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**RELIGION AS A TOOL FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract**

The paper explores the possibility of drawing on religious values and ethos in solving some of the problem militating against national development. The paper undertakes a sociological interpretation of the phenomena which have militated against meaningful development of the nation viz a viz global standard. It discovers among other things that corruption, poor leadership, moral decadence, insecurity, low economic growth, religious crisis among others contribute to the low pace of development of the nation. It concludes by recommending that all religious groups should draw on the theosophical perspectives of religion (Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion) in the country to foster peaceful co-existence in order for the nation to actualize her dreams of national development.

**Keywords:** Development, Tool, Corruption, Sociological, Challenges.

**Introduction**

Religion as a tool for national development, which is the major focus of this paper, is really not an easy task. This is so because of the controversial and various definitions given to religion by different users of the concepts. The word "Religion" is derived from the latin word "religio" which means to bind together, to bind fast, or fasten up that that, which might otherwise fall apart. Gleen (1962) states that "religion as that aspect of culture comprised of shared beliefs and practices which not only identify or define the Supernatural and the sacred and man's relationships thereto, but which also relates them to the unknown world in such a way that the group is provided with moral definitions as to what is good (in harmony with or approved by the Supernatural) and what is bad (contrary to or not in harmony with the Supernatural). The Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines religion as the belief in an ever living God that is, in a Divine mind and Will ruling the Universe and holding Moral relations with Mankind (Britannica, 1970).

The above quotation indicates that religion which is as old as man is the pivot around which the social institution of humanity lies. That is to say that religion

is the most powerful rallying force of people from all walks of life, hence Karl Marx sees religion as "the opium of the people (Isiorhovoja et al, 2010). Though many do not agree with the definition, Marx's definition shows the tie between religion and the society. Those who are against this definition do so due to the limited reasoning accorded to it.

Thus, Okwueze (2003) explained opium (religion) as a means of solving societal anarchies, frustrations, wars and violence or pains that face the populace in the present dispensation. In other words, religion gives us hope where it appears there is no hope at all and makes it possible for us to live till tomorrow. For the efficacy of this paper, religion therefore, is the belief by which man acknowledges the existence of a Supernatural Being as the creator of the universe and the recognition of this 'Being' as an object of worship, love and obedience, which eventually will guide and direct the people in the way they should behave and to have respect for this 'Being' and fellow mankind. Religion too, is a universal feature regardless where you live, you have no doubt seen how religion affects the lives of millions of people. That is why Gleen (1962) stated that "Religion deals with man's relationship with God and his fellow men. Thus, the teachings, roles, moral standards and in fact ethical proportion of a religion should influence the personality and the daily behaviour of each believer.

#### **Moral Behaviour that Leads to Under Development**

The state of moral decadence or evil perpetuated in Nigeria society today in all ramifications of life now cannot be equated with the moral standard of Nigeria populace many years ago. Such moral decadence like lack of respect for elders, greed, drug addict, indecent dressing, cultism, cheating, indiscipline, corruption at all levels etc hence Attah (2011) states that "for the nation not to become a laughing stock in the eye of the world, every Nigerian must change his/her current attitude such as lack of love for our fellow human beings and for the nation and learn to be disciplined. With love and discipline, you will not covet, you will not cheat and you will not abuse anybody". Until recently, security of lives and properties was rest assured, the entire culture abhors evil and protects decent behaviour. Hard work, integrity, respect for authority were highly stressed and rewarded. But now in Nigeria, the word 'Moral' has been suppressed, subjected and relegated to the background and not a few have been swallowed by this moral decadence.

Considering what is obtainable in the society today, one begins to raise questions on why the society has degenerated so fast with collapsed conscience, moral decay despite the proliferation of religious groups. One of the causes of

under development in Nigeria society could be traced to corruption. According to Ejiogu (2000), "Corruption gives rise to corruption, it results in under development and this explains why we seem to be no where". Akin to this, it seems that bribery and corruption have become a disease in the society. This could be seen from the highest top officials down to the messengers whose work is to carry files from one table to the other, bribes are either given or taken. Some custom officers take bribes and sometimes confiscate imported items. Corruption in Nigeria has reached its peak especially among the law enforcement agencies like the Nigeria Police force (NPF) who arrest, detain and extort money from the poor masses. Reacting to this, Nwokora (1990) was right when he said "To talk about the police in Nigeria is like wasting precious ink and paper. We know that if there is any sector of our national life that is most prone to this infamy, it is our police force. Ignorance and cowardice on the part of the populace, callousness and intimidation on the part of men in uniform, have made it an unwritten common law that to get out of trouble, real or imaginary (most often imaginary) you just tip the police". The virtues of justice, temperance, diligence and respect have gone, only few persons have it. There is no need denying or arguing that, Nigeria has lost sense of values.

Agha (2003) states that "Misplacement of values has contributed to moral decadence in Nigeria society". This is to say that misplacement of value has made many people fall in their responsibilities. It makes people to act or be involved in all kinds of dubious and unguided acts. Furthermore, misplacement of values have killed people's conscience to the extent that parents could kill their son in order to make quick money. In modern Nigerian society, all of man's desire, hopes, joy, dreams affections, virtues and association seem to have been narrowed down into naira and kobo. The sanctity of human life is often violated. Another factor that is instrumental to the lingering of corruption in Nigeria is lack of exemplary leadership be it military or civilian. These leaders, assume power or office feel they have arrived. They siphoned and confiscate government treasury for their personal aggrandizement forgetting the oath they took to shun corruption and uphold the constitution. This, Achebe (1983) laments poor leadership in Nigeria thus; "The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely, a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land and climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or ability of the leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which are hallmarks of true leaderships".

Economic form of corruption in Nigeria militates against national development. Nigeria as a nation is blessed with both human and natural resources. But due to mismanagement and misplacement, this wealth has not been impacted on the life's of the generality of her citizens. For this reason, Attah (2011) opines that "Nigeria is richly endowed, we have everything it takes to make Nigerians very happy and contented but what exists here is an abiding paradox-poverty in the midst of plenty. Mother Nature has blessed us but either through mismanagement or under utilization we are not enjoying fully, the benefits of nature's bounty". A fallout of corruption in Nigeria is unemployment which in turn fuels social vices like cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery to mention but a few. Insecurity is one of the factors that hinder development in modern Nigeria society. The problem of ethnic militia as well as religious/political intolerance has created so many crises in Nigeria. The negative activities of these sects such as the Boko Haram and Militants in the Niger Delta region continue to undermine development efforts in the country. This is because insecurity scares investors which in turn lead to underdevelopment. Buttressing this, Aghalor (2011) said that "Any country that cannot provide security for its citizens is sliding into anarchy and a situation where might is right".

#### **How Religion can be Harnessed for National Development**

For religion to be effective as instrument for the development of Nigeria, it has to liaise with the society because Nigeria as a nation is a society. In highlighting this, Gleen (1966) said that "Religion does not exist by itself but is, rather, an interacting segment of a larger socio-cultural entity influencing and being influenced by other component parts. Thus, while religion is a cultural universal, there is a great variability in the specific expressions of religion found in or various societies". Since, there is tie between religion and society and it has a unified element, it therefore means that a complex pattern of behaviour in the society is a culture which includes religion. That is, culture is a complex reality of the society which includes religion as one of its pattern of behaviour in any society. Therefore, religion is one of the cultural patterns of human society which helps to shape and reshape the society. "Religion serves as an agent of social justice and truth". No doubt, our present day social environment is battling desperately against foreign inspired cultural disease like bribery and corruption, bureaucracy and nepotism, denial of merited official promotions, authoritarians and arrogance in power, love of money, moral decadence as well as religious persecution; the agents of religion should diligently and courageously fight against the above mentioned ills through her teachings, prophetic proclamation and criticisms" (Gleen).

Religion in its effort to promote and develop our society should be expected to see that our social institutions are well enriched and reinforced by those essential values and achievements which humanity in general consider as important to the pursuit of order and peace, progress and happiness, protection of the weak and invalid, social cohesion and solidarity as well as preferential treatments to all and sundry. According to Ngugi (1981) in *river between*: "A religion that took no account of people's way of life, a religion that did not acknowledge spots of beauty and truth in their way of life is good for nothing. It would not satisfy. It would not be a living experience a source of life and vitality. It would only main man's soul". Therefore, every religion should respect its efficacy in creating norms and values applicable to interpersonal relationship and this has to be throughout all social institutions of our daily life - family, industry, business, politics, economics and all ramifications of life. Nigeria to be well organized and progressively developed, religion must strive as a matter of policy and practice, never to mix old wine into the new wine Iwe (N.D). It must never capitulate to any given state of affairs or status quo, but rather strike a bargain with it as looks ahead and plans with foresight and vision for the welfare of the people and their culture. The spirit of sound progress will inspire organized religion to see its facts that its ideas and exercise of authority, the spirit and standard of its service to the people, in keeping and comparing favourably with the achievements of humanity in Nigeria.

In line with this statement above, Omoregbe (1993) states that "no society can live without morals". That is to say the society's morality is those standards of conduct which the reasonable man approves. It concedes that morality is necessary in the society. We must therefore, support religion as an instrument without which morality cannot be maintained and these instruments are teaching, doctrine and the law. Morality is concerned with the field of human values and the desirable in respect to conduct. Traditional view sees morality as an out-flow of religion indissolubly bound up with it. A nation without morality is a nation without religion. Morality moulds a good man and the good man moulds the good nation and society. The way by which the ills and atrocities of this nation could be curtailed since both low and high members of the populace are involved is through re-orientation and re-direction of priorities towards our individual and social values. Omoregbe identified this character problem, which manifests itself in mass corruption among Nigerians as a moral sickness affecting both society and the individuals in it. One therefore, suggest that the only remedy to this ugly situation in the country is by inculcating of morals and it is also not out of place if the big heads in authorities and highly placed personalities should change from bad behaviour to good behaviour. In other

words, the people should repent and have a change of heart that all these anomalies will be stopped and Nigeria will become a suitable place of abode.

### **Conclusion**

Corruption, moral decadence, low economic growth, insecurity, political instability among others which are so hard to get rid off, have created a lot of imbalance in Nigerian society. A society where the rich is encouraged to become richer and the poor continuously getting poorer. Everybody is in line to meet up and in the process; all sorts of atrocities, corruption of different types are done and perfected into the bodies of our society. The paper also conclude that religion as a major tool in the process of national development if given proper and adequate attention by the government will foster and promote human resources, and bring about peaceful co-existence in the society.

However, the future of Nigeria is in the hands of Nigerians, the earlier they come to realize their problems and also become determined to solve these issues through self moral examination, the better and sooner the society would be sanitized for the sake of progress in the nation.

### **Recommendations**

In our families, parents as well as able bodies adults should strive to inculcate discipline and morals into children so that when they become of age they will not depart from it as proverbs 20:6 said and to bring back the values of traditional African way of life, which disallows fraud, dishonesty and other problems posed to corrupting the minds of the youths. If this is done, awards, credit and unnecessary recognition should no longer be given to people whose source of wealth cannot be ascertained. Rather, merit should be given and upheld to those that merited it as the wisdom of experience should be encouraged in the society. Moral instructions should be introduced at all levels in the school curriculum starting from Nursery, Primary, Secondary and to tertiary institutions as a way of imparting moral self discipline, love, patriotism and commitment among the people.

Religious Educators should also once in a while organize seminars and workshop where ills, atrocities, corruption and its results would be read out. In this case, both private and public servants should be made to come together to listen to important resource persons who shall be drawn from all disciplines to speak on the evil results of these ills and atrocities of the society. Again, film show, radio, as well as announcement and advertisement, television and newspaper should be used as a medium of imparting discipline into the populace. Open air

preaching against these evils in the society should be used in condemning corruption in our society.

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