

RELIGION AND NIGERIA'S NATIONAL INTEGRATION: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

There are certain factors that work against national integration, such as ignorance, cultural clashes, biased minds, the proliferation of religious organizations, lack of good governance, religious bigotry and lack of patriotic spirit. The state of experiencing the presence of the ultimate reality, the Almighty, Transcended God, and expressing the divine encounter to the people around is religion. Man and religion existed simultaneously. Human being establishes integrity in relationship with God which enhance the spirit of progression and development of his environment. Religion, whose etymology is "religare," which means "binding together," is a force of cultural integration. People from different religious ideologies and personalities gather to express their shared beliefs and practices in God. People who are forming a nation should work to promote national unity. This paper looks into how religion promotes or hinders national integration in Nigeria. It examines the connections between religion and national integration coupled with suggestions of potential solutions that will promote a solidly united nation with one voice. Qualitative and descriptive inquiry methods are used. Data were gathered through interviews and personal observations as primary sources. While secondary data sources form the foundation of the library which are thematically analysed. The study finds out that religion has become an obstacle to national integration due to false doctrines, indoctrination and bigots. The study recommends certain proposals on factors to promote national integration through religious tolerance, patriotism, knowledge of other religions, good governance and national reconciliation. There should be frequent roundtable discussions on conflict, peace, and resolution, intra and inter-religious dialogue and relationships conferences and workshops, leadership orientations, and shared value systems. Schools should place a strong emphasis on instilling patriotism in students at all levels, while avoiding ethnicities. All citizens should value these four common religious values of: humility, commitment, contemplation, and compassion.

Keywords: Religion, Integration, Nation, patriotism, cultural values

Introduction

Religion describes how humans encounter the Almighty God, the Ultimate and Transcendent. The spiritual experience is being expressed. This applies to Nigerians everywhere. Religion appears to bring together people who follow its ideas and rituals.

The fear of the unknown brings people together. Individuals who have experienced God express their vision and messages for others to hear and believe. Religion is a powerful source of national integration in every ethnic group that makes up Nigeria.

Islam and Christianity, the two major religions in Nigeria, are frequently at odds in their evangelism, faith, and doctrine; the Christians organize crusades, and the Muslims spread jihad as a means of conversion; the extremists of the religions overdo their actual practices, causing chaos, rioting, and violence. The existence of religion suppresses all kinds of barbaric activities; it dispels ignorance and ushers in knowledge, tolerance, and enlightenment. Nevertheless, religion always seems to be bringing about adversity, destroying the nation's unity.

As a result, religious intolerance sneaks in, distorting solidarity among people with diverse religious ideas and practices. As a result, the word REGION is poisonous and losing value. Ignorance of other religions leads to violence, riots, murdering, burning, and looting of people's property. Most of the religious violence between Muslims and Christians takes place in Kano, Bauchi, Jos, Kaduna, and Katsina. There is a widespread belief that any Christian is from Southern Nigeria, while Muslims are from Northern Nigeria, regardless of geographical location. The Fulani, a group of Muslims from the north, are relocating to Southern Nigeria's forests. Kidnapping for ransom, killings to sell human parts, raiding, attacking people at night and burning their homes, forcing them to IDP camps, damaging their farm produce, and preventing them from returning to their farms. These occurred incessantly in Zamfara, Jos, Benue, Yobe, Bornu and Eungu States. As a result of series of Kidnapping and destroying of farm crops by herdsmen and their cows in Edo State. The Community Vigilantes of Urome in Edo State, stopped a lorry conveying the Muslims going to Kano to celebrate the Eid Mubarak, Sallah on March 29th 2025 taken them as Kidnapers and killed sixteen of them in jungle justice. They may be Christians, traditionalist and free thinkers.

On March 29, 2025, the Community Vigilantes of Urome in Edo State halted a vehicle carrying Muslim Hausa/Fulani hunters from River State on their way to Kano to celebrate Eid Mubarak and Sallah and halted them, killing sixteen of them in jungle justice. These acts of insecurity and human and property devastation occurred on multiple occasions in Zamfara, Jos, Benue, Yobe, Bornu, and Eungu states. Due to a series of kidnappings and agricultural destruction by herdsmen and their cows in Edo State. The vigilantes were thought to be less religious and more concerned with the safety of their land.

There were errors and misunderstandings about who adhered to the Christian religion. The Muslims in Kano intended retaliation and planned to assault Christian churches in northern Nigeria, ordering all churches to close their places of worship and threatening war and violence. In this day of misinformation and hate, employing religion to promote national integration is a slow process. Religion and national integration in Nigeria seem unlikely from this perspective.

Furthermore, national integration can be achieved by religious tolerance, patriotism,

knowledge of various religions, excellent administration, and national unity. Roundtable conversations on conflict, peace, and resolution should be held on a regular basis, as well as conferences and seminars on intra- and interreligious dialogue and partnerships, leadership orientations, and shared value systems. Security should be increased to combat all types of crimes and evil actions.

Although, there are different points of views that surround religion and national integration. The unity of a nation is derived from the diversified pluralistic society like Nigeria. The Nationalists, Sir Herbert Macaulay, from the west, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe from the east and Sir Ahmadu Bello from the northern Nigeria teamed up with their different religious values background experiences and, explicitly expressed them collectively as beacons to national integration in spite of their religious differences. Experience and Expression are two wonderful words that are inextricably linked. The experience refers to coming into contact with the divine, supernatural, and ultimate realities that engulf the universe. In this study, Religion is seen as an effort to bridge the vacuum of disunity, injustice, antagonism and hatred, serves as a light that enlightens the nation. Religion is the beacon that lights the nation to promote its integration. Religion involves series of transformation stages from tradition to modern. Adherents of aliens' religions of Islam and Christianity tend to be more advanced in expressing their religions to other citizens thereby converting them to the faith. This is sharing of faith to unite more people into one solid nation. People from various ideologies and personalities join forces to express their shared beliefs and practices in gods or God (Opara 2021:94). People coming together to form a nation should promote national integration. Religion serves as both a convener and an integrator. When the people who make up a nation are united by a common religion, it fosters greater mutual understanding, peace, and development. It eliminates conflict and hatred, restoring swift and smooth resolutions.

The paper attempts to investigate the extent to which religion has aided or hindered national integration in Nigeria. It assesses the links between religion and national integration. People of like mind, ideology, inspiration, belief, aspiration, and philosophy embedded in religion are clearly set to rationalize on the same platform. They can tolerate and accommodate each other's flaws while also tapping into and utilizing the divine's latent talents. Every person has something to offer society. When these ideas, visions, knowledge, and talents are pulled together, they lead to long-term development. Religion can promote national integration when adherents of various religions recognize the common ground of all religions, have a thorough understanding of each other's beliefs and practices, and share the same perspective on the divine and his encounter with mankind. The similarity between believing in one God and returning to God after death should be a deciding factor in national integration. Religion, on the other hand, impedes national integration by causing incompatibility, intolerance, hatred, misunderstanding, a lack of mutual coexistence, and conflicts.

Interviews and personal observations were used to collect primary data. While secondary sources of data are drawn from the library, the paper assesses various proposals for

factors that promote national integration through religious tolerance, patriotism, knowledge of other religions, and national reconciliation. Certain factors that work against national integration were invariably identified, such as ignorance, cultural clashes, biased minds, the proliferation of religious organizations, a lack of good governance, and a lack of patriotic spirit. The purpose of this paper is to propose potential solutions that will promote a solidly united nation with one accord. Examples include round table discussions on conflicts, peace, and resolution, intra and inter-religious dialogue and relationships, leadership orientations, and shared value systems. While avoiding ethnicities, schools should place a strong emphasis on instilling patriotism in students at all levels. I argue that the four common religious values of humility, commitment, contemplation, and compassion, like the three jewels of Chinese Taoism of compassion, frugality, and humility, should be treasured by every citizen. This will help religious values promote national integration in Nigeria. The paper utilizes the theoretical framework of Emile Durkheim's theories of religion based as a unified force to a nation.

Theoretical Framework

The paper employed theoretical framework of Emile Durkheim on the concept of the Sacred and the Profane. A French sociologist, who gained prominence during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He is recognised as one of the key pioneers of contemporary sociology, alongside Karl Marx and Max Weber. Durkheim posited that religion served as a means of fostering solidarity and identification among individuals within a given society, particularly within systems of mechanical solidarity. Additionally, religion played a somewhat lesser yet still significant role in the context of organic solidarity. Durkheim's analysis acknowledged the social origins of religion. Durkheim posits that religion is a result of human agency rather than divine intervention. The author approaches religion as a unique social phenomenon and conducts a sociological analysis of it.

Durkheim expounds extensively on his religious theory in his seminal publication, *Forms of Religion* (Fieser and Dowden, nd). Durkheim posited that religion serves three primary functions in society. Firstly, it fosters social cohesion by facilitating shared rituals and beliefs, thereby promoting social solidarity. Secondly, it reinforces religious-based morals and norms, which aid in maintaining conformity and control within society. Lastly, religion provides a means of offering individuals a sense of purpose and meaning in life. This should be incorporated and imbued into the goal of religion on national integration in Nigeria. The functions of religion encompass several aspects, such as providing a sense of direction and significance to an individual's existence, strengthening communal cohesion and steadiness, functioning as a mechanism for regulating social conduct, enhancing physical and mental health, and inspiring individuals to strive for constructive societal transformation (Emerson, Monahan, & Mirola, 2011). Emile Durkheim defined religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to

say, things set apart and forbidden--beliefs and practices which unite in one single community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." Various religions have a tendency to bifurcate social existence into two distinct domains, namely the "sacred" and the "profane." The sacredness of an object is not an inherent quality but rather a culturally constructed concept. The attribution of sacredness to an object is contingent upon the communal investment in its significance. Its function is to unify a group of individuals. The argument is basically on the profound knowledge and comprehension of other regional religions and sacred practices to foster national religious integration. Nigeria as a nation, recognize the predominant religions, namely African Traditional Religion, Islam, and Christianity. In addition to these, there exist several minor religions such as Ekankar, Bahaism, Judaism, Asian; Confucianism, Shintoism, Buddhism, Taoism, and indigenous founded religion and sect such as, Gurumarahaji, and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star (O OObuu). There are various secret cults in the country that venerate diverse deities. The pursuit of national integration in Nigeria encompasses adherents of various sacred and profane religions. It is imperative that individuals are united in their efforts towards achieving the shared objective of promoting national integration. According to Emile Durkheim's theory, religion serves as a unifying force that binds the entire nation together in all aspects. Nigeria as a society can borrow the argument of Emile Durkheim's theory for unity purpose. More importantly, the argument upholds the commonly known adage that emphasises the importance of unity, stating that when individuals come together as a cohesive group, they are more likely to succeed and thrive, whereas when they are divided and fragmented, they are more likely to fail and experience downfall. The domain of religion encompasses a wide range of elements, including those that are divine and human, holy and unholy, mundane and heavenly, godly and ungodly, good and evil or bad, moral and amoral, as well as saints and sinners. Religion has the potential to serve as a unifying force in a culturally diverse society. Ethical norms, legal principles, cultural values, and customary behaviours are established to provide all members of society with equitable treatment, impartiality, and ethical conduct. According to Opara, "Religion is a system of being aware of the existence of God, acknowledging him and worshiping him irrespective of the stratum. Religion can be taken as qualities of activities that are found in many human activities including development." (Opara 2023:40).

Concept of Religion in Nigeria

The influence of religion is ubiquitous in Nigerian society, both consciously and unconsciously. The cultural context in which the concept is located has an inherent influence on it. Mbiti (1969) posited that religiosity is a salient characteristic of African societies, including Nigeria. The indigenous traditional religions are the primary religious practices that hold sway in Nigeria, originating from the land and transmitted across generations. It is intertwined with the culture. The introduction of Islam to the Northern Nigeria was through Arab traders. Christianity was brought to the region by Western Christian missionaries (Opara 21:45). There exist several minor religions, sects, and cults that subscribe to diverse deities. The concept of religion in Nigeria embodies Durkheim's perspective of being both sacred and profane. Nigerians exhibit a profound

connection with the divine entity, commonly referred to as God, whom they hold in high esteem and venerate across diverse geographical locations. The aforementioned names are attributed to the divine being in various local languages. For instance, in Yoruba, the name "Olorunfemi" signifies God's love for the individual. Similarly, in Igbo, the name "Ikechukwu" denotes God's power, while in Gbagyi, the name "Shekwoisa" refers to God's timing. Additionally, in the Efik and Ibibio languages, the name "IniObong" signifies God's timing, and in the Igala language, the name "Ufedoojo" denotes God's love. Nigeria boasts a total of three hundred and fifty distinct ethnic languages, each of which is associated with a unique appellation for the divine and a corresponding to different deities to venerate. It is pertinent to acknowledge the ethnic diversity nature of Nigeria. It implies people have encounter with God in their unique religions. It is imperative to various adherents of religions to embrace unity and solidarity to build a great nation. According to Kayode (1984), individuals have the ability to engage in prayer as a means of communicating with God, regardless of their location or time thus, channel it to national integration.

Nigeria is a country that exhibits a diverse range of religious affiliations, with Islam, Christianity, and traditional religion serving as the three predominant religious traditions. Scholarly evidence has been presented to demonstrate the presence of an established indigenous religion in Nigeria that boasted a substantial following prior to the advent of Islam and Christianity.

Kitause and Achunike (2013: 45) argue that religion is a crucial phenomenon in contemporary Nigeria. This phenomenon has attained extensive recognition and has generated substantial attention among the Nigerian population. Throughout history, the aforementioned endeavors have been the primary focus of human experience. The investigation of religion has attained substantial eminence in modern scholarly discussion. This subject matter is a topic of discussion across diverse media platforms, including print media such as newspapers and magazines as well as broadcast media like radio and television. The majority of Nigerians exhibit a notable interest in religion, owing to its perceived benefits such as unity in diversity, tolerance and freedom. The available evidence suggests that Nigeria is a society that exhibits pluralism. This statement suggests that Nigeria is a country where multiple religious communities coexist and engage with one another without obstructions or hindrances in the pursuit of their daily activities.

According to Uka (1990: 46), the topic of "religion" encompasses profound and significant inquiries concerning human existence, including the cause of human suffering. What is the underlying cause of the existence of all entities? What is the ontological essence of the concept of the afterlife? The term "religion" refers to the set of beliefs and practices observed by a particular religious group. What is the underlying reasoning behind the tradition of Muslims engaging in the act of pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca? What is the underlying reasoning for the practice of Holy Communion

within the Christian faith? In present-day discussions, the concept of "religion" encompasses a diverse range of faith traditions, such as Islam, Christianity, African Traditional Religion, Judaism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Shintoism, and comparable customs. Religions are systems of beliefs that individuals employ to interpret and establish connections with both the concrete and abstract elements of their environment. Undoubtedly, these different faiths are nowadays commonly seen in Nigeria. The Federal Government ought to acknowledge their existence within the states.

Ministers of the federal government have made conflicting statements about Nigeria's state-religion relationship (Ogbu 2014: 135). Nigeria as a diverse nation is inclined into different ethnic religious background based on geographical area. Consequently, Nigeria is not a secular country, as evidenced by the all too sensitive nature of the subject of religion here. Even the way we deal with problems shows that we like controversies and events that get a lot of attention, which the media is all too happy to support, over real debate about the best ways to solve problems (Tabia 2017). The religious backgrounds and religious affiliations of the citizens that constitute Nigerian nations to its formidable acclamation of national integration. The citizens of Nigeria were adhering to traditional religion refers as indigenous religion preceding to the advent of the Islam and Christianity, that turned to dominate the traditional religion.

African Traditional Religion

As per Ekeopara's (1996) definition, African Traditional Religion pertains to the religious convictions and rituals observed by individuals of African descent. The practise is considered customary and endemic to the African continent. The indigenous religion of Africa may be deemed an appropriate nomenclature, given its origin in Africa and predominant adherence by African populations. There is a prevalent belief that the native religion of African languages lacks localization. There is a prevailing belief that this phenomenon is not limited solely to Africa and its inhabitants but rather is purportedly inclusive of all global races. The term "Africa," when emphasised, solely denotes the geographic region where African Traditional Religion holds a dominant presence. The indigenous religion that has been practised by Nigerians predates the arrival of Christianity and Islam. African individuals have incorporated a religion that has deeply penetrated every facet of their existence.

Onwurah (1990:278) affirms the religiosity of Nigerians, particularly the Igbo. An individual exhibits a strong adherence to religious beliefs and lacks the ability to navigate life without the framework of religion. The individual consumes food and beverages with a consistent and ritualistic frequency and exhibits a consistent pattern of sneezing. According to the author, religion constitutes an integral aspect of an individual's overall existence. It is probable that the statement made aligns with the views expressed by Mbiti in 1969.

The author's statement on page three regarding the correlation between the presence of African individuals and their religious beliefs is of significance. According to Idowu's (1966:5) assertion, Nigerians and other Africans are religious people in all aspects. School Software pro (2022) describes the indigenous religions of the Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba ethnic groups

One of the most common tribes in Nigeria is the Hausa, who are now primarily Islamic. They currently have the lowest level of religious traditionalism's impact. Islam, of course, is the cause of that. The Hausas were introduced to Islam by traders from Guinea, Mali, Borno, and North Africa as early as the 11th century; they embraced and helped expand the religion. The Sokoto Caliphate, which even waged war against colonial powers in the 19th century but lost and became a part of the British Empire, was founded by the Hausa in collaboration with their Fulani fellow believers and later conquerors, demonstrating how Islam empowered the Hausa to be a powerful tribe. Maguzawa is the name of the main Hausa traditional religion, which was primarily worshipped in secluded areas of Hausaland in pre-colonial Nigeria. Maguzawa is also the name of a Hausa ethnic grouping. It is believed by followers of the Maguzawa faith that there are up to 3,000 spirits (Iskoki), which may be split into two main categories: TheDaji (bush spirits) and the Gona (agricultural spirits). This religion recognises six main spirits, namely: The spirit that can eat souls is called Bagiro.

Manzo is a Japanese word that means "messenger". A dog-like spirit that torments souls is described as this spirit. BabbanMaza, which translates to "great among men," Thus, it is referred to as a pestle. The spirit known as Waziri bestows gifts on humanity. According to legend, Mai'iali is the spirit world's queen, and she is frequently depicted with kids and a big dress on. The monarch of all spirits is said to be SarkiAljah. An additional Hausa religion that was followed prior to the invasion is Bori. The primary aspect of the Bori religion is spirit possession. For instance, they performed exorcisms (curative possession) to use spirits to heal ailments. In this instance, spirits were "tamed" by Bori priests in order to be used in healing rituals. A woman named "Inna" held the top position. The name Inna means "the mother of us all."

The Igbo people of southern Nigeria had a common name for their traditional religious practises called Odinani before the invasion began. Odinani possessed a monotheistic quality. They held to the doctrine of a single God (Chineke or Chukwu), who also possessed a large number of spirits (Alusi). Everyone on Earth is credited to Chineke as its creator. The earth was split into the human and spirit realms by religion. Death was thought to be a passage for humans into the afterlife. According to Odinani, each person has a guardian spirit known as "Chi" that is chosen by Chineke. The Christian guardian angel is the closest analogy to Chi. After death, it was thought that a person's chi would follow them into the afterlife. An additional part of Odinani, in which Igbo people believed they could speak with their ancestors who were in the spirit world, was ancestral worship. In ancestral shrines intended for ancestral worship, they made sacrifices to their deceased. Additionally, there were inferior spirits in addition to Chukwu, the greatest

spirit: The sun gods Anyanwu and Amadioha are in charge of governing the weather. The god of the sky, Amadioha, also grants justice and lightning. The earth goddess is named Ana, Anada, Ani, or Ala. The god of time and accomplishments, Ikenga, also held authority over farming and blacksmithing. Soldiers largely revered the god of battle, Ekwensu. Odinani's system of priests was separated into two categories: Hereditary Priests: These individuals served a certain deity or spirit. These priests possessed practically boundless power, were symbols of authority, and were given the authority to carry out justice-related duties.

The Yoruba people of south-west Nigeria continue to practise their ancient religion, which centres on the concept of "Ayanmo" (destiny). It is thought that every human person possesses an ayanmo, which will one day be joined to the creator after death. The Yoruba have three names for their Supreme God: Olodumare/Eledumare, Olorun, and Olori. The world is thought to have been created by Olodumare. When someone passes away, their ayanmo reaches Olodumare. The name Olorun alludes to the king of the heavens. The link between the worlds of "Orun" (heaven) and "Aye" (earth) is Olofi. While all gods and spirits reside in Orun, humans are said to reside in Aye. The Yoruba have a belief in orisha, who are lesser deities and spirits that can roam between heaven and earth. They might be autonomous spirits or gods' servants. Other spirits called "ironmole" are thought to be Olorun's servants and his emissaries to the human world. The Yoruba religion and race originated in the kingdom of Ile-Ife, which is located in modern-day Osun State. Every day, many sacrifices are made here. It is said that the Oba (king) of Ile-Ife is the guardian of over 200 gods and spirits. He is a descendent of Oduduwa, who is acknowledged as the father of all Yoruba people. Aganju, Yemoja, Ogun, Oya, OrishaIbeji, Oba, Osoosi, Osun, Obatala, Esu, Erinle, Sango, Orunmila, and Osanyin are a few of the important gods in Yoruba religion. At their different alters, each of these gods had priests who followed a hierarchy. In addition to praying to their departed in special shrines, especially in ancestral homes, Yorubas also practise ancestral worship by giving presents and pouring libations to their ancestors who have passed away. In the extended family, the priest is typically one of the elders or the eldest. The Yoruba people used the services of an Ifa priest (babalawo) to consult an oracle known as Ifa for divinity to resolve challenging life situations and puzzles. Before making decisions on engaging in certain activities, like going to war, selecting a new king or chief, getting married, travelling, etc., kings, chiefs, communities, families, and individuals have depended on the advice of the Ifa oracle.

The traditional religion is a religion that emanated from the land of inheritance before the coming of Islam and Christianity. It is a religion on the belief and activities of the Supreme Being, spirits, ancestors, divinities, medicine and magic. According to Ugwu and Ugwueye "Religion is as old as man himself" who discovered his weakness and limitation as a dependent being and "establish relationship with the sacred" (Ugwu 2004:3) he encountered as Supreme Being. Traditional Religion existed as human being came into being and established close relationship with the almighty, Supreme Being

who is invisible and creator, protector and sustainer of the entire community. Each geographical area gave name to the supreme invisible being according to the language they use for communication. Traditional African religion is built on oral traditions, which implies that fundamental beliefs and methods of living are passed down from generation to generation. These are not theological doctrines, but rather cultural identities passed down through stories, myths, and tales (<https://www.sahistory.org>). The most significant aspect of someone's life is their community. This group is made up of people who share the same memories and traditions. The individual exists solely within the context of the community, and absence from it is sometimes worse than death. Even though a believer's family lives far away, they still have power over him or her. Religion helps to maintain moral order in most African communities. It gives the community a sense of security and order. Followers of the indigenous religion believe in the spirits of their ancestors to guide them (<https://www.sahistory.org>).

Islam

Ikenwa in "the three Major Types of Religion in Nigeria and their Beliefs." explains the origins of Islam in Nigeria can be traced back to the ancient Borno Empire and the Usman Dan Fodio era. This particular religious' tradition can be traced back to the 11th century. Originating from the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed, this ideology initially gained prominence in the northern region of the nation. The religion of Islam gradually permeated the Middle Belt region. Subsequently, the religion gained recognition in certain southern localities. Religious practices are more prevalent in the northern region. Furthermore, it boasts a significant following among diverse cultural groups. Undoubtedly, Nigeria boasts the largest Muslim population in Western Africa, which is a source of pride for the country. Islam encompasses various regional sects. A significant number of adherents subscribe to the Maliki School of Law, which is a branch of Sunni Islam. However, there are also some who adhere to the Shafi'i Madhab. Numerous adherents of Sunni Islam actively participate in religious practices. The individual concurs with the beliefs of Mouride, Qadiriyya, and Tijaniyyah that the aforementioned practices are classified as Sufi laws and orders, which involve the integration of religion with dancing and singing.

Muslims hold that there is a single, all-powerful God who both created and rules the cosmos. His greatness cannot be compared to that of His creation because He is distinct from and elevated above everything He creates. In addition, he is the only being worthy of adoration, and submission to him is the ultimate goal of all creation. The Islamic view of God is different from that of all other religions and philosophical systems because it is based on a clear and unambiguous idea of monotheism (<https://www.whyislam.org>). Islam literally translates as "peace." Actually, those who practice Islam are the ones who stand for safety and peace. It is the religion that Allah Almighty granted to Muhammad (PBUH) around 1400 years ago, and according to Islamic doctrine, no other religion will be sent to guide mankind. Muslims therefore hold that Islam is the final religion of Allah and that everyone receiving guidance in this life and the next will be a member of the Islamic community (<http://www.quranreading.com>).

True faith in Islam has a decisive effect on man's spiritual and material lot, as well as his personal and social behavior, political conduct, and financial life. According to the Holy Qur'an, true believers are those whose hearts feel submissive and humble when God is mentioned; and when God's revelations are recited unto them, they (the revelations) increase and strengthen their faith; and those who trust in their Lord, establish the prayer (as enjoined on them), and spend what we have bestowed on them. Those are the people who genuinely believe it. They have high honor with their Lord and abundant provision (Qur'an, 8:2-4). And the believers, men and women, protect and support one another; they enjoin the right and forbid the bad; they create worship; they pay the poor-due; and they follow God and His Messenger. God will show them mercy; God is truly Mighty and Wise. To believers, both men and women, God offers gardens with flowing rivers and gorgeous houses in gardens of everlasting bliss. The greatest delight, however, is God's pleasant pleasure. That is the ultimate happiness (Qur'an, 9:71–s72) HammudaAbdalati, "Islam in Focus." <https://www.islambasics.com/chapter/the-basic-concepts-of-islam>.

Christianity

The advent of Christianity occurred during the era of colonialism, initially making its way into the southern region of the nation. Presently, it has disseminated to numerous other regions within the nation. The southern region of the United States exhibits a comparatively higher density of individuals who identify as Christians in comparison to the northern states. The states of Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Lagos, Delta, Edo, Enugu, Akwa-Ibom, Oyo, Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Abia, Ebonyi, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Rivers, Adamawa, Taraba, and Plateau are known to have a significant presence of individuals who identify as Christians. The remaining states exhibit a lower prevalence of individuals who identify as Christians. Various Christian denominations have been established under the influence of European and American origins. The religious denominations in question are Catholicism, Anglicanism, Methodism, Baptism, Christ Apostolic Church, and Apostolic Faith. A number of ecclesiastical denominations of indigenous origin have also emerged. Several examples of African churches include the African Church, the African Methodist Church, the Church of the Lord Aladura, the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, and the Celestial Church of Christ. Additional religious institutions that have been established include the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Students Christian Movement, and the Four Square Gospel Church.

Christianity is a monotheistic religion founded on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, Christianity is an Abrahamic faith. With roughly 2.8 billion adherents, or one-third of the world's population, it is the largest religion. Most people in 157 countries and territories are probably Christians. Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that his coming as the messiah was foretold in the Hebrew Bible and written about in the New Testament (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity>). The Bible, which consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament, is the sacred text of Christianity. One of Christianity's essential beliefs is the theology of the Trinity: one God in three persons: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and Jesus Christ's simultaneous divinity and humanity.

There are several denominations of Christian churches, each with its own unique style of worship and teaching. But everyone agrees that the Lord Jesus Christ is God and the Savior, as shown by the Bible and the work of the Church. The majority of Christians are against disrespectful usage of the names of God or Jesus. Blasphemy is what we call this. Christians hold the Bible and its religious symbols, such as the cross, in the highest regard. If they were mistreated, they would be upset. Most Christians won't worship in areas where major religious symbols of other religions are present because churches are places where reverence and acceptable behavior are required. The Eucharist, also known as Communion, the Lord's Supper, or Mass, is one of the liturgical activities of Christians. All of these terms refer to the same ceremony honoring Jesus' last meal with his disciples, baptism, or some other type of initiation. Prayer and Bible reading during corporate worship (<https://territoryfamilies.nt><https://territoryfamilies.nt>). Apart from the three predominant religions, African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, there are other religions that have sprung up as well. These include, Bahaism, and Judaism.

Baha'u'lláh, an Arab religious figure, is credited with the concept, history, beliefs, leadership, and creation of the Baha'i faith. The Baha'i Faith, the world's newest autonomous worldwide belief system, teaches God's oneness, humanity's unity, and religion's inherent harmony. It is the world's second most common religion, after Christianity, and it aims to bring people together.

The Baha'i teachings advocate for the compatibility of science and religion, gender equality, and the abolition of all prejudice and racism. Baha'is believe in the ability of each individual to discover the truth for himself, and there is no clergy – Baha'is congregate in democratically-led communities and welcome everyone. Baha'is try to fill their souls with spiritual qualities like love, kindness (Hatcher 2021), honesty, truthfulness, humility, and service to others without expecting anything in return. They do this because they believe that the human spirit lasts forever (<https://bahaiteachings.org/bahai-faith>).

A monotheistic religion arose among the ancient Hebrews in Judaism. Judaism is defined by a belief in a single transcendent God who revealed himself to Abraham, Moses, and the Hebrew prophets, as well as a religious life based on the Scriptures and rabbinic traditions. For Jewish people, Judaism is a multifaceted way of life. It incorporates theology, law, and many distinct cultural traditions. According to the Bible, the family of the Hebrew patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had their main residence in Haran in northern Mesopotamia in the early second millennium BCE. At the time, Mitanni was a Hurrian monarchy. From there, Abraham, the patriarch of the Hebrew people, is claimed to have traveled to Canaan, which roughly corresponds to the present-day states of Israel and Lebanon. Throughout the biblical era and subsequent centuries, Canaan was a melting pot of eastern Mediterranean, western Asian, and Egyptian cultures. Moving from Canaan to Egypt, where they were employed as slaves, were the Hebrew forefathers

of the nation of Israel, whose name derives from the patriarch Jacob, who was also known as Israel. A few generations later, they went back to Canaan and lived there for a while.

The Jews eventually dispersed around the globe and picked up the languages of their new homes. Thus, while conducting daily business in (variations of) the languages of their host countries, Hebrew was preserved as a sacred language. Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Spanish (Ladino), and Judeo-German were born as a result (Yiddish). The Jews have remained the same throughout all of their difficulties because they still love God like Abraham, understand His teachings like Moses, and are adamant about living according to His will (<https://www.chabad.org/library/article>). The Nigerians who adhere to the religion of Judaism follow the rudiments involve in the religion. In addition, the religions like Buddhism, Shintoism, Taoism and Confucianism and Zoroastrianism erect temples and Shrines in the neighborhoods. They provide spiritual nourishment to the ardent members and as well to everyone that recourse to their spiritualities.

In line with global inclusiveness and integration, there are other religious movements and organizations in Nigeria that are independent, self- existence and self- sustenance, such as Brotherhood of the Cross, Gurumaraji, Restrictusian, Ecomug. However, they seemed to have affiliate with other existing religions in Nigeria. The brotherhood of the Cross and Stars (BCS) is a religious organization founded by OlumbaOlumba in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. It differs from mainstream Christianity in that it maintains that BCS is not a church but the new Kingdom of God on Earth and that its founder, OlumbaOlumbaObu, is the Holy Spirit personified, the God of all creation; while his eldest son, OlumbaOlumba Jr., is the returned Jesus Christ BCS incorporates into Christian teaching ideas of incarnation and reincarnation.

They believe that, God is bio spiritually, interconnected with all things in nature, is male and female, and good and evil. They hold the faith that, Jesus did not have time to fully communicate his beliefs before crucifixion, and Obu's role has been to explain, expand upon and add to his teaching. This is why a part of Brotherhood teaching has no counterpart in either the Old or the New Testament. His son, Rowland, continues to add to the teachings. Brotherhood of the Cross and Stars, followers suggest that Obu's achievements exceed those of Jesus Christ. In reincarnation, they assert belief in the transmigration of souls between humans and animals, BCS members practice vegetarianism and veganism. (They are also teetotal). The Brotherhood of the Stars' website says that "BCS do not believe in medicine of any form".

OlumbaOlumbaObu: In official BCS literature, it is suggested that Obu has the attributes of God, although Obu has gone on record as saying "I am not Jesus Christ or God." BCS says that it believes that calamity will come if the world does not worship Obu as God. Idolatry has turned to become the order of the day. Different individuals have deified

themselves as gods, divine and savior, objects of worship and have attracted lots of Nigerians to follow and believe in them and pay homage.

Another dimension of religion is satanic worshippers' prevalence in the larger societies. They have followers who believe and worship Satan in all ramification. It is pertinent to mention the fact that some citizens belong to one cults or the other, professing their solidarity, taking oaths and promises secretly undisclosed to nonmembers. As religion is concern, there is always a bond that ties or bind the believers of gods or objects together. In the midst of the various categories of people in Nigeria; believers and non-believers, free thinkers, moralist, traditionalist and atheists inhabiting the country, residing in every nick and cranny of the nation. The worrying notion is how to use religion to bind everybody in in Nigeria together. Everyone seems to belong to one religion or the other, in line to this notion, let's view the extent religion serves as a national integration.

Conceptualizing National Integration in Nigeria

Human beings do not live in vacuum, they need the association and interaction of one another. Togetherness is the strength of the people. In line with this notion, integration is the hallmark of experiencing sharing of ideas, talents, knowledge, capabilities, goods and services. It entails different group of people coming together to understand one another's cultural differences, religious background, beliefs and practices. Integration involves absolving and assimilating Ideas, proposals and culture of other people to enrich oneself. Integration is connecting various people or objects to a whole. It depicts the mixture of varieties of people or things from different origins, aspirations, rationalities and philosophy to form a nation. Combining various individuals of different cultural and religious background to form a unity is a challenging tasks. It requires tolerance, mutual understanding, forbearance, faith, trust, honesty and cooperation.

Before amalgamation of the Northern Nigeria and the Southern part of Nigeria in 1914 by Sir Fredrick Lugard, there was no nation called Nigeria (Nasiru 2012:61), except existing fragmented tribes and communities from different geographical areas. Nariru asserts that "all we had were peoples of many ethnic groups who, despite their differences in language, religion, culture and history, maintained some social and commercial connections with one another" (Nasiru 2012:61).The amalgamation of the Northern protectorate and Southern protectorate was to enhance enlarged smooth administration of the Colonial masters from the Western world. Although it was so obscured, with little or no enlightenment on the importance of the united nation of Nigeria to the aborigines. The integration of various ethnic groups in Nigeria has not augured well due to the vast geography areas of the nation. There are different views on lifestyles, different choices of values, rationality, Philosophy, historical background, economy, occupation, social behaviour, culture, styles of government and different ancestry. Each ethnic group suspects each other, often wage wars to its adversaries. Lots of rancour, hatred, disputes,

conflicts, fighting and kidnapping were rampant. Many actions of some tribes were barbaric and untamed. There were lots of killings, confiscating and fighting each other, while some involved on killing and butchering human beings, devouring and eating human flesh prior to the advent of the two prominent religions, Islam and Christianity. There is need for national integration in Nigeria through implementation of religious core values (Akah 2018).

Appraisal of Religion as a National Integration Agent

Religion tends to unite different people together. Religion is the expression of certain experiences human being encountered with the Ultimate, Supreme Being, Transcended and the Almighty. In the former case, a shared religion can be perceived as contributing to a sense of national unity and a common link among the nation's residents. Another political component of religion is the promotion of a shared national identity, such as ethnicity, language, or culture. On the other hand, religion exacerbates and fosters social inequality and conflict. It encourages the impoverished to accept their position in life while also fueling animosity and bloodshed inspired by religious differences. This viewpoint is concerned with how people perceive their religious experiences. It highlights that beliefs and practises are not sacrosanct unless they are regarded as so by people. They take on unique significance and give meaning to people's lives once they are viewed as sacred. The argument lies on the fact that the goal of religion ought to aim at establishing unity.

Prior to conceptualization of religion as a model of national integration in Nigeria, different parts of Nigeria into engrossed different kinds of evils, abnormality such as: Religious polarization and disputes are prevalent in Nigeria. Given its arsenal of material and human resources, Nigeria has everything it needs to become a truly great country in every way. The emphasis on development in connection to religious integration among various religious communities in Nigeria aims at building a fortified progressive nation. A nation that fears God.

Integration in this context is the acceptance of people that constituted constitutionally the bona fide citizens of the nation Nigeria. Integration, which literally entails putting components into a whole, having equal access for all regardless of religion, ethnicity, culture, gender and social class (Encarta Dictionary 2009). The choice depends on the observer's understanding of what constitutes national integration as well as the plan for achieving social stability and advancement. Adejoh (2005) defines national integration as the process of integrating disparate cultural and social groupings into a single territorial unit and establishing national unity. The term presupposes the existence of an ethnically diverse society in which each group distinguishes itself through its own language or other self-aware cultural traits, posing the issue of developing a sense of territorial nationality that eclipses or eliminates inferior parochial loyalties. Integration can be described as the gradual elimination of antagonisms and the decrease of cultural and regional decisions and differences in the process of establishing a homogeneous political entity. According to the preceding, national integration refers to the process of

constructing a just social unit that provides every resident with a sense of belonging, a satisfactory level of participation in decision-making and development, and the opportunity to share from the society's resources in a manner commensurate with decent and acceptable living (Adeoye, 2015: 4). The argument is that integration involve commitment, self-sacrifice, tolerance, emotional balance and maturity.

Religion as a vehicle to national integration eligibly serves numerous purposes in society such as, giving meaning and purpose to life, supporting social unity and stability, acting as a social control agency, fostering physical and psychological well-being, and encouraging people to fight for positive social change. The religions in Nigeria ought to find a common ground to evaluate the useful roles religion play to national integration in Nigeria. The value of religion is inevitable; it is grossly permeating into the lifestyle of the populace without much efforts. According to Mbiti, Africans are religiously imbued with. Religion imparts lots of values that are utilize to shape the behavioural attitudes of people in the society. This paper explores vital appraisal on the functions of religion in national integration in Nigeria. There are two explicate ways to judge the nature and practice of religion in Nigeria in view of negative and positive ways. Prior to the enlightenment and modernization in Nigeria, religion seemingly practiced in isolation, lack of solidarity, antagonism, hatred, tribal war, hatred and ignorance.

The background religious practices in Nigeria is on isolation in different geographical areas. Naturally, the country set up is built on different boundaries that demarcates each geographical settlement. The indigenous people experience the presence of the supernatural being in various forms, worship God in different forms and in their local ways. Religion was practiced in isolation, remote inhabited areas. The populace is separated from each other because of the nature of the geography of the nation. Isolation hinders religion in national integration in Nigeria due to absence of solidarity. Lack of solidarity as a nation is an obstruction of religion in national integration. An adage has it that, 'united we stand, divided we fall.' Consequently, lack of unity emerges due to ignorance of teamed solidarity that builds up a nation. The adherents of indigenous religion in different ethnic regions and settlements have limited knowledge of others as a result of illiteracy. This results to insufficient understanding of the teachings of religion.

Every religion preaches peace. The Quran discourages Muslims from "caucus arguments with followers of other religions except to invite them to Islam through civility, good words, good manners, and good example" (Aminu, 2006). This suggests that it is forbidden to keep company with people who perpetrate negative acts like corruption, conflict, hatred, killing and other acts which are not the teachings of any religion. With peace, there will be development and national integration. Illiteracy breeds antagonism in the lifestyle of the uneducated citizens. Any religion that lacks understanding of other religions in the geographical region disapproves peace, tolerance, unity and progress. There is frequent rise of hostility, hatred and opposition. People from different tribes and backgrounds find it difficult to relate together even with the same religious beliefs.

At times tribal war erupt between different religions due to different religious beliefs, ideologies and practices. Thus, ethnicity is an impediment to religious role in national integration and progress. People tend to privatize national politics under the pretense of religion. Nothing in Nigeria's political history captures her problem of national integration more graphically than consequence on diversity and multicultural outlook of individual and collective identities in the country". All of these impacts negatively on the tolerance level of Nigerians of diverse religions. Some religions monopolize politics in their tribal geographical regions which erode unity in diversity, the usual dream of Nigeria as a nation. Politicization of one's Religion: This relays to individuals in the country who describe their religion or ethnic group as superior or inferior for the sake of access to resources. Wild arguments are thrown on who is the majority, minority, and so on. If not controlled, can degenerate into violence ethnic or religious conflict with its negative consequences on the lives and properties of people. Thus, failure to live in peace leads to destruction. Both Christians and Muslims should shun these senseless conflicts.

It is pertinent to unveil some individuals in ethnic groups who monopolize and manipulate religion-political affairs of the community and extend it to entire nation. There is political manipulation that overshadows the general interest of the populace. Political Manipulation: This is another cause of ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria. For instance, Babaginda during his regime tried to put Nigeria in Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Christians view this as an attempt to Islamize the country. This gave rise to Christian, Muslims violence in the country Nigeria. However, factors like lack of appreciation of different cultures, intolerance, poverty and unemployment also fuel the disintegration in the appreciation of issues of religious diversity in the country. Nigeria with about 200 million people with different cultural backgrounds, religious intolerance is common. Such attitude still may lead to disorder, hostility and confrontation which does not promote national integrations. There are other factors that are hindering religion to play the role of national integration.

Other factors according to (Sen, 2006) are: unemployment, influences of international extremists, shallow media coverage, among others contributed to the promotion of singularity of identities with the attendant countries at a time Nigeria was in need of finance. Christians viewed this as an attempt to islamize Nigeria. This of course was the beginning of Christian versus Muslim open confrontation in Nigeria. Suspicions of other religions and denominations fail to give room to the role of religion in National integration. However, the first religious riot motivated by ethnicity between Muslims and Christians was in Kafanchan, old Kaduna state in March 1987 (Asemota,2013:1). The following month in Ilorin, Kwara state witnessed a conflict when some Christian youths held an Easter procession in a thickly Muslim neighborhood, pointing at houses and singing, "Jesus dey here"? "He dey" (Asemota, 2013: 1). The tension went on and with Zaria, Tafawa Balewa, ZongoKotaf, Kano and several others (Thisday live, 24th

Thursday April, 2014:2). There is lack of transparency and above all tribal dominance by the major ethnic groups (Nusiru, 2008:1). Others include, tribalism, nepotism, impunity, favouritism and religious and ethnic bigot. Religious manipulations emerging from one part of the country. We have Jihadist, Banditry, Ritualist, Robbery, False prophets, Extremists, Pretenders, Syncretism, Hypocrites and ungodly adherents of various religions. Societal crimes are being exonerated and perpetuated by religion. Some individuals often accuse religion for as a divisible agent of disintegration, rancor, hatred, mistrust, perjury. Nevertheless, the paper reveals some positive functions religion play to uphold the national integration in Nigeria.

Since the colonial era and continuing today, ethnic and religious issues have made the concept of national integration appear unattainable. Ethno-religious tensions are deeply established in Nigeria, endangering the country's basic survival as a nation. Intra- and inter-religious conflicts are common. The question is how this violence can be used to promote national unity, integration, and progress. It has a harmful impact on people's socioeconomic and political lives. To the extent that issues that should have been addressed are being ethicized unnecessarily. It is apparent that the grievances that generally exacerbate ethnic and religious crises are frequently disclosed through sectarian crises, tribal unrest, passionate political complaints, and violent rebels, among other things. However, national integration is a matter of need rather than choice. The truism is the fact that, Religion is the underline factor in the facilitation of national integration in Nigeria. The citizens of Nigeria are deeply rooted in religion which permeates every aspect of their lives. Based on this, one can deduce that religion play vital roles in national integration. The appraisal on the positive roles of religion on national integration can be viewed thus: Religion inculcate virtues, solidarity, self-control, gives meaning and purpose to life, reinforces social unity and stability, serves as an agent of social control of behavior, promotes physical and psychological well-being, and motivates people to work for positive social change.

Religion gets mental peace and emotional support the populace. It encourages them to face their lives and problems and gives right shelter. Human life is uncertain. People struggle for survival amidst the uncertainties, insecurities and dangers, Some-times they feel helplessness. It is the religion which consoles and encourages them in all such time of crisis. Religion is enabling the people to accept hardship and absorb abnormalities it brings to the Nigerian nation. Ibenwa and Iheanacho (2017: 50) stressed the fact that people are bred into the spirit of self- assurance which religion offered to overcome emotional distress.

Religion promotes the major social virtues like truth, honesty, non-violence, service, love, discipline etc. A follower of the religions internalizes these virtues and becomes disciplined citizen of the society. More importantly, religion serves as a means of transaction. It provides stalwart moral precepts and guidelines for an ideal human interaction. Religion provides directives the citizens to follow. Some these directives are

embedded into the constitution of the court, especially on the rights and duties of the citizenry (Goldberg: 2022). The implication is that; religion encourages the adherents to be law abiding in order to foster national integration. Religion is an effective means to strengthen self-confidence. There are certain beliefs like 'work is worship', 'duty is divine', 'result in predestined' etc. which is found in various religions gives strength to the individual and promotes self-confidence.

Religion gives rise to the spirit of brotherhood, strengthens social solidarity. It has the supremely integration and verifying force in human society. It is true that common belief, common sentiment, common worship, participation in common rituals etc. are the significant cementing factors which strengthen unity and solidarity. Opara asserts Religion as source of togetherness and oneness. Brotherhood involves team spirit that enhances development, religion helps to harness human resources and talent and promotes national development (Opara: 2021, 103). Religion meaning religare, to bind is in congruent with the role of religion in national integration in Nigeria. The people that constitute the citizens of Nigeria are drawn from religious adherents of different geographical areas to see beyond ethnicity and go into national integration.

The spirit of service is one of the roles religion has brought in the national integration in Nigeria. Religion inculcates the spirit of self-service. It demands that people should be charitable and benevolent. Through various religious experiences the believers tend to forget the worldly life and problems. This experience suppresses the animal desires in people and converts the animalistic qualities of people into human qualities. This implies that the spirit of service prompts the religious adherents to render services of various kind to the nation. It promotes patriotism and enable the citizens to work assiduously to the development of the nation. It propels individual as well as groups of like mind and aspiration to form NGO-Non Governmental Organizations (Opara 2021: 206). These services are meant for poverty eradication. The service involves people from different beliefs and philosophy. Even religious arms, donations, and gifts. Rendering assistance to the less privilege, the Anawin, poorest, beggars, handicapped and disables internal displaced camp. Different religious organizations and institution: schools, hospitals, skill acquisition centers, all these services are rendered to the populace regardless the religious affiliate. Religion teaches to the people to serve the masses and promote their welfare. It gives message that “the service to humanity is service to God”. For this reason, people spend money to feed poor and needy. It develops the philanthropic attitude of the people and thereby injects the idea of mutual help and co-operation. With the influence of religious belief different religious organisations engage themselves in various welfare activities.

Religion has significant role in organizing and directing social life. It helps in preserving social norms and strengthening social control. It socializes people and enables them to exercises control over both individual and group in various ways. As an informal means, religion regulates the activities of people in its own way. People organize crusades and

pilgrimages, General Assemblies and Convention both at National level and state across the nation. The religious organization inculcate certain values via, self-control, communal responsibly People so participate in Churches, and Mosque. Religion serves as an agent of socialization and social control. Religion plays a charming role in providing recreation to the people. Religious rites and festivals are more or less performed in every religion which gives relief to the people from mental exertion. Religion gives much more pleasure to the people and provides eternal recreation. In Church activates people from all works of life converge to harmoniously worship and praise God, they sing, dance and play musical instruments. In festivity, sacrifice and offerings are made followed by merriments and pageantry. It enhances national integration in Nigeria. It gives much more pleasure to the people and provides eternal recreation and relaxation of mind. Okobia and Osajie argue in support of religion as promoter of national integration in Nigeria base on religion as a unifying facto harmonization of common interest, conformity with societal norms and values, justice and human relationship (Okobia and Osajie 2024:332).

Religion influences economy. Sociologists like Sombart and Max Weber rightly established the relationship of religion with economic system. Weber observed the influence of Protestant ethics in the development of capitalism. The spirit of capitalism is found in Nigeria regarding our custom, rituals and norms. Abundance food production is divine blessings and favour. Wealth and riches are endowed by the deities and Supernatural Beings.

Religion has played a significant role in political system in the ancient and medical society. Even in modern times in many countries of the world the religion directly and indirectly also influences political activities. During ancient and medieval period, the monarchs were treating themselves as the representatives of the God or ruling the society in the name of God. Even today, Political leaders take oath in the name of God in Nigeria when they want to take the mantle of leadership.

The pluralistic nature of Nigeria prompted the writer to give four suggestions, 'All citizens in Nigeria should possess common religious values such as: humility commitment, contemplation, and compassion. Imbibing the spirit of humility will enable Nigerians to be simple, shun excess accumulation of properties, take the needful, concentrate and choose high values of things, be loyal, honest and respectful, love justice and obey laws and order. Commitment will assist the citizens to be hardworking, have focus, love their jobs no matter the level, being faithful, contribute to workforce of the nation, join in nation building, serve as a patriot, love your job, be punctual and dedicated to your duty. Contemplation is a call to reflection and meditation. It is self-examination, active consciousness and self-awareness. It reduces much noise making, increases more reflection on one's duty, ability to invent new techniques of performing duties, new innovations and outlook, new styles, creative and productive. Compassion enable us to show genuine love and concern to the less privilege, the need, poor in the society. To be generous, charitable to the vulnerable, to show mercy and forgiveness to one another.

Respect filial love, shun revenge. Report to the appropriate authority in mildness and simplicity. If every citizen is imbued with these four values that will serve as four treasures, four jewels and pearls, the role of religion in National integration in Nigeria will be of solid foundation.

Recommendations

Religious Leaders should impart on their adherents the respect and tolerance for other religions apart from their own as worshippers of God too. They should inculcate the virtue of love, forgiveness, and unity. There should be frequent Roundtable discussions on conflict, peace, and resolution in all institutions and Government establishments every last weekend of the Month.

Intra and inter-religious dialogue, relationships and leadership orientations, and shared value systems should be compulsory courses in all our learning establishments to foster national integration.

Schools should place a strong emphasis on instilling patriotism on students at all levels, while avoiding ethnicities. All citizens should value common religious values such as humility, commitment, contemplation, and compassion.

The government should respond to religious crisis on time in order to arrest the situation. Fanaticism in religion must be minimized in order to pave way for re-designing the Nigerian society.

Leaders should strengthen existing policies that promote tolerance of other people's culture. The knowledge of Nigerian nation and its citizens in terms of geography, history, sociology and anthropological set ups and other basic information that can nurture the spirit of empathy are grossly deficient.

Nigerians must learn to love one another and imbibe the spirit of patriotism and nationalism. The 'federal character' principle which encourages discrimination and indigenization should be de-emphasized by the government and all. Since Nigeria is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic and heterogeneous nation, secularity should be the best option in order to promote national integration antidevelopment. Okobia and Osajie argue in support of religion as promoter of national integration in Nigeria base on religion as a unifying facto harmonization of common interest, conformity with societal norms and values, justice and human relationship (Okobia and Osajie 2024:332). This implies that religion is unstoppable. Religion as religion is one, but religion as practice is many and in these practices human interpretations of divine will could lead to misunderstandings and crises. Yet, religion seen in its true form has no provision for discrimination or segregation and as such if well harnessed can foster national integration.

Conclusion

The existence of human being in different geographical areas corresponds with religion. God revealed himself to mankind to worship him in various forms. Religion binds people

together in the society they find themselves. Every religion has message that intertwines with culture. And culture and doctrine unit the followers together, propel them to adhere to the dictates of the invisible Supreme being who the populace attribute different names in their vernaculars. In this study, Religion endeavours to bridge the vacuum of disunity, injustice, antagonism and hatred, serves as a light that enlightens the nation. Religion is the beckon that lights the nation to promote its integration. In Nigeria, the predominant religions include, African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity. Although other religions can be pointed out within the country both the foreign religions and those emanated from Nigeria. The adherents of these religions are the citizen of the country drawn from different geographic locations with different ethnic cultural and religious background. It is pertinent to exhibit both the negative and positive roles religion plays in the national integration in Nigeria. The negative roles of religion in disintegrating Nigeria as a nation include; fostering social inequality and conflict. It encourages the impoverished to accept their positions in life while also fueling animosity and bloodshed inspired by religious differences and fanatics. Others include: religious riots, violence, rancor, hatred, Insults, polemics, mistrust, injustice religious bigotry, impunity, terrorism, kidnapping and ill feelings to one another.

Religion as a vehicle to national integration elastically serves numerous purposes in society such as, giving meaning and purpose to life, supporting social unity and stability, acting as a social control agency, fostering physical and psychological well-being, and encouraging people to fight for positive social change. The religions in Nigeria ought to find a common ground to evaluate the useful roles religion play to national integration in Nigeria. The value of religion is inevitable; it is grossly permeating into the lifestyle of the populace without much efforts. The appraisal of role of religion involves the capacities in transformation- foster development, transcendence- binding and uniting people with the ultimate, transmission- impart sacred customs, transaction- providing ethical standard, and translation, interpreting- life events, imparting respect, honesty, modesty and tolerance to the citizenry. It gives assistance in political administration of the government. It has much influence on the economy, regulate the conscience of the adherents who constitute the citizens of the nation. Religion helps to set the moral standard of the society which appeals to individuals to render unalloyed services to nation building. The trending fact is the concern of modernity on religion, terming it obsolete, ancient, archaic and tradition. It sounds uneducated, animosity, religious bigotry, unreasonable and irreverence to the Almighty, Transcendent and the Ultimate reality. The controller of the cosmos is the architect of the universe, the beginning and the end, the nameless according to Taoism. And invisible controller of the global science and technology.

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