

THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND CULTURE IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

UGWULEBO, K. C. (PhD)
Department of Religion & Cultural Studies
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri
Phone: +2348035815463

&

DURUJI, S.U.N (PhD)
Department of Religion & Cultural Studies
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri

Abstract

Some contemporary scholars have argued that the best approach to national development is the development of the human persons, especially the development of human moral capacity. Religion and culture play enormous role in this regard. Religion and culture develop the individual's moral and behavioural capabilities for meaningful contributions to national development. Thus, this paper seeks to examine the role of religion and culture in national development: issues and challenges in the 21st century. It starts by clarifying some key concepts used in the study. It goes ahead to take a glance at the Nigerian national development portrait. It also examines the relevance of religion and culture in human society; the role of religion in national development; cultural values and national development; and issues and challenges of religion and culture in the 21st century. The paper observes that religion is the most abused and manipulated phenomenon in the society today as seen in the way it is being used by unscrupulous clerics and politicians to unleash terror and violence on the society just to serve selfish interests. The paper therefore recommends among others, that the government should join forces with religious leaders in the country in order to wage a serious war against terrorism and corruption which have remained the bane of our national development.

Keywords: Religion, Culture, Behavioural Capabilities, National Development, 21st Century

Introduction

No matter how people feel about the phenomenon religion, it has got a lot to do with the development of human persons, human societies and nations. Religion unites people, fosters unity, love and a sense of brotherhood among people of different cultural, ethnic, racial, social, academic and economic backgrounds. It has in it an inbuilt capacity for evoking social solidarity, cohesion and cooperation among people in the society. This is the reason why Emile Durkheim can be adjudged correct when she 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 a people into a single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them (Nwokoye, 2006). However, the single moral community is not only called or known as a church, but it can also be called Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Taoists, Confucianists, Traditionalists and so on (Madumere, Awusaku, Onu, 2020). In line with the above, Ofusaia and Eboh (2015) cited in Madumere, Awusakku and Onu (2020) observe that religion traditionally defined what the goals of human relations should be in every society. Religion is aimed at giving meaning and purpose to life, re-

enforcing social unity and stability, serving as an agent of social control of behaviour; promoting physical well-being and motivating people to work for meaningful socio-economic development in the society.

Most countries of the world which have recognized the importance of religion in the pursuit of national development and positive nationhood have made relative progress in the economic, cultural, technological, political and social development. India has enjoyed relative stability, peace, unity and economic development over the years. Israel is making headway technologically, culturally, politically, economically and militarily amid external aggressions that have persisted over-times. Asian Tigers have broken the chains of poverty, economic dependence and all forms of imperialism to make a gallant entrance into the league of nations with vibrant, strong and progressive economies through the exploration of the teachings and values of Islamic religion. Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirate (UAE) Kuwait and others are smoothly cruising on the path of economic and technological greatness as they ride on the wings of Islam. There are numerous examples.

Unfortunately, Nigeria in her 61 years of nationhood still finds it very difficult to properly anchor her feet on the threshold of national development. Several development plans, economic policies and constitutional amendments have not yielded the expected dividends. The three widely practiced religions in the country namely Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion can be harnessed to impact on governance and behavioural attitudes of the citizens (Yesufu, 2016) and ultimately on national development.

It might be that the moral values, teaching doctrines and ethics of these religions, have not been properly explored and utilized by our national policy-makers for the promotion of national development. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine the role of religion and culture in National Development and some issues and challenges impinging on religion in the 21st century.

Clarification of Key Concepts

Religion

Religion is one of the commonly used words in our society today. Its definition is multifarious as every scholar looks at the phenomenon from his or her own personal perspective. Religion is rooted in ancient antiquity. It is probably one of the oldest institutions which have existed since man was created on earth (Nwokoye, 2006). Johnson and Sampson (1994) cited in Ajaegbu (2012) defines religion as a system of social coherence commonly understood as a group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen or imaginary being or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions and rituals associated with such belief or system of thought.

Mc Gee (1980) in Nwokoye (2006) defines religion as a set of actions organized around the sacred that is non-empirical source of power, transcendence, mystery and awe. It can as well be seen as the beliefs and practices of a people, be it an individual, a clan, village, state, continent or the world (Usman, 1987).

Culture

Culture is the totality of a people's way of life. UNESCO (2002) cited in Okafor, Onwudufor and Nnoruga (2013) defines culture as a set of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, life styles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs. The above definition reveals the complex nature of culture as a phenomenon that cuts across every facet of human life and so may not be amenable to a single definition. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defined culture as the integrated pattern of human behaviour that includes thought, speech, action and artifacts and depends on man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.

National Development

National development entails the overall growth and advancement achieved by a nation in relation to the socio-economic, psychological, political, cultural and ideological realities of its citizens. It is the development of a nation achievable through joint actions of the government and citizens (Oguaju, 2009) cited in (Awusaku, 2013). Similarly, Igwe (2005) in Awusaku (2013) defines national development as the

all round interconnected progressive transformation of man, society and nature made possible by his incremental mastery over them. It is the organized effort of a nation to raise the standard of living of its people through the development and utilization of its human, material and physical resources (Orisa, 2013). It involves the process of progressive creation of conditions in which citizens are able to exercise and utilize under the rule of law, all their rights, socially, politically and economically (Orisa, 2013).

Theoretical Framework **Structural Functionalist Paradigm**

This theoretical approach owes its origin to Auguste Comte (1798-1857) a French sociologist born during the industrial revolution and at the eve of the French revolution. He viewed society like an organism with structure (parts) undergoing change. This is known as organic analogy (Ekpenyong, 1993). Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim later developed and expanded the work of Conte. Structural functionalism centres on the analysis of social statics that is, with the stability and order of society. The society is made up of different parts that are organized or structured in such a way they become mutually interrelated. The major parts, according to Conte are the family, polity, economy and religion (Ekpenyong, 1993). These parts perform certain functions necessary for the survival and persistence of a society (Anderson & Taylor, 2005). Structural Functionalist assumes that social institutions would be redundant unless they continued to contribute to society. Institutional roles in the society are said to be complementary in nature. The role of one institution complements that of another. Religion and culture contribute to social stability and also promote value consensus among members of a society (Awusaku, 2013). Religious beliefs and cultural values give people in the society together for meaningful national development striving.

A Glance at Nigerian National Development Portrait

The needs to achieve sustainable national development occupy a place of prominence in responsible governments' scheme of things. The ultimate target of every responsible government in the globe is to achieve appreciable rate of national development for Nigeria, the contrary is the case as its national development portrait has remained phantasmagoric since independence in 1960. The nation, as observation and events in the country have shown, is in a retrogressive march to national development. It seems to have lost its direction (Anyanwu & Brown, 2013). The first Nigeria's national development plan in Nigeria was the Ten-year plan for development and welfare (1946-1955). This failed as a result of constitutional changes at the time. This was followed by the 1955-1960 national development plan which was not implemented at all, possibly due to seeming exist of the colonial masters for Nigeria's independence in 1960 (Anyanwu & Brown, 2013).

Nigeria's achievement of political independence in 1960 was followed by their enunciation of the objectives of her national development plans; a more made to increase the real income of average citizen; to reduce dependency on foreign power, to reduce unemployment; to distribute income more evenly develop better, reliable and more efficient technology (Anyanwu & Brown, 2013).

Nigeria has also drafted several other national development plans such as the first national development plan-1962-1968; the second national development plan – 1970-1974; the third national development plan -1975-1980; the fourth national development plan – 1980-1985; (Anyanwu & Brown, 2013). At the expiration of the fourth National development plan in December 1985 a one year economic emergency programme was initiated in 1986. Later, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which was then projected to last for two years was introduced. It was then that the government decided to stop the traditional 5 years planning program for a 3 year rolling plan which will be operated along a 15-20 year perspective plan and the annual budget (Obikezie & Obi, 2004).

Other major strategic initiatives such as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy; the strategy for attaining the Millennium Development Goals and the 7 point Agenda were not seem to have been effectively implemented. The Nigeria vision 20:2020 which expressed the aspiration for Nigeria to become one of the top 20 economics in the world by 2020. The attainment of Vision 20:2020 would enable the citizens (www.commonwealth/thngo). 2020 has come and gone and Nigeria could still not

be found among the great and top economics of the world. Regrettably, Nigeria might soon be listed among the poorest countries of the world given the way things are going.

The Relevance of Religion and Culture in Human Society

It is commonly said that whatever that has no relevance ceases to exist. Religion and culture are associated with a myriad of relevance and so hope to outlive other social-cultural institutions in the society. Religion and culture are intimately by interrelated, each influencing the other as they jointly influence the society, which in turn influences them (Akama, 1997). Religion and culture shape and influence the moral life of members of the society. Religion and culture have a catalogue of ethics, moral values and norms which they uphold and inculcate into members of the society. This helps to achieve a stable society. Every religion and culture have got its essence which stands for the good of man and society.

Religion functions to uphold the norms of a society and culture functions to provide a pattern of life acceptable order. Religion and culture are twin sisters that function for the socialization of individuals in the society (Akama, 1997). When religion is functioning alongside with culture, it purifies, refines and rids culture of obnoxious and inhuman elements capable of endangering the existence of society. Religion and culture perform unification function as they unite persons from different economic and education background. Unity and social cohesion cannot be separated from social progress and development.

The Role of Religion in National Development

The role of religion in national development cannot be under estimated. Religion performs integrative function in the society. It inculcates in people the value of tolerance, peaceful cooperation, love, spirit of team work, and friendliness needed to move the society, nation, organizations and institutions forward (Oshewolo & Maren, 2015). Religion ensures integrative or coordinated management system in an institution which according to Orisa (2013) is one of the indices of national development.

Religion inculcates God-consciousness in people. This is one of the cardinal factors that influence a person's morality. The result of this is godly character. Godly character no doubt is the foundation of national development as it induces honesty, good citizenship, obedience to law and constituted authority, respect for life, respect for life, respect for the rights of others, good sense of judgment, dignity or labour and personnel integrity and so on. All these qualities or values will invariably reflect on all aspects of our national life, thus paving way for socio-economic transformation and ultimately national development.

Similarly religion is known to be an instrument of social control of behaviour. It brings crime rates and corruption to check in every society. Without religion, the whole humanity would have been engulfed in gross darkness as evils would have over flooded the entire humanity. Religion eradicates social evils which plague the society. It is hoped that evils in Nigeria will be eradicated as adherent of various religions sincerely embrace the tenets of faith and teaching of their religions (Kitaase & Achunike, 2013).

Religion has contributed to reduction of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria through their engagement in poverty eradication programmes, economic empowerment of indigent members and others in the society through the establishment of skills acquisition centres where members are trained in computer programming, bakery and confectionaries, hair dressing, tailoring, interior decoration, GSM repairs etc. This contribute to national development by improving the living standard of the beneficiaries. Religion contribute to politics and development of democracy through restraining or criticizing the conduct of government, encouraging political participation, promoting democratic values and norms, articulating and aggregating distinctive societal interests (Oshewolo & Maren, 2015) for the purpose of fostering good governance and national development.

Cultural Values and National Development

Like religion, culture plays enormous role in national development. Culture is one of the sources of societal morality and a major agent of socialization in the society. No one can talk about moral development of members of any society without mentioning or awarding high marks to culture in this regard. Cultural attitudes, beliefs, skills and dispositions that render him or her morally mature or adequate human being read to contribute meaningfully to national development (Perkarsky, 1998). In many parts of Africa especially

among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria, social justice (encapsulated in their aphorism – Egbe bere, Ugo bere) forms an integral part of the people’s cultural values. It entails among others, the need to stick to accountability, transparency, responsibility, honesty and probity in dealing with other individuals, groups and government. Cultural values are a source of human and national development. The value system of people is unquantifiable in the life of a nation aspiring for rapid national development (Opara, 2013).

Issues and Challenges of Religion and Culture in the 21st Century

Religion and culture have got a lot of issues and challenges to contend in this 21st century among which are religious extremism, corruption, religious abuse, obnoxious cultural practices, gender segregation in some cultures and the influence of globalization. Religion has been abused or misused by unscrupulous individuals in the society who are either clerics or politicians or ordinary members of a certain religious sects to caused untold hardship and misery to many cities and individuals (Nwokoye, 2006). Ethno-religious crises have continued to plague Nigeria since her independence in 1960. The Sharia crisis which raged in the North in 2000 threatened the peace and unity of Nigeria. Before the year 2000, there were Kaduna crisis (1982), Zango Kataf crisis (1992) Bauchi crisis (1991), 1987 Jos crisis (2001), Illorin crisis (1986), Bulunkatulu uprising in Maduguri (1982) and Maiduguri riots (2004) (Nwokoye, 2006) are typical examples.

The emergence of the Islamic extremist sect Boko Haram worsened the problems associated with religious extremism in Nigeria as they continue to unleash terror on residents of Borno, Kano, Katsina, Bauchi, Yobe States etc.

Religious leaders in Nigeria have not been able to live up to expectation; they often manifest characters that negate the tenets of faith and teachings of their religions. They often do not practice what they preach. Some clerics are brazenly involved in corrupt practices.

Some cultures in Nigeria are still involved in obnoxious practices such as discrimination against some individual on the basis of what is called Osu caste system. They are not allowed to break kolanut, bless traditional wine meant for libation in honour of ancestors, among the so called Diala, or hold Ezeship title etc. This will not make for social cooperation and national integration needed for national development.

Women are still being discriminated against in many parts of the country as they are merely seen and not heard. They are not allowed to take up leadership positions in the society as the men dominate and subjugate them to play second fiddle in almost everything in the society. Most of our cultural values lack the inherent capability to meet up and compete favourably with other cultural values in the western world. They could hardly be accepted in the global arena as valid and salubrious cultural practices that will enable the practitioners the opportunity to maximally develop their socio-economic political talents for meaningful contributions to national development

Conclusion

Religion has been the most abused and manipulated phenomenon in the society today as seen in the way. It is been used by unscrupulous clerics and politicians to unleash terror and violence on the society just to serve selfish interests. Culture on its own; have given room for oppression and discrimination against certain individuals in the society without any legally based or cogent reason for that. Religion and culture despite the above and other issues have remained outstanding in their role in national development of any nation when properly utilized by practitioners.

Suggestions

The paper therefore makes the following suggestions as they way forward:

1. Religious leaders and their various adherents should endeavour to live by examples, practice what they preach and hear in order to influence others in the society to embrace religions and their various tenets as changing agents in the society and instruments of national development.

2. Religious extremists should have a rethink and change their attitude for their personnel good and that of the entire Nigerian society.
3. Cultural values should be rid of all forms of obnoxious and discriminating practices in order to give culture a real human face it needed from contribution to national development.
4. The government should join forces with religious leaders in order to wage a serious war against terrorism and corruption, which have remained the bane of our national development.

References

- Ajaegbu, O. O. (2012). "Religion and national development in Nigeria". *American Academic and Scholarly Research Journal* 4(4): www.aasrj.org/aasrj.
- Akama, E. S. (1997). Religion, culture and society. In E S Akama (Ed) *Man and his religion*. Lagos: Jetin's International Ltd.
- Anderson, M. L & Taylor, H. F. (2005). *Sociology: The essentials*. Australia: Thompson Learning Inc.
- Awusaku, C. U. (2013). "The indispensability of the church in Nigeria's quest for peace, security crime-free society and national development" *IAUE Journal of Social Sciences*, 10 (3): 293-315.
- Ekpenyong, S. (1993). *Elements of sociology*. Lagos: African Heritage Research and Publications.
- Igwe, O. (2005). *Politics and globe dictionary*. (New edition), Aba: eagle Publishers.
- Johnston, D. & Sampson, C. (1994). *Religion: The missing dimension of statecraft*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kitause, R. H. & Achunike, H. C. (2013). "Religion in Nigeria from 1900-2103". *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(18): 45-57 www.iiste.org.
- Madumere, N. F., Awusaku, C.U. & Onu, B. O. (2020). "Psychosocial issues of religious fanaticism, insecurity and national development in Nigeria" *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations (IJRHR)*, 12(1):131-155.
- McGee, R. (1980). *Sociology: An introduction*: New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Nwokoye, N. A. (2006). Management of religious crisis for sustainable democracy in Nigeria. In E.A Obi & O.S.A Obikeze (Eds): *Contemporary social issues in Nigeria*. Onitsha: Book Point Ltd.
- Obikeze, O. S.A & Obi, E. A (2004). *Public administration in Nigeria: A developmental approach*. Onitsha: Book Point Ltd.
- Ofusaia, J. N. & Eboh, R. N. (2015). "Education as an instrument of social change on the Nigerian society". *Nigerian South-South Journal of Social Studies and Civic Education*, 9 (8): 42-52.
- Oguaju M. C. (2009). *Nigerian York: Key to national development*. Abuja: University of Abuja press.
- Okafor, V. E., Onwudufor, F. O. F. & Nnoruga, A. S. (2013). "Violence against women: socio-cultural impediments to national development". *IAUE Journal of Social Sciences*. 10 (3): 129-143.
- Opara, O. U. (2013). "Ethics and Nigeria's national development in the 21st century: A sociological perspective". *IAUE Journal of Social Sciences* 10 (3): 272-291.
- Orisa, A. A. (2013). "Impact of ethnicity on Nigeria's national development" *IAUE Journal of Social Sciences* 10 (3): 144-153.
- Oshewole, R. M. & Maren, B. A . (2015). "Religion and Politics in Nigeria". *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 6 (63), 1-12.
- UNESCO (2002). <http://www.UNESCO.org/education/imld/2003/universaldeccl>.
- Usman, Y. B. (1987). *The manipulation of religion in Nigeria 1977-1987* Kaduna: Vanguard Printer.
- Yesufu, M. L. (2016). "The impact of religion on a secular state: The Nigerian experience" *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 42 (1): www.scielo.org.29 retrieved 15/2/22 by 6.20pm.