, healthcare, and social welfare.
- e) Commitment to co-operation in areas like education, healthcare, and social justice.
- f) Expression of hope for future collaboration and exchange.

These above elements contained in the joint communiqué were fundamentally instrumental in laying the foundations of Nigeria's formal relations with the Vatican in the coming years. As the 1970s progressed, Nigeria was active in her neutral stance during the Cold War period and played a pivotal role in her foreign diplomacy with the Vatican. Under the administration of General Murtala Ramat Muhammad, Nigeria experienced no high-key visits from the Vatican delegation but had enjoyed economic and humanitarian aid coming from the Holy See as a result of the cordial relationship between the two countries. These economic and humanitarian aids were instrumental in providing relevance to Nigerian social and economic sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture and trade. The Murtala Ramat Muhammed regime, though lasting for six months, secured the Holy See's moral support on social issues such as social justice, peace, and human rights which helped to reinforce Nigeria's stance on the world stage⁵.

After General Murtala Ramat Muhammed was assassinated on 13th February, 1976 while driving to work along his usual route on George Street, Lagos City, his Chief of Staff of the Supreme Military HQ, Brigadier Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo took the mantle from his dead predecessor and was sworn in as the Military Head of State⁶. As Military Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo drafted his own foreign policy stance with the Vatican. He continued foreign relations with the Vatican, by strengthening her bilateral ties through diplomatic engagements and foreign visits. General Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo visited the Vatican in 1977 and offered his sincere co-operation and friendship to the Holy See. Such offer was received and accepted by the reigning Pope, Pope Paul VI (1897-1978)⁷. During the meeting with Pope Paul VI, General Obasanjo discussed ways to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between Nigeria and the Vatican, particularly in areas such as education, healthcare, and social development. General Obasanjo also highlighted the importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation in promoting peace and stability in Nigeria and the world.

Throughout the years of the Obasanjo military regime, Nigeria experienced stability and peace through her cordial relationship with the Vatican. The Obasanjo regime was instrumental through the assistance of the Vatican in encouraging interfaith dialogue and co-operation between Nigerian Muslims and Christians which cemented a strong and lasting peace between the two religious communities⁸. General Olusegun Obasanjo's regime forged efficient collaboration on social and economic issues with the Vatican providing social support for Roman Catholic schools and hospitals in Nigeria⁹. His regime also helped in securing co-operation and respect with the Vatican on international issues such as human rights, disarmament, and developments through international organizations such as the UNO and EU. By the time the Obasanjo military administration had ended on October 1st, 1979, Nigeria's diplomatic relations with the Vatican was already deeply strong, cordial and formalized, with a secured foundation for future

development and co-operation in the coming years¹⁰.

The Shehu Shagari presidency attempted to seek a strong and warm continuity of co-operation and respect with the Vatican, and a strong sense of sharing Nigeria's cultural heritage and values with the Holy See. On 12th February, 1982, Pope John Paul II also known as *Pope John Paul the Great* (1920-2005) began a 5-day tour to Nigeria with a group of high-ranking Vatican officials and clergy¹¹. During the visit, the Pope had a private audience with President Shehu Shagari and discussed Nigeria's development and social matters such as religious harmony, social justice, human rights, religious peace, religious tolerance and social order¹². He addressed the Nigerian government and emphasized heavily on the importance of social justice, human rights, and interfaith dialogue in the country. Pope John Paul II urged the Nigerian government to address social and economic issues and tackle them beforehand¹³. He emphasized intensely on the need for international co-operation and solidarity with the people of Nigeria in order to address global challenges¹⁴. The Pope's five-day visit to Nigeria strengthened bilateral ties and diplomatic engagements with the Vatican, paving the way for committed interfaith dialogue and peace in the country and international support from the Vatican for global issues¹⁵.

Principles that Guide Nigeria's Foreign Relations with the Vatican

There are basic principles that guide the Nigerian government on foreign relations with the Vatican. Those principles laid the foundation for the country on her cordial relationship with the Holy See in the coming years. Nigeria's, foreign policy stance with the Vatican under the presidency of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983) was based on the following:

- a) Mutual respect: Respect for the Vatican's independence and authority.
- b) Cooperation: Collaboration on development, education, healthcare, and social welfare initiatives.
- c) Inter-faith dialogue: Encouragement of dialogue and understanding between Christians and Muslims.
- d) Sovereignty: Recognition of Nigeria's sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs.
- e) International cooperation: Collaboration on global issues through international organizations like the United Nations.
- f) Cultural exchange: Promotion of cultural exchange and understanding between Nigeria and the Vatican.
- g) Peace and justice: Commitment to peace, justice, and human rights, aligning with the Vatican's values.
- h) Non-alignment: Maintenance of Nigeria's non-aligned status, avoiding entanglement in Cold War politics.

In addition, the Shagari administration's foreign policy commitments to the Vatican was in accordance with the joint communiqué which was signed six years ago between Nigeria and the Vatican during the military administration of General Murtala Muhammed (1975-1976)¹⁶. From 1979 to 1983, Shagari's Nigeria enjoyed peaceful and cordial relations with the Vatican and benefited from economic and humanitarian assistance from the Vatican which helped in the advancement of many development projects and infrastructural plans in the country, particularly in the rural areas of the South-South and South-West geopolitical zones¹⁷. Shagari's foreign policy stance with the Vatican was guided by the following principles:

- a) A desire for cooperation and mutual benefit.
- b) Respect for the Vatican's unique status and influence.
- c) A commitment to peace, justice, and human rights.
- d) A focus on development and social welfare.

- e) A recognition of the importance of interfaith dialogue and understanding.

This stance helped foster a strong and cordial relationship between Nigeria and the Vatican during Shagari's administration. The Shagari administration secured the Vatican's moral support against the apartheid regime in South Africa and the Vatican's moral persuasion to woo other countries around the world against Apartheid South Africa. The military administration of General Muhammadu Buhari proved to be very impressive and vibrant as its foreign policy focus in relation with the Vatican seemed to be more formal and diplomatic. It secured the Vatican's support for its stand against corruption and promotion of good governance. It continued working with the Vatican on interfaith relations and dialogue in the country between Nigerian Muslims and Christians¹⁸. The administration encouraged cultural exchanges between Nigeria and the Vatican by granting scholarships and training programs for Nigerian Catholic Priests and Nuns and permitting of musical performances and art exhibitions. These cultural exchanges were often limited due to the nature of the president and his social priorities of General Muhammadu Buhari himself as the sitting Military Head of State at the time. As the curtains were closing for the military administration of General Muhammadu Buhari on 27th August, 1985, those same curtains were also opening for a new military administration under General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida that same year¹⁹.

Under the military regime of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, Nigeria enjoyed the Vatican's moral and humanitarian support on domestic and global issues which earmarked Nigerian's influence and foreign monopoly on the world stage. The Vatican provided medical aid and support to the Babangida government to combat diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and cancer²⁰. The Vatican supported Nigerian Catholic educational institutions and centres in order to promote access to quality education in Nigeria²¹. The Vatican collaborated with the military administration of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida on global issues such as poverty, military disarmament and environmental protection which were very instrumental in shaping Nigeria's international image on the world stage in the coming years²².

General Abacha's military administration was somewhat hostile and bitter in its foreign relations with the Vatican²³. The Vatican's criticism of the Abacha regime's human rights abuse and its condemnation of the execution of Ogoni environmental activist and writer, Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists such as Saturday Dobe, Nordu Eawo, Daniel Gbooko, Paul Levera, Felix Nuata, Baribor Bera, Barinem Kiobel, and John Kpuine on November 10th, 1995 worsened and strained relations between Nigeria and the Vatican. The Abacha government temporarily recalled its ambassador to the Vatican for further consultations²⁴. Despite the Vatican's criticism and condemnation of General Sani Abacha's poor human rights record, the Vatican continued to provide humanitarian assistance to Nigeria, particularly through Catholic organizations, but this was not necessarily tied to direct diplomatic engagement with the Abacha regime²⁵. The Abacha regime's international isolation and pariah status limited diplomatic engagement with the Vatican and further frustrated any future promising bilateral ties and agreements between the Vatican and the military government of General Sani Abacha (1993-1998)²⁶.

After General Sani Abacha's untimely death on June 8th, 1998, the Vatican saw hope and opportunity in the new military administration of General Abdulsalami Abubakar as he was sworn in as the new military head of state²⁷. General Abdulsalami Abubakar immediately restored and strengthened relations with the Vatican by re-engaging with the Vatican and restoring human rights. General Abdulsalami Abubakar's military government solely engaged in diplomatic exchanges with the Vatican, including visits from high-ranking officials and clergy. General

Abubakar exchanged correspondence with Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) and other Vatican officials, addressing issues such as human rights, democracy and religious freedom²⁸. He supported Vatican-backed initiatives, such as humanitarian projects and interfaith programs. General Abubakar also appointed a new ambassador, Alhaji Ibrahim Akaje to the Holy See (Vatican), ensuring diplomatic representation and regular communication²⁹. General Abdulsalami Abubakar or his representatives attended Vatican-sponsored events, like the 1999 Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa, demonstrating Nigeria's commitment to engagement with the Vatican. These diplomatic exchanges with the Vatican by the Abubakar military regime helped strengthen ties, fostered greater understanding, and facilitated cooperation between Nigeria and the Vatican.

The Presidency of Chief Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo that kicked off on May 29, 1999 restored hope for the country's foreign relations with the Vatican as President Olusegun Obasanjo met with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican in 2000, discussing human rights, democracy, and religious freedom in Nigeria. In 2001, the Vatican and Nigeria signed a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in healthcare, education, and development projects³⁰. According to the Memorandum, Nigeria would be guaranteed complete Vatican support and assistance on the following issues such as healthcare, education, development projects, human rights and social justice, interfaith dialogue and religious freedom, cultural exchange, and technical assistance and capacity building³¹. This MoU served as a framework for cooperation, outlining areas of mutual interest and collaboration between the Vatican and Nigeria. It facilitated joint projects, exchanges, and initiatives, promoting development, understanding, and shared values between the Vatican and Nigeria under the administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. In 2002, Obasanjo attended the Vatican's Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa, reinforcing Nigeria's commitment to interfaith dialogue. In 2003, Pope John Paul II sent a special envoy to Nigeria to support Obasanjo's efforts in promoting peace and stability in the West African region. Nigeria and the Vatican collaborated on a joint humanitarian project to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa in 2004. This project achieved numerous outcomes in several parts of the country which were as follows:

- a) Increased awareness: The project helped raise awareness about HIV/AIDS in Nigeria and other African countries, reducing stigma and promoting education.
- b) Healthcare infrastructure: The initiative supported the establishment or upgrading of healthcare facilities, including hospitals and clinics, to provide better care for HIV/AIDS patients.
- c) Treatment and support: The project provided antiretroviral therapy (ART) and support services for people living with HIV/AIDS, improving their quality of life.
- d) Capacity building: The initiative trained healthcare workers, community leaders, and volunteers to address HIV/AIDS-related issues.
- e) Community engagement: The project engaged local communities in HIV/AIDS prevention and support efforts, promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility.

The following year, after the sudden death of Pope John Paul II, Chief Obasanjo met with Pope Benedict XVI (1927-2022) to discuss continued co-operation and mutual support. The Vatican supported Nigeria's efforts to host the 8th All Africa Games in 2006, promoting sports development and youth engagement.

The administration of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007-2010), though a short-lived presidency, promised to explore areas of cooperation with the Vatican on development projects, such as poverty alleviation, agriculture, and infrastructure development³². Other areas of diplomatic relevance included:

- a) Strengthened diplomatic relations: Yar'Adua pledged to continue and strengthen Nigeria's diplomatic relations with the Vatican, building on existing ties.
- b) Interfaith dialogue: He committed to promoting interfaith understanding and dialogue

between Christianity and Islam, reflecting the Vatican's emphasis on ecumenism.

- c) Support for Catholic education: Yar'Adua promised to support Catholic educational institutions in Nigeria, recognizing their contributions to the country's development.
- d) Collaboration on healthcare: He agreed to collaborate with the Vatican on healthcare initiatives, particularly in addressing HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other health challenges.
- e) Promotion of human rights: Yar'adua was committed to upholding human rights and dignity, aligning with the Vatican's advocacy for social justice.
- f) Support for peaceful coexistence: He pledged to promote peaceful coexistence among Nigeria's diverse religious and ethnic groups, reflecting the Vatican's message of peace and harmony.

Sadly, his death on May 5th, 2010 from a prolonged illness hindered any future bilateral agreements and treaties between Nigeria and the Vatican, and darkened the dynamics of Nigeria-Vatican relations for some years.

President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, a native of Otuoke, Bayelsa State, took the mantle of leadership on 6th May, 2010 and promised Nigerians a strong continuous commitment to Nigeria's diplomatic ties with the Vatican. In his inauguration address on 29th May, 2011, he emphasized on the shared values and goals between Nigeria and the Vatican, such as promoting peace, justice, and human dignity³³. He indicated his intention to build on the foundations laid by his predecessor, President Yar'adua, in terms of Nigeria-Vatican relations. During his presidency, Nigeria's foreign relation with the Vatican was characterized by the following:

- a) Continuity: Jonathan built on the foundations laid by his predecessor, President Yar'adua, maintaining a strong diplomatic relationship with the Vatican.
- b) Strengthened ties: Jonathan's administration strengthened Nigeria's ties with the Vatican through regular diplomatic engagements, high-level visits, and cooperation on shared values.
- c) Papal audience: In 2012, President Jonathan met with Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican, discussing issues like peace, security, and interfaith dialogue.
- d) Support for Vatican initiatives: Nigeria supported various Vatican-backed initiatives, such as peace building efforts, human rights campaigns, and humanitarian projects.
- e) Collaboration on development: The two entities cooperated on development projects, including healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation programs.
- f) Interfaith dialogue: Jonathan's administration promoted interfaith dialogue and understanding, reflecting the Vatican's emphasis on ecumenism.
- g) Diplomatic appointments: Nigeria maintained a strong diplomatic presence at the Vatican, with regular ambassadorial appointments.
- h) Vatican's support for Nigeria: The Vatican offered support and guidance on issues like terrorism (Boko Haram) and political stability³⁴.

The Presidency of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan appreciated the Vatican's moral and spiritual support when the Eagle Square was attacked by MEND terrorists on October 1st, 2010. The Vatican's Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, sent a message to President Goodluck Jonathan, condemning the attack and expressing solidarity to Nigerians, sympathy for the victims and their families and hope for peace and reconciliation in the country³⁵. The Vatican provided support for Catholic educational and healthcare institutions in Nigeria, contributing to human development and capacity building. The Vatican encouraged and supported interfaith initiatives in Nigeria, promoting understanding and peaceful coexistence among different religious groups. The Vatican provided humanitarian aid to Nigeria, particularly in response to natural disasters, conflicts, and health crises. The Vatican advocated for human rights and dignity in Nigeria, particularly in areas

like religious freedom, women's rights, and protection of minorities.

The administration of Rt. General Muhammadu Buhari provided a new dimension of foreign policy direction that was diplomatic, dynamic and constructive for the country as a whole. After his inauguration on 29th May, 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari visited the Vatican in 2015, meeting with the new Pope, Pope Francis I to discuss co-operation on global issues. Pope Francis visited Nigeria in 2016, highlighting the country's importance in Africa and the global Catholic community. President Buhari and the Vatican worked together to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. The Vatican supported Nigeria's candidacy for international organizations, such as the UN Security Council. Nigeria and the Vatican issued joint declarations on issues like human trafficking, climate change, and peaceful coexistence³⁶. The Vatican supported Nigeria's development efforts, particularly in education, healthcare, and social welfare. The Buhari government secured the Vatican's support for its fight against Boko Haram and other terrorist groups during the mid-2010s and early 2020s³⁷. Nigeria and the Vatican cooperated on humanitarian projects, such as refugee support and disaster relief. The Vatican encouraged peaceful coexistence among Nigeria's diverse religious and ethnic groups. Such peaceful co-existence helped in legitimizing and sustaining Vatican influence and international credibility among world nations, particularly African and Afro-Caribbean nations. The Vatican's credibility and influence in Africa is today a paramount factor in its bilateral relations between Black Africa and the Holy See in the 21st Century.

Pros and Cons of Nigeria's Foreign Relations with the Vatican through successive Nigerian Heads of State

Nigeria has gained a lot in her relations with the Holy See and has worked to achieve many goals in safeguarding her national interests. Successive Nigerian Heads of State from General Murtala Ramat Muhammed to Rt. General Muhammadu Buhari worked tirelessly to secure Nigeria's international image at the world stage through the support and assistance of the Vatican. The Vatican worked with numerous Nigerian Heads of State to promote interfaith dialogue and peace-building process in order to forge unity, tolerance, and peace among Nigerian Muslims and Christians. The Vatican has been instrumental in providing economic and humanitarian assistance for the people of Nigeria in times of political and economic crises.

It is important to emphasize the moral and spiritual support the Vatican has given to Nigeria on areas of national and international importance. Nigeria's fight against apartheid received moral support from the Vatican at a time when many Blacks in South Africa was brutally oppressed, segregated or discriminated, killed and denied political and economic privileges/rights by the apartheid government. Such support from the Vatican helped Nigeria to sabotage and attack the apartheid system both at home and abroad. It is worth noting that the Nigerian government enjoyed support and humanitarian assistance from the Vatican due to the fact that Nigeria believed in the necessity of mutual co-operation and respect in international affairs, particularly a mutual co-operation with the Vatican for diplomatic reasons. The Vatican has played a key role in the success story of Nigeria since the start of their diplomatic engagement 46 years ago. Nigerian Heads of State such as General Olusegun Obasanjo, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, General Ibrahim Babangida, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Rt. General Muhammadu Buhari helped in securing Nigeria's reputation at the world stage through the support and assistance of the Vatican. The Vatican's association with Nigeria has helped improve the country's image globally, countering negative perceptions.

As Nigeria has gained from her diplomatic engagements with the Vatican both at home and abroad, she has suffered losses from such diplomatic engagements with the Vatican. Despite all the moral support and humanitarian assistance coming from the Holy See to the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Nigeria is still in danger of being under the yoke of neo-colonialism

through the Vatican. The Vatican's insistence on the role of Christianity in Nigerian history being recognized and affirmed by the Nigerian government undermines Nigeria's sovereignty, and cultural integrity and pride at home and abroad. With this, the respect that the Vatican has earned from Nigeria through diplomatic engagements and support for global issues for 46 years can be destroyed or tarnished due to the Vatican's emphasis on Western norms and values in its bilateral agreements and treaties with Nigeria. The Vatican's failure to pay reparations and compensations to the Federal Government for its role in the colonization of Nigeria and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade mirrors the nature of the Vatican as a colonial empire resisting the change and gradual demands for African pride and integrity to be redeemed and restored from the years of colonial oppression and racial servitude at the hands of Vatican Catholic clergymen and cardinals.

A Critique of Nigeria's Diplomatic Ties with the Vatican in the 21st Century

Foreign Diplomacy is a global currency because it can enhance reputation, encourage global collaboration and foster economic growth in any democracy in the world. Nigeria's diplomatic ties with the Vatican has earned her a great global recognition around the world and produced an enormous outcome of international proportions for Nigeria to rise at the top of international politics. Despite achieving great international recognition and acclaim through her diplomatic relations with the Vatican, Nigeria continues to experience weak and sloppy miscalculations when it comes to dealing with the Vatican. The Vatican, with all its influence and international gift of persuasion, can be underestimated when it comes to cultural and social matters. The Vatican's emphasis on the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the history of Nigeria can be a political loophole for the Vatican to use as leverage against the country on cultural and social matters. The joint communiqué signed in 1975 between Nigeria and the Vatican can be used against Nigeria by the Vatican to swing general public opinion on cultural and economic issues that define the political and social situations of today's age of globalization. This is the age of globalization and many developing Third World countries are being drawn into international systems and values that do not reflect their cultural aspirations, traditions, customs, and values that define them collectively as regional communities and families working for their own good. African countries such as Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cote D'Ivoire, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Tunisia, Chad, Niger, Namibia, South Africa, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Rwanda, Mauritania, Madagascar, Djibouti, and Algeria are being dragged into the globalization period by the Western powers in order that Western hegemony may erode into the African environment and destabilize cultural and political institutions in the African continent. Let us not forget that during the Cold War (1947-1991), the Vatican was involved in several covert operations against the Soviet Union and other Soviet-allied states in Europe in order to destabilize the region in fear of a Communist takeover in Europe³⁸. The Vatican worked with the US, Great Britain, West Germany, Israel, and France side by side with each other to sabotage African nations whose governments were suspected to be Communists or Communist sympathizers and allies³⁹. It is best to understand that the Vatican's dark history in Cold War politics during the 20th Century should alert Nigerians of the dangers of allowing the Vatican to deceive the Nigerian government with its Christian piety and virtue which can be a camouflage of a far more wicked and chaotic future for the country and her citizens.

The Vatican's dark history is an indication that in the near future, electoral fraud and rigging in federal and state elections can occur when a presidential or governorship candidate does not ascribe to Christian norms and values. The Vatican's emphasis on Western values and norms indicates that it will set up new bilateral agreements and treaties that will promote social and political agendas that will threaten the customs, values, and traditions of many Nigerian ethnic communities across the country. The rise of controversial issues such as abortion, same-sex practices, and transgender rights are gradually changing the religious and social stance of the

Roman Catholic Church and the Vatican as a whole. This rise occurring in the Vatican should tell the Nigerian government that the Vatican Church can alter the beliefs of Nigerian peoples and their cultural institutions at any given moment. Nigeria, as an African country, should consider itself as a country of African customs, traditions, and values that have transcended many generations for thousands of years, and not a nation founded on Western norms and traditions.

Though Nigeria appreciates the co-operation she has enjoyed from the Vatican, it is important to understand the reality of political happenings in the period of globalization. The Vatican can swing general public opinion on indigenous values and traditions that have survived for thousands of years and try to push Western norms and values that alienate indigenous values and traditions of the Nigerian populace in the 21st Century. The period of globalization should remind the Nigerian government that cultural values and traditions are at a crossroad and are in danger of annihilation if relation with the Vatican is not well managed. The Vatican's bilateral agreements can dictate to the Nigerian government on matters of national importance and destabilize Nigeria's political dreams and aspirations as the *Giant of Mother Africa*.

The failure of the Nigerian government to pressure the Vatican to pay reparations and restitution to the Federal Republic of Nigeria for its pivotal role in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is a complicated issue that needs to be addressed and resolved by the Federal Government for the sake of posterity. The Vatican's role in the enslavement of Black people during the slave trade era is a dark history that still haunts Nigerians to this day and has left a deadly wound on the pride and dignity of the Nigerian people. The Vatican has not emphasized this issue on the global stage and has refused to make amends for its role in the enslavement of Nigerians during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. This question should be thrown at the faces of our political leaders, *When will the Vatican make amends for its sins against Nigeria?* The Vatican, in order to make peace with the Nigerian people, must pay reparations to the Nigerian government and the reparations must be paid for peace to reign between Nigeria and the Vatican. It is not enough to have mutual respect and co-operation with Nigeria. It is about proving one's worth as an institution and empire, and ensuring that such diplomatic relationship continues to flourish between the two countries. Nigeria must prove herself worthy of the title, *Giant of Africa* by ensuring that the Vatican respects her history, customs, and traditions and makes peace with her through the payment of reparations for her sins and evils against Nigerians during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Such reparations will be relevant and resourceful for the country's social, economic and political development.

Another task that Nigeria must tackle to prove herself as the *Giant of Africa* is to ensure that the Vatican's blatant racism against her citizens does not go unchecked. Many Vatican delegates who come to Nigeria often promote racist rhetoric and often times attack Nigerians at street corners. Such behaviours aren't permitted by the Nigerian legal codes and should be punished severely by the Nigerian federal government. The Catholic Nuns and Priests sent to Catholic Schools and Colleges by the Vatican daily commit atrocities against Nigerian children by calling them racial slurs and insults that are directed at them because of their African race, and violating their humanity by demonizing their cultural roots to their face. The Vatican and its officials take the Nigerian people for granted when they mock our indigenous cultures, customs, and traditions and they do this to the faces of average Nigerians. If Nigerians don't take time, the Vatican will use its influence and money to bribe our politicians and traditional leaders to molest the people and bastardize the indigenous cultures and customs of many Nigerian ethnic groups. Nigeria must stand up against the racism and corruption of the Vatican and ensure that the culture and customs of Nigerian tribes are safeguarded and defended from the evil hands of neo-colonialism in the guise of Vatican love, generosity, kindness and compassion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria, through her 46-year diplomatic relations with the Vatican, has secured gains from her relations with the Vatican despite the fact that the Vatican itself has a dark history of

oppression, racism and colonialism against the Black people of Africa. It is very essential that Nigeria must continue to secure her foreign relations with the Vatican in order to maintain global relevance and credibility among global nations. While working towards securing her interests in the Vatican, the Federal Republic of Nigeria must tirelessly strive towards ensuring that her national sovereignty, pride, and integrity are not strategically threatened or sabotaged by the Vatican or the Pope. Nigeria's foreign relations with the Vatican is sure to jackpot promising results and outcomes for the country if Nigeria does everything within her power to put in place diplomatic initiatives to ensure that her interests will not be jeopardized in anyway and ensure that the people of Nigeria will profit from such relations with the Holy See. Though the Nigerian government is hopeful about Nigeria's diplomatic future with the Vatican, it is possible that the Vatican can in the next 29,000 years prove to be more of a foreign threat to the Federal Republic of Nigeria than a foreign ally of the country and its peoples.

The Nigerian Federal Government should draft bills to enforce stiff penalties on the Vatican in case of political interference on Nigerian general elections and place a tough ban on Vatican officials who desecrate traditional religious shrines of various ethnic groups in the country. The Federal Government should review previous bilateral agreements and treaties made with the Vatican in order to address the need for reform. It should enforce penalty or fines on any Vatican official who attacks Nigerian children for their cultural or racial identity. The Nigerian President or the National House of Assembly should draft new bilateral agreements and treaties according to Pan-African principles, values and philosophies in order to protect Nigeria's cultural institutions and centres from Vatican control and influence. Such bilateral agreements and treaties conducted, compiled and written by either the Nigerian President or National House of Assembly should be followed to the letter by both Nigeria and the Vatican. The Vatican must agree to those bilateral agreements and treaties in order for bilateral relations to flourish and continue between Nigeria and the Vatican. Bilateral agreements and treaties written by either the Nigerian President or the National House of Assembly should be dictated and followed for the Vatican to sign with the Federal Government which will guarantee respect and value for Nigerian cultural values, traditions, and customs without any reference and recognition of the role of Christianity or Catholicism in the history of Nigeria. These bilateral agreements and treaties must make no reference to Christianity or Roman Catholicism, but must make reference to African customs and traditions in order to curb Western hegemony and monopoly in Nigeria's foreign affairs.

The Nigerian Federal Government must seek and demand reparations from the Vatican in order that the country's pride, dignity and virtue can be restored to the people of Nigeria for the Vatican's pivotal role in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Reparations from the Vatican for its evils during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade will heal the wounds of the past and encourage further development in all sectors of the country, particularly in the banking, communication, entertainment, arts and music, and education sectors operating in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This must be done for Nigeria to be a strong and independent nation and for the Vatican to continue to enjoy relations with the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the 21st Century and beyond. Also, the Nigerian Federal Government must also demand reparations from the Vatican for its role in the colonization of Nigeria in the 19th Century in order that the pride of Nigeria can be maintained, regained and safeguarded not only in Africa, but in the world.

Finally, the Nigerian Federal Government should limit humanitarian assistance and cultural exchange between Nigeria and the Vatican in order to safeguard her sovereignty and cultural independence. Cultural exchange programs between Nigeria and the Vatican should be reviewed by the Nigerian Federal Government in order to ensure the Vatican promotes mutual respect and understanding, rather than perpetuating racist attitudes towards Nigerians and their various cultural traditions and values. Though some humanitarian goods should be accepted from the Vatican, they must be vetted before they are approved by the federal government in order to see whether there is anything poisonous or sinister about the goods exported from the Vatican.

The Pope, in general, should be banned from entering the country if while visiting the country, he makes blatant racist statements or comments about Nigerians or their national heroes and heroines or their cultural roots. If the Pope makes racist or bigoted statements about Nigerians or their cultural roots or any prejudiced comment against Nigerian culture and traditional values outside the country, he should be banned by the government from entering the Federal Republic of Nigeria indefinitely without any consideration for his title or status as a Catholic pontiff.

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