



RELIGION, ETHNICITY AND AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES: PERSPECTIVE FROM NIGERIA'S NATION BUILDING

Kanayo Nwadiolor, Oynekachi Moses Nwakanma & Obiora C. Alokwa

Department of Religion and Human Relations,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

It is always strange that in the quest for nation building, there is the tendency in some quarters to believe that religion has no part to play in developmental activities, social, political, educational, and even recreational. This school of thought sees nation-building as consisting mainly of technological advancement and the setting up of all kinds of modern structures. It is further believed that since Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation, each of the ethnic groups has its peculiarities in terms of culture, language, and belief system. They claim that this has resulted in a series of upsurges in ethnic tension and unrest. Oftentimes, these ethnic tensions translate into religious crises. The consequences of the above-observed situation amount to national instability and underdevelopment. However, these peculiarities and diversities, unique as they may be, if properly appreciated and accommodated, provide a platform for mutual respect, peaceful co-existence, and nation-building. This paper has therefore investigated the place of religion in Nigeria's nation-building amidst ethnic characters and ideologies. The work adopted a critical literary approach and concluded that religion in any society is the foundation upon which the social values rest. There is scarcely a sphere of man's life that is left untouched by the conditioning effect of religious ideas. In Nigeria today, the national concern is to achieve political stability, economic stability, and advanced technology. Religion when truly practiced in its truest form and spirit, plays a vital role in purposeful leadership, nation building, social justice, law and order, peace-making, reconciliation, forgiveness, and the healing of wounds, be they political or religious.

Keywords: Nigeria, Africa, development, religion, ethnicity, Nation-building

Introduction

Nigeria has experienced waves of ethnic and communal violence in many parts of the country, which have caused many lives to be lost and many others to be internally displaced, with their corresponding destruction of properties. Ethnic and communal conflicts are contemporary realities that, if not properly addressed at the appropriate time, could lead to the demise of any nation. The causes of these crises were numerous. Some fanatics believed that Nigeria would know no peace until everyone had embraced their religion; others cause trouble on the grounds of theological differences. Again, many individuals feel that a particular religion has dominated the Nigerian political scene for a long time, and it is their turn to claim their rights and lord it over all with no moderating hand. Additionally, self-interest, love of power, personal gain, political interests, and other mundane affairs had led many religious leaders to either incite or encourage their followers to cause trouble. Either way, religion has been employed in this very sensitive issue of ethnicity in recent years, a consequence of which the liberty, peace, and national cohesion are seriously threatened. This employment of religion in furthering the parochial interest of ethnic groups has brought about insecurity that has engulfed the entire society due to injustice, poverty, and the underdevelopment it created. This has culminated in political instability in Nigeria's fledgling democratic dispensation.



Seeing religion used in this way, men of critical mind and intellectual alertness have started to wonder if religion can ever promote peace in society and thus contribute to nation-building. There are critics, social, political, and related areas, who feel very strongly that religion should be discarded to make peace and progress when talking about nation-building. Kalu (2002) observes that in the 1960s when Nigeria was in a mood, hope, exuberance, of being at the threshold of building a new nation, the anti-religious feelings was so noticeable to the extent that the popular opinion was that the new nation must be built on national, scientific bases without any of the mumbo-jumbo which religion purveys. For such people, religion was a mere bourgeois attempt to feed the masses with opium, the elixir that rubs the sense from a correct perception of reality. These groups of people had imbibed Comte's three stages of civilization, which construed that civilization had moved from a theological stage through philosophical to the scientific stage. It would appear that whichever way we turn, modernity and development have been portrayed as the benefits of science and the conquest of religion (Kalu, 2002). Enwerem (1995) adds that enough attention has not been given by social scientists to the role of religion in the building of Nigeria because they either subsumed religion into ethnic politics or tried to demonstrate that religion is apolitical. This is a point of departure because the life of a developing nation like Nigeria, which is riddled with complex moral problems, needs the spiritual forces, especially now that people are often driven to points when rationality and scientific gadgets fail and raw emotions take over.

No doubt, we do not need to 'crucify' the critics of religion for their position, particularly because when religion that preaches peace and harmony, that talks of a God of Love, that encourages brotherhood of man, now resorts to violence, bloodshed, and destruction of fellow men. However, viewed objectively, it is crystal clear that religion has not at any time deviated from its principles. The essential nature of religious spirituality remains the same, and it will continue to be so. The absurd faces of religion that we see are the manifestations of human limitations of those who practice religions. Religion, therefore, minus detrimental human elements, remains essentially what it is meant to be, and it will continue to minister to the millions of people who take solace under its umbrella. Thus, while it is true that religion has often been misdirected into a negative role, this is not enough justification to ignore its inherent potential for meaningful developmental projects. Therefore, it is short-sighted for a student of the Nigerian political scene to ignore or dismiss the religious phenomenon, or for those involved in the struggle for nation-building in Nigeria to fail to extend the struggle to the terrain of religion.

This paper is therefore based on the attempt to go beyond the prevalent religiosity in the country and suggest possible avenues to retrieve the emancipatory potentials of religion from its current exploitation and demonstrate how it can be directed towards creating a new social order in Nigeria. At the same time, it is hoped that this study will provide useful evidence that will interest, and perhaps provoke, those struggling for nation building in Nigeria to pay closer attention to, rather than dismiss the potential which religion has for mass appeal and the mobilization of energies necessary for nation building.

Ethnicity and Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

Although much disagreement exists among scholars as to what defines ethnicity, most of them agree that ethnicity often involves assigning importance to perceived affinities among individuals and some sense of differences among groups. Sanda (cited by Onifade and Ogunlade, 2010) defines an ethnic group "as constituting interacting members who define themselves as belonging to a named labeled social group with whose interest they identify, and



which manifests certain aspects of a unique culture while constituting a part of a wider society” (p. 84). Dunmoye (1990) sees an ethnic group as being united by a common name in which the members take pride, a common language, and territory, and by a feeling that all who do not share this name are enemies. This perhaps explains the prevalence of ethnic aggressiveness in contemporary Nigeria. On the other hand, Otite (cited by Chinyere, 2010) defines ethnicity as the contextual discrimination by members of one group against others based on the differentiated system of socio-cultural symbols” (p. 184). Nnoli (1998) defines ethnicity as a social phenomenon associated with the identity of members of the largest possible competing communal group in a political system seeking to protect and advance their interests. Osaghae (1994) argues that ethnicity can disaggregate into political, economic, socio-cultural, and religious dimensions. This is exactly what makes ethnicity easily susceptible to conflict.

Conflict itself is, by nature, a constant phenomenon in any human organization. Conflict means contradictions arising from differences in interest, ideas, ideologies, orientations, perceptions, phenomena, and tendencies. Pruitt and Rubin (cited by Chinyere, 2010) consider conflict “as a perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that parties’ current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously” (p.184). Coser (1956) describes conflict as a struggle over values, claims to status, power, and scarce resources in which the aims of the opposing parties are not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals. These descriptions of conflict indicate why the interplay of ethnicity and religion easily causes conflict in Nigeria. Based on these definitions, one can posit that when the symbols characterizing an ethnic group is stressed beyond the elastic limit required for healthy living in a society, it tends to bring about self-centeredness. This is the point where the concept of ethnicity comes into play. When other groups in the same territory behave in the same manner, it will lead to ethnic conflict.

Nigeria is one of the creations of the colonial project in Africa, a structural heritage from the fall outs of the Berlin conference of 1884 and 1885 where European imperial powers, to save themselves undue embarrassment and wasteful wars in African continent over their historic scramble for what they regarded as “no man’s land—full of treasures to be exploited”, carved out to each other spheres of influence and protectorates (Njoku, 2003). As a consequence, the numerous peoples and cultures who owned and peopled the lands so re-possessed, were brutally overcome, their administrative structures were dismantled, enfeebled and they were forcefully re-organized and reigned into a jumbo territories for easier control, supervision and, of course, grand exploitation by the particular European power who held military sway over the territories. This process of structural reorganization of the African continent culminated in the merging of various and often warring ethnic groups into an entity called Nigeria without consulting the ethnic groups and bringing them to dialogue as to the terms of reference for the merger (Nwadior and Uzoigwe, 2013). This, in turn, denied the people their basic right of participation, equality, and social well-being, and thus led to conflict. Nnoli (1980) adds that “the introduction of indirect rule in Nigeria by Lord Frederick Lugard, not only reinforced ethnic divisions, it also complicated the task of welding diverse elements into a Nigerian nation” (p. 113). This strategy of governance distanced ethnic groups from each other. This era of provincial development, though relatively peaceful, also fanned the embers of ethnicity.

Since independence, the situation in Nigeria has been fraught with ethnic politics whereby the elite from different ethnic groups strive to attract as many federal resources to their regions as possible, neglecting issues that could have united the country. Ours is a situation of politicized



ethnicity and competition for resources, which worsened the relationship between the ethnic groups.

This brief sketch gives some ideas of the social space and political context in which the two major world religions (Christianity and Islam) were introduced to compete for membership and spheres of influence. There is a general notion that religion, especially Christianity and Islam, underpins the ethnic crises in contemporary times. The consequences of the above-observed situation amount to national instability. This is also one reason why ethnicity and religion are considered to be very sensitive issues in contemporary Nigeria. The point is that ethnicity does not occur in isolation or pure form. Ethnicity is always closely associated with political, religious, and other social views. Therefore, in most cases engenders religious conflict.

Ethnicity as a concept connotes struggle. Olaifa (2010) states that “it implies either an overt or covert competition between two or more ethnic groups; the trigger of the competition might be political, economic, social or even cultural in nature” (p. 237). When two or more ethnic groups come together to form a nation, battles for supremacy, justice, and equitable distribution of resources are inevitable. Religion is an important cultural characteristic. How important the religious identity is varies from person to person. Of course, different religious characteristics are given different relative values in each ethnic group. Religion is one of the critical factors that help define culture and thus ethnicity. There are ethnic groups in which religious identity is a primary defining factor, although in many others, it does not matter.

Religion is also primordial and easily used in the same manner as ethnicity to mobilize public opinion. Sometimes religious identity becomes part of an ethnic identity, and of course, when coupled with the power of the ethnic groups’ myth of common descent, it presents a volatile social mixture indeed. Ethno-religious conflict, therefore, arises where ethnic identity and religious loyalty overlap. Many scholars and statesmen have argued that these two sources of identity are the main causes of Nigeria’s underdevelopment and have been used by some political leaders for selfish ends. The sad, recurring history of ethno-religious riots in Nigeria serves to underline how explosive the deadly potential religious excesses can be when left unchecked. This indeed sharpens the urgency of our discourse.

The Meaning of Religion in Relation to Nation Building

The notion of religion suggests an attempt by man to work out a relationship between humans and a superordinate or supernatural being. “It was borne out of man’s endeavour to understand the supernatural in the context of the world he lives in” (Bolarinwa, 2010:64). Thus religion is premised on the assumption that human perceptions of things, whims and caprices require higher power to help them respond adequately and effectively to all their concerns. Religion is essentially a spiritual pilgrimage characterized by man’s acknowledgement of his limitations and self-insufficiency; and the adoption and formulation of paths, doctrinal and practical moral lives, in explanation and answer to the fundamental issues and problems of human existence. “The spiritual dimension of human nature stands to inject fundamental and ultimate meaning and explanation into human existence and life (Iwe, 1985:13). This means that religion plans with foresight and vision for the welfare of the people. Religion and standard of its service to the people are in keeping with the achievements of humanity the world over in terms of law, liberty, justice, human dignity, human rights, and democracy. The above description of religion encapsulates its inevitability in the quest for nation-building. According to Okoye (2006), “men look at various religions for answers to those profound mysteries of human condition



which today, even as in old times deeply stir the human heart” (p. 72). Little wonder, therefore, that religion has often been conceived as a system relating man to an ultimate value epitomized in God or the supreme being and embodying a creed, code, cult, and a mode of communication (Odey, 2004). This attempt to capture the essence of religion has given rise to the radical Marxian perspective that sees religion as a sigh of the oppressed creatures, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soulless condition, the opium of the people.

The functional perspective of the essence of religion captures it as performing the functional roles, reinforcing the collective conscience of society requisite for social order and stability. A common thread to the above perspectives is that they all linked religion to man’s physical and social environment. To this extent, it could be argued that there is largely an interaction between religion and the society within which it functions. Hence, Bolarinwa (2010) submits that religion is no doubt a way of life for many people. Its cross-national existence and the sentimental attachment to it by people of different cultures and backgrounds make it a politically active instrument in both national and international politics and nation-building.

Religion has a place in the life of every nation. Irrespective of the faith or denomination, religion, when truly practiced in its truest form and spirit, has been and remains sacred. It plays a vital role in purposeful leadership, community building, social justice, law and order, peacemaking, reconciliation, forgiveness, and the healing of wounds, be they political, family or personal; hence, religion has been held sacrosanct by many people in the world. Religion provides a guide to dos and don’ts for man to live a meaningful life and to reverence the creator. The Bible and the Quran openly stipulate how man must live on earth concerning corruption and protection of lives and property, and to that, nation building. Furthermore, Udofia (2010) asserts that “in a traditional African society like Nigeria, where traditional religion held sway before the advent of Christianity and Islam, immoral acts and activities that were against the sanctity and peace of the society were seen as obscene and sacrilege, what might be considered in contemporary world as corruption” (p.131). Religion and community development were intertwined, hence any action of a community member or group that was against the common good of the people was seen as corruption.

From the foregoing, therefore, it is obvious that religion is a vital stabilizer of human life in a world of conflicting opposites. And it is etched deeply in the human genetic and ontological blueprint. Any attempt to remove it from human existence is an exercise in futility. The emphasis here is that, there exist a nebulous feeling beyond all logic and reason, which impels man to go out of himself in search of meaning, relationship and significance, and religion to a great extent, embosoms all these attempts. It emanates from man’s desire to make sense out of the principal questions posed by his existence- birth, death, human variances, gender, race, economic inequality, social status, sickness and suffering, success and failure, work, and so on. It is therefore the considered view of the present researcher that religion as an option has not been truly tried in Nigeria. We have embraced the precepts and discarded the praxis. Nigeria today reeks of decadence and infrastructural decay because almost everyone places the self above every other consideration whenever he is acting. Selfishness is the bane of Nigeria, and religion is a revolt against selfishness.

If nation-building, therefore, connotes the act of reforming the nation and taking it to a better state, then religion must be at the fore because God Himself is a reformer par excellence. With special reference to Christianity, Okere (2005) says that:



It is quite apt to call Jesus a social reformer committed by his very mission to the restoration of justice in individual social and spiritual life. Although this social dimension of Christ's work does not exhaust his mission, it is an essential part of it. A Christian cannot, therefore, remain indifferent to justice. (p. 72).

We are invited to participate in the creative development of our world, and insofar as the political dimension is often the only area where this can be done, it is a duty for all those who are religious. This holds and indeed for a greater reason here in our Nigerian society. Religion must play a role in politics in creating a society more worthy of man. Okere (2005) maintains that religion has a vision of hope, of the world as improvable, of man as redeemable, and it has an effective programme for realizing this hope. Religion exposes man to the best thoughts and the best ideas of humanity. It equips man with the latest and most up-to-date knowledge, knowledge which is man's most formidable instrument in the effort at survival and in the building of a nation.

Religion and Nation Building: The Historical Evidence

Enwerem (1995) sees the need to draw together progressive elements from all religions in the country and get them to work together for the positive development of the nation. This call is consequent upon the evidence that abounds to the fact that religion has been a vital force in the development of nations throughout the world. Again, no student of modern Nigeria can be oblivious of the ascendancy of religion in the country's political terrain over the years. No longer do many Nigerians look at government policies, actions, and motives behind them from the purview of ethnicity as they used to in the not-so-distant past. Now, these are largely seen through the lens of religion. Iwe (1985) corroborates that there is no doubt that it was religion that laid the foundation of infant and adolescent Europe. The academics of Rome and Constantinople, the monastic schools of Europe, and the early beginnings of the Universities of Bologna, Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge stand to testify. It would therefore not be a wild claim to say that the contributions of religion were the historical prerequisites for the European Renaissance and the dawn of the so-called age of Reason. Furthermore, the advent and progress of the Industrial Revolution did not find religion entirely wanting. It was the forces of religion that insisted that the industrial revolution and its institutions should put on a human character and wear a human face. Religion and some religious elements stood implacably against the inhuman exploitation of the labour of children and women at the factories. Against the nefarious nature and consequences of the slave trade of the 19th -20th centuries, religion registered strong opposition. There is, moreover, the fact of the humanizing and enriching role and impact of religion on the nations of such developing regions as Africa, Indo-China, South America, and so on.

With special reference to Nigeria, Enwerem (1995) notes that the 19th-century missionaries to Nigeria were products of the new enlightenment age characterized by a belief in progress. This explains the Christian missionaries' commitment to the material, moral, and political advancement of the so-called unenlightened or uncivilized peoples. Olukoju (1997) adds that "from the beginning, Christian missions had a three-pronged mission of spreading the three C's- Christianity, Commerce and Civilization" (p. 137). It could hardly have been otherwise given that this evangelical revival coincided with the abolition of the infamous trans-Atlantic slave trade. This was expressed in the famous concept of the "Bible and the plough", which encapsulated the argument that the only effective solution to the problem of the slave trade was



the destruction of the trade at source and its substitution with commerce and agriculture. Buxton (cited in Olukoju, 1997) puts it this way:

Let missionaries and school masters, the plough and the spade, go together and agriculture will flourish; the avenues to legitimate commerce will be opened; confidence between man and man will be inspired whilst civilization will advance as the natural effect, and Christianity operate as the approximate cause of this happy change. (p. 137).

This was the context within which Christian missions deployed men and materials to the Nigerian area from the 1840s. While the primary goal of the Christian missions was the establishment of their religion, the introduction of Western education had accompanied great effect on a larger section of the Nigerian society. In creating a new elite, their spirituality was to register a most profound impact on the evolution of modern Nigeria.

The missionaries initiated and championed the earliest form of Nigerian nationalism. At the religious level, cultural nationalism matured into the establishment of indigenous independent Christian Churches. These, together, have grown to be a force to reckon with in religious circles in modern Nigeria. More importantly, perhaps, at the political level were the vision and activities of the cultural nationalists who prepared the way, as Ayandele (1966) rightly notes, for the eventual emergence of political nationalism in the 1920s. Christian education provided for Nigerians avenues through which they could possess in a short period what it took Europeans centuries to acquire. Consequently, Christian-educated individuals could now have the audacity to look the white man in the face, challenge his authority, aspire to his status, and what is more, know what the white man knows, if not even more.

These missionaries also pioneered professional printing. Significantly, it was the C.M.S. that published in 1859 Nigeria's first newspaper, the *Iwe Irohin*, a fortnightly publication (Omu, 1967). An English language supplement was added in 1860. The Christian missionaries thus pioneered newspaper publishing in Nigeria, an industry that played a decisive role in the country's later history. It was the chief weapon by which the educated Africans were to exercise their power of participation in their government. Ajayi (1965) posits that "not only did the C.M.S. inaugurate journalism in Nigeria, it also started the tradition of the large number of one-room printing works in several large towns in Nigeria" (p. 159).

Training in tropical medicine and social welfare was another plank of Christian missionary spirituality in Nigeria. By 1914, various missions had established hospitals across the country, notably the CMS Iyi Enu Hospital near Onitsha, the Wesley Guild Hospital, Ilesha, the Baptist Hospital in Ogbomosho, and the Sacred Heart Hospital of the Society for African Missions in Abeokuta (Ayandele, 1966).

About the Islamic religion, Afigbo (1997) states that the great achievements of the Western Sudanese states have been related to the process of Islamization. Islam stimulated literacy and brought the Western Sudan in touch with the Arabic civilization and the rest of the world. Trading Arabs built the Trans Saharan trade and nurtured elite within the Sudanic communities who, centred in the courts, served as the bureaucrats for the empires. Abdul (1970) continues to say that some basic characteristics of the Islamic religion are interesting in considering nation-building. The first is that Islam spread through traders, wandering scholars, and peripatetic pastoralists. These are invariably classes of people who are not tied to narrow, closed societies. They are adaptable and have an immense ability to absorb new ideas, cultures



and change. Abubakar (1974) further argues that Islam also lays great emphasis on organization and administration. The jihads of yesteryears were invariably followed by an administrative reorganization. The penchant for rational organization, commercial entrepreneurship, emphasis on discipline and literacy, the subjection of all facets of life to the religious-all these characteristics made it possible for Islam to contribute to nation building.

Gbadamosi and Junaid (1997) note that one obvious feature of the evolution and progress of Islamic spirituality in Nigeria in the pre-jihad era has been its close association with rulers and the growth of political entities. For the first time, the Hausa states as well as parts of Borno and Yorubaland were brought together as one single political system. Ajayi (1974) also confirms that this was a major and critical step forward in the evolution of Nigeria. The necessary, if tentative inference is that Islamic religion also fosters and strengthens the process of urbanization. Furthermore, the percolation of Islamic religion into Nigeria since the 11th century has brought in its wake the introduction of literacy in Arabic and Quranic system of education both of which have had far reaching political, social and cultural effects (Gbadamosi and Junaid, 1997). Suffice it to say that this education covered a wide range of subjects, and shed considerable light on the history and development of Nigerian society up to the 19th century.

The prominence given to the study of African traditional religion in recent times made it possible for the subject to be employed as leverage for fostering the spirit of nationalism and cultural liberation. To this, Erivwo (1988) maintains that “the study of the African past, which included her past religious spirituality, contributed to the success of the epoch, making FASTAC 77” (p. 3). For the Africa, good and evil behaviour, but especially the latter, have their social dimensions. This is a logical consequence of the people’s belief in the close relationship between man and the supernatural powers that steer the course of his destiny and on whom man depends entirely for his life and progress. It is this awareness of the unfailing sanction from the divinities that was responsible for the prevalence of law and order in the traditional society where before there were no policemen or soldier to enforce the laws of the state. When the traditional society was strictly faithful to African traditional spirituality, crimes were very rare indeed. Mbiti (1975) confirms that African religious spirituality, values and practices are directed towards strengthening the moral life of each society. Morals are the food and drink which keep society alive, healthy and happy. Once there is a moral breakdown, the whole integrity of society also breaks down and the end is tragic. Thus, African traditional spirituality emphasizes the importance of morals in practice, and insists that they must extend into all areas of life for the welfare of the individual and society at large.

There is, therefore, an abundance of historical evidence to substantiate the role claim of religion as the promoter of nation building. Ogbunwezeh (2003) contends that “religion has served as one of the formidable capstones of many great civilizations” (p. 61). Many of the conceptual schemes that sustained the socio-economic and political cohesion and life of these societies have a deep spiritual taproot, which checkmates any tendency to patronize unwarranted and socially unapproved behaviours. Anyanwu (2003) also argues that the centrality of religion in the making of societies in Africa since the 20th century is readily acknowledged and commented on by scholars, leaders, politicians and other interested persons or groups. Without these spiritual safeguards in such societies, the concourse of social interaction would be fraught with danger, which would lead to disintegration. Here religion is employed to ensure the survival of the common good. Religion ever since the morning of human social evolution has had a social dimension because what is injurious to your neighbour constitutes an offence against the divinities, who are custodians of all. Premium is placed on justice and fair play in one’s



interpersonal relations with his neighbour. The special contention here is that there is still a strong need for religion to continue its traditional role as the agent of nation building here in our developing Nigeria. Nigeria in its present pre-industrial economic procreativity and stagnation, in the exposure of their national resources to international commercial exploitation and speculation, in the throes and cauldron of political instability, in the darkness of adult illiteracy, in the bewildering wastage of precious man power resources and in fetters of colonial hang-over and neo-colonialism, in the view of the present researcher, need to take clue from the Western world where religion played a significant role in the building of nations. The voice of organized religions could be effectively mobilized and raised against all forms of exploitation and degradation that had tended to perpetuate Nigeria in the status of under-developed nation. This is a real task for religion.

Religion, Enlightenment and Nation Building

To talk about nation building is to educate our people on the art of living humanly. This means the studied cultivation of private individual virtues such as the ability to love, selflessness, ambition, hard work, orderliness; and of public virtues such as solidarity, readiness to cooperate, ability to look at life critically, obedience to law, punctuality, courtesy and fairness. Without such a thorough and comprehensive education embracing practical skill, cultural self-development and moral rectitude, we might more easily enforce nation building in poultry than hope to humanize our society. This is one reason religion is indispensable as an agent of nation building. In pursuing this goal, religion is not only liberating our people from a long standing inhumanity, but it is pre-eminently fulfilling its existence as the presence of God in our midst.

Religion has the urgent task of enlightening our people. It has to guide our people by exhortation and programmed measures of action in the various task of wiping out mass illiteracy from the face of our land. Here in Nigeria, there are so many man-made disabilities and miseries arising from simple ignorance such as ill-planned families and irresponsible conception and reproductive habits, protein-deficient diets, environmental blindness and life in filthy surroundings, poor eating habits and deplorable lack of sense of time. That these factors impede our quest for nation building is not in doubt and no nation can be built on the foundation of misery orchestrated by share ignorance and irresponsible family lives.

Religion has a part to play here. It is essentially one of enlightenment and of demolition of popular ignorance, prejudice, fear and superstition. To this, Iwe (1985) suggests that religion “must remind our people that man is the author of his calamities and woes. It is he and he only who must solve his problem; it has been truly said that God helps those who help themselves” (p. 20). Religion, through sermons and various other programmes organized for families such as counseling, marriage course and so on, is in a position to teach our people that sound and effective family planning is a reasonable measure for the achievement of domestic harmony, success and welfare, which are integral parts of nation building. Again religion has what it takes to rescue and lift our people from this quagmire of environmental insanitation and squalor, to acceptable standard and practice of sanitation worthy of civilized men. Religion is not here to preach hallow sermons while its adherents sink and wallow in filthy mud and surroundings like pigs. Cleanliness, they say, is next to godliness.

Religion can also encourage our people to adopt decent eating habits and healthy sense of time. It is high time we stopped this self-abusive concept of “African Time”. Iwe (1983) notes that



one of the basic characteristics of primitives is lack of sense of time and urgency. This of course, is a major log in the wheel of our nation's progress. Lateness to work and other important appointments have become almost a norm in our society that only a spiritual consciousness can reverse.

It is also the responsibility of religion to orientate our people to appreciate the institutions and values of our own culture Ugwu (2002) opines that:

People of other cultures do not respect people who ape them; their smile is not that of approval, it is that of conquest. And so long as another culture controls our virtues, so long shall we be slaves to that culture. (p. 60).

Religion in alliance with our educational institutions has the responsibility to discourage our people from any senseless imitation of foreign cultures. Our culture has got its own magnanimous values such as respect for human life and the liberty of man, love of truth and honesty, social justice and equality of opportunity, parental authority and filial loyalty, domestic solidarity and responsibility, social solidarity, authority in the service of people, integrity in the administration of public truth, belief in retribution and reward after death, and so on. All these are the noble values and treasure of our culture here in Nigeria which we cannot safely, without social calamity, abandon or exchange for foreign cultures. Religion is about the only aspect of life that has the potentialities to constantly strive for the preservation of these rich cultural heritages. Religion and culture are twins, essentially inseparable and inter-dependent aspects of human life. Religion and culture are so intimately related and connected that in reality it is not possible for a society to have a culture without a religion or religion without culture.

Ugwu (2002) maintains that our culture has been in a very serious conflict with that of the foreign countries. Most of the ugly practices inherent in these foreign cultures have been appropriated and are now the order of the day in our society. In the contemporary Nigerian society, such cultural cancers as bribery, nepotism and the injustice of confidential secret, denial of merited promotions, authoritarianism and arrogance in power, power mania, mammonism, religious discrimination, leadership crises and lack of compassion for the common man are prevalent. To this, it is the institution of religion, therefore, that can defend most effectively our cultural heritage against all these symptoms of social morbidity.

Furthermore, work is the motor of development, in it man expends his sweat and his energy and talent to transform the raw materials provided by nature into a human product, a product no longer of nature but of culture. Work is the marker of civilization and culture which is the end product of development. Here, we see that the three major religions in Nigeria have a positive attitude to work. Their collective emphasis could play a great role in a development oriented ideology. The fact that spirituality inculcates and promotes such lofty human values as social justice, hard work, solidarity, independence and national integrity cannot be undermined in its virile role for nation building. Hence Nwadior (2011) concludes that religion has a duty to encourage our people to dispose themselves to the benefits from the educationally and culturally revolutionary measures.

Religion, Good Governance and Peace in Nigeria

It is clearly undeniable that one of the perennial political problems of our developing Nigeria is one of leadership. The quality of leadership at various levels of our institutions leaves much



to be desired. Not infrequently, vital positions of authority are occupied by mediocre or the less qualified persons. There is often wide spread complaint against corrupt and inefficient leadership. In midst of these complaints, there is much spirituality can do by way of remedy, without running the risk of arrogating to itself the exercise of purely political authority. The major religions in Nigeria have the power to inculcate into the people the conviction that there is need for able leadership in every human society; that true and efficient leadership must be in the hands of qualified, competent, enlightened and honest persons and that humble service for the common welfare is of the essence of genuine leadership (Iwe, 1985). Leadership must be exemplary and must endeavour to imbibe the principles of good governance, namely, honesty, transparency, accountability, sincerity, justice and prudence. This is where religion will play its role because a God-fearing politician will certainly live by these principles. As humans, we learn from God to be honest, transparent, accountable, sincere, just and prudent in managing the affairs of people.

Indeed, not just Islam and Christianity, all religions that have their scriptures revealed from God uphold these tenets, and call on adherents to adopt them in their daily dealings. If every Christian will be a good Christian, guided by the teachings of the Holy Bible, and every Muslim will be a good Muslim, guided by the provisions of the Holy Quran, then Nigeria will be a much better place for us. Unfortunately, it is the moral bankruptcy of Nigerian leaders that is responsible for the worsening condition; their good and pathological craving to have more and more of what one does not really need is a consistent factor in Nigerian leadership. Okoye (2006) argues that:

The cure to all societal problems really is individual and national spirituality and spiritual awakening. It is only when our leaders are led, guided and inspired by the spirit of God that they can be humane and considerate in dealing with the people God entrusted in their care. (p. 143).

It is only then that they will come to the realization that acquisition of worldly wealth is worthless. Solomon in all his wisdom and riches found worldly acquisition to be vanity. The Quran, Sura 3 said “nothing shall his wealth and gains avail him”. The day shall come, says Luke, when not a single stone will be left on another, everything will be destroyed. You can be certain that these prophecies also refer to all material acquisition. Religious leaders have a responsibility towards the political leaders and the moral development of our nation. They are supposed to be the beacons and the light of the society. The clerics are supposed to call the government to order when it begins to deviate from the right path.

Again, the rigour and tempers whipped up by critical national issues must find in religion a soothing light and temperature. The greatest and most essential asset that Nigeria desires now is peace and harmonious co-existence. The greatest public good in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society like Nigeria. This greatest political good of humanity, Iwe (1985) insists, must be given the national and international dimensions and emphasis it deserves. Here the various religious traditions in Nigeria can serve a very useful purpose by incessantly highlighting the indispensability and paramount importance of peace for development, prosperity and progress. Peace in traditional society was held in high esteem. It is a spiritual value since in that the order, harmony and equilibrium in the universe and society are believed to be divinely established and the obligation to maintain them is religious. It is also a moral value since good conduct is required of human beings if the order, harmony and equilibrium are to be maintained. Hence any action that negates or threatened peace was strictly abhorred. It is undeniable that in spite



of incessant religious crises that have ravaged Nigeria in recent times, religion still possesses the force and resources to popularize the principles and ideas of peace, and thereby instill the habit of peace into the people. Religion has clearly indicated that true and stable peace is the fruit of justice and peace is essentially an order characterized by truth, love, justice and liberty. Peace results from that harmony built into human society by its divine founder, and actualized by man as they thirst after ever greater justice. Ezeanya (2002) notes that in her national anthem:

Nigeria prays to God to help her build a nation in which no man oppresses, namely, a nation in which justice shall reign supreme; a nation in which everyone gets that which belongs to him by right, a nation that would be blessed with peace. (p. 321).

In short, Nigeria is praying to build a kingdom of justice, love and peace. It is evidently with such a genuine atmosphere of peaceful order that nation building can be realized with security. It is an order that would permit the citizens to carry on their task, fulfill their duties and claim and enjoy their rights without inhibitions or molestations.

Religion vis-à-vis Growth of Wealth and Urbanization

One of the major concerns of any developing nation, Nigeria inclusive, is massive growth of wealth and phenomenon of increasing urbanization with its corresponding rapid economic expansion which in turn will be stimulated by advanced technology. Viewing the task of nation building as consisting mainly of technological development, the ability to defend the frontiers of a nation, and the control of a buoyant economy, tends to assume that religion has nothing positive to contribute to economic development, since it is generally on economic strength that a country is called developed, developing or underdeveloped, and religion is considered lying outside the realm of nation building. However, rapid growth in wealth, industrialization and urbanization must be matched by growth in humanity and righteousness which can only be stimulated by religion. There is the corresponding need to put a human face on and humanize the socio-economic and technological forces and factors of our times to be able to achieve a developed nation. Religion helps to build the character of a nation by giving a metaphysical dimension of life, accommodating rituals in life so that emphasis is shifted from physical to the metaphysical realm, encouraging selflessness through charity and encouraging simple living and high thinking. Religion has the responsibility to inject a measure of sound and balanced humanism into the economy, and into the process of industrialization and urbanization, if these are not to run risk through naked materialism and stark self-seeking (Iwe, 1985). Modern society needs not only expert technicians and technocrats, but most importantly, it requires the emergence of spiritual men. The future of a modern Nigerian society and of technocracy is safer in the hands of spiritual men, guided not by the raw forces of materialism, grabbing capitalism and self-contradicting expediency, but rather pious men illumined by refined logic, higher principles and values. The presence and influence of such spiritual men, Iwe (1985) insists, will inspire the socio-economic and urban network and structures of modern Nigerian society with higher values as social justice, Love, friendship, solidarity and sincere consideration for the common man. To see therefore that the expansion of socio-economic forces, the growth on wealth and urbanization are achieved in the spirit of sound and balanced humanism, spirituality must be readily employed and harnessed.

Religion provides a wholesome perspective of the ethical values which should guide policy planners in nation building because a developed nation will come about only if it is built on the



solid foundation of sound ethical and spiritual principles. Schumacher (cited in Kalu, 2002) once observed that it is curious that people do not see a connection between the Sermon on the Mount with matters of technology and economics; how to construct an outlook that could lead to an economic of survival. He warns that development is not a task for only economists; rather, a developing nation should avoid a technology which dehumanizes, destroys and pollute the ecology. He recommends a technology with a human face, a developmental strategy which considers the quality of life as its supreme goal. This is where religion as a factor in nation building comes to fore.

The building of a nation such as we envisage, cannot be achieved by the mere accumulation of material things or the procurement of a life of comfort and ease often to a limited few. Any project for the building of a nation which loses sight of, or ignores the spiritual and material well-being of man taken as a whole, cannot succeed in building a nation in which no man is oppressed. If you remove spiritual inclination from man, blot out his mind from the belief in his maker, what we have left is an animal who acts out of sheer convenience, one who obeys the law out of fear of punishment or hope of material gain or for pure intellectual satisfaction. It follows therefore that the building of a nation is first and foremost the building of the people that make up the nation which, in effect, boils down to the building of the individuals themselves. This is why spirituality has a vital role to play in the building of a nation.

Conclusion

Religion dominates the roots of the culture areas of Nigeria. Little or no distinction existed between the profane and the sacred dimensions of life. Thus all activities and instruments of survival and nation building should be clothed in religious ritual, language, and symbolism. Kalu (1978) opines that in Africa, the dominant world view is incurably religious. It is always strange, therefore, that in the quest for national development there is the tendency in some quarters to ignore the core values in a faddist appeal to foreign heroes and European prescriptions. Spirituality is the strongest element in traditional background, and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned.

The above assertions merely buttress the fact that one could not reasonably discuss nation building in our Nigerian context without recognizing the spiritual factor which undergirds our moral values, traditions and thinking. Religion, therefore, must regulate not only matters of spiritual salvation and moral development but also economic and socio-political affairs. Its influence and practice shall not be confined to the Mosques or the Churches but should be the same in the marketplace, social gathering and political soap-box. Religion has a set of social ethics which should govern the direction of development.

Nigeria aspires after greatness. It strives to build a state in which all are united; a state free from tribal hatred and prejudices, a state in which everyone gets that to which he is entitled, a state free from the endemic vice of bribery and corruption, and where justice, love and peace reign supreme. The aspiration is noble and laudable, but she cannot import these virtues from abroad with her oil money; neither can she impose them with force of arms. The three major religions in Nigeria, African traditional religion, Islam and Christianity are indispensable recipes for building a happy and stable nation. Each religion has its own specific contributions to make for a united and peaceful Nigeria. To attempt to build a nation without employing the forces of spirituality is to hope to construct a massive structure upon the foundation of sand. Such a building will collapse at the slightest gust of wind and the fall will be great. Any nation where people lack spirituality is bound to lack conscience, compassion, and progress.



References

- Abdul, M.O.A. (1970). Yoruba divination and Islam. *Orita*, iv, 1, 17-25.
- Abubakar, S. (1974). Emirate type government in the Sokoto caliphate in the 19th century. *Nigerian Magazine*, cxiii, 59-64.
- Afigbo, A.E. (1977). *The poverty of African historiography*. Lagos: Afrografika.
- Ajayi, J.F.A. (1965). *Christian mission in Nigeria. The making of new elite*. London: Longman.
- Anyanwu, U.D. (2003). Re-thinking Christianity and African cultural development: The experience of the Igbo of eastern Nigeria. In T.I. Okere (Ed.). *Religion in the world of change: African ancestral religion, Islam and Christianity* (pp.46-59). Owerri: Assumpta.
- Ayandele, E.A. (1966). *The missionary impact on modern Nigeria, 1842-1914: A political and social analysis*. London: Longman.
- Bolarinwa, J.O. (2010). Clash of cultures: Muslim-Christian violence in Nigeria and its implications for political stability. In I.O. Albert & O.N. Olarinde (Eds.). *Trends and tensions in managing conflicts* (pp. 63-14). Ibadan: John Archers.
- Chinyere, A.N. (20210). Peace education: Untapped pathways to managing ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. In I.O. Albert & O.N. Olarinde (Eds.). *Trends and tensions in managing conflicts* (pp. 181- 198). Abuja: SPSP.
- Coser, L. (1956). *The functions of social conflict*. Cilenoe: Free.
- Dunmoye, R.A. (1990). Partysystem: Democracy and political stability in Nigeria. *Nigerian Political Science Association*, 71 – 103.
- Enwerem, I. M. (1995). *A dangerous awakening: The politicization of religion in Nigeria*. Ibadan: IFRA.
- Eriwwe, S.U.C. (1988). Religion and identity: The Church's role in nation building with special reference to Nigeria. In P.A. Dopamu (Ed.). *Religion and the development of a nation: The state of Nigeria* (pp.1-14). Ilorin: N.A.S.A.
- Ezeanya, S.N. (2002). The contributions of Africa traditional religion to nation building. In E.C. Amuchaezi (Ed.). *Readings in social sciences: Issues in national development* (pp. 321-336). Enugu: Fourth Dimension.
- Gbadamosi, T.G.O. & Junaid, M.O. (1997). Islamic culture and Nigerian society. In A. Osuntoku & A. Olukoju (Eds.). *Nigerian peoples and culture*. Ibadan: Davidson.
- Iwe, N.S.S. (1985). *Christianity & culture in Africa*. Onitsha: University.
- Kalu, O.U. (2002). Religion as a factor in national development. In E.C. Amuchaezi: (Ed.). *Readings in social sciences: Issues in national development* (pp.307-320). Enugu: Fourth Dimension.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1975). *An introduction to African traditional religion*. London: Heinemann.
- Njoku, C.A. (2003). Imperial religions in a fractured land: The structural roots of religious hubris in Nigeria. In T.I. Okere (Ed.). *Religion in the world of change: African ancestral religion, Islam and Christianity* (pp. 270-285). Owerri: Assumpta.
- Nwadiolor, K.L. & Uzoigwe, A.M. (2013). Ethnicity and social stability in Nigeria: The place of religion. *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Culture and Civilization*, 14, 3, 65-85.
- Nwadiolor, K.L. (2010). The Christian church and the quest for cultural revival in Nigeria. *Ogiris: A New Journal of African Studies* 8, 91-106.
- Ogbunwezeh, E.F. (2003). Religion and the socio-economic realities of Nigeria: A critique of relation in a corrupt social milien. In T.I. Okere (Ed.). *Religion in the world of change: African ancestral religion, Islam and Christianity* (pp.60 -74). Owerri: Assumpta.



- Okere, T. (2005). *Church, theology and society in Africa*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension.
- Okoye, R.N. (2006). *Mis-governance, poverty and societal tension: The Nigerian experience*. Onitsha: Africana First.
- Olaifa, T. (2010). Preventive diplomacy and ethnic conflict: The Role of women in perspective. In I.O. Albert & O.N. Olarinde (Eds.). *Trends and tensions in managing conflicts* (pp. 217 – 244). Abuja: SPSP.
- Olukoju, A. (1997). Christianity and the development of the Nigerian state. In A. Osuntokun & A. Olukoju (Eds.). *Nigerian peoples and culture*. Ibadan: Davidson.
- Onifade, C.A. & F.O. Ogunlade (2010). The influence of social education on students' responses to ethnic and religious crisis in Nigeria. In I.O. Albert & O.N. Olarinde (Eds.). *Trends and tensions in managing conflicts* (pp. 82-94). Abuja: SPSP.
- Osaghae, E. (1994). *Ethnicity and its management in Africa: The democratization link*. Lagos: Malthouse.
- Omu, F.C. (1967). The Iwe Irohin. *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, iv, 1, 35-44.
- Udofia, D. (2010). The role of religion in anti corruption war and management of national security in Nigeria. In I.O. Albert & O.N. Olarinde (Eds.). *Trends and tensions in managing conflicts* (pp. 124-135). Ibadan: John Archers.
- Ugwu, C.O.T. (2002). *Man and his religion in a contemporary society*. Nsukka: Chuka.