

RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATIONS IN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES: PERSPECTIVE FROM NIGERIA'S NATION BUILDING

Kanayo Nwadiakor, Ph.D

*Department of Religion and Human Relations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*

Abstract

It is always strange that in the quest for nation building, there is the tendency in some quarters to believe that religion has no part to play in developmental activities; social, political, educational and even recreational. This school of thought sees nation building as consisting mainly of technological advancement and the setting up of all kinds of modern structures. It is further believed that religion as a means of retardation and retrogression has contributed immensely to the enslavement of mankind rather than liberation and that it has suppressed in men all elements of growth. The exponents of this view are victims of prejudice and bias against religion and spirituality and who exhibit enormous ignorance about the role of religion in human life. This paper is conceived, therefore, on the conviction that spirituality has a significant role to play in the general development of not only an individual but also a nation. Religion in any society is the foundation upon which the social values rest. There is scarcely a sphere of man's life that is left untouched by the conditioning effect of religious ideas. In Nigeria today, the national concern is to achieve political stability, economic stability, and advanced technology. All these can cater for man in various ways most especially, the development of his body. But with all these, something permanent is lacking, and that is "spiritual balance". A person without spiritual balance is no better than a beast without a soul. Religion therefore, can only provide this spiritual balance. Religion when truly practiced in its truest form and spirit has been and remains sacred. It plays a vital role in purposeful leadership, nation building, social justice, law and order, peace-making, reconciliation, forgiveness, and the healing of wounds, be they political or religious.

Introduction

In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed a number of religious crises that had led to loss of lives and properties. Such religious crises were not only between one religion and another but were also found within a particular religion. The causes of these crises were numerous. There are fanatics that believed that Nigeria will know no peace until everyone has embraced their own religion; others cause trouble on the ground of theological differences. Again, there are many individuals who feel that a particular religion had dominated the Nigerian political scene for a long time and it is their turn to claim their right and lord it over all with no moderate hand. Additionally, self-interest, love of power, personal gain, political interests and other mundane affairs had led many religious leaders to either incite or encourage their followers to cause trouble.

Seeing religion used in this way, men of critical mind and intellectual alertness have started to wonder if spirituality can ever promote peace in the society and thus contribute to nation building. There are critics, social, political and related areas, who feel very strongly that spirituality should be discarded in order to make peace and progress when talking about nation building. Kalu (2002) observes that in the 1960s when Nigeria was in a mood, hope, exuberance, of being at the threshold of building a new nation, the anti-religious feelings was so noticeable to the extent that the popular opinion was that the new nation must be built on national, scientific bases without any of the mumbo-jumbo which religion purveys. For such people, religion was a mere bourgeois attempt to feed the masses with opium, the elixir which rubs the sense from a correct perception of reality. These groups of people had imbibed Comte's three stages of civilization which construed that civilization had moved from a theological through philosophical to the scientific stage. It would appear that whichever way we turn, modernity and development have been portrayed as the benefits of science and the conquest of religion (Kalu, 2002). Enwerem (1995) adds that enough attention has not been given by social scientists to the role of spirituality in the building of Nigeria because they either subsumed spirituality into ethnic politics or tried to demonstrate that spirituality is apolitical. This is a point of departure because the life of a developing nation like Nigeria that is riddled with complex moral problems needs the spiritual forces, especially now that people are often driven to points when rationality and scientific gadgets fail and raw emotions take over.

No doubt, we do not need to 'crucify' the critics of religion for their position particularly because when religion that preaches peace and harmony, that talks of a God of Love, that encourages brotherhood of man, now resorts to violence, bloodshed and destruction of fellow-men. However, viewed objectively, it is crystal clear that religion has not at any time deviated from its principles. The essential nature of religious spirituality remains the same and it will continue to be so. The absurd faces of religion that we see are the manifestations of human limitations of those who practice religions. Religion, therefore, minus detrimental human elements, remains essentially what it is meant to be, and it will continue to minister to the millions of people who take solace under its umbrella. Thus, while it is true that religion has often been misdirected into a negative role, this is not enough justification to ignore its inherent potential for meaningful developmental projects. Therefore, it is short-sighted for a student of the Nigerian political scene to ignore or dismiss the religious phenomenon, or for those involved in the struggle for nation building in Nigeria to fail to extend the struggle to the terrain of religion.

This paper is therefore based on the attempt to go beyond the prevalent religiosity in the country and suggest possible avenues to retrieve the emancipatory potentials of religion from its current exploitation and demonstrate how it can be directed towards creating a new social order in Nigeria. At the same time, it is hoped that this study will provide useful evidence that will interest, and perhaps provoke, those struggling for nation building in Nigeria to pay closer attention to, rather than dismiss the potentials which religion has for mass appeal and for the mobilization of energies necessary for nation building.

The Meaning of Religion in Relation to Nation Building

The notion of religion suggests an attempt by man to work out a relationship between humans and a super-ordinate or supernatural being. "It was borne out of man's endeavour to understand the supernatural in the context of the world he lives in" (Bolarinwa, 2010:64). Thus religion is premised on the assumption that human perceptions of things, wimps and caprices require higher power to help them respond adequately and effectively to all their concerns. Religion is essentially a spiritual pilgrimage characterized by man's acknowledgement of his limitations and self-insufficiency; and the adoption and formulation of paths, doctrinal and practical moral lives, in explanation and answer to the

fundamental issues and problems of human existence. "The spiritual dimension of human nature stands to inject fundamental and ultimate meaning and explanation into human existence and life (Iwe, 1985:13). This means that spirituality plans with foresight and vision for the welfare of the people. The spirit and standard of its service to the people are in keeping with the achievements of humanity the world over in terms of law, liberty, justice, human dignity, human rights and democracy. The above description of spirituality encapsulates its inevitability in the quest for nation building. According to Okoye (2006), "men look at various religions for answers to those profound mysteries of human condition which today, even as in old times deeply stir the human heart" (p. 72). Little wonder therefore that spirituality has often been conceived as a system relating man to an ultimate value epitomized in God or the supreme being and embodying a creed, code, cult and a mode of communication (Odey, 2004). This attempt to capture the essence of spirituality has given rise to the radical Marxian perspective that sees spirituality as a sigh of the oppressed creatures, the sentiment of a heartless world and the soulless condition, the opium of the people.

The functional perspective of the essence of religion captures it as performing the functional roles reinforcing the collective conscience of society requisite for social order and stability. A common thread to the above perspectives is that they all linked religion to man's physical and social environment. To this extent, it could be argued that, there is largely an interaction between spirituality and the society within which it functions. Hence Bolarinwa (2010) submits that spirituality no doubt is a way of life for many people. It's cross national existence and the sentimental attachment to it by people of different cultures and background makes it a politically active instrument in both national and international politics and nation building.

Religion has a place in the life of every nation. Irrespective of the faith or denomination, spirituality when truly practiced in its truest form and spirit, has been and remains sacred. It plays a vital role in purposeful leadership, community building, social justice, law and order, peace making, reconciliation, forgiveness and the healing of wounds, be they political, family or personal, hence spirituality has been held sacrosanct by many people in the world. Religion provides a guide to dos and don'ts to man in order to live a meaningful life and reverence the creator. The Bible and the Quran openly stipulates how man must live on earth with

regard to corruption and protection of lives and property, and to that, nation building. Furthermore, Udofia (2010) asserts that “in a traditional African society like Nigeria, where traditional religion held sway before the advent of Christianity and Islam, immoral acts and activities that were against the sanctity and peace of the society were seen as obscene and sacrilege, what might be considered in contemporary world as corruption” (p.131). Religion and community development were intertwined, hence any action of community member or group that were against the commonwealth of the people were seen as corruption.

From the foregoing therefore, it is obvious that spirituality is a vital stabilizer of human life in a world of conflicting opposites. And it is etched deeply in the human genetic and ontological blueprint. Any attempt to remove it from human existence is an exercise in futility. The emphasis here is that, there exist a nebulous feeling beyond all logic and reason, which impels man to go out of himself in search of meaning, relationship and significance, and religion to a great extent, embosoms all these attempts. It emanates from man’s desire to make sense out of the principal questions posed by his existence- birth, death, human variances, gender, race, economic inequality, social status, sickness and suffering, success and failure, work and so on. It is therefore the considered view of the present researchers that spirituality as an option has not been truly tried in Nigeria. We have embraced the precepts and discarded the praxis. Nigeria today reeks of decadence and infrastructural decay, because almost everyone places the self above every other consideration whenever he is acting. Selfishness is the bane of Nigeria, and religion is a revolt against selfishness.

If nation building therefore connotes the act of reforming the nation and taking it to a better state, then religion must be at the fore because God Himself is a reformer per-excellence. With special reference to Christianity, Okere (2005) says that:

It is quite apt to call Jesus a social reformer committed by his very mission to the restoration of justice in individual social and spiritual life. Although this social dimension of Christ’s work does not exhaust his mission, it is an essential part of it. A Christian cannot, therefore, remain indifferent to justice. (p. 72).

We are invited to participate in the creative development of our world and in so far as the political dimension is often the only area where this can be done, it is a duty for all those who are religious. This holds and

indeed for a greater reason here in our own Nigerian society. Spirituality must play a role through politics in creating a society more worthy of man. Okere (2005) maintains that spirituality has a vision of hope, of the world as improvable, of man as redeemable, and it has an effective programme for realizing this hope. Religion exposes man to the best thoughts and the best ideas of humanity. It equips man with the latest and most up to date knowledge, knowledge which is man's most formidable instrument in the effort at survival and in the building of a nation.

Spirituality and Nation Building: The Historical Evidence

Enwerem (1995) sees the need to draw together progressive elements from all religions in the country and get them to work together for the positive development of the nation. This call is consequent upon the evidence that abound to the fact that spirituality has been a vital force in the development of nations throughout the world. Again, no student of modern Nigeria can be oblivious of the ascendancy of spirituality in the country's political terrain over the years. No longer do many Nigerians look at government policies, actions, and motives behind them from the purview of ethnicity as they used to in the not so distant past. Now, these are largely seen through the lens of religion. Iwe (1985) corroborates that there is no doubt that it was religion that laid the foundation of infant and adolescent Europe. The academics of Rome and Constantinople, the monastic schools of Europe, the early beginnings of the Universities of Bologna, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge stand to testify. It would therefore not be a wild claim to say that the contributions of religion were the historical pre-requisites for the European Renaissance and for the dawn of the so called age of Reason. Furthermore, the advent and progress of industrial revolution did not found religion entirely wanting. It was the forces of spirituality that insisted that the industrial revolution and its institutions should put on a human character and wear a human face. Religion and some religious elements stood implacably against the inhuman exploitation of the labour of children and women at the factories. Against the nefarious nature and consequences of the slave trade of the 19th-20th centuries, religion registered strong opposition. There is, moreover, the fact of the humanizing and enriching role and impact of spirituality on the nations of such developing regions as Africa, Indo-China, South America, and so on.

With special reference to Nigeria, Enwerem (1995) notes that the 19th century missionaries to Nigeria were products of the new enlightenment age characterized by a belief in progress. This explains the Christian missionaries' commitment to the material, moral, and political advancement of the so called unenlightened or uncivilized peoples. Olukoju (1997) adds that "from the beginning, Christian missions had a three-pronged mission of spreading the three C's- Christianity, Commerce and Civilization" (p. 137). It could hardly have been otherwise given that this evangelical revival coincided with the abolition of the infamous trans-Atlantic slave trade. This was expressed in the famous concept of the "Bible and the plough", which encapsulated the argument that the only effective solution to the problem of the slave trade was the destruction of the trade at source and its substitution with commerce and agriculture. Buxton (cited in Olukoju, 1997) puts it this way:

Let missionaries and school masters, the plough and the spade, go together and agriculture will flourish; the avenues to legitimate commerce will be opened; confidence between man and man will be inspired whilst civilization will advance as the natural effect, and Christianity operate as the approximate cause of this happy change. (p. 137).

This was the context within which Christian missions deployed men and materials to the Nigerian area from the 1840s. While the primary goal of the Christian missions was the establishment of their religion, the introduction of western education was accompanied with great effect on a larger section of the Nigerian society. In creating new elite, their spirituality was to register a most profound impact on the evolution of modern Nigeria. The missionaries initiated and championed the earliest form of Nigerian nationalism. At the religious level, cultural nationalism matured into the establishment of indigenous independent Christian Churches. These, together, have grown to be a force to reckon with in religious circles in modern Nigeria. More importantly perhaps, at the political level, were the vision and activities of the cultural nationalists who prepared the way, as Ayandele (1966) rightly notes, for the eventual emergence of political nationalism in the 1920s. Christian education provided for Nigerians avenues through which they could possess in a short period what it took Europeans centuries to acquire. Consequently, Christian educated individuals could now have the audacity to look the white man in the face, challenge his authority, aspire to his status, and what is more, know what the white man knows, if not even more. These

missionaries also pioneered professional printing. Significantly, it was the C.M.S. that published in, 1859 Nigeria's first newspaper, the *lwe Irohin*, a fortnightly publication (Omu, 1967). An English language supplement was added in 1860. The Christian missionaries thus pioneered newspaper publishing in Nigeria, an industry that played a decisive role in the country's later history. It was the chief weapon by which the educated Africans were to exercise their power of participation in their own government. Ajayi (1965)

posits that "not only did the C.M.S. inaugurated journalism in Nigeria, it also started the tradition of the large number of one-room printing works in several large towns in Nigeria" (p. 159).

Training in tropical medicine and social welfare was another plank of Christian missionary spirituality in Nigeria. By 1914, various missions had established hospitals across the country, notably, the C.M.S. Iyi Enu Hospital near Onitsha, the Wesley Guild Hospital, Ilesha, the Baptist Hospital in Ogbomosho; and the Sacred Heart Hospital of the Society for African Missions in Abeokuta (Ayandele, 1966).

With regard to Islamic religion, Afigbo (1997) states that the great achievements of the Western Sudanic states have been related to the process of Islamization. Islam stimulated literacy and brought the Western Sudan in touch with the Arabic civilization and the rest of the world. Trading Arabs built the Trans Saharan trade and nurtured elite within the Sudanic communities who, centred in the courts, served as the bureaucrats for the empires. Abdul (1970) continues to say that some basic characteristics of Islamic religion are interesting in considering nation-building. The first is that Islam spread through traders, wandering scholars and peripatetic pastoralists. These are invariably classes of people who are not tied to narrow closed societies. They are adaptable and have an immense ability to absorb new ideas, cultures and change. Abubakar (1974) further argues that Islam also lays great emphasis on organization and administration. The jihads of yesteryears were invariably followed by an administrative reorganization. The penchant for rational organization, commercial entrepreneurship, emphasis on discipline and literacy, the subjection of all facets of life to the religious-all these characteristics made it possible for Islam to contribute to nation building.

Gbadamosi and Junaid (1997) note that one obvious feature of the

evolution and progress of Islamic spirituality in Nigeria in the pre-jihad era has been its close association with rulers and the growth of political entities. For the first time, the Hausa states as well as parts of Borno and Yorubaland were brought together as one single political system. Ajayi (1974) also confirms that this was a major and critical step forward in the evolution of Nigeria. The necessary, if tentative inference is that Islamic religion also fosters and strengthens the process of urbanization. Furthermore, the pecculation of Islamic religion into Nigeria since the 11th century has brought in its wake the introduction of literacy in Arabic and Quranic system of education both of which have had far reaching political, social and cultural effects (Gbadamosi and Junaid, 1997). Suffice it to say that this education covered a wide range of subjects, and shed considerable light on the history and development of Nigerian society up to the 19th century.

The prominence given to the study of African traditional religion in recent times made it possible for the subject to be employed as leverage for fostering the spirit of nationalism and cultural liberation. To this, Erivwo (1988) maintains that “the study of the African past, which included her past religious spirituality, contributed to the success of the epoch, making FASTAC 77” (p. 3).

For the Africa, good and evil behaviuor, but especially the latter, have their social dimensions. This is a logical consequence of the people’s belief in the close relationship between man and the supernatural powers that steer the course of his destiny and on whom man depends entirely for his life and progress. It is this awareness of the unfailing sanction from the divinities that was responsible for the prevalence of law and order in the traditional society where before there were no policemen or soldier to enforce the laws of the state. When the traditional society was strictly faithful to African traditional spirituality, crimes were very rare indeed. Mbiti (1975) confirms that African religious spirituality, values and practices are directed towards strengthening the moral life of each society. Morals are the food and drink which keep society alive, healthy and happy. Once there is a moral breakdown, the whole integrity of society also breaks down and the end is tragic. Thus, African traditional spirituality emphasizes the importance of morals in practice, and insists that they must extend into all areas of life for the welfare of the individual and society at large.

There is, therefore, an abundance of historical evidence to substantiate the role claim of spirituality as the promoter of nation building. Ogbunwezeh (2003) contends that "religion has served as one of the formidable capstones of many great civilizations" (p. 61). Many of the conceptual schemes that sustained the socio-economic and political cohesion and life of these societies have a deep spiritual taproot, which checkmates any tendency to patronize unwarranted and socially unapproved behaviours. Anyanwu (2003) also argues that the centrality of spirituality in the making of societies in Africa since the 20th century is readily acknowledged and commented on by scholars, leaders, politicians and other interested persons or groups. Without these spiritual safeguards in such societies, the concourse of social interaction would be fraught with danger, which would lead to disintegration. Here spirituality is employed to ensure the survival of the common good. Religion ever since the morning of human social evolution has had a social dimension because what is injurious to your neighbour constitutes an offence against the gods, who are custodians of all. Premium is placed on justice and fair play in one's interpersonal relations with his neighbour. The special contention here is that there is still a strong need for spirituality to continue its traditional role as the agent of nation building here in our developing Nigeria. Nigeria in its present pre-industrial economic procreativity and stagnation, in the exposure of their national resources to international commercial exploitation and speculation, in the throes and cauldron of political instability, in the darkness of adult illiteracy, in the bewildering wastage of precious man power resources and in fetters of colonial hang-over and neo-colonialism, in the view of the present researchers, need to take clue from the Western world where spirituality played a significant role in the building of nations. The voice of organized religions could be effectively mobilized and raised against all forms of exploitation and degradation that had tended to perpetuate Nigeria in the status of under-developed nation. This is a real task for religion.

Spirituality, Enlightenment and Nation Building

To talk about nation building is to educate our people on the art of living humanly. This means the studied cultivation of private individual virtues such as the ability to love, selflessness, ambition, hard work, orderliness; and of public virtues such as solidarity, readiness to cooperate, ability to look at life critically, obedience to law, punctuality, courtesy and fairness. Without such a thorough and comprehensive education embracing

practical skill, cultural self-development and moral rectitude, we might more easily enforce nation building in poultry than hope to humanize our society. This is one reason spirituality is indispensable as an agent of nation building. In pursuing this goal, religion is not only liberating our people from a long standing inhumanity, but it is pre-eminently fulfilling its existence as the presence of God in our midst.

Religion has the urgent task of enlightening our people. It has to guide our people by exhortation and programmed measures of action in the various task of wiping out mass illiteracy from the face of our land. Here in Nigeria, there are so many man-made disabilities and miseries arising from simple ignorance such as ill-planned families and irresponsible conception and reproductive habits, protein-deficient diets, environmental blindness and life in filthy surroundings, poor eating habits and deplorable lack of sense of time. That these factors impede our quest for nation building is not in doubt and no nation can be built on the foundation of misery orchestrated by share ignorance and irresponsible family lives.

Religion has a part to play here. It is essentially one of enlightenment and of demolition of popular ignorance, prejudice, fear and superstition. To this, Iwe (1985) suggests that religion “must remind our people that man is the author of his calamities and woes. It is he and he only who must solve his problem; it has been truly said that God helps those who help themselves” (p. 20). Spirituality, through sermons and various other programmes organized for families such as counseling, marriage course and so on, is in a position to teach our people that sound and effective family planning is a reasonable measure for the achievement of domestic harmony, success and welfare, which are integral parts of nation building. Again spirituality has what it takes to rescue and lift our people from this quagmire of environmental insanitation and squalor, to acceptable standard and practice of sanitation worthy of civilized men. Spirituality is not here to preach hallow sermons while its adherents sink and wallow in filthy mud and surroundings like pigs. Cleanliness, they say, is next to godliness.

Religion can also encourage our people to adopt decent eating habits and healthy sense of time. It is high time we stopped this self-abusive concept of “African Time”. Iwe (1983) notes that one of the basic characteristics of primitives is lack of sense of time and urgency. This of course, is a major log in the wheel of our nation’s progress. Lateness to work and other

important appointments have become almost a norm in our society that only a spiritual consciousness can reverse.

It is also the responsibility of religion to orientate our people to appreciate the institutions and values of our own culture Ugwu (2002) opines that:

People of other cultures do not respect people who ape them; their smile is not that of approval, it is that of conquest. And so long as another culture controls our virtues, so long shall we be slaves to that culture. (p. 60).

Religion in alliance with our educational institutions has the responsibility to discourage our people from any senseless imitation of foreign cultures. Our culture has got its own magnanimous values such as respect for human life and the liberty of man, love of truth and honesty, social justice and equality of opportunity, parental authority and filial loyalty, domestic solidarity and responsibility, social solidarity, authority in the service of people, integrity in the administration of public truth, belief in retribution and reward after death, and so on. All these are the noble values and treasure of our culture here in Nigeria which we cannot safely, without social calamity, abandon or exchange for foreign cultures. Religion is about the only aspect of life that has the potentialities to constantly strive for the preservation of these rich cultural heritages. Religion and culture are twins, essentially inseparable and interdependent aspects of human life. Religion and culture are so intimately related and connected that in reality it is not possible for a society to have a culture without a religion or religion without culture.

Ugwu (2002) maintains that our culture has been in a very serious conflict with that of the foreign countries. Most of the ugly practices inherent in these foreign cultures have been appropriated and are now the order of the day in our society. In the contemporary Nigerian society, such cultural cancers as bribery, nepotism and the injustice of confidential secret, denial of merited promotions, authoritarianism and arrogance in power, power mania, mammonism, religious discrimination, leadership crises and lack of compassion for the common man are prevalent. To this, it is the institution of religion, therefore, that can defend most effectively our cultural heritage against all these symptoms of social morbidity.

Furthermore, work is the motor of development, in it man expends his sweat and his energy and talent to transform the raw materials provided by nature into a human product, a product no longer of nature but of

culture. Work is the marker of civilization and culture which is the end product of development. Here, we see that the three major religions in Nigeria have a positive attitude to work. Their collective emphasis could play a great role in a development oriented ideology. The fact that spirituality inculcates and promotes such lofty human values as social justice, hard work, solidarity, independence and national integrity cannot be undermined in its virile role for nation building. Hence Nwadiolor (2011) concludes that spirituality has a duty to encourage our people to dispose themselves to the benefits from the educationally and culturally revolutionary measures.

Religion, Good Governance and Peace in Nigeria

It is clearly undeniable that one of the perennial political problems of our developing Nigeria is one of leadership. The quality of leadership at various levels of our institutions leaves much to be desired. Not infrequently, vital positions of authority are occupied by mediocre or the less qualified persons. There is often wide spread complaint against corrupt and inefficient leadership. In midst of these complaints, there is much spirituality can do by way of remedy, without running the risk of arrogating to itself the exercise of purely political authority. The major religions in Nigeria has the power to inculcate into the people the conviction that there is need for able leadership in every human society; that true and efficient leadership must be in the hands of qualified, competent, enlightened and honest persons and that humble service for the common welfare is of the essence of genuine leadership (Iwe, 1985). Leadership must be exemplary and must endeavour to imbibe the principles of good governance, namely, honesty, transparency, accountability, sincerity, justice and prudence. This is where religion will play its role because a God-fearing politician will certainly live by these principles. As humans, we learn from God to be honest, transparent, accountable, sincere, just and prudent in managing the affairs of people.

Indeed, not just Islam and Christianity, all religions that have their scriptures revealed from God uphold these tenets, and call on adherents to adopt them in their daily dealings. If every Christian will be a good Christian, guided by the teachings of the Holy Bible, and every Muslim will be a good Muslim, guided by the provisions of the Holy Quran, then Nigeria will be a much better place for us. Unfortunately, it is the moral bankruptcy of Nigerian leaders that is responsible for the worsening

condition; their good and pathological craving to have more and more of what one does not really need is a consistent factor in Nigerian leadership. Okoye (2006) argues that:

The cure to all societal problems really is individual and national spirituality and spiritual awakening. It is only when our leaders are led, guided and inspired by the spirit of God that they can be humane and considerate in dealing with the people God entrusted in their care. (p. 143).

It is only then that they will come to the realization that acquisition of worldly wealth is worthless. Solomon in all his wisdom and riches found worldly acquisition to be vanity. The Quran, Sura 3 said "nothing shall his wealth and gains avail him". The day shall come, says Luke, when not a single stone will be left on another, everything will be destroyed. You can be certain that these prophecies also refer to all material acquisition. Religious leaders have a responsibility towards the political leaders and the moral development of our nation. They are supposed to be the beacons and the light of the society. The clerics are supposed to call the government to order when it begins to deviate from the right path.

Again, the rigour and tempers whipped up by critical national issues must find in religion a soothing light and temperature. The greatest and most essential asset that Nigeria desires now is peace and harmonious co-existence. The greatest public good in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society like Nigeria. This greatest political good of humanity, Iwe (1985) insists, must be given the national and international dimensions and emphasis it deserves. Here the various religious traditions in Nigeria can serve a very useful purpose by incessantly highlighting the indispensability and paramount importance of peace for development, prosperity and progress. Peace in traditional society was held in high esteem. It is a spiritual value since in that the order, harmony and equilibrium in the universe and society are believed to be divinely established and the obligation to maintain them is religious. It is also a moral value since good conduct is required of human beings if the order, harmony and equilibrium are to be maintained. Hence any action that negates or threatened peace was strictly abhorred. It is undeniable that in spite of incessant religious crises that have ravaged Nigeria in recent times, spirituality still posses the force and resources to popularize the principles and ideas of peace, and thereby instill the habit of peace into the people. Religion has clearly indicated that true and stable peace is the

fruit of justice and peace is essentially an order characterized by truth, love, justice and liberty. Peace results from that harmony built into human society by its divine founder, and actualized by man as they thirst after ever grater justice. Ezeanya (2002) notes that in her national anthem:

Nigeria prays to God to help her build a nation in which no man is oppresses, namely, a nation in which justice shall reign supreme; a nation in which everyone gets that which belongs to him by right, a nation that would be blessed with peace. (p. 321).

In short, Nigeria is praying to build a kingdom of justice, love and peace. It is evidently with such a genuine atmosphere of peaceful order that nation building can be realized with security. It is an order that would permit the citizens to carry on their task, fulfill their duties and claim and enjoy their rights without inhibitions or molestations.

Religion vis-à-vis Growth of Wealth and Urbanization

One of the major concerns of any developing nation, Nigeria inclusive, is massive growth of wealth and phenomenon of increasing urbanization with its corresponding rapid economic expansion which in turn will be stimulated by advanced technology. Viewing the task of nation building as consisting mainly of technological development, the ability to defend the frontiers of a nation, and the control of a buoyant economy, tends to assume that religion has nothing positive to contribute to economic development, since it is generally on economic strength that a country is called developed, developing our underdeveloped, and religion is considered lying outside the realm of nation building. However, rapid growth in wealth, industrialization and urbanization must be matched by growth in humanity and righteousness which can only be stimulated by religion. There is the corresponding need to put a human face on and humanize the socio-economic and technological forces and factors of our times to be able to achieve a developed nation. Religion helps to build the character of a nation by giving a metaphysical dimension of life, accommodating rituals in life so that emphasis is shifted from physical to the metaphysical realm, encouraging selflessness through charity and encouraging simple living and high thinking. Religion has the responsibility to inject a measure of sound and balanced humanism into the economy, and into the process of industrialization and urbanization, if these are not to run risk through naked materialism and stark self-seeking (Iwe, 1985). Modern society needs not only expert technicians and

technocrats, but most importantly, it requires the emergence of spiritual men. The future of a modern Nigerian society and of technocracy is safer in the hands of spiritual men, guided not by the raw forces of materialism, grabbing capitalism and self-contradicting expediency, but rather pious men illumined by refined logic, higher principles and values. The presence and influence of such spiritual men, Iwe (1985) insists, will inspire the socio-economic and urban network and structures of modern Nigerian society with higher values as social justice, Love, friendship, solidarity and sincere consideration for the common man. To see therefore that the expansion of socio-economic forces, the growth on wealth and urbanization are achieved in the spirit of sound and balanced humanism, spirituality must be readily employed and harnessed.

Religion provides a wholesome perspective of the ethical values which should guide policy planners in nation building because a developed nation will come about only if it is built on the solid foundation of sound ethical and spiritual principles. Schumacher (cited in Kalu, 2002) once observed that it is curious that people do not see a connection between the Sermon on the Mount with matters of technology and economics; how to construct an outlook that could lead to an economic of survival. He warns that development is not a task for only economists; rather, a developing nation should avoid a technology which dehumanizes, destroys and pollute the ecology. He recommends a technology with a human face, a developmental strategy which considers the quality of life as its supreme goal. This is where religion as a factor in nation building comes to fore.

The building of a nation such as we envisage, cannot be achieved by the mere accumulation of material things or the procurement of a life of comfort and ease often to a limited few. Any project for the building of a nation which loses sight of, or ignores the spiritual and material well-being of man taken as a whole, cannot succeed in building a nation in which no man is oppressed. If you remove spiritual inclination from man, blot out his mind from the belief in his maker, what we have left is an animal who acts out of sheer convenience, one who obeys the law out of fear of punishment or hope of material gain or for pure intellectual satisfaction. It follows therefore that the building of a nation is first and foremost the building of the people that make up the nation which, in effect, boils down to the building of the individuals themselves. This is why spirituality has a vital role to play in the building of a nation.

Conclusion

Religion dominates the roots of the culture areas of Nigeria. Little or no distinction existed between the profane and the sacred dimensions of life. Thus all activities and instruments of survival and nation building should be clothed in religious ritual, language, and symbolism. Kalu (1978) opines that in Africa, the dominant world view is incurably religious. It is always strange, therefore, that in the quest for national development there is the tendency in some quarters to ignore the core values in a faddist appeal to foreign heroes and European prescriptions. Spirituality is the strongest element in traditional background, and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned.

The above assertions merely buttress the fact that one could not reasonably discuss nation building in our Nigerian context without recognizing the spiritual factor which undergirds our moral values, traditions and thinking. Religion, therefore, must regulate not only matters of spiritual salvation and moral development but also economic and socio-political affairs. Its influence and practice shall not be confined to the Mosques or the Churches but should be the same in the marketplace, social gathering and political soap-box. Religion has a set of social ethics which should govern the direction of development.

Nigeria aspires after greatness. It strives to build a state in which all are united; a state free from tribal hatred and prejudices, a state in which every one gets that to which he is entitled, a state free from the endemic vice of bribery and corruption, and where justice, love and peace reign supreme. The aspiration is noble and laudable, but she cannot import these virtues from abroad with her oil money; neither can she impose them with force of arms. The three major religions in Nigeria, African traditional religion, Islam and Christianity are indispensable recipes for building a happy and stable nation. Each religion has its own specific contributions to make for a united and peaceful Nigeria. To attempt to build a nation without employing the forces of spirituality is to hope to construct a massive structure upon the foundation of sand. Such a building will collapse at the slightest gust of wind and the fall will be great. Any nation where people lack spirituality is bound to lack conscience, compassion, and progress.

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