

**THE GAINS OF THE PRACTICE OF RELIGION ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE PRE-COLONIAL AND CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

**Ogunlusi Clement Temitope And Louis Taiwo Omojola (Phd)**  
Department Of Religious Studies Ekiti State University, Ado- Ekiti

<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2023.0611>

**ABSTRACT**

Over the years, it has been observed by scholars that many countries in Africa are facing the terrible debacle of underdevelopment and Nigeria is one of Such. The challenge is vivid in her educational, social and economic depreciation. This work examined the reasons for this state and sketched what religion had impacted on the development or otherwise of the country Nigeria in the Pre-colonial and colonial period vis- a vis contemporary time to ameliorate her state. It discovers that the practice stemming from wrong understanding of religion is not out of the reasons responsible for this debacle. Descriptive and historical methods of analysis were used in this study. It was further exposed that beside venality, lack of good governance and religious intolerance contribute largely to underdevelopment in Nigeria. While it is acknowledged that religious sects have contributed significantly to national growth through the establishment of schools for formal education, hospitals for health care delivery services, instilling morals in religious and political arenas, economic development through micro loans in corporation with directorate of rural farmers and artisans, establishment of peace and justice commissions, other humanitarian services, and playing her role as a prophet and the conscience of the nation; it is also acknowledge on the other hand that religion had been used in fomenting lots of evils. The article therefore recommended an enhanced cooperation between the government and the different religions in order to further enhance peaceful co-existence and continuous national developments through those aforementioned services as it is known for in the pre-colonial and immediate post-colonial days. It further recommended continuous preaching of socio-religious values of hard work, integrity and honesty in order to fasten the bid of national development.

**Keywords:** Religion, National Development, Impacts, Revisiting, Integrity.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

It is said by the ancient philosopher, Socrates, that a life not examined is not worth living. It is time for Nigeria to go back to the drawing board to re-examine its practice of religion and assess whether it makes for national development or otherwise. A good sense of history of the Nigerian past especially during and post missionary/colonial days, as far as religion is concerned, gave a good account of positive gains or influences on Nigeria. The three dominant religions: African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam in their early times in Nigeria recorded more success than failures and these in no little way added to political struggle and emancipation from the old and primitive ways within the level of civilization of the period in question.

In simple terms, the influence of religion on education, health care delivery, corporate and social responsibility, entertainment, tourism and the likes were gains of religion. Can one recount the same gains and development today from the influence of religion in national Nigerians'

development? On the surface, Nigeria presents a picture of a people who are religious in every way; She presents a physical development structure that builds on churches and mosques in every nook and cranny of the country; She also produced millions of pastors/Imams or head of churches/mosques certified or non-certified; she has also produced many literatures proclaiming and acclaiming God; but in reality, in the contemporary time, have all these spelt well for Nigeria? Hence, this paper sets out to revisit and assess the gains or impacts of religion on national developments especially in the recent time which is bedeviled by intolerance and violence while using the progress as a comparative analysis with the time past as in the colonial and immediate post-colonial days.

### **Cursory Look at Meaning of Religion**

Since the issue at stake here is about the practice of religion, it will not be out of place to attempt a definition of Religion. One would agree that religion is a broad concept and attempting to define it is always not confined but broad as well and hence not very easy. The definition of religion is a contentious and complex issue even in the study of related subjects and researchers not agreeing on any one or precise definition. However, for the sake of clarity few definitions of religion will be considered below. Etymologically, the word religion came from the Latin word '*religio*' which originally meant obligation or bond. It was perhaps a derivative from the verb *religare* 'tie back, tie tight'. According to John Ayto, it developed the specialized sense 'bond between human beings and the gods,' and from the 5th century it came to be used for 'monastic life' ... 'religious practices' began from this, but the word's standard and modern meaning came into use in the 16th century.<sup>i</sup> However, taking a cursory look at the dictionary meaning of religion, one would see different definitions and this is still as a result of the complexities of religion. According to *The Oxford Encyclopedia English Dictionary*, religion is the belief in a superhuman controlling power, especially in a personal God or gods who is entitled to obedience and worship.<sup>ii</sup> Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices, the service and worship of God or the supernatural, commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance.<sup>iii</sup> Religion according to *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* is clearly defined as the belief in the existence of a god or gods, and actions that are associated with their worship, or one of the systems of faith that are based on the belief in the reality of a particular god or gods.<sup>iv</sup> Meanwhile, *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines it as "belief in and reverence for a supernatural authority recognized as the maker and ruler of the universe"<sup>v</sup>

Many scholars of religion have defined religion from different perspectives, and notable among them is Emile Durkheim who sees it as an integrated system of beliefs and practices relating to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, that is, those who hold to them.<sup>vi</sup> Also, Immanuel Kant aligning with Immanuel Kant sees religion as "acknowledgement of all obligations and responsibilities as divine directive to which all the believers are earnestly committed."<sup>vii</sup> One can therefore conclude that religion is itself life or a form of living such that it becomes a process, pattern or behavior woven in the fabrics of its members and has now become a culture and reflects as cultural identity in certain communities or clans. In content and as a practice, religion is a deposit or set of rituals vindicated by myths and meant as tools of communication between the human and the divine for the purpose of accomplishing or averting the transformation of the human condition. According to Ekong, religion satisfies certain common purposes like the advancement of group

solidarity (since religion is a cultural possession), consolidating moral order, advancing social control and backing for other social organizations such as schools, hospitals and welfare agencies.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Traditional Religion**

Before Christianity and Islam in Nigeria were the existence of indigenous religion upheld by our forefathers and passed on from them to their succeeding generations. One cannot trace its origin to any particular founder no matter how long one digs into history. Meanwhile, it needs to be pointed out here that Nigeria is a large country with diverse ethnic groups and varieties of culture. The best one can do in discussing Nigerian Traditional Religion is to acknowledge this diversity and to discuss straight what the traditional religion offered the people in the past and used that as a standard to pursue the course of this work, that is, the comparative analysis and then used it as well to encourage adherents in the contemporary time to do more for national developments.

J. O. Awolalu is of the opinion that the indigenous religion commonly called African Traditional Religion, is regarded by the forebears of Africans as their true religion and has passed down from generation to generation. According to him, it is the basis of the African's existence and conditions, its behavior and reactions to external stimuli. According to him, it is agreed that the lack of documentation for its spread does not limit its acceptability and subsequent development as it remains the nourishing faith embraced by the predecessors of the contemporary generation of Nigerians practiced today in many rituals and intensity by a populous number of Nigerians either openly or secretly.<sup>ix</sup>

Nigerians, particularly the traditional worshippers, believed in a world made and sustained by the Supreme Being who also created Divinities and spirits as his representatives in this terrestrial abode. In it, one has to be in Intimate touch with the Supreme being to be successful since he is the author of life and the determiner of destiny and as well be attuned to the divinities and spirits and the ancestral spirit who are the functionaries of the Supreme Being.<sup>x</sup> According to Garba Ashiwaju, the cosmology of the Nigerian traditional religionist is, in an appreciable proportion, expressed in mystery. The Supreme Being is a mysterious one who is so severed in his awesomeness and benevolence. The divinities are also awe-inspiring, probably sustenance of faith and confirmation of the ethos of the religion. The ancestors have their varying levels of anathemas that must be protectively observed to prevent horrible occurrences or tragedies.<sup>xi</sup> Consequently, the Nigeria Traditional Religion, reserves in no small dimension, a place for "mysterious beings and powers which are mystical, pre-natural and esoteric; and their comprehension is the prerogative of "those who have access to them". The possessors of these powers serve as messengers of the corresponding divinities, and in this capacity interpret their message and wishes to the people. Norton is of the opinion that the local deities that underscore microcosmic cosmologies are the ones that control the affairs of the local peoples' way of life.<sup>xii</sup>

Before the introduction of Christianity and Islam, traditional religion was a fortifying force between the members of the society. In the traditional setting, a whole community was often bound together by the requirements of the religion. For example, at the family level respect for age was inculcated in the members as a necessary ingredient of the religious beliefs, and as an extension of this demand, hard work, good neighborliness, honesty and integrity, chastity, sense of fulfillment among others were emphasized.

The age grades, secret and open societies were effective means of suppressing tensions and clash of interests. Worship involving annual or biannual celebrations which brought people together

tended to foster the peaceful existence of the community. Above all, the fear of the instant adjudication and judgment of oracles without the possibility of appeal helped to maintain orderliness, discipline as well as pilot the society according to the well-set goals.

The political power was controlled by men of the “right age, experience, and achievement. Kalu observed that “gods were the real source of primary and secondary authority while rulers were spiritualized agents”. The emphasis was on good stewardship; moderate and honest use of power remained the main objective of rulers who were constantly reminded of the destructive powers of the gods. All these were the stabilizing characteristics of traditional religion. With these they were able to make appreciable progress in their communities and by extension to the larger societies effectively.<sup>xiii</sup> In the course of time in modern Nigeria, these strong traditional institutions, beliefs and practices were weakened by various factors. The traditional religion could no longer integrate and stabilize effectively. With the introduction of Islam and Christianity, they no longer had political influence one way or the other because the stakeholders of the traditions no longer identify openly associated with the religion whereas, it could be said that traditional religion was before then a strong force to be reckoned with even among the elites.

It cannot also be denied however that the traditional religions have their challenges and limitations in the contemporary time due to their failure to engender necessary modern institutions, professional skills and technical expertise essential (such to which Lewis<sup>xiv</sup> attested) needed to sail in the torrent of major social-economic and political order of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – unlike the two other major religions with long history of trans-regional/international networks, scientific and diplomatic engagement, professionalization, and extensive traditions in literacy.

### **Christianity**

The cult of the Supreme Being in the traditional religion, which was already in existence in most parts of Africa and indeed of the Southwest of Nigeria plays crucial role in the conversion experience of the Yorubas from traditional to Christian religion as was the case in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Peel, this complex process of conversion created a new narrative that made the people to embrace the promise of Christianity’s contribution to the development of western education and of a more promising future away from devastating disruptions from protracted warfare in much of that century. For him, the interchange that assimilated native cosmology to Christianity essentially vindicates the extraordinary achievements of the Yoruba Christian Church movement, *Aladura*, at the time of colonialism during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>xv</sup>

The critics of Christian Missions in Nigeria were of the opinion that its activities were disruptive and denominationalism. But it needs to be emphasized here that the bodies were vanguards of social transformation in the various communities during the early period. Schools and hospitals were established to enhance the social life of the populace; they stood against superstitions and inhuman practices of human sacrifices. Missionary encounters in Nigeria came with the Gospel and social action. The establishment of schools, hospitals and other infrastructural developments was a major transformation force and tool in the Socio-religious lives of the people.

Christianity’s contributions to the growth of Western education in Yorubaland was introduced and championed by the different Christian missionaries from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the area under review. However, the Christian missionary effort was later complemented by the Government and Islamic religion in the area on the establishment of formal institutions. The Christian missionaries successfully made use of western education in converting Muslim and

traditional believers to Christianity in Yorubaland.<sup>xvi</sup> According to him and agreeing with Peel and Akanmidu, Christianity in Yorubaland is regarded as a stimulus of social transformation and has demonstrated non-conformist but transformist postures.<sup>xvii</sup>

### **Islam**

Islam got to the northern part of Nigeria in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and by the 19<sup>th</sup> century had secured a base in the areas. In his paper titled 'Islam in Nigeria: Its Concept and Manifestations' Muhammad Sani Umar described Islam as essentially a faith based on submission, surrender and amity. But he quickly points out that Islamic beliefs are centered on the concept of the TAWHID which forms the base upon which the totality of Islam is erected. He adds that Islam in this way is conceived more than just a religion but a cultural manner of being or existence which characterizes a group of followers – the Ummah. Examining other variables in the super – structure of Islamic belief, Umar identifies the legal system which centres on the sharia. To him, Islam has given rise to sophisticated experience including such fundamental elements of human existence as culture, law, politics, intellectual tradition etc. The resume of Islamic manifestations in pre-colonial Nigeria, according to him, cannot be limited to the ceremonials of salat, zakat and hajj but must extend to all the expressions engendered by the Islamic faith.<sup>xviii</sup>

The religion Islam has made its own tremendous mark in the life of its adherent in the country. Many institutions of education and other social welfare of the people were provided. Peter corroborated this when he said:

In pre-colonial Northern Nigeria, for instance, the dominant Qur'anic education underpinned and legitimated the Islamic state system established at that of the Muslim reform movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was also the main supplier of clerks, administrators, advisers, physicians, judges and scribes.<sup>xix</sup>

According to Awolalu, the Muslim approach to traditional religion took a method from the Christian mode. The Islamic missionary methodology did not employ an abrupt cessation with the Traditional Religion like the Christian method and this helped Islam to make a quick foothold in the land.

### **Pre-Colonial Days and Religion's Influence:**

It could be well argued that there was no Nigeria prior to Colonial incursion since the entity called Nigeria today existed then in strata of kingdoms and empires. The history of the then dwellers (later called Nigeria) could be traced to settling traders who transverses the Middle East and Africa in the early 1100 BC. Many early African civilizations established in the territory that is recognized currently as Nigeria. Some of them were: the Kingdom of Nri, the Benin Empire, and the Oyo Empire.<sup>xx</sup> At those times and within each people was a form of religion but all of them came to be called African Traditional Religions. The area called Nigeria today fell within British control in 1861 and was proclaimed a British protectorate in 1914. It was the amalgamation of Lord Lugard that brought together as one entity the structure called Nigeria. Even before this, it was begun as a northern protectorate as distinct from the Southern protectorate. Meanwhile the original dwellers of the land who had existed hundreds and thousands of years before their advent were Hausas, Igbos and Yorubas, just on a broad scale. Within these there were various ethnicities. The Fulanis came much later and just about two hundred years ago. Nigeria gained independence in 1960 and

became a republic in 1963. Within this framework, it might not be easy to put together what religious influence had been on each of these nation states as whole unless discussed in their respective stratum. The interaction of religions in pre-colonial Nigeria was mutual and reciprocal; though it cannot be denied that there were some pockets of crises then but also were rational development during that time. There is no doubt that the pre-Independence Era in Nigeria witnessed a situation under which different religions helped to shape the societies in Nigeria. As remarked by Ekoko and Amadi, the practice of traditional religion helped to fashion out a situation where groups of people participated in rituals and culturized relationships with their culturally postulated supernatural beings. To him, such a situation may not always be wholesome but in spite of this, the whole societies were bound by the requirement of such a religion and guaranteed societal stability and cohesion.

### **State of Nigeria Development**

To start with, it is very imperative to define what national development is. Different scholars have defined it from their own perspectives. In the first instance, it could be expounded as the capability of a nation or countries to advance and enhance the social wellbeing of its members by readily making available social services and comforts like education, portable water, transport, infrastructure, medical care and the like.<sup>xxi</sup> National development is also referred to as a nation's proficiency in improving the lives of her citizens or its penchants to work towards the improvement and creation of better lives for its citizens, indigenous or foreign, native of subjects. Such yardsticks of improvement could be material or social in which the material facet of the development may involve a growth in the gross domestic product (GDP) and in social viewpoint may mean literacy level and accessibility of health-care. National development means the experiences that refine a nation's determination inspired towards a positive growth in political, economic, religious, social as well as the educational sector. It also embraces the course of revolution in all aspects of the nation's existence not losing sight of peaceful coexistence among the various clans in the nation<sup>xxii</sup>.

However, studies have shown that although it could be affirmed that Nigeria had made some progress in recent years, in spite of these, its human capital development ranked very low as it is between 150 – 157 countries in the World Bank's 2020 Human Capital Index. This is highly discouraging as the country continues to have steady developmental challenges and hence making it to be backward among the comity of nations. The country's continuous dependence on oil has an adverse effect on her economy. There is a need to diversify to other areas such as agriculture or technology and other ventures that could improve the economy. This would be achieved if the nation or its leadership can address insufficient infrastructure, build formidable and professional and well-organised institutions; formulate standard, effective and lasting policies on economy and governance which is based on positive ideological principle; and more importantly its culture address of profligacy in governance as well as other aspects of social life.

In Nigeria, there is a high level of disparity or inequality in terms of income distribution. The same applies to job or employment distribution and opportunities. This is quite intentional on the part of the government. It crept in the form of a quota system aimed at bridging the gap of development within the regions in the country. This, rather than alleviating, has made the level of poverty increase the most. This is so because, rather than competency and expertise, affinity and ethnic sentiment are employed at service rendered to the nation. Hence, a destruction of the developmental and growth mechanisms of the both the economic and governance system thereby

resulting in systemic failure of the whole growth structure of the nation. There are so many unemployed graduates resulting in more poverty, inflation weighs high on household dwindling income and unstable welfare and eventual socio-political unrest, insecurity. All these projected as of 2020 to have pushed an additional 7 million Nigerians into poverty.<sup>xiii</sup> The question here is: are these challenges attributable to religious sources? If that applies, to what extent can we say religion is responsible?

### **Trends in the Practice of Religion in Nigeria and Reasons for the Deterioration**

It is good to bear in mind that Nigeria is one of the most populous countries in the world; indeed, the most populous of the countries of the black people. In the same vein, its people are commonly regarded as the most religious in the world. This fact may rightly or wrongly account for the reason why there are so many positive developments as well as negative ones accruing daily from her practice of religion.

#### ***Some Negative Trends:***

1. **Ignorance:** Among the negative trends in the practice of Religion in Nigeria is the lack of the understanding of the meaning and practice of religion. When one misses the understanding of the meaning, essence and objective of a matter, it necessarily follows that his practice of that matter will be out of the right track. This is the bane of the practice of religion in Nigeria or among many Nigerians including many so-called religious leaders. This ignorance of the meaning of religion has led in many ways to wrong teachings of the tenets of faith particularly in Christianity and Islam. The first result of this is of course fanaticism.
2. **Fanaticism:** Fanaticism in effect produce those who are either slothful and spent their useful and productive times in the church or on the mountain praying while they should be working; or people who are so overzealous in the defence of their religion or faith to the point they begin to destroy others' property or even kill fellow humans for their God/god and regard this as divine injunction. While the former set of people (slothful) do not contribute any meaningful impact to development (whether national or personal), the second set of people (the Zealots), in their turn, destroy what is meaningful and already established in the national development. These two sets of people are found not only among the commoners or street urchins but also among well placed citizens of the country who are holding high and sensitive positions but slowing down or destroying the national development course with their backward mindset. They introduce wrong policies or intentionally or unintentionally into the system and in their mediocrity and bigotry enforce or impose them on others.
3. **Struggle for Supremacy:** Sheepishly or egotistically, there is struggle for supremacy among the main religions especially in Christianity and Islam. This struggle is expressed in the spirit of domineering. The North of the country was expressly evangelized by Islam while the South was predominantly taken by Christianity. Both sides were equally blessed with numbers from the other, that there were many Muslims in the south and at the same time lots of Christians in the North either as natives or migrants. This is of course expected. But the problem comes when one religion wants to claim or convert all from pillar to post of the entire country. There is no way there won't be problems. The worst is when those who are privileged to be at the helm of affairs try to use the governmental apparatus to aid

this anomaly. Take for example, in 1986 during his regime, General Ibrahim Babangida, signed up Nigeria with the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). This, according to Isiramen, sowed the seeds of religious debacle in the country and both Christianity and Islam intensified their struggle for supremacy and dominance as a result of this religious sentiment on the part of the leadership of the country.<sup>xxiv</sup> This struggle led to various strategies of domination. For example, the introduction of religious legal system/code of a particular religion into the system and enshrining it into the constitution in a secular state is seen by many as convenient strategy not only to destabilize the country but empower themselves who actually thrive in chaos but on the long run never record lasting success or achievements. This act, to a large extent, has heated the polity, caused lots of upheavals and loss of lives.

4. **Untrained Religious Leaders:** To where exactly should one attribute or trace all these problems? Will it be wrong at this point to attribute them to wrong leaderships both in religion and in our inexcusably political leaders? Today in Nigeria, there are too many (to be counted) self-acclaimed men of God, 90% noncertified, who are misleading the vast majority, another 90%, of the people. They have no formal education or none at all in what they are claiming. Once only able to read the scripture, they lay claim to divine inspiration and call, soar in their voices to mislead even learned people. Imagine where professors sit down quietly and attentively listening to an unschooled prophet or pastor or self-acclaimed priest who prophesied to him and he had to follow up diligently as if it was a scientific postulation. One asks: where is wisdom, logic, common sense and prudence? This is not to say or deny that anyone cannot be used by God as an instrument or medium of His message but where any dick, tom, harry and jerry become messenger or medium and without being tutored in this discipline, then there is a problem. Even Jesus the Master took time and pain to select among his many followers, call them disciples (meaning pupils, students or followers for the sake of learning) tutor and certify them, graduate them with the title Apostles (meaning those who are sent) before they began their mission. It is unacceptable, whereby one wakes up in the morning and claims that in his sleep he had vision of a call and thereby acclaim himself a preacher, prophet, pastor or priest. What do you expect in a society where this order is the order and becomes the order of the day?

The question is, are there no learned ones among them? Yes, there are. But as Wole Soyinka said, “there are prophets and there are prophets”. There are cases of learned and sincere men of God whereas there are many others who take the advantage of their learnedness to cheat and exploit others. Where knowledge is, in turn, meant for aggrandizement of the self, selfish economic gains, fame and recognition seeking, flamboyant and extravagant lifestyle and the likes, where the flock is wallowing in abject poverty, crass ignorance and already missing the essence of religion, that is, peace and comfort here while on earth and salvation of the soul hereafter. When this constitutes the understanding of religion then the gains are of negative trend. Should one begin again to enumerate the result of this kind of setback that this wrong understanding of the meaning of religion or outright lack of it has caused the course of nation and individual developments in the Nigerian society and history. Destruction of lives and property, destruction of positive and creative ideas and policies that would have helped raise the country into greater heights and limelight are the gains accruing from this bane. Where

---

ignorance and wrong knowledge reigns, backwardness and systematic destruction of institutions are the only recorded achievements and gains.

### ***Some Positive Trends***

It will be totally wrong to downrightly dismiss the many wonderful and positive gains religion had brought to the nation or slaughter them on the altar of the negative outcomes. From the time past and even now, religion has shaped the making of Nigeria and Nigerians. The ideological mindset and psyche of Nigeria today is not shaped by any other than the mainstream religions. Hence, if there is anything good to talk about in Nigeria of the colonial and pre-colonial days and even in the contemporary time, it cannot be outside the influence of the three main religions. From time, the establishment of formal educational institutions started by the missions. This is also the same of health care delivery institutions as well as many vocational centres.

Many of our leaders today were products of genuine mission influence. This was before the colonial administration came in with their own influence which of course was purposely for the advancement of their countries and not the colonies. Colonial masters helped only to the extent to make the indigenous people read and write so as to be useful for their course. But the Missions came not only to evangelize but to raise not only the morale of the people; to help them to be able to help themselves. This missionary spirit still permeates the mind and psyche of many Nigerians and hence always ready to advance the course of genuine development in the country. Many of these people still work with honest minds and attend to others and matters of national interest with godly dispositions. Their efforts are crowned with the little developments and sanity around us.

### **Contemporary Evaluation of Religion's Contributions to National Development**

It is very evident that it is not the influence, social and physical/structural development that used to be in the pre-colonial and the colonial period that religion is now or still exacting in Nigeria. Some may want to prove that religion is still doing most of those services and building structures in Nigeria, yes, this is quite true, but in the present time, religion is used as a tool of discourse more than any other thing. It is arguable that the social developments of the pre-colonial and colonial days and immediate post-independence days of our fathers are much better than the experiences of our contemporary time. Most developments of those times were selfless, and in the spirit of health rivalry geared towards the common good.

In fact, according to Garba Ashiwaju, the proclamation of the Nigeria Traditional Religion as anti-colonial and proto-Nationalist has helped to fashion out a seed of discord which neither Islam nor Christianity could exterminate. Rather, events of this period extrapolated a clear programme of disunity among the rank and file of these principal religions on the baseless claim of superiority of one over the other.<sup>xxv</sup>

Contemporary time is setting high records in the development of individuals and not the populace at large. How many political leaders or elites in the country today are even richer than the country itself? How many church leaders today in Nigeria are recorded among world leading wealthy proprietors globally or how many are, in the name of God, world's first-class capitalists?

The answer is written on the open board. Religion has become, away from the opium of the people as Karl Marx puts it, the best of business ventures, whether in large or small scale, where there must be profit even if it is at the detriment of the helpless, hapless, downtrodden faithful believers. How can anyone see more development in the contemporary time when what Reinhold Neibuhr called the culture of 'narcissistic hedonism' is the order of the day. According to him, rather than

self-love, solidarity for the pursuit of the common good should be the law of human existence since man's wellbeing and community peace can only be guaranteed only if he is selfless and removed from the self-effacing consequences of self-love. But the opposite is the case in Nigeria where in most situations, the love of self has taken over the love for the common good.

Unfortunately, according to Imaekhai, this kind of prophetic fervor which Neibuhr implied has been declining since the 1970s in the religions of Nigeria. Religious life in the country, to the extent that we can speak of it, is now marked more by "sentimental self-flagellation" rather than by "substantive social consciousness" solely because the nation's life is suffering from "social amnesia", a disease that prevents systemic social understanding of power, prosperity, and influence in society as reality among the people<sup>xxvi</sup>.

Indeed, the 'prophetic fervor' which came with the early Christianity and Islam in Nigeria is unfortunately waning. The passion with which Christianity and Islam established educational, vocational, health and other social institution has exchanged for passion for rivalry and domination. The resultant effects of this are seen in the eruption of violence and other kinds of crises between the two major religions. Little wonder then Olushola Ibukun concluded, "After all, it's been said that religion has often been alive in Nigeria's national problems. Religion plays a role in crisis generation and resolution and its potent in the lives of the citizenry. Indeed, it often lamented that if Nigerians lived by the ethics and doctrine of the main religions, society's problem would have been solved."<sup>xxvii</sup> It must be explained that what may be termed as rivalry in those pre-colonial and the colonial days, which as a result of divergent philosophies of education held by the western and Arab missionaries, were rather mutual accusations or mutual contentions which in turn translated to mutual competitions for higher developments of social services and physical/institutional structures that lead to the speedy development of the nation. Balogun explains more on this kind of rivalry that what led Islam into establishment of schools and other social services was their agitations to meet up with the social gap between their children and those that attended missions' schools before, during and after colonial engagement of Nigeria.<sup>xxviii</sup> Garba Ashiwaju put this kind of rivalry even in an extreme language as he remarked that the history of Islam in Nigeria since Independence is essentially a history of Muslim reactions to Christianity and its tradition in the country.<sup>xxix</sup> This was the kind of reactions or rivalry then but which made for positive development in the country. Unlike in the present time, any rivalry, mere accusations or slight misunderstanding always find its expression in hate speech, lack of tolerance and eventual violence. Meanwhile and without prejudice, the Traditional Religion in Nigeria deserves kudos for its capacity and ability to tolerate, co-exist, maintain and sustain itself alongside Islam and Christianity. Unfortunately, instead, Christianity who sourced from the man of peace, Christ and Islam the religion of peace found it difficult to tolerate each other and result into violence at any slightest provocation. It will not be out of place and not misadvised to encourage Christianity and Islam to learn what peace means from their third brother whom they met on ground, marginalized, discredited, maligned, suppressed, displaced and discarded who yet tolerated them, accommodated them and still remained peaceful. This is lesson in humility and peaceful coexistence.

In this evaluation, it will not be wrong to agree with the opinion of M. H. Kukah in his paper 'Religion and Public Morality in Nigeria: A Christian Viewpoint' that Colonialism in no small measure helped to feather the nest of religious intolerance in Nigeria, featuring religious bigotry, suspicion and hate. According to him, it is rather inconceivable that years after independence, Nigeria's socio-political scene, especially in 1979-1983, introduced an era of untruth, injustice as well as religious and political intolerance.<sup>xxx</sup> One may be forced to ask what the role of religion is

in the society: is it to bring peace and comfort or to foment chaos? Is it not possible to conclude that religion in Nigeria rather than helping to solve national crises has failed and not only failed but has allowed itself to be used as an instrument of dissent, chaos disorder, violence and war? What is the way forward?

### **The Way Forward**

Being a tool that provides inspiration, succor; capable of uniting, fighting moral decadence and social upheaval, religion therefore becomes a force to reckon with. Since also it can be influential in building political stability, fostering of economic veritable policies and even used to build and regulate individual's conduct and behavior in the society, it can therefore not be neglected, and its influence on the people whether Christian, Moslem or traditional religion adherent cannot be underestimated. Can it ever be overemphasized that it has played great roles in the revolution of the country and still has more to play in various ways.

With the above vitality of religion in mind, it becomes necessary for Nigeria to find the way forward by going back to the drawing board to map out a new way to chat with religion. Nigeria must understand the meaning and essence of religion and streamline its course along it. As long as religion is man and he is his religion, a dichotomy between them will be difficult. But the essence of governance in a nation is that the ruling organ is able to coordinate all activities within its body, whether spiritual or temporal, for the good of all. A situation whereby these organs are left without coordination will surely lead to chaos, anarchy and doom, notwithstanding whether they are of spiritual or temporal order. There is always the need for coordination. This is not to suggest a takeover of the affairs of the religious institutions by the government but there should be regulatory measures to prevent unbecoming situations. That is the essence of Government.

In furtherance of this, different religious institutions should also have strict control on their activities and members. The fact that religious inclination is personal, that faith is by freewill and belonging to a particular sect is a choice does translate to license to do what one likes, infringe on others' freedom, rights and privileges or stand in the way of others. It is even worse when force, duress and cohesion are used to subject others to one's way or will. Both the Government and Leaders of various religious institutions have much to do in this regard.

Leaders in religion have the obligation to teach correct tenets, and lead the adherents to abide by them. As advocated by Afolabi<sup>xxxii</sup> and many others, the onus to live and lead by exemplary life rest on the Church leaders. Rightful education should be given at the right time to avoid fanaticism, heresies and eventual chaos. Bringing to order, those who undermine religious peace either by teaching or following false order, should be a priority to both church leaders and government.

Another set of people to be wary of are those who see in religion the tool to manipulate others for selfish gains (self-acclaimed religious leaders), or manipulate political situations using religion thereby destabilizing the peace of the country (political elites). These sets of people are actually the religious problems of the country and the Government should have no hesitation in legislating or promulgating against them if the country must move forward.

By now, the country Nigeria and her government should be sincerely tired of bloodshed which its history had been recording on full scale since independence. Isiramen<sup>xxxiii</sup> gave lucid account of these various gory events, their causes and aftermath then commented as follow:

As far as development is concerned, religion remains a core and largely divisive aspect of the politics of ethnicity in Nigeria. However, in view of the fact that the Nigerian nation is constitutionally multi-religious, the Bible

and the Koran have become instruments of divide and rule. .... The gruesome consequences of the violent struggle between these two religions for supremacy have had an adverse impact on development in Nigeria. In an atmosphere of constant religious feud development processes are bound to suffer setback of various dimensions. ... Religious violence becomes a potent instrument of under-development in Nigeria since each crisis often leaves behind scars and memories of tears, destructions, sadness, frustration, anger, mutual suspicions, acrimony and vengeful spirit. Where such a ghoulish environment prevails, no significant development can be made and sustained. Violence is capable of scaring investors (foreign or local) because it will amount to economic risk for anyone to invest in an environment that is not conducive for business. For instance, the religious crisis of 1999 made many people, especially foreigners, to unceremoniously abandon the National Sports Festival that took place in Bauchi. The crisis that accompanied the Miss World pageant exposed Nigeria to the international world as an unsafe country for business transactions. Worst still, the nation's hard earned currency which could have been channeled to such positive development programmes like education, health and other social services is often spent quelling religious riots which usually result in the defacing and destruction of houses, business centers, Churches and mosques. This act of wanton destruction is retrogressive.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

It must be noted that under such circumstances and situations as this, no country can progress or have any meaningful developments. It is on this note that the government and religious leaders must check again their understanding of the meaning and essence of religion and governance to chart a new course for the multi religious and multi ethnic populace if there will be a way forward into development and progress in the country.

## 2. CONCLUSION

There is no gainsaying in that religion has played great roles in the revolution of the nation Nigerian and will continue to do the same in many ways. It will continue to exert a powerful impact on the citizens and by regulating their activities, regardless of their religion as it preaches fundamental qualities required for growth in the society. This confirms its influence on the citizens. For instance, it is believed that the legacy derived from western education as a result of Christianity is an enduring and imperishable gift and one can equally affirm of Islam. The same is not wanting as well of the traditional religion especially in its spirit and virtue of tolerance. It becomes obvious that the phenomenon of religion is an encompassing one; touching on every aspect of life especially with regard to the Nigerian nation.

It is also no gainsaying that religion, in the hands of manipulators in Nigeria, is a triggering potency precipitating conflicts, unrest, domestic and international oppression in the country to the extent of displacing people, destroying human lives and property, and hampering education, politics, social and psychological welfare of the nation and eventually acts as a setback or clog in the wheel of progress in the country. The history of Nigeria since independence has veritably attested to this. It should be noted therefore, where development is concerned in Nigeria, religious crisis is a hostile and turbulent wind that blows no one any pleasant sail. To move the nation forward on the part of development, something has to be done fast to put an end to religious bigotry from all sides in the

country. All religions in the country are encouraged to work towards national development as they have been doing in the time past. They should not relent in adding more values to the society by following the tenets of their religions rigorously since inherent in every religion is a penchant for progress and peace. The Government should be at alert, apply caution in their meddling with religion and governance; regulate strictly, and when necessary, certain excessive activities of certain sects within the religions; place acute surveillance to prevent insurgence/insurrection of any kind; and deal incisively with defaulters, especially fanatics and violent adherents, through the introduction and execution of penal measures. One cannot deny the importance of religion to human existences and that humanity's history becomes replete in man's cooperation with certain super-natural observances and indeed such have aided personal, interpersonal and socio-educational development as well as domestic and international cooperation.

Subject to how it used, religion in Nigeria is beyond reasonable doubt a double-edged sword which has made or marred but which if henceforth is well channeled or utilized, can be a vital tool to build a politically stable and economically viable country just the same way it has being used by some to destroy it. The choice we make is ours. We must remember that the problem of Nigeria is not religion per se but how it has been practiced and used by those who maneuver it for their own venal end. Hence, the need for religious leaders to be sincere and properly educate their adherents on what their religions require, insist that the needful be attended by them while themselves live and lead by example. Meanwhile, the government too should apply prudence in matters of religion and governance and sincerely disallow the political elite from manipulating it

## REFERENCES

<sup>i</sup> John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins*. <http://web.pdx.edu/~tothm/religion/Definitions.htm> retrieved 28-06-2022.

<sup>ii</sup> *The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary*, Joyce M. Hawkins and Robert Allen, Eds., SV 'Religion' (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 1220

<sup>iii</sup> Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10<sup>th</sup> edition, SV 'Religion' (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1998), 988

<sup>iv</sup> *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English*, A. S. Hornby Ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1304

<sup>v</sup> American Heritage Dictionary, <http://web.pdx.edu/~tothm/religion/Definitions.htm>

<sup>vi</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1915), 47

<sup>vii</sup> Friday I. Imaekhai, 'The Importance of Religion in the Nigerian Society', in *Religion and the Nigerian Nation: Some topical Issues* by Celestina O. Isiramen et al, (Ibadan: En-Joy Press & Books, 2010), 27

<sup>viii</sup> E. E Ekong, *An Introduction to Rural Sociology*, (Ibadan: Jumak Publishers, 1988), 16

<sup>ix</sup> J. O. Awolalu, 'Traditional Religion in Nigeria: A Liturgico-cultural Viewpoint' in *Nigeria Since Independence, The First 25 Years*, Edited by J. A. Atanda et al. Vol. ix 'Religion' (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1989), 2

<sup>x</sup> J. O. Awolalu, 29

<sup>xi</sup> Garba Ashiwaju, 'Introduction: Religion and National Integration', in *Nigeria Since Independence*, 3

Robin Horton, 'African Conversation', 'On the Rationality of Conversation', Part One. *African*.<sup>xii</sup>

*Journal of International African Institute*, Vol. 41 No. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, April, 1971.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, 'Religions in Nigeria: An Overview' in *Nigeria Since Independence*,

<sup>xiv</sup> Bernard Lewis, *Islam in West Africa*, Lewis attest that incorporated into indigenous cosmologies, Christianity and Islam provided frameworks for large-scale modes of identity as well as instruments for an "intellectualist paradigm" that reflects the rapidly changing conditions that were becoming prevalent starting in the second half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>xv</sup> Olufemi Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, (London: Duke University Press, 2016), 3; see also: J. D. Y. Peel, *Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 36

<sup>xvi</sup> Rotimi Williams Omotoye, 'The Contributions of Christianity to the Development of Western Education in Yorubaland, South-Western, Nigeria (1854-2015)', in *Religion and Human Capital Development, Essays in Honour of Prof. Yasir Anjola Quadri*, Edited by Y. O. Imam et al, (Ilorin: University of Ilorin, 2017), 69

<sup>xvii</sup> Rotimi Williams Omotoye, 72

<sup>xviii</sup> Muhammad Sani Umar, 'Islam in Nigeria: Its Concept and Manifestations' in *Nigeria Since Independence*, 5

<sup>xix</sup> Peter B. Clarke, 'The Religious Factor in the Development Process in Nigeria: A Social-Historical Analysis', [Genève-Afrique: acta Africana](http://www.genève-afrique.org/acta-africana). - Genève: Inst., ISSN 0016-6774, ZDB-ID 41306-9. - Vol. 17.1979, 45-64

<https://www.google.com/search?q=history+of+nigeria&oq=history+of+&aqs=chrome.2.69i57j35i39j0i131i433i512j0i131i433j0i433i512j0i131i433i512i2j0i512j0i131i433j0i512.7436j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

<sup>xxi</sup> <https://www.slideshare.net>

<sup>xxii</sup> Tolu Lawal and Abe Oluwatoyin, 'National Development in Nigeria: Issues, challenges and prospects', *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research*, Vol. 3 (9), 237-241, November 2011, available online, <http://www.academicjournals.org/jpapr>.

<sup>xxiii</sup> 'Nigeria Development Update', retrieved June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022, [en.wikipedia.org>wiki>Economy of Nigeria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Nigeria)

<sup>xxiv</sup> Isiramen, 329

<sup>xxv</sup> Garba Ashiwaju, 'Religion and National Integration', in *Nigeria Since Independence, The First 25 Years*, 7

<sup>xxvi</sup> Imaekhai, 32

<sup>xxvii</sup> Olusola Ibukun 'Forward' in *Religion and the Nigerian Nation: Some topical Issues*, xv.

<sup>xxviii</sup> S. A. Balogun, 'Islam in Nigeria: Its Historical Development', in *Nigeria Since Independence*, 55-57

<sup>xxix</sup> Garba Asiwaju, 6

<sup>xxx</sup> Mathew Hassan Kukah, 'Religion and Morality in Nigeria: A Christian Viewpoint' in *Nigeria Since Independence*, 148-167

<sup>xxxi</sup> Okebukola A. O. Afolabi, 'Religion and Good Governance: Nigerian Experience', in *Religion and Governance in Nigeria* Edited by Jacob K. Ayantayo et al, (Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 2012) 6

<sup>xxxii</sup> Isiramen, 330-333

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Isiramen, 329-344