

An Evaluation of the Impacts of Religion and Politics in Developing Nigeria Towards Integrity

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Abstract

Religion is a concept which naturally evokes positive sentiments of goodness, kindness, love rectitude, peace with God, with oneself, and fellow-men. This serves as a potent tool that can create integrity in our society. Politics is the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decision that affects a society. The relationship between politics and religion is intimate because there is always a point of convergence. Focusing on state of Nigeria as a typical example of a religious pluralism, there are two dominant religious groups namely, Islam and Christianity, and both impact to breathe integrity into the society. Some scholars write on the roles of religion and politics but the aspect of integrity is missing. So, the recognition of the problem brought about by the politicians and religious leaders without integrity in their ways of governance has inspired the writing of this paper which is aimed at exploring the relationship between them; how they both relate to power, and how their relationship can develop Nigeria towards integrity. This paper used historical method for data gathering. Secondary data were sourced from published books and effectively used to analyse the cogent means through which both can serve as a developing tool in Nigeria so as to generate integrity for the society. It was noted that the relationship between religion and politics in development is likely to be complementary as long as religious beliefs and practices promotes integrity in all spheres of life. Therefore, development and integrity is impossible without religious values and political sanctity.

Key words: Development, Religion, Politics, Politics in Nigeria, Integrity.

INTRODUCTION

The great philosopher, Aristotle describes man as a political animal.¹ This has to do with the conceptualisation of man as being constantly engaged in the process of influencing, threatening or using threat on others and thereby, directly or indirectly being engaged in politics. That is, man is political and he is inevitably involved in power play whether or not he likes it. In his own contribution, Jawondo depicts man as both a religious and political animal.² Man is arguably the only animal with a religion. If man is also a religious being, it therefore implies that religion is a universal activity, practiced in all human societies, extremely varied in form and is regarded with great seriousness by those who adhere to it.³ This submission raises the fundamental question as to whether or not all people are religious which is however not the force behind this paper. But, all people practice one type of religion or the other.

Meanwhile, scholars have contributed immensely on the issue of religion and politics in different dimensions. Ojo analyses the religious crisis in Nigeria and its implications on democracy.⁴ Also, Ayorinde writes about religion and national unity,⁵ Jawode speaks on the role of Islam in Ilorin politics.⁶ With all the scholarly views on religion and politics, they were mute about the impacts of integrity on the development of Nigeria. With this, scholarly works on religion and politics are yet to discuss the issue of integrity in both religion and politics for the development of the society. This paper focuses on Christianity and the Islamic religion for a proper understanding of the scope of this work and evaluates integrity in the practice of religious values in the society and in the involvement of political leaders in all system of government in relation to integrity.

Furthermore, historical method for data gathering was used. Secondary data were sourced from published books and effectively used to analyse the cogent means through which both can serve as a developing tool in Nigeria in order to generate integrity for the society. Therefore, the dynamism of this paper is the analytical aspects of how the

relationship between religion and politics can develop Nigeria towards integrity.

Clarification of Concepts: Religion, Politics and Integrity

Imo does not agree on a single definition of the word 'religion' because religion is a combination of two things: the profane and the supernatural.⁷ Therefore, a good definition has to take the two into consideration. Imo emphasises that a good definition of religion should feature specificity and inclusiveness. He advances that religion is the varied symbolic expression of, and appropriate response to that, which people deliberately affirm as being of unrestricted value for them. McGee posits that the religious communities of human beings are often distinguished by reference to their central object of worship.⁸ Around this sacred object, person or concept, ritual practices, ethical system and social organisation take form. He defines religion as a set of activities organised around the sacred; that non-empirical source of power, transcendence, mystery and awe. The basic dimensions of religion include the belief patterns which accommodate the sacred reality people experience through revelation, reflection or divine illumination, ritual practices which are prescribed for believers as appropriate human responses in the relationship to the ultimate source of being or value; ethical codes which are behaviour directed towards the other person, and cultic organisation.

As a concept, politics is a phenomenon which has its origin in the class of individual preferences, its process in public demands for accommodation of competing goals and its output in the form of binding public policies.⁹ In a similar vein, David Easton famously defined politics as being concerned with the process of authoritative allocation of values in any social system.¹⁰ Values here include all things sought after in the society such as wealth, respect, prestige, position, security, power among others.

Integrity is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. It is the state of being whole and undivided, upright in speech and action. With integrity in the practice of religion and politics, it will help generate development to the Nigeria society. Furthermore, integrity serves as a condition of being unified or sound in construction. Looking at the Nigerian politics, it is glaring that integrity is absent and with the

absence of it, the society cannot tend to development rather it tends to retrogression. When integrity is involved in both religion and politics, it brings internal consistency and there would be lack of corruption that will definitely result into development in the Nigeria society.

Looking at the different positions of scholars on the concepts of religion and politics, both seem to have a set of well stated objectives. These structured objectives are directed or targeted at the people who could be adherents as the case may be. The question now is, do their stated objectives converge at a point which ultimately necessitate integrity and development in the Nigeria society by both? Hank Eso sees religion as a tool of politics and that in the real sense of it both make strange bedfellows. In his words, just as soccer is singularly the sole and most unifying factor in Nigeria, nothing is as divisive as religion especially when it is used as a tool of politics.¹¹

The Roles of Integrity in Religion and Politics

This section is devoted to the consideration of the roles of integrity in religion and politics. Indeed, religion and religious associations perform a number of democratic roles but the extent to which these roles have been performed is another issue. Because religion is a complex phenomenon, the social functions performed are quite diverse. Some religious functions are manifested immediately and observable while some are latent and not immediately discernible. It should be recognized that if an activity helps the integrative performance of an organisation, then we call it functional. Roles like support for tolerance, peaceful cooperation, co-existence and love are integrity that are promoted through ministerial and lay practice. Scholars like Schaefer and Lamn identify some democratic utilities of religion which include the integration of human societies composed of individuals and social groups with diverse interests and aspirations. In their view, religious bond transcend these personal and divisive force.¹²

Another important function identified by the two authors is the ability of religion to legitimize the existing social order with integrity. Borrowing heavily from the essay of Rotimi, Mala & Aiyegboyin, religion performs six interrelated functions, namely, restraining the conduct of government, encouraging political participation, promoting democratic values and norms, articulating and aggregating distinctive

societal interests, generating cross-cutting identities and providing avenues for the development of leadership skills that result from integrity.¹³ With reference to the first function of restraining and containing government conduct, religious associations in Nigeria have repeatedly and stridently denounced bad governmental policies or actions that infringe on the interests of the religious community in particular, and the welfare of the citizenry in general. Thus, religious associations have joined independence groups in civil society in criticizing the dubious and circuitous nature of the military's democratisation project and government's management of the religious disturbances that have convulsed several Northern states. On the stimulation of political participation and civic identification, Nigeria's religious organisations have played an important role in encouraging and mobilising their members towards active participation in, and identification with public affairs and politics. This is done by stimulating a sense of integrity through civic identification and participation in their members by urging such members to pray and fast for peace, stability, justice and progress of the nation to enhance development in the society

Thirdly, the demonstration of integrity in both religion and politics, promotes democratic values and norms. This is done through the promotion and propagation of such democratic norms and values as tolerance, moderation, unwillingness to compromise, and respect for truth, justice and freedom. Religious leaders in Nigeria have at different times demonstrated this commitment to democracy by urging Nigerians not to waiver in their support for democratic institutions.¹⁴ More so, integrity provides avenues for interest representation. Religious organizations articulate, aggregate and represent distinctive societal interests. The Christian representation and mobilisation against Nigeria's membership in the OIC represented only one of the many instances of interest representation by the Christian community since 1986. Religion equally generates cross-cutting interest. The existence of cross-cutting interests implies that competing affiliations could operate to secure social peace and democratic stability, and prevent destructive or protracted social conflict, by inducing individuals and groups to divide their emotions in a single explosive line of affiliation.¹⁵

Finally, religious organisations, like many other ordered shares of associational activity or social intercourse, provide an appropriate

environment for the development of leadership skills. This is done by displaying an impressive capacity to manage people and resources in their respective organizations by speaking out courageously and consistently against the excesses, and proffering solutions to the nation's problems. Through this, religious leaders have gained some reputation and legitimacy as effective national leaders of thorough and potential statement. It would however be misleading to conclude that religious organizations have been uniformly or consistently supportive of democratic processes and values in Nigeria. In general, integrity in religion is functional or dysfunctional, depending on the extent to which it contributes to the achievement of societal goals and development.

Factors that Hinders Development and Integrity in Nigeria

In spite of series of developmental strategies, functional roles of integrity in religion as aforementioned and put in place by successive religious leaders and government, and sometimes with good intentions; all attempts to generate meaningful development and integrity proved futile. The following are the basic hindrances to Nigeria's development.

1. Lack of Good Governance: Where there is bad governance, development becomes a mirage. This is the result of bad leadership in the country. Most leaders have no sense of integrity and commitment to the development of the nation.

2. Poor Formulation and Implementation of Policies: There are lots of cases which are lacking in the executive capacity responsible for formulation and implementation of the plan. Planning is supposed to involve the peasants in the villages, even the local government officials who are close to the people are not always consulted.¹⁶

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. According to Chuta, corruption and development are antithetical to each other, the two cannot cohabit, and so, where one is present, the other suffers.¹⁷ This has brought unpredictable setback and drastically reduced Nigeria's integrity among other nations of the world.

5. Religious Intolerance: Nigeria has witnessed a variety of religious disturbance, some of which have threatened the existence of the country as a nation since independence. There are always palpable fears at the slightest provocation of inter-religious skirmishes especially in the northern parts of the country and the political leaders are savaging the nation through these religious crises and enriching their pockets. The persistence of this monster has become the source of worry for most Nigerians. It is against this backdrop that this paper will look at the impacts of religious groups and politics in promoting development and integrity.

The Impacts of Religion and Politics in Developing Nigeria towards Integrity

Nigeria, in every ramification, is a pluralistic society. There is a high level of religious and ethnic pluralism in the nation. There are Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and several others, all of which belong to a common nationality. Each of these tribes has its own culture. All these differences make life challenging to each of the religious groups. Therefore, with all these differences, in order to attain development, and retain the integrity of Nigeria, the people generally have to bury all their differences and work together as a team in order to achieve our aims.

The level of development of a country is affected by many factors, nevertheless, this paper tends to emphasise the impacts of religion variables. However, social factors can also be important determinants of growth. Religion is a source not only of intolerance, human rights violations, and extremist violence, but also of non-violent conflict transformation, the defense of human rights, integrity in government, and reconciliation and stability in divided societies. The paper examines the contribution of religion and politics to foster development and integrity of this nation.

Firstly, Social Roles: It can be deduced that the recognition of social justice is the recognition of God in the scheme of things and this can equally lead to progress and development. After all, God is the maker of man and the source of all that is good; prosperity, peace, justice, equity and all these presupposes social justice. Religion teaches man that he is a creature of an all powerful Father of whom he depends his life and well-being which he will give account. Man cannot develop without religion.

According to Ezeanya, to attempt to build a nation without God is to construct a massive structure upon the foundation of sand, such building will collapse at the slightest gust of wind and the fall will be great.¹⁸ So, the impact of religion and politics in development is to tell the people that, social justice, egalitarianism and building of a nation is not merely the conception of man, but it is ordained by God. With this, religion can be seen as the promoter of growth and development as they direct people toward integrity like: honesty, discipline, hard work, education and absenteeism from harmful activities; though it can also encourage violence in the name of doing the will of God. In the view of the above, one can say that religion and politics play the roles of moving the nation forward by bringing the citizens together to plan for good of the nation.

Secondly, Political Roles: The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with Nigeria, climate, water, air or any other thing else. The major Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility of integrity in their different positions held. As regards the challenges of personal example which is the hallmark of the true leadership, it is not only the rulers; the people also contribute to the ruin of the nation. This is done simply by disrespecting constituted authorities, sometimes apathy and absence of commitment of behaviours of the citizen for conducive and rancor-free atmosphere hinders progress.¹⁹

If the leaders should be educated politically on what leadership entail and the led people understand their position too, obedience, the magic of decorum and political awareness would have been effective. The Nigeria political milieu has not been satisfactorily done. Integrity can bring about sustainable political development through the inculcation of high sense of integrity to duty, morality, selfless service, respect for human lives, public accountability, love for one's neighbour, and sense of humanity. It will lead to the abhorrence of violence, starting from the Boko Haram crisis that has taken religio-political dimension, back to the Biafra war. With religion, there is a sense of religious awakening which is supposed to have a positive impact on the political development of the country.²⁰ Integrity can contribute to national integration, political mobilisation, reformation of ethnic identity, peaceful co-existence, and economic social and political development. In agreement to the above, Marshall submits that the virtues inherent from the political education of these

religions has effected some changes and hence helped in the development of our nation.²¹

Thirdly, Health Care System: Religious groups in this country have been doing its best to ensure that the country becomes a better place to live. They have been providing and helping people to have good health care services. For example, there is Seventh Day Adventist Hospital in Aba, Ife, Jengre, and Ilisan. Faith Clinic Foundation in Nsukka, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Umuahia.²² Likewise, political leaders should ensure and build hospitals, vital centers and health care system that can solve the health challenges of the citizens of Nigeria to prevent untimely death as a result of poor medical facilities.

In the fourth place, Agricultural Sector: Many religious groups encourage people, especially their members to embark on farming by providing fertilizer and soft loans to them. The members also encourage the farmers by buying their harvested goods. Religious groups also encourage their members to be hard working as no religion encourages laziness. Then, the political leaders should be able to augment what the religious leaders are giving out to the society by providing lands, tools and necessary implements for the success of farm work by the citizens who are willing and ready for farming. With this, Nigeria can gradually develop to the expected nation admired by her citizens for integrity.

In the fifth place, Economic Development: Analysis of the implications of diversity in Nigeria and other countries suggest diversity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for conflict. In other words, the very fact that a country has different ethnic, communal, religious, and racial groups do not make division and conflicts inevitable. In cross country studies, Weber's hypothesis had been revisited. Barro and McCleary assess the effect of religious participation and beliefs on a country's rate of economic progress.²³ Using international survey data for 59 countries drawn from the World Values Survey and the International Social Sciences Program conducted between 1981 and 1999, these authors found that greater diversity of religion is associated with higher church attendance and stronger religious beliefs. For a given level of church attendance, increase in some religious beliefs notably belief in heaven, hell and an afterlife, tends to increase economic growth. This is evident in the activities of churches in Nigeria where they assist some of their devoted members not only influencing their view of success and the

need to acquire wealth but also help to secure job for them, thereby helping to improve their living standards and the country at large.

Lastly, Educational Roles: Religion and politics could also foster development through encouragement of members to acquire formal education. If formal education is significant to a high standard of living, then religion may explain why there are many poor people in northern Nigeria than other regions especially South-Western and South-Eastern Nigeria. This is because the practice of women in Purdah in Northern Nigeria could account for the low enrolment of women in formal education institution. Finally, the impacts of religion and politics in Nigeria's development and integrity cannot be overemphasised because they are involved in all areas of human life.

Recommendations

In view of the issues raised in this paper, these are the recommendations;

1. Integrity should be a fundamental base in government policies to always inculcate moral principles, justice, truth, equity and honesty, which is a reagent to personality change, thereby reducing corruption.
2. The study of moral education should be made compulsory in all categories of learning and the national orientation agency should also include it in their plans.
3. Government should give executive power to the Christian Association of Nigeria and the Islamic Society of Nigeria in promoting, integrity, inter-religious dialogue, and religious tolerance through organising seminars and workshops for religious adherents which will help in building an integrity culture in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Integrity is a potent tool that is efficient in the development of Nigeria. Development can literally be achieved through the consistent practice of integrity by the religious and political leaders in all their spheres of leadership. With the involvement of integrity in religion, it has a functional aspect as evidenced in morality, justice, truth, economic development, educational and social services which it can render through its various institutions as dysfunctional.

Any nation that lacks integrity is bound to lack conscience, compassion and progress. We need and must support unreservedly the free practice of integrity in religion by Nigerian Christians, Muslims and Traditional animists. No religion in Nigeria should be deemed superior or subordinate to the other, and none should be state-sanctioned or enforced. Finally, we must be willing to overcome the temptation to mix religion and politics or make religion a tool of national partisan politics because of the intricacies involved. ²⁴Nevertheless, we can probably conclude that integrity must be in relationship between religion and politics that would eventually guaranty a hundred percent development in the Nigeria society.

ENDNOTES

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