

**RELIGION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:
AN APPRAISAL**

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ABSTRACT:

Religion has a lot of role to play in economic and sustainable development. The country is facing problems of under development that are evidenced in educational sector, social, political and economic deterioration. This paper seeks to discover the reason for the lack of development and look at the various roles religion can play in the sustainable development of Nigeria. The researcher applies phenomenological approach in tackling the subject matter, and it was discovered that corruption, religious intolerance and lack of good governance contributed largely to this underdevelopment. It also discovered that religion has played cardinal roles in growth of our society through the establishment of mission schools and churches. This work recommends that the government should not isolate religion to the background, since religion is found in every strata of the government.

Keywords: *Religion, Sustainable, Economic, Development, Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION:

Religion has been criticized by scholars due largely to the suffering and devastation humans had had over the centuries due

to wars caused or justified by religion. The Islamic jihad, the Crusades, the European religious wars are some of the example. It is the negative manifestations that Bertrand Russell regards religion as a source of untold misery to the human race. However, religion builds a conceptual framework on which human qualities are developed. It is worthy to note that religion has been the foundation for the sanctity of human life, fundamental equality of all men, men's liberty, anti-slavery and favorable attitude, religious freedom domestic stability and favorable attitude to work.

RELIGION DEFINED

Religion is a system beliefs or practices concerning an object, person unseen or imaginary being or system of thought considered to be supernatural sacred divine. It is a structure within which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued; usually among a community of lie-minded believers (John and Sampson 1994). Religion can be found in all new human societies. An examination of the earlier societies shows strong suggestions of religious signs and observances. Religion has continued to be a significant part of societies and human experience, shaping how individuals react to the society which they live (Fagbamila, David and Issa 2014).

Defining development, Akwalla (2009) posits that development is a process that includes; physical development which includes man-made goods produced by the use of technology, personal development which included the Psychological directions of individuals and cultural development which comprises of the values norms and traditions of a society. Seers (1979), posits that the reason for development in any given society is to reduce inequality, unemployment and poverty. Sen (1999) holds that

development is a complete process involving a multidimensional view of poverty or inadequacy that includes illiteracy, illness and poor health condition, hunger noiselessness humiliation, powerlessness, insecurity, and an absence of access to basic infrastructure. Dambisa (2010), opines that most African countries are confronted with major developmental challenges orbiting on leadership, corruption, insecurity of varied degree like kidnapping, terrorism, child trafficking, ritual killings, armed robbery and the most endemic problem poverty is also wreaking. The scholar also adds that "There is no denying the fact that all these indices of backwardness are similar to what is operating in our country today.

Nigeria is struggling with such problems such as illiteracy, hunger, poor health, humiliation, unemployment and expectations of accelerated development seem difficult to realize. Today, some of the citizens of Nigeria feel frustrated, not cared for, no basic amenities like water and light while corruption is found in every strata of the government and the church, nepotism is growing rapidly in the hands of political fathers or mentors. Nigeria economy is in grim and the state is in economic recession, money has no value, garri is on the high side, corruption is on high side destroying every aspects of human life. In addressing the present condition of the nation, President Muhammandu Buhari, during Eid-el-filtri, called for fervent prayers for the country. He emphasized that the present predicament where we are today is enormous; indigenous people of Biafra, economic recession, lack of development in agricultural and mining sectors, and lack of patriotism (Nwabughioaga 2016).

The state of the nation has greatly affected her quest for improved

quality of life of her citizen as poverty, unemployment and starvation still pervade the nook and cranny of the country. A developed country is one that can provide basic needs for her citizenry, provide infrastructure, good road network, regular light and constant payment of salary to workers and pensions to retirees, building of good schools, hospitals, and market make life meaningful to the people. Nigeria in the last fifty years has been battling with problems of development inspite of abundant materials and natural resources in her possession. William (1990), general misconception is that religion and development do not mix; that religion and development can and do go together. He further asserts that Nigeria's development in the past, would have charted and therefore taken a different course, and may have a slower rate of development. Following this view, Adeyomo (2002), resounds the views of Durkheim, Karl Mark and Max Weber on the role of religion on social institutions such as economic and politics. He posits that religion is an interactive force in a society because it has the potential to shape collective beliefs. It provides cohesion in social order by promoting a sense of belonging in collective enterprises. It is against this backdrop that this work sets to assess the role of religion in economic and sustainable development. This work will assess Christianity and African Traditional Religion; it will look at the background of the two religions and their contribution to sustainable development.

RELIGION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Christianity is a religion that was established in Palestine through the person and activities of Jesus of Nazareth. It is not easy to set an exact date when Christianity began. Some people have suggested that the historic visit of the Holy Ghost to the Apostles

to be the official date for the beginning of the church. This view neglects the fact that beginning of Christianity cannot be removed from the ministry of Jesus. It is therefore, safer to say that Christianity cannot be removed from the ministry of Jesus Christ.

African Traditional Religion is the term that is used to describe the religion that was founded by our fore-bears in Africa. This term seems to be the most comprehensive title that best explains all the religious experience and religious features that were articulated and conserved by the founders of various tribes in Africa. The word Traditional, according to the New Webster's Dictionary of the English Edition, refers to what has been communicated from the ancestors to descendants. Thus, African Traditional Religion can be described as the religion that was communicated to the Africans by their ancestors. The best understanding of the concept in which the word "traditional" is used to describe the religion will be objectively possible when it is viewed as the religion. "Traditional" is not to refer to as something of the past, it is only to be indicated. It is undergirded by a fundamentally indigenous value system and that it has its own pattern with its own historical inheritance and tradition from the past. In other word, it is an indigenous religion which evolved from the life and culture of the Africans and has been in transmission from generation to generation. African traditional Religion was not borrowed from any of the world's religions. Rather, it is a distinct religion which distinct features evolved gradually through the years from the practices and experience of the forebears. The history of the religion is traced to the history of the origin of African continent. The founders of the religion were no less than the father (of blessed memory) of Africa. African Traditional Religion is therefore, the indigenous religion of

Africans. Infact, it can be called the original religion and indeed the very first religion practiced in the continent before the advent of other religions especially Christianity and Islam.

The Christian Church today is seeking to evangelize and disciple large members of the people in Africa. Their religious background is African Traditional Religion. In order to build bridges of Communication with them, their traditional religious beliefs and practices must be understood. All learning proceeds from the known to the unknown. What the person believes and knows form the basis for further knowledge. Therefore, someone who wants to communicate with others must know those people well. This is true in every area of communication whether in teaching or public speaking. Therefore, the study is necessary in order to evangelize and disciple the people of Africa for Christ effectively. Many Christians turn to African Traditional Religion in time of crisis.

Witchcraft and sorcery are great temptation. People even Christians resorted to the ancestral spirit for help during time of trouble. The traditional help from the witchdoctor is often felt need during times of crises. The Christian Church must inquire why this is so and what should be done to help the people? What does the scripture say concerning these problems? In order to answer these questions, a thorough understanding of African Traditional Religion must be achieved. The Christian Church in Africa needs to develop her faith so that it becomes truly rooted in the life of the people.

The gospel in its true content is unchanging. The gospel is applied to all men and women in every culture because it is God's message to all mankind. The human race is one. All people have

descended from Adam and Eve. All people in Adam have fallen away from God. Christ is the answer to the spiritual need of every one. But the manner of worship, the expression of praise and thanks to God, must be shaped in part by each culture. The music of the church should be rooted in traditional culture. The gifts of helps and governing within the church should be taken on a local flavor. The Holy Spirit stamps everyone with the mark of divine life but this life then reflects the different cultures of the human race. The Eucharist in our churches should be Africanized with our culture and tradition, local music, dancing and drumming should be encouraged in our worship. Today, there is a cry throughout Africa for a real, genuine and authentic African worship, not a Christianity that is half foreign, but a Christianity that has stamp of African seal and culture on it.

One might be tempted especially the young and the immature, to think or imagine that religion is irrelevant to cultural evolution and growth. To dispel such illusion or self-deception it might be necessary to preface what we are going to say by the assertion that: religion is an essential and inseparable aspect of human existence as culture itself. Religion and Culture are so intimately related and connected that in reality it is quite impossible for a society to have a culture without religion or to have religion without culture. In essence, a living religion can be looked up as inseparable from culture. Though religion and culture are not identically one and the same thing, one basic truth is that no culture has ever appeared or develop except together with a religion, therefore religion and culture are two inseparable facts of one human reality. As religion revives and illuminates culture, culture give flesh and substance to religions; as culture incarnate religion, religion redeems and saves culture (Anyanwu 2004). According to Idowu:

Religion is very much and always with us. It is with us at every moment of life in our inner most beings and with regards to the great or minor events of life; it is discussed daily in the newspapers through the radio and television and in our conversations. It is with all of us inevitably; whatever may be our individual avowed attitudes to it (Idowu, 1973)

Religion has always served a purpose which belongs to the very fabric of life itself. Briefly stated, religion has a duty to contribute to:

According to (Anyanwu 2004), he posits that religion has the urgent task of enlightening the people. It has to guide people by exhortation and programmed measures of action in serious task of wiping out mass illiteracy. Among the traditionalists, Religion in alliance with educational institution always strives to discourage senseless imitation of foreign culture. In Ibibioland especially Ikono and Ini, we have no need to sell our authentic way of life and cultural heritage to other people.

Our culture has got its own magnanimous values such as respect for elders and human life, and the liberty of man, love, truth and honesty, social justices and equality of opportunity, parental authority and filial loyalty, domestic solidarity, authority in the service of the people, integrity in the administration of public trust, belief in retribution and reward after death. All these are the noble values we cannot safely abandon or exchange without social calamity and they are all preserved through religious sanctions.

Not every aspect of a culture is good, functional or acceptable. There could be some elements of its institutions and practices which if allowed persisting for a long time would stultify and degrade that culture. It is these cultural purifying truths that religion fearlessly and ceaselessly impresses on the minds and will of the people. Religion therefore purifies the culture by removing obnoxious cultural practices. It is now a matter of common knowledge that our culture is battling desperately against inspired cultural cancer such as bribery bureaucracy and nepotism, authoritarianism, powermania, mammonism, leadership crisis and lack of compassion for the common man. All the above symptoms or culture malaise and disorder are foreign to the fundamental values of our culture. To defend our culture against all these symptoms of socially ability is the task to which our religions must diligently and courageously address themselves. Religious sense, spirit and sobriety must prevail if our culture is to be saved from foreign cultural incursions and depredations.

Closely allied to its function of popular enlightenment, religion has a duty to promote, develop and patronize the culture of the people. The salient points of our cultural values are not in doubt and they are clearly distilled and preserved in our proverbs, idioms and institutions. Religion in its effort to promote and develop culture shall be expected to see that culture is reinforced and enriched by those essential values and achievement which humanity in general considers as essential to the pursuit of order, peace, progress and happiness. Religion has also sustained the educational sector by establishing schools, mass illiteracy program planning and training courses. Religion has also worked hard to make sure that we have a quality education. This was made clear when some states return schools to the owners.

(missionary/churches eg Lutheran, Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist.

One concept of right and wrong, virtue and vice comes from religion. Considering the fact that there is need for good and harmonious living, religion becomes essentially very indispensable in people's lives. We are not quite aware that many societies can afford to exist in the absence of morality, trust, justice, liberty, truth, goodness and faithfulness. Only religion provides these. Therefore for any society to be in love, peace and harmony, its citizen must be imbued with the good life provided through moral education. It is only religion that teaches one to develop a sense of duty, to eschew evil, bribery, corruption, nepotism and tribalism.

Ejim (2010), observed the peculiar character of Christian and Islamic economic principles of interest-free loan helped greatly in developing our nation. By this, the rural dwellers can easily borrow from their religion, and feel rest assured that the burden will not be too much for them. This encourages increase in food production and business venture. Religions encourage her groups especially members to embark on farming by providing soft loan and fertilizer to her members. Most religion embarks on palm oil plantation, and pineapple farms to help boost the finances of the church. Religion also encourages her adherent to be really committed in farming work as no religion encourages laziness. Some religions go into fishery, poultry, Snail and Piggery to help sustain her church especially now that here is a great controversy on tithe payment.

Religion has helped a lot in this sector. It has helped a lot of people to have good healthcare services. Looking at our country

today, some of the best hospitals today is run by the church e.g St. Luke's Hospital Anua in Uyo, Methodist Hospital in Itumbang, St. Joseph Rehabilitation center at Ukana Iba, Leprosy Home at Usuakoli, all these hospitals have gone a long way to boost the health sector of our Country and are at affordable cost. Religion has played tremendous effect on the political world, spiritually, ecclesiastically and temporarily. In the spiritual arena, religion made inroad for women leadership and later ordination. In Methodist Church, John Wesley encouraged members to be involved in public administration. Thus a lot of members were involved in government service in the United Kingdom, the issue continued till date. The vice President of Nigeria is a pastor in the Redeem Christian Church of God.

The Nigerian political milieu has not been satisfactorily done. Religion can bring about sustainable political development through the inculcation of high sense of duty, morality, selfless service, respect for human lives, public accountability, love of one's neighbor, sense of humanity, abhorrence of violence, (starting from Boko Haram,, Biafra war, religious intolerance etc). With religion, there is a sense of religious reawakening which is supposed to have a positive impact on the political development of the country. Religion can contribute to national integration, political mobilization, reformation and ethnic Identity, peaceful co-existence, economic social and political development (Afolabi 2015). In agreement to above, Marshall (2010), submits that the virtues inherent from the political education of these religion has effected some change and hence helped in the development of our nation.

Oboh citing Aristotle noted that, "the building of the nation is first and foremost the building of the people that make up the

nation. This effect boil down to the building of the individuals themselves." Religion has a lot of roles to play, justice, love and peace which are essential ingredients for national development are products of human heart and mind. From religion, man learns these virtues and makes efforts to do good and avoid evil. Through religion, man sees himself as a creature who owes his existence to a higher power from who man came and to whom man must render account for his/her behavior. This knowledge will definitely endear man the desire to live morally upright, because morals are the food and drink which keep the society alive, healthy and happy. Once there is moral breakdown, the whole integrity of the society also breaks down and the end is tragic.

The religious leaders through their preaching, teaching and other activities, should serve as watchdogs to politicians and public office holders. Their constant outcry against corruption, poverty, moral decay, and embezzlement of public funds, wickedness and all the evils that have retarded the rate of development in this country can go a long way in redressing the menace. The churches, mosques and traditional institutions through engagement in charity work can socially transform the less privileged ones in the society by offering scholarships and establishing schools and affordable health-care centres.

In order to be a truly successful nation and the "giant in the sun" Nigeria must give God a place of honour in its national life. Every individual who is acting, whether in private or in public, whether by day or night whether on his/her own behalf or on behalf of the nation, state, or community of which he/she form a part, should act in full awareness that the eyes of god, divinities, spirits, and ancestors are on him/her, taking note of every moral

act of his/hers and that every act posited has a corresponding reward or punishment recorded against it. If all will work in line with this knowledge or religious obligations and roles, the nation will develop evenly.

FACTORS THAT HINDER SUSTAINABLE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

1. The Vicious Circuit of Poverty:

The vicious circle of poverty refers to self-reinforcing situation whereby certain factor exists that tend to perpetuate an undesirable phenomenon. In developing countries, the vicious circle of poverty can be viewed on both the demand side and supply side. The demand side implies the low levels of demand which in turn lead to low rate of investment and corresponding lack of capital, low productivity and low income. From the supply side, low productivity implies low incomes which in turn imply low saving and low level of investment leading to deficiency of capital.

2. Health Epidemic such as HIV/AIDS:

This may apply directly due to loss of life or indirectly when person is sick, hence unproductive to the nation, hence reduces productivity. This is partly because of inadequate healthy facilities in the developing countries.

3. Corruption and Resource Mismanagement:

This has considerably hampered development as public funds meant for development have sometimes been diverted to private or family use. Funds meant for development have often been mismanaged.

4. Lack of Entrepreneurial Skills:

Entrepreneur plays a major role in development. Development of entrepreneurial skill may sometimes be hindered by government policies which in trying to maintain a particular social order may deny those with entrepreneurial talent a chance to exercise their talents.

5. Human Resource Constrains:

In many developing countries, individuals lack key skill and knowledge required for economic development. Lack of adequate skilled, human resources, lead to low productivity and factor immobility. This implies that there is low knowledge on alternative production method, natural resources and opportunities.

6. Inappropriate Policies:

In a bid to develop faster, many developing countries adopt policies that if fully implemented can lead to a very fast economic growth, but in most cases, the policies made are over-ambitious hence implementable and end up being partially implemented. This hampers growth as well.

7. Social Cultural Difference:

Economic development is affected by social attitudes. Business transaction may be limited among different communities or religious more as if they have social and cultural difference as this may inhibit geographical mobility.

CONCLUSION

Religion is characterized by dysfunctional element, most especially in Nigeria; it is also believed that it deals with abstract things, that is, conception of Supreme Being is intuitively mediated quite while science which has a conceptual knowledge

which centres on sense perception. Religion, just as its dysfunctional aspect has functional aspect as evidence in morality, truth, justice, economic development, educational and social services which it can render through its various institutions. These functional aspects can be incorporated to the benefit of the nation's development, which religious dialogue, tolerance is given its due place. Although our country is having multiplicity of region, which is the problem in Nigeria and whereas tolerance and dialogue must be the way out to bring solution and benefits of these religions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The government should give more power to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Islamic Society of Nigeria, African Traditional Specialist in promoting inter-religious dialogue and religious tolerance through organizing Seminars, Symposium, Conferences and workshops for religious adherents which will go a long way to help in building formidable and sustainable development.

2. The government needs to be proactive in promoting the culture of tolerance by adherents of religions. The best way to do that is the enlightenment of various religious adherents through the use of credible religious scholars, to imbibe the habit of reporting through the right channel.

3. The religious culture should be promoted through education and enlightenment of the masses through civil society organization, educational Institutions, mass media, social media as respect and tolerate other religions as well to respect the culture of others. It will also go a long way to stop the incessant

religious violence in Nigeria.

3. The government should as a matter of urgency restore the teaching of Christian Religious knowledge (CRK) in the curriculum to boost the knowledge of the young people; on Christian religion. It should also be made mandatory for all the pupils both in primary and tertiary education to instill our culture, moral values to our young ones.

4. Religion should be carried along in government policies to always inculcate moral principles, justice, truth; equity and honesty which is a reagent to personality change thereby reduce corruption. This is because laws and plans on eternal aspects of man exploiting scientific models are falling Nigeria.

5. The government should as matter of fact employ chaplains into various arms of government to help sanitize the polity.

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