


Navigating Religious values in Nigeria's Democratic Landscape

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Abstract

Nigeria is a democratic country. Political actors in Nigeria have covered themselves with the spirit of favouritism, unequal allocation of resources, sectionalism, unbalanced political structure and political struggle to be in control of power. This negates the principle of organic unity in diversity which could amount to crisis. Democracy connotes respect for the sovereignty of the people and can only be realized in an atmosphere of love for one another and patriotism. Therefore, integrating religious values into the democratic system becomes paramount. This paper examines how religious values could be used to improve the democratic culture of the country. It adopts a qualitative research approach and data was collected from secondary sources. The findings revealed the ineffectiveness of democracy without religious values; some religious values have direct link with essential of democracy. This paper advocates religious values for lasting democracy and continuously advancing towards an improved society.

Key Words: Democracy, political leaders, religious values, Nigerians, Nigerian society

Introduction

Religion and politics are integral features of man's social interaction and existence. Religion is a divine manifestation or revelation to man and man's response to the call in appreciation of the reality and consequences of the revelation (Makozi, 1988). Hence man is an individual that subjected his whole self to God his creator and the services of his society. The essence of religion structures man's life and regulates his relationship with his fellow in society as it is the foundation of political order, legitimacy to civil law and forms sovereignty (Ejizu, 1986). Thus man's value systems and attitudinal orientations are the functions of one's religious belief (Ejizu, 1986). Politics is all about governance which primarily involves the structuring of power for achieving some articulated goals (Madu, 2004). This process entails the mobilization of human and other human resources, managing, directing, and enforcing the affairs of public policy and decisions towards the regulation of social order (Ejizu, 1988). There are different forms of political system. These include monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, among others (Duran as cited in Madu, 2004).

Democracy being a form of political system in this present time is not guided by the principle and value of religion. Abraham Lincoln gave a known definition of democracy as the government of the people, by the people, for the people (Pinsker, 2013). In other words, democracy aims to safeguard the rights of ordinary individuals and promotes principles like justice, equality, equity, and respect for human rights, among others. In this epoch, Nigeria is witnessing a series of human right violation and social injustice. The numerous of them which include: Lack of equity in distributing dividends of government; Economic underdevelopment in some parts of Nigeria; Ethnicity, tribalism and nepotism; Ungodly acquisition of wealth and official corruption; Born to rule mentality, mafia mentality and Godfatherism; Police/army brutality and extra-judicial killing; Bloody rampage by Fulani herdsmen across Nigeria; The menacing spate of genocide of Boko Haram insurgence; Enslavement, human trafficking and ritual; and all manners of servitude, marginalization, neglect of minority ethnic groups. Nigerian democratic government is not guided by the principles and values of religion which should be the hallmark of a true democratic system.

There are social strangulation, economic destruction, political manipulation and disempowerment, exclusion and marginalization, indiscriminate and other acts of violence which turn Nigeria into a huge blood pool (Chukwudozie, 2016). These are clear evidence of the failure of the government to uphold social justice and human rights in society. This is because Nigerian Democracy could not succeed without being built on the values that transcend the contingencies of existence.

Human beings are created in the image of God. On the premise of human dignity, freedom is rooted (Okeke, 2015). In freedom, all rights, privileges and responsibilities are found. Democracy that is not built on religious fundamental values but rather fleeting values is built to oppress the system and pays no attention to the common good. This paper, therefore, harnesses religious values for the enhancement of democratic culture. This paper adopts a qualitative research approach to examine and analyse how religious values could be used to improve the democratic culture of the country, as the findings revealed the ineffectiveness of democracy without religious values. It underscores the significance of religious values in establishing a sustainable democracy and advancing towards a more progressive and improved society.

Theoretical Framework

The theory used for the explanation of this study is the institutional theory. Institutional theory is a theory on the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure that considers the processes by which structures such as schemes, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behaviour (Scott, 2004). This theory believes that for a society to develop and maintain its unity, it must create political, social, cultural economic and religious institutions. These institutions are capable of evolving innovative policies of social integration, ethnic harmony and unity, and peaceful coexistence as basis for sustainable development. This theory argued that in a developing country like Nigeria, there is a need for good leadership as a way of preserving ethnic and cultural sustainability. Nigerian leaders in all sectors like the socio-cultural, economic, political and religious institutions should aimed at bringing the diverse ethnic groups together for harmony, unity, love and progress; thereby encouraging the good governance of democracy. Institutional theory is a widely accepted theoretical position that emphasizes productivity, ethics, and legitimacy (Scott, 2008)

Conceptual Clarification:

Values and Religious Values

Value is one of the great words that have multiple and complex meanings (Morris as cited in Agha, 2015). It is the regard that something is held to deserve; the importance, worth, or usefulness of something; principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgment of what is important in life (Oxford Languages, 2022). Values encompass the individual attributes we opt to exhibit in order to steer our behaviours; they reflect the type of individual we aspire to become, our treatment of both ourselves and others, and our engagement with the surrounding environment. Values serve as overarching principle for ethical behaviour (Mintz, 2018).

In other words, values in a limited context represent what is commendable, sought-after, or valuable. They constitute the driving force behind intentional endeavours, serving as the objectives that guide our actions. Values encompass extensive inclinations towards suitable paths of action or results. Values, therefore, mirror an individual's perception of morality and ethics, or what is considered as the ideal standard -such as

"universal equality of rights," "admiration for excellence," and "treating individuals with respect and honour".

Values that function in a society which has strong value traditions or in a particular institution of a given society (for example, religious), which also distinguishes the presence of strong value traditions; contribute to a faster process of a person's socialization, his/her harmonious joining a certain context of the social environment (Bobyreval et al, 2019). The functioning of values is the influence of the end on human activity, human behaviour, social life and the development of culture (Pecherkina, 1995 as cited in Bobyreval et al, 2019), as 'the good' is desirable by all humans. Something is valuable if it is good, cherished, important, useful, desirable and worthwhile.

Religious values reflect the principles upon which a person makes decisions that govern their life (LaVerne, 2021). Religious values are a timeless phenomenon and can be presented as initial fundamental principles that can be defined as "principles", "laws", "attitudes" and "commandments", among others. They are the most fundamental part of any culture and society that shares the foundations of a given religious dogma, during the society's development (Bobyreval et al, 2019). Religious values define what people expect of themselves and others based on the beliefs common to the religions they practice. Such values represent the core principles that guide daily decision-making. They help people determine which actions to take, and to make judgments about right or wrong and good or bad. The world's most commonly practised religions often have similar values, although variations exist in the way some values are prioritized over others (Kraft, 2017). Religious values are typically based on values influenced by the lives of religious persons and reproduced within religious texts (Davis, 2017).

Politics

The word politics is derived from the Greek word '*polis*' meaning city-state (Liddell & Robert, 1940). Etymologically, English politics has its roots in the name of Aristotle's classic work, *Politiká*, which introduced the Greek term *politiká* (affairs of the cities) (Buhler, 1961). It is the art or science of government; the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing governmental policy; the art or science concerned with winning and holding control over a government (Merriam Websters, 2022). Okwueze (2003, p.153) defines politics as, "a process of adjustment and inter-play of power and interest within the public life and affairs of society on a local, national and international level. "Politics is all about the government which is that indispensable social organization established in every society to formally enact, codify and enforce laws and values of that particular society" (Ekwunife, 1992, p.9).

Democracy

Democracy is ruled by the people. The term is derived from the Greek *dēmokratia*, which was coined from *dēmos* ("people") and *Kratos* ("rule") to denote the political systems (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022). The values of freedom, respect for human rights and the principle of holding periodic and genuine elections by universal suffrage are essential elements of democracy. In turn, United Nations (UN) observes

that democracy provides an environment for the protection and effective realization of human rights (UN, n.d). Democracy provides an environment that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in which the freely expressed will of people is exercised (UN, n.d)

Leadership

Leadership is a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal (Kruse, 2013). There are key elements that are attached to the concept of leadership. These include:

Leadership stems from social influence, not authority or power; leadership requires others, and that implies they don't need to be 'direct reports'; no mention of personality traits, attributes, or even a title; there are many styles, many paths, to effective leadership; it includes a goal, not influence with no intended outcome (Kruse, 2013).

Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Leaders carry out this process by applying their leadership attributes, such as – beliefs, values, ethics, character, knowledge and skills. The leader tries to influence the behaviour of individuals or groups of individuals around him to achieve desired goals. Leadership is essentially a continuous process of influencing behaviour. It may be considered in the context of mutual relations between a leader and his followers (Truett, n.d.).

Democratic leadership, also known as participative leadership or shared leadership is a leadership style in which members of the group take a participative role in the decision-making process. This type of leadership can apply to any organization, from private businesses to schools and to the government (Kendra, 2022). The democratic leadership style is one of the most effective types and leads to higher productivity, better contributions from group members, and increased group morale (Amanchukwu et al, 2015). Democratic leadership has some of the major characteristics which include: group members are encouraged to share ideas and opinions, even though the leader retains the final say over decisions; members of the group feel more engaged in the process; creativity is encouraged and rewarded (Khoshhal & Guraya, 2016). These leaders are sincere and make decisions based on their morals and values. They also tend to seek diverse opinions and do not try to silence dissenting voices or those that offer a less popular point of view (Kendra, 2022).

Background to Democracy: An Overview

There are many forms of government and administrative structures. These include democracy (government by the people), monarchy (government by the royal family), polyarchy (government by many), oligarchy (government by a small group), aristocracy (government by the elite), plutocracy (government by the rich) and theocracy (government by someone regarded as divinely guided), among others (Okeke, 2015; Thompson, 2021). These forms of government are seen as legitimate particularly if they respected and valued the

dignity of the human person and pursue the common good for the betterment of everyone. Democracy rests upon a well-understood group of values, attitudes, and practices - all of which may take different forms and expressions among cultures and societies around the world (US Embassy, Seoul, 2017). In a democracy, power belongs to the people. The idea of democracy derives its moral strength – and popular appeal – from two key principles: individual autonomy - the idea that no one should be subject to rules which have been imposed by others. People should be able to control their own lives (within reason); equality - the idea that everyone should have the same opportunity to influence the decisions that affect people in society (Council of Europe, 2012).

Historically, democracy owes a lot to ancient Greek civilization. Democracy was invented from Greek, as the word was coined by Herodotus, the Greek historian in the 5th Century BC to mean popular rule (*demos* – the people and *kratein* – to rule) (Okeke, 2015). Under Cleisthenes, democracy was established in Athens which is why Cleisthenes is referred to as 'the father of Athenian democracy' (Hsia et al, 2007). During Athenian democracy equal political right and equality before the law was enjoyed by the citizens; public issues were discussed and debated in the assembly and decided by the majority vote; there was accountability by the elected public officers; people enjoyed political and civil freedom, the right to criticize and oppose and were protected against tyranny by respect for the law (Clark & Foweraker, 2001; Okeke, 2015). Based on the record by United Nations (n.d) to sustain democracy, the UN General Assembly and the former Commission on Human Rights endeavour to draw on international human rights instruments to promote a common understanding of the principles and values of democracy.

The Commission recommended a series of legislative, institutional and practical measures to consolidate democracy in 2000. The Commission further declared the essential elements of democracy in 2002', which include the following; respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; freedom of association; freedom of expression and opinion; access to power and its exercise following the rule of law; the holding of periodic free and fair elections by universal suffrage and by secret ballot as the expression of the will of the people; a pluralistic system of political parties and organizations; the separation of powers; the independence of the judiciary; transparency and accountability in public administration; and free, independent and pluralistic media. With the above development, a system of democracy is intended to promote human and social values and development. Hence, democracy journeys to perfection as man progresses seeking true values with guidance and faith.

Fundamental Religious Values to Improve Democratic Culture for Sustainability

Value is something worthy of pursuit and can be rated based on how positively it impacted human life and condition. In other words, values have certain fundamental import in human

life. Man's sense of value is the determinant factor in shaping his life. This section would incorporate the religious values of the three major religions in Nigeria (Traditional religion, Christianity and Islam). Each religion has similar and differing values (Davis, 2017). As human beings, we have an innate sense of morality. No matter what religion, race or colour we are, certain qualities serve as the moral standard. We admire justice, bravery, honesty and compassion. Also, we abhor those who demonstrate treachery, cruelty or corruption. Moral standards are universal, and one of the most important aspects of Islam is adherence to high moral standards and good manners in society (Stacey, 2023). All these values are based on their importance to human life. Religious values, therefore, are said to be 'anthropocentric' because it is human-centred. It is called value because of its significance to man. Religious values are those values which the practice of religion irrespective of the sect encourages, values that connect man with the religious life, values that without which one cannot be a good religious person. These religious values if properly incorporated would make democratic governance a good and sustainable one.

In traditional religion, there are a set of values that guide the behaviour of every member of the traditional society. These values have been consistent from generation to generation. These values are fostered on respect for human life, human dignity and elders; regard and appreciation for one's family and benefactors, and hospitality; self-control, humility and courtesy; virtues of forgiveness, harmony and peaceful co-existence; diligence and hard work; truth, honesty and justice; unity and cooperation, all crowned in good character (Ilogu, 1974; Ifemesia, 1979; Onwubiko, 1991; Falade et. al., 2009; Awoniyi, 2015).

Christian values are the principles of life that were taught by Jesus, the principles that a follower of Jesus Christ holds as important. The foundation is found in God's Word, the Bible. Christian values are consistent and change over time. The root of all values Jesus Christ taught in the New Testament is 'love'. This can be summed up in two thoughts, 'love God' and 'love others'. Christian values include the following: love and peace, humility and selfless service, justice, respect, honesty and sincerity, compassion, generosity and kindness, Worship only God and have faith in God; practice what you preach and don't be a hypocrite; forgiveness and don't revenge; all is crowned living a moral life (Okeke, 2015; Compassion, 2022).

The basic values of Islam that can be identified such as faith and God, home and family, as well as freedom have occupied a prior position in the religious culture of modern Islam (Bobyreval et al, 2019). Every Muslim is the recipient, guardian, and executor of God's will on earth; his responsibilities are all-encompassing. A Muslim's duty to act in defence of what is right is as much part of his faith as is his duty to oppose wrong (Bassiouni, 2012). Values in the Islamic religion expressed in the Qur'an include equality, justice, fairness, kindness (to people and animals), brotherhood,

mercy, compassion, charity, forgiveness, honesty, patience, respecting parents and elders, keeping promises, and controlling one's anger. Islam also commands love, 'love of God' and those 'God loves', love of his messenger (Muhammad) and believers (Mufti, 2013; Bassiouni, 2012; Bobyreval et al, 2019).

From the above religious values, the concentration of this work is on the values that have a direct link with good and democratic governance. The religious values are as follows

Love

Love is a virtue as well as a value. Love is the root of all services. Whatever you do, let it be for love. In traditional religion, it is love that brought the spirit of community life, hospitality and kindness, among others. In Christianity, Love is the fundamental characteristic of who God is and it's a value that is to describe His children as well. "We love because he first loved us." – 1 John 4:19. 'Love the Lord your God' is the most important of the commandments and then 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. In Matthew 5: 43-48, Jesus made the point that we should extend our Christian love to all people of the world, regardless of race, religion, nationality or any other artificial distinction. We must practice that Christian love even toward our enemies. In Islam; Muslims are directed by Allah ('God') in the ways to become close to Him and how to gain His love. In the Sahih Muslim Hadith, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "You will not enter paradise until you believe, and you will not believe until you love to the other Muslim what you love to yourself." Democratic leaders should learn how to apply the principle of love, by showing respect, affection, benevolence, goodwill and concern for the welfare of the people for good democratic governance.

Humility

Humility or being humble is a quality of being courteously respectful of others. It is the recognition that the human being is a creature of God and also Children of God (Okeke, 2015). In a traditional religious context humility can mean recognition of self with a deity (i.e. God) or deities, and subsequent submission to said deity as a member of that religion (The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1910). In Christianity, humility is best exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ. This Biblical account:

Does nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross (Philippians 2:3-8).

The above is a comprehensive Christian teaching on humility.

The word 'Islam' on the other hand means "surrender to the will God (Allah) could be interpreted as humility". In Islam, successful indeed are the believers, those who humble themselves in their prayers (Quran, 23: 1-2). Acting with humility does not deny one's self-worth. Rather, it affirms the inherent worth of the human person created in the image of God. It is the opposite of aggressiveness, arrogance, boastfulness, and vanity. Humility is exactly what is needed to live in peace and harmony with all persons. It dissipates anger and heals old wounds. It allows us to see the dignity and worth of all of God's people. Humility distinguishes the wise leader from the arrogant power-seeker (Proverbs 17:7, Matthew 20:20-28). Democratic leaders should imbibe this virtue of humility and see themselves as servants to the people who voted them in.

Peace

In the African traditional religious context, peace is an expression of divine will towards all creation, humans and nature; God gives peace to sustain and propagate the life of all living creatures; Peace knows no discrimination and no favouritism, based on creed, gender, health, race, or wealth (Mbiti, 2010). There are many aspects of this Christian value mentioned in the Bible. It refers to rest and tranquillity and ultimately, peace is a gift from God. "Let us, therefore, make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification." (Romans 14:19). Biblically, peace is more than just the absence of conflict; it is taking action to restore a broken situation. It's more than a state of inner tranquillity; it's a state of wholeness and completeness (Word Study, 2019). The word Islam means peace and submission.

Muslims greet each other by saying '*Salaam alaykum*' meaning 'peace be upon you (Douglas, 2003). 'Peace is a Word Spoken by a Merciful God!' (Quran 36:58). Islamic peacemaking is a teaching and tradition that has the potential to transcend divisions. The teachings of Islam invite people to live a peaceful life based on theism, justice and purity. Therefore, peace in Islam is an eternal constitution. Even the nature of war in Islam is a defensive one, not an offensive one because the principle of Islam is peace and coexistence, not conflict, violence and war (Yazdani, 2020). Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the good of people, free communication among men, and respect for the dignity of persons and people (Okeke, 2015). Democratic leaders should embrace peace for the unity and progress of their democratic government.

Justice

Justice according to Iwe (as cited in Chukwudozie, 2016, p.105) is "a moral virtue which inclines the will constantly and perpetually to render to others their due in time and place and a given set of circumstances." African traditional religion holds a moral sense of justice and truth. The principle of justice is to give each person or group, whether weak or strong what is his due and demands the contribution of each based on equal consideration. The Igbo indigenous justice system is process-oriented, victim-centred, and humane, and it applies

persuasive and re-integrative principles in adjudicating justice. A major component of the Igbo indigenous justice system is that it is participatory, and decisions are reached through consensus (Elechi, 2008). Biblical references to the word "justice" mean "to make a right." Justice is, first and foremost, a relational term — people living in the right relationship with God, one another, and the natural creation.

From a scriptural point of view, justice means loving our neighbour as we love ourselves and it is rooted in the character and nature of God. As God is just and loving, so we are called to do justice and live in love (World Vision, 2012). Justice for Christians has a double operation: It exposes the character of God and requires humanity to be like God. Through its development and embodiment, the peculiar concept of Christian justice has had a transformative impact on both religion and the globe (Hassell, 2011). Justice is the goal of Islamic law, as it is the goal of Islamic society in general. In both the Quran and Hadith, justice requires the offender to take personal responsibility for his or her actions and in most cases compensate for the harms and losses of the victim (Absar, 2020). The noble ideals of justice have pushed people to protest, revolt, and clamour, for liberation, freedom, and independence from people who deny them justice (Chukwudozie, 2016). Democratic leaders should maintain justice to ensure a better and more sustainable democratic government.

Respect

Traditional religion is accorded to people by respecting their opinions and giving them the honour that is due to them. According to Okeke, (2015, p.22), "respect is special regard or consideration which one is giving another person primarily because he is a child of God." It is also a core Christian value because people are made in the image of God, everyone is special, everyone's opinion matters, everyone's contribution is important, everyone's feelings should be considered and everyone's faith is sacred. Respect can mean simply treating each other with politeness and courtesy, and recognising that everyone's contribution is important and that everyone's feelings should be considered (Catherington Church, 2022). Respect as a value is to be conscious that God has created all people in His image. As a response, we show respect to all. "Show proper respect to everyone, loves the family of believers, fear God, and honour the emperor." – 1 Peter 2:17.

The Qur'an is treated with immense respect by Muslims because it is the sacred word of God. While the Qur'an is recited aloud, Muslims should behave with reverence and refrain from speaking, eating or drinking, or making distracting noise (BBC, 2011). Islam binds respect to peace, love and compassion, all attributes of the One God, therefore to fulfil our obligation to honour and obey God. Islam states that it is the responsibility of each individual to treat all creation with respect, honour and dignity. The most deserving of respect is the Creator Himself. Respect begins with loving and obeying the commandments of God and from this respect

flow all the manners and high standards of morality that are inherent in Islam (Aisha, 2008). It is pertinent for democratic leaders to be affectionate, benevolent, and concerned for the welfare of the people he is serving.

Honesty

Honesty is a positive value that connotes virtues like truthfulness, integrity, straightforwardness, sincerity, fairness, etc as opposed to lying, cheating and theft, among others. Honesty is held as a very important value in many ethnic and religious cultures, if not all (Dahlsgaard, Peterson & Seligman, 2005; Hilbig & Zettler, 2009). It is highly valued in the Bible since any deception to gain an advantage or harm someone else is prohibited by the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:16) and many other Bible passages. In a traditional religious setting, a value like honesty is well encouraged among the adherents. Looking at the political circle in Nigeria, today deception like lies, cheating and failing to tell the whole truth is very common, so also in business and everyday life. A rationalization is a form of self-deception by which we convince ourselves that sinful actions are justified to achieve a good result, but this is just another form of dishonesty (Galatians 6:7-8, James 1:26, 1 John 1:8). People must strongly resist the temptation to engage in any form of theft, cheating, deception, innuendo, slander or gossip.

Islam commands Muslims to be honest to themselves and others; to tell the truth, even if it is against their interest; not to cheat or betray other people; to be truthful in their words and deeds, and privately and publicly alike (Azra, 2014). Islam instructs us to keep the trust and return it at the behest of the trustee because it creates mutual harmony, love, justice, equality, and trust which lead to the existence of a good society (Qasmi, n.d). This order recurrently comes in the Noble Qur'an and the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam). , Al-Qur'ān, 4:58 says that "Indeed, Allah commands you to return trusts to their rightful owners; and when you judge between people, judge with fairness. What a noble commandment from Allah to you! Surely Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing".

Honesty is an excellent and admirable attribute. Honesty is the precious essence due to which the atmosphere of love and trust prevails. Honesty creates a good spirit of brotherhood, justice, and equality in society (Naseem & Zia-ur-, 2020). Honesty in words implies telling the truth in all situations and under all circumstances; fulfilling the promises, whether written or given verbally, in text and spirit and giving an honest opinion and the right advice to the one who asks for it. Honesty is all about doing the right thing in the right way at the right time whether under supervision or not and giving out one's due rights without asking for these rights. The democratic leaders should be doing their work with all sincerity and flawlessly carrying out the duties and tasks completely in fairness to all irrespective of tribe or ethnicity.

Generosity

Generosity is the core Christian value of being kind and unselfish, especially with our money and time. According to

Proverbs 22:9, "The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor." The Bible tells us to share generously with those in need, and good things will come to us in turn. Each of us has something to offer to someone in need. We can give our money and our time to charity, be a friend to someone who is sick or lonely, do volunteer work or choose a service-oriented occupation. We may give unselfishly of our time to our spouse, children or parents. Generosity is an outcome of brotherly love where each person has something to give to someone in need, namely our time, talent, advice, money or other material things including our services (Okeke, 2015).

Generosity was among the countless good qualities of Prophet Muhammad. He was the most generous of people and he used to be most generous in Ramadan. Prophet Muhammad sees our worldly possessions are bounties from God, who is the Most Generous. Muslims believe that everything originates from God and everything will return to Him. Thus, it is logical to behave as if that which we possess is merely a loan, something we are obligated to preserve, protect and ultimately share (Stacy, 2023). However, being generous does not only mean giving freely from what you have in abundance.

Generosity does not lie in giving away something that is no longer useful but in giving freely from the things we love or need. Even in the direst of circumstances, a true believer is the one who gives generously (Stacey, 2023). And God says in the Quran that He will repay the generosity of a believer. God tells us in the Qur'an that whatever we give away generously, to please Him, He will replace and multiply. God knows what is in the hearts of men. God is the one who provides for us and He expects us to share generously. Generosity or *sadaqah* may pave the way to Paradise because with every generous act comes a great reward from God (Stacey, 2023).

The traditional adage also indicates the importance of being generous to others in the traditional religion. The adage will tell you that "when you give you get ten times over"; "Doing good is receiving good in the end"; "One good deed deserves another", and "God is gracious to a person who is gracious to others", and many more are the indications that generosity is one of the moral values in the traditional religion. Generosity could be viewed as a wise investment in the future. Our leaders are encouraged to be benevolent and unselfish with their possessions, with their time and with exemplary behaviour towards the governed.

Faith in God

Nigeria is a very religious nation just like Africans are known for their religiosity (Mbiti, 1980). Nigerians believe that God is the origin of beings and all in existence. In all the practicable religious sects in Nigeria, God is at the apex and is recognized as the beginning and the end. For Christians, God is ultimate. According to Okeke (2015, p. 26), "a Christian cannot keep away from his consciousness the undeniable fact that God is sovereign. He is to worship only God in all aspects of his life." In the traditional religion, God is the Supreme Being and the Arbiter of life. God – *Chukwu* is the creator of the universe

and everything in it. According to the Igbo worldview, *Chukwu* created the spirit beings, man, plants, animals and other objects of nature. *Chukwu* made man to be in the centre of all His creations (Onuorah, 2018). Muslims believe that God is the creator of all things and that God is all-powerful and all-knowing. God has no offspring, no race, no gender, no body, and is unaffected by the characteristics of human life, our possessions, with our time and with our exemplary behaviour towards others.

Looking at the views from these religious sects, faith in God implies submitting to His greatness and unlimited powers because God is the sole creator and controller of the universe. By seeking God first through worship and inclining to him alone to seek for his refuge, tries to nurture himself and seek God's propinquity. In this epoch, many things compete against God for our devotion and as well thwart the due attention to God. Some of the things include excessive attention to material things like houses, cars, clothes, jewellery, physical appearance, entertainment; pursuit of wealth, power, fame, pleasure or status, excessive devotion to self, job, hobbies and selfishness. All these excesses amount to greed, covetousness, arrogance, gluttony and pride. These attitudes and many others negate the supremacy of God. Faith in God does not only express love of God but also love of neighbour.

These religious values are very useful, desirable and worthwhile as they remain the qualities that have a strong foundation in the teachings of the world religions. Leaders are responsible for the application of these principles and are accountable to God and man for their administration (Bassiouni, 2012). These values possess the qualities that undergird democracy when it is properly applied in the practice of democratic leadership.

Democracy without Religious Values

Nigeria became independent from British rule in 1960 with a democratically elected government (Okeke, 2015). Since then, Nigeria has made a lot of progress and advancement in many aspects of life in different areas of governance. That notwithstanding, there is much contradictory evidence that things are generally not well with Nigerian democracy, as Chukwudozie (2016) pointed out, "freedom to choose our political leaders is short-changed for shoddy elections as we have impostors as leaders and who have powers without responsibility." The will of Nigerian citizens does not count in Nigerian democracy because many people have been disenfranchised. With disenfranchisement, the democratic mandate of the people is hijacked and consequently relapse the desire to get good governance and human development. This situation is endangering democracy. Here are some negative results of not cultivating religious values in Nigerian democracy: electoral malpractice, corruption, greed, bribery, poor priority in governance, politics without honour and excessive display of power, among others.

Recommendations

Human society should be founded on the principle of justice equity and the common good of the general populace.

Currently, Nigerians are confronted with complex problems of social, religious, economic, and political instability which threatens the very foundation of leadership and national development. From experiences over the decades, we have come to discover that democracy as a product is achieved from the combined effort of those who lead the society and those of the people who are led. Religious values are values evident in the life and teachings of the religious founders' and traditional and cultural values are the values that make democracy worthy of practising. Religious values constitute a big challenge to Nigerian political leaders. This paper, therefore, recommends the following.

1. Nigerian political leaders should take the primary responsibility of living and engaging in politics in line with the religious values listed in this study. This will help to improve the life of the led, their world and the world of politics.
2. The leaders should live exemplary lives by being the doers of good both in secret and in the public domain. By so doing, they will be portrayed as good leaders and be in a position to serve the public with good conscience and also enjoy the satisfaction of seeing others who are not from the same religious sects learning and imitating to be better citizens.
3. The populace is encouraged to influence religious values since they are cherished human values. This is because political leaders are the products of the society. In integrating religious values into our system, everyone has positive roles to play because it is not logical to conceive a very dishonest and corrupt society where political leaders are honest.
4. Political leaders should see their position as a God-given position and opportunity to serve the people without fear or favour but lead in honesty, humility, sincerity, love and be very peaceful. They need to serve with selfless love, and equal love for all and maintain justice, equity and fairness in all their operations.

Conclusion

Democracy in our society today is a form of government where the power is invested in the people. Every society needs people that are in tune with the necessary and useful values for the improvement of society. The given situation in Nigeria today is that democracy is not in an optimal state. This is because the political leaders refuse to integrate religious values into the political system and this adversely affects the socio-political and economic structures of the country. This paper argues that religious values are the foundation on which political leadership is built. Democracy today is considered the best form of government and it is founded on religious values. These values are veritable instruments for the propagation of good principles, behaviours and values. Political leaders should pay attention to how these values are guiding their actions if truly they want lasting democracy.

If these religious values are neglected and rejected, the democracy of the country cannot be functional, and the country will lack progress and development. This paper also stipulates that Nigerian democracy must not be delinked from religious values because it would improve the democratic culture of the country. The Nigerian democratic leaders and the led should appreciate the import of these religious values listed in this study and cultivate them towards a better Nigerian political order. This will make a remarkable contribution to the improvement of both the current and future generations of Nigerians and make Nigeria a progressively better society.

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