

THE RELIGIOUS ROLES ON YOUTH FORMATION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The study focused basically on ascertaining the roles of religion on youth formation in national development. There has been an ongoing debate on the assertion that religion has any role to play in formation of positive attitude amongst youths needed for national development. The continent of Africa is facing great increase in social vices and poor level of development, and Nigeria is not left out. This is evident in her educational, social and economic deterioration. This paper sought to discover the reason for the deterioration and sketch the role religion has played in the formation of positive virtues for national development of Nigeria to ameliorate her state. Qualitative and descriptive method of inquiry was used in this study and it was discovered that lack of adherence to stipulated norms promulgated by religious organization has resulted in increased in social vices, mono economy, corruption, religious intolerance and lack of good governance which has contributed largely to underdevelopment. It also found out that religious groups have played starring roles in national growth through the provision of schools, hospitals, micro loans in partnership with directorate of rural farmers, inculcating morals through teaching in religious and political assemblies for national growth. The article recommends among others an improved partnership of the government arm and the different religions.

Keywords: Religion, youth formation & national development.

Introduction

There is virtually no society that does not practice one form of religion or the other. However, the role religion plays in formulation of positive attitude among youth needed for national development varies significantly from one countries to another (Ayo, 2011). Before establishing the role of religion on youth formulation in national development, it is pertinent to establish the foundation of the study. Thus, the key variables like religion, youth formation and national development were thoroughly reviewed. Religion is a powerful universal phenomenon that has permeated Countries of the world. It has to do with the belief in a supernatural being that is invisible. Religion creates great impact in human behavior and in most cases transforms primitive and hostile behavior to a refine and more acceptable attitudes compatible with human cohabitation (Awolalu, 2008). It was through the influence of religion that Nigerians stopped killing twins and banishing their mothers to evil forest; to start appreciating twin children. Religion moderates our greed, hostility and animosity of killing human being as a punishment for a minutes offence. Religion makes us to appreciate our creature and seek for ways of moderating our action in order for us to have a peaceful coexistence, and seek for salvation. This change of behavior can impact positively on national development in Nigeria. It is the effort of and activities of man that enhances or retard national development.

The Concept of Religion

Eliade (2010) in his functional perspective sees religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, ultimate non-material fact and has a “dynamogenic” quality. That is, it has the capacity not only to dominate individuals but also to elevate them above their ordinary abilities and capacities. He argues that social life is impossible without the share values and moral beliefs which form the collective conscience. Also, in their absence, there would be no social; order, social control, social solidarity or co-operation. Therefore, the sacredness of religion strengthens values and moral beliefs which form the basis of social life.

Deton (2006) conceives religion as a fixed relationship between the human and non-human entities, the sacred, the supernatural, the self-existent, the absolute or simply, God. However, religion is such a wonderful universal phenomenon that is found in every society, developed or underdeveloped, black or white race. Pratt (1996) agrees that religion is a social behaviour associated with individuals or communities directed towards the power or forces which they conceived as having lasting and ultimate control over their religion, men exchange

obedience and loyalty with security and peace in form of a covenant with the supernatural powers, hence they turn to worship them culminating in a religious exercise.

According to Eliade (2010), religion is the most substantial bond of humanity, the fear of the unexplainable phenomena of the universe and some superstitious beliefs compel men to enter into a bond or pact with such unknown forces. Balm (1994) sees religion as the experiences of the holy. This is where the objective side of religion comes to play. The objective of worship is conceived by man to be holy; having convinced himself thus, man the “experience” of such encounter expresses and passes onto others that which he has internalized. It is easy, therefore to experience the “holy” than to know or localize it.

Serrate and Hawkini (1992) share common views with Karl Marx when they assert that religion makes one to forget one’s earthly hardship because, for the religionist the other world is where one would lay his treasures. Also, there is no retaliation because “vengeance is mine” says the Lord. Marx was materialistically inclined, so to him the need of this immediate world is more urgent than the imaginary pie in the sky.

However, Davis (1993) suggests that if religion is practiced honestly, it can open to the realities of life and not cause a blind folding as some of the economic determinists seem to argue. Religion, according to Dopamu (2005), is a factor of civilization and the knowledge and its seed everywhere have been known to contain such potent elements. Forde (2002) relates religion to its role in society through individual members who believe. Thus, becomes a factor of cohesion order, peace and solidarity in the society. The researcher is of the view that religion is both God-word and Man-word oriented. It involves God and man relationship for the purpose of communion and communication in peace and security ensured on the part of man, a sort of pact resulting in some ritual observances.

Harry (2006) observes that religion in its essence gives meaning to life and serves as an instrument for promoting social solidarity, value consensus, harmony, and tolerance in the society. Also, it strengthens the unity of a group or country and much of the norms of the social system are integrated by religious beliefs.

Youth Formation

Haralambos and Heald (2004) opined that youth formation is the development of positive attitude that prepares a young person to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood and achieve his or her full potential. Youth formation is promoted through activities and experiences that help youth develop social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive competencies (Ubani, 2003). This developmental phases is

part of the youth development process and supports the young person in developing: (a) the ability to analyze his or her own strengths and weaknesses, set personal and vocational goals, and have the self-esteem, confidence, motivation, and abilities to carry them out (including the ability to establish support networks in order to fully participate in community life and effect positive social change); and (b) the ability to guide or direct others on a course of action, influence the opinions and behaviors of others, and serve as a role model capable of influencing others positively (Wehmeyer, Agran and Hughes, 1998).

Conditions that promote healthy youth formation are supported through programs and activities in schools and communities. Researches on carried out on youth formation, emphasize that effective programs and interventions recognize youths' strengths and seek to promote positive development rather than addressing risks in isolation. Youth who are constructively involved in learning and doing and who are connected to positive adults and peers are less likely to engage in risky or self-defeating behaviors (Maman, 1990). Providing the conditions for positive youth attitudinal formation is a responsibility shared by families, schools, and communities. The conditions for developing such healthy attitude amongst youths needed in national development reside in families, schools, and communities.

National Development

Naomi (1995) believes that development is usually taken to involve not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life. Chrisman (1984) views development as a process of societal advancement, where improvement in the well-being of people are generated through strong partnerships between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society. It is reasonable to know that development is not only an economic exercise, but also involves both socio-economic and political issues and pervades all aspects of societal life.

National, according to Longman dictionary of contemporary English, refers to a phenomenon that embraces a whole nation. National development therefore can be described as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. This is best achieved through development planning, which can be described as the country's collection of strategies mapped out by the government.

National Development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to

achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems. (Munasinghe, 2004).

Lawal (2011) describe national development as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. However, in this paper, national development will refer to the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people, by providing social amenities like quality education, potable water, transportation, infrastructure, medical care etc.

Nexus between Religion Roles and Youth Formation in National Development

Religion is seen as a social-cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements (Morreall, 2013). Supporting the above assertion, Nongbri (2013) opines that religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. It is also seen as the entirety of the linguistic expressions, emotions and actions and signs that refers to a supernatural being or supernatural beings. According to James (2010) religion is a relatively-bounded systems of beliefs, symbols and practices that addresses the nature of existence, and in which communion with others and otherness is lived as if it both takes in and spiritually transcends socially-grounded ontologies of time, space, embodiment and knowing. Religion fosters national unity and development. It offer people the understanding of existence and provide rules and regulations which controls people behavior as it is believed that to live a godly life according to one's religion is to carry out one's duty both to God and men. Thus, it can be established that religion contributes significant in influencing youths' attitudinal development and implementation. The more youths' development and implements the right attitudes preached in the gospel, the more easier it becomes to build and maintain a healthy nation.

Parrinder (1996) and Idowu (2008) are of the view that in Nigeria; very little efforts have been made to tap the potentials of religion as cement for unity and the development of nationhood through inculcating positive attitude especially among youths. Despite the above attainable benefits, religion is being manipulated to cause ethnic divisiveness and civil strife. Some people exploit it for their selfish

political ambition. Religion is one vital element that can be harnessed for fostering solidarity and unity.

Mutuah *et al.*, (2010) avers that being life itself, religion can serve as the basis on which a nation can be solidly founded. It can also be used as an instrument of bringing into reality our dreams of a united nation. Religion is also characterized as a sound entity that is functional in the sense that it contribute to the maintenance of societal stability of equilibrium.

According to Clark (1994), religion can be used to make way for the understanding of the world in which we live. It can supply answers to such questions as the existence of God, the sufferings and pains of humans, the problems of after death and so on. It could provide moral values by which a nation may stand. Such moral values include what is virtue and vice, thereby enriching the people's morals, the welfare of the individuals and society at large.

Denton (2006) suggests that religion may inspire people to develop great ideas as courage, love, endurance and sense of kinship. Yinger (1990) avers that national development requires that all hand must be on deck to build a strong and united nation which could be anchored on religious and intellectual capabilities of every citizen.

Awolalu (2010) succeeded in clarifying that religion can be a part in national development by promoting high moral standards such as honesty, courage, hard work, obedience and respect for leaders especially among youth that are leaders of tomorrow. He suggests that religion could be expected to encourage faith, trust, and confidence in both God and fellow human beings which makes for integration, cohesion and solidarity by bringing people together for worship, festivals, ceremonies, and prayers especially people of different ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Forde (2002) argues that religion help youths develops attitudes capable of solving the problems of selfishness which hinders the pace of progress in nation building. Idowu (2002) suggests that religion can effectively provide an understanding of certain occurrences that affect man and his environment, especially some of the trials and tribulations being experienced by Nigerians such as anxiety about the structural adjustment programme (SAP). The continued drift of the nation may be attributed to our sins, but for people who are deeply religious, it can be argued that through the power of prayers backed by God led ministers these national problems could be successfully resolved to the glory of God. According to Tim (1996) there is the beliefs that "if God cares for the things of nature and environment, such as the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea and the animals in the forest, God will definitely cater for the needs of the country which he has created". Meyer (1996)

describes religion as being capable of promoting national development and moral identity, to inculcate in the individuals the right attitude which would eradicate crime, murder, suicide, rape, corruption, indolence, dishonesty and cheating which has bedeviled the nation. He further stated that when individuals imbibe these attitudes, it will be demonstrated in their families, social groups and other works of life.

In summary, the above empirical evidence provided on the role religion in national development made obviously clear that religion helps in developing positive attitude amongst the populace needed for all round positive development. Religion instill discipline among the youths especially during their various stages of developing positive virtues like respect for life, adherence established laws, creates a better understanding of the world around us amongst others that contributes to development of the nation. It was also established that religion aid in the formulation and implementation of favourable policies that ensure sustained national development, trains up youths who can be better leaders of tomorrow and minimizes the incidence of corruption amongst the youth who are leaders of tomorrow.

Factors that Hinder National Development in Nigeria

In spite of series of developmental strategies put in place by successive governments, and sometimes with good intentions, all attempts to generate meaningful development proved futile.

- 1. Poor Formulation and Implementation of Policies:** There are in most cases, no executive capacity responsible for the formulation and implementation of the plan. Some of the previous development plans failed because; there was little or no consultation of the general public. Planning is supposed to involve even the peasant in the villages. Even the Local Government officials who are close to the people were not consulted. (Mimiko 1997).
- 2. Lack of Good Governance:** This militates against national development. Where there is no good governance, development becomes a mirage. This is as a result of bad leadership in the country. Most of our leaders have no sense of commitment to development.
- 3. Decolonization:** Decolonization allowed the crop of leaders that aligned with colonial power to take over Nigeria. This ensured the sustenance of a neo-colonial economy even after political independence. These leaders on assumption of power quickly turned up the repressive machinery of the colonial state rather than dismantling it. Significantly, they have no vision of development to

accompany the efficient instrument of repression they inherited. All they were interested in was access to power and privileges and not development.

4. **Corruption:** High level of corruption and indiscipline is another barrier to development. Nigeria is corrupt, managed by corrupt leaders who have made the state an instrument of capital accumulation, rather than using it to project the interest of the citizenry. A very good plan supervised by a thoroughly corrupt state can hardly do a thorough job. Corruption and development are antithetical to each other, the two cannot cohabit, and so, where one is present, the other suffers. (Chuta 2004).

Strategies for Ensuring National Development

The beauty of any development plan is the faithful implementation of such plan, which its success lies with the implementers. In the previous subsections, it was mentioned that most of the past development plans failed as a result of implementation problem, lack of committed leadership, lack of adherence to suggestions of religious leaders, etc.

Based on this fact, new development policies and strategies are currently in place as alternative strategies for ensuring sustained national development, such as Seven Points Agenda, Vision 2020, change begins with you, etc. These policies and vision appear to be all embracing but they are not sacrosanct in their totality. But if faithfully implemented, the nation at least will move towards path of national development.

First, development requires total commitment on the parts of the leadership (religion and non-religion). The need for discipline and honesty on the part of the project implementers cannot be compromised; such officials should show enough discipline, interest, willingness, dedication and honesty. Without these attributes and the will to pursue set economic goals, all other ingredients of development present would amount to nullity.

Secondly, there is need for attitudinal change. Nigerians must as a matter of fact change their pessimistic attitude towards national development. The anticipated changes should be promulgated by religious leaders since they control a greater number of the populace. Similarly, the idea or belief that “things cannot work in Nigeria or Nigerian factor” should be discouraged. Real development is achieved through internal activities rather than from external influences. Development is seen as a process generated within a society by forces propagated and invigorated by the actual members of that society. It is believed that true development can neither be started nor sustained by outsiders. Although, no country can develop in isolation, but heavy

emphasis should not be placed on foreign resources for the country's development.

Importantly, citizenship should be promoted over indigeneity in order to achieve cooperation and participation of all communities in the development process. Omotoso (2008) noted that the 1999 constitution is directly or indirectly promoting indigeneity in the country. For example, section 318(1) of paragraph (IV) supports indigeneity. The constitution sets parameters for indigenes and non-indigenes. It equally gives legal bases to various discriminatory policies that actively promote indigeneity, contrary to some sections that argue against discrimination. This is very contradictory.

Leadership in Nigeria must behave in a way to inculcate the spirit of patriotism in the minds of the people, so that they will be ready to stand with the government in her development efforts. When Nigerians see themselves as one and not as belonging to one section of the country as portrayed presently, the urge to develop Nigeria will be germinated and sustained.

Additionally, the need to reform electoral process is imperative for socio-economic and political development. Electoral fraud is one of the banes of Nigeria's development. The role of leadership in development cannot be overemphasized, all efforts towards development must be coordinated and directed by the leaders, therefore, the leaders must be development conscious, have genuine interest for development and the political will to propel such development. The leaders must also have the cooperation of the people, because, it is the people that develop a nation. Honestly, the aforementioned ingredients cannot be possible without a legitimized mandate for the leaders by the people. When a leader assumes office illegitimately or through electoral fraud, such leader is bound to fail in his effort to generate meaningful development. This is due to the fact that such illegitimate leaders tend to display characters that repress development such as; selfishness, corruption, pride, thuggery and inefficiency and also, there is apathy and natural detachment to development plans by the people as they did not see such emerging leaders as the products of their consent through voting. Based on the foregoing, the electoral process should be reformed in such away that nobody assumes power (political) through crook or fraudulent means. The process should be made opened, free, fair and competitive. All legal battles preceding the elections must be concluded before any swearing in. This, it is believed, will create genuine environment conducive for development.

Lastly, development plan should not be exclusively regarded as economic issue it should be seen as holistic and encompassing national

issue that cuts across economic, social, political and psychological aspects of human endeavour.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has x-rayed the place of religion in youth formation in Nigeria's national development. It must be noted that religion cannot be rejected in its totality because of how much it has permeated into our knowledge system. More so, the world is gradually growing into a global village within which all kinds of cross-cultural activities are taking place.

Religion can be used as a tool or means of promoting national development by nurturing youths to development positive attitude. Though religious conflict are master minded by greedy and corrupt politician and religious leaders. The structures of the society guarantees religious conflict, and can be used too to strengthen inter-religions cum denominational cooperation; which will promote national development. Religion has a direct impact on the individual, the individual are the once who steer the ship of development, due to their ability to peacefully co-exist and use their creativity to better themselves and their environment. It is equally the individual that is used to ferment religious conflict. Religion preaches the virtues of peace, love, understanding and goodness. If the individual is highly religious, his moral upbringing will impact positivity on national development.

However, it is an urgent task for us to raise our religious norms such that it contributes positively to national development through the cultivation of positive attitude among youths. This must be reflected at homes, in governance and in school curricula at all levels. Indeed the opportunity to correct the basic error of our religious beliefs is upon us; this is because it will restore to us our inward beauty, identity, and pride. It therefore behooves us to choose where to belong so that we can proceed in putting measures in place to attack any hindrance to national development which we hope to achieve. Government should carry out deliberate effort to promote inter-religious and denominational cooperation, meetings, conferences and universal worship, by creating a platform that will handle such responsibilities. The platform will action the followings:

- i. To periodically host interreligious/denominational worship.
- ii. Promote high moral standards such as honesty, hard work, obedience and respect to elders and leaders.
- iii. It should be used to build faith, trust and confidence in both God and fellow human beings.
- iv. Build solidarity, integration and cohesion among the people irrespective of one's religious denomination.

- v. Preach against vices, crime, corruption, indolence, dishonesty and cheating.
- vi. Promote value re-orientation of the people through this platform, Churches, Mosques, National Orientation Agency, Schools and etc. to depart from existing socio-economic vices, impatience, corruption, electoral violence, that is crippling our polity.

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