

Religion, Politics And National Development: Problems And Prospects

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Abstract

This paper endeavoured to address the issue of national development from religious and political angles. In doing this, it was deemed necessary to adopt the methods of descriptive phenomenology and that of comparative phenomenology given the nature of the work. It was also found necessary to review and appraise the place of religion in national development. The efforts of the missionaries in this regard were reasonably discussed. The study particularly established that national development is a primary responsibility of those in politics. It also established that the level of development of any society is very much dependent on political will, vision and determination of those in governance given the number of problems discussed and their relationship with those in power.

Key words: Religion, Politics, Issues, Nation, and Development

Introduction

The two main terms of great importance in this discourse are National and development. Although, nominal in nature, the other two terms, Religion and Politics, which are rather demonstrative and definitive in the title, are forces that shape and bring about the required intentions of the people in context of this paper. Again, looking at the first two terms, 'national development' from the surface level, 'national' stands out as the main functional word in the title of this discourse. If the suffixal is eliminated, the adjective becomes noun "Nation" and all the paper is talking about is the nation – the peoples of Nigeria. For the sake of space, only the term nation will be treated in this segment, the rest three will be duly attended to subsequently. According to Encarta Dictionary (2010), the term nation is of the same Greek root with word "ethnic" *ethnos* which etymologically talks of people of a particular origin or culture who "share national, racial, linguistic or religious heritage, whether or not they reside in their country of origin", or "a group or groups in society with distinctive cultural traits"; or an interest group that "belong to or are associated with the traditional culture of a social group".

Whether one perceives Nigeria as a nation or as a nation-state as most scholars seem to class her, the definitions above rightly describe Nigeria as a people. They have one central language – English. They are Christians, Muslims or members of Indigenous Religions across the borders of the country. In one way or

the other, they speak each other's' languages, understand each other's cultures and inter-marry themselves. They are one. The last two definitions essentially describe Nigeria as one people in diversity. Odiaka (1991) puts this clearest. According to him his forefathers migrated from somewhere in North-Central and settled or founded a place called Ebu in Delta State. He is Kayode by name not necessarily because he was borne in Lagos but because his Ebu people have link with the Yorubas. As a matter of fact, he believes that Ijebu people migrated from his place and that their real name is Ijoebu. In view of this, he believes that the coming of the Europeans was more of a course than blessing because until they came, the present days Nigeria saw themselves as one but for easy administration they delineated Nigeria according to geographical regions.

The nation-state of Nigeria is not only one but by several standards, also ranks among the nation with very high endowments in virtually all spheres of life. According to authorities, it has almost all natural resources that many nations that are attractive have. In human resources, it also has talents and experts in almost all fields that are so far available in the world. Bill Clinton of US testified, of late, that Nigeria should be better than America and several other world powers compared to the number of experts across the world that are Nigerian indigenes. It is also on record that the nation has more number of churches and mosques than in other nations that are called Christian or Muslim nations though it is called a secular state.

But rather than seeing the reflection and input of the several experts, mineral or natural resources or the religious institutions in the nation the story has been that of misery and woes. The nation ranks among the poorest and most corrupt in the world. It is against this background that this topic is instigated.

The Place Of Religion In National Development

The task of this segment is to address the question as to whether or not Religion has any role to play in building or national development. In other words, it is set to clear an impression that religious life has no meeting point with life in society because any such attempt will be tantamount to "worldliness". Before any further word in this section it will be important to attempt a definition. While religious scholars are unable to agree on a particular definition, it will be important to say, for the sake of this work, that it is man's effort to satisfy certain emotional needs by establishing and maintaining cordial relations with the supersensible world and his fellow man. Research shows that religion of any sort, be it Indigenous, Islam, or Christianity, has at one time or the other contributed immensely to the well-being of the society. According to Falola and Olupona (1991),

In the pre-colonial Nigeria, religion played a major role in everyday thought and action. Practitioners were concerned with the problems of life and much of the rituals aimed at improving peoples' earthly lot by placating the deities or spirits capable of causing misfortunes, the people were also accustomed to involving divine aid in achieving such ends as health, fertility, and

prosperity. Religious beliefs and practices were, therefore inseparable from the economic and socio-political life of the People (p 153).

In order to ensure national building and development Traditional Africans in olden days engaged the people in such practices according to Kanu (2009), which can be observed in each society. The sense of morality is dictated by the need to foster harmony as well as to contribute to the welfare of the society. In this connection, there are sets of patterns of code of behavior for the individual and community (p. 83). This is, perhaps, why several people will always refer to “the good old days” in Africa when people obeyed the moral codes, customs etc. and those things were normal. Economic activities of all kinds were not stopped. The political or social leaders listened to the priests and hardly did anything without consulting them. Similarly, in the Christian Bible, especially the Old Testament, the throne always worked hand-in-hand with the altar. Towards the end of Moses’ career as the leader of Israel, part of the hand-over note he prepared which he included in his farewell speech was effort to tie Israel’s economic and social wealth or wellbeing to their obedience, as a nation, to the law of God. Thus he said:

Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord Your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth, and all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God: Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks (Deut.28:1-466 NJKV).

A similar statement is seen in the same Deuteronomy where Moses implied that obedience to the commandments of Yahweh would totally eradicate poverty in the land. The passage reads thus:

However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the Lord Your God is giving you to possess over your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the Lord your God is careful to follow all these commandments I am giving you today. For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will you borrow from none, you will rule over many nations but none will rule over you (Deut.15:4-6 NIV).

With respect to this passage, Hayford (2012) and his colleagues assert that “Moses’ statement “however, there should be no poor among you” (V41) is conditioned upon full obedience (v5)”. Similarly, Wagner (2008) writing in the context of the Church, comments as follows: “As I understand God’s Kingdom economy, nothing is wrong with having rich people in the church, but something is wrong about having poor people in Church; because the Old Testament principle in Deuteronomy 15:4 states that there shall be “no poor people among you”(p. 105).As has been seen in both religions, if not three religions, assuming that Old Testament record is basically in reference to Judaism, religion, regardless the type, closely associates success or well-beings of people either as a group or as individuals, with obedience to the law of God. According to Kanu (2004) such moral codes are also found in the Muslims’ Qur’an which guide and guard the Muslim faithful. They also believe that success or failure is strictly conditioned upon obedience to the laws of Allah.

Apart from spiritual and moral teachings, and guidance of religion which have severally enhanced economic cum social developments in history, religious institutions and bodies initiated social and urban development programmes in Africa and Nigeria in particular. With the establishment of schools and skill acquisition centres by Christian missions in late 19th and 20th centuries, for instance, transition in the sphere of economic activities and social life and strata commenced. According to Blakemore and Cooksey (1980), the growth of Missionary activities during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reflected the expansion of European and American trade and political influence in the world (p. 28).In the view of Turaki (1999), this movement with its school system was the most potent and effective tool for social transformation. Achunike (2004) gives a brief activities and objectives of Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Church as follows:

On 6 January, 1967 Paul VI created the Pontifical Commission,Justice and Peace this commission attempts complete development of all mankind, the commission takes the name Justice Development And Peace in the third world countries, the aim of every Justice and Peace Commission at all levels is to create the consciousness in the people of God their own development for more justice and peace in the world, Development is about people and the steady improvement of their lives, the work of Justice and Peace Development in every Catholic diocese is to gather, synthesize and evaluate studies related to the development of people’s Peace, and Justice and Human Rights, JDPC has the following as its principal objectives:

1. To promote the quality of life for all people;
2. To promote human rights (e.g. U.N. Charter, on Human Rights and Banjul Declaration on Human Rights);

3. To form and animate groups to participate in their own development;
4. To make a preferential option for the poor and marginalized;
5. To identify unjust structures and to make corrective action;
6. To promote Catholic Social Teachings;
7. To research, document and publish information on social issues (p. 133).

Further to this is the fact that the Commission, according to Achinike , later built a Social Centre at Awka Road Onitsha and that this was formally established in 1966 and its main concern was caritas. It has other arms like adult education centre, and centres for learning other trades. It is on record that the early development and social transformation enjoyed by Africans and Nigerians in particular are largely due to the contributions of the early missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They did not only establish schools and award scholarships to pupils in those days, they also established skill acquisition centres where those who could not cope with academic activities learnt trades of different kinds including tailoring, soap making, catering etc.

Politics And National Development

Before any step into this segment, it will be necessary to ask and answer the question, what is politics. Several things or answers quickly come to mind as one hears this question. But, what actually is politics? Ogunsanwo (2007), in a lecture entitled *Political Office and Governance: For Gain or Service*, opines that politics is “one involving activities aimed at ensuring that someone emerges vested with authority to allocate values or resources between competing the interests and groups which of course will include the person concerned”(p 4). Similarly, Dzurgba (2008) who likes to approach the definition as both an activity and a process declares it thus:

Politics is an activity. It is, therefore, a series of actions which is called a process, a political process is called a political system. A political system means a system of interactions. It is a platform for planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling and managing orderly interactions between individuals and social groups(p. 1).

The two definitions above imply that politics performs the functions of adaptation, integration, allocation of human and material resources, resolution of conflicts and promoting mutual understanding and cooperation. Following the definition by Ogunsanwo, that politics involves activities which aim at ensuring that someone emerges vested with authority to allocate values or resources, it will rather be most important to talk about those who hold political offices. Such are those who, by reason of their positions in any arm of the Government, are empowered by the law or constitution to oversee the wellbeing of the people within their jurisdictions. The question then arises, what does the constitution of Nigeria, for instance, say about the political office holders and National Development? In the 2011 edition of the

amended constitution of Nigeria, chapter two sections 16 and 17 under the Economic objectives, the following is documented. The state shall, within the context of ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this constitution to:-

- (a) Harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and efficiency, a dynamic and self-reliant economy;
- (b) Control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity;
- (c) Without prejudice to its right to operate or participate in areas of the economy, other than the major sectors of the economy manage and operate the major sectors of the economy.
- (d) Without prejudice to the right of any person to participate in areas of the economy within the major sector of the economy, protect the right of every citizen to engage in economic activities outside the major sectors of the economy.

It is further stated that the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring

- (a) The promotion of planned and balanced economic development; that the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good.
- (b) That the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or a group.

In section 17, sub-section 1 and paragraphs 1 and 4, it is stated that (a) every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law and (b) that exploitation of human or natural resources in any form whatsoever for reasons, other than the good of the community shall be prevented. The constitution makes provision for all including free education for all which enhances the national development and security of all citizens. Building and maintenance of good roads is one of the activities that will not only ensure security but also facilitate national building. Energy generation is of no less importance in regard to development. The list is inexhaustible. In a recent broadcast at Ogun State Radio, precisely, on Monday 25th of February 2013, John Kuffour, a former president of Ghana was referred to as saying that it is the responsibility of those in government to ensure that the nation is developed in terms of man-power development and all level of infrastructural activities. It is, however, on record that Nigeria, in history, has enjoyed state's effort to establish programmes that were meant to bring about development in the land. These include the Railway Cooperation, Electrical Cooperation of Nigeria, Palm settlement in the East, Coco Cooperation in the West and Pyramids in the North, to mention but a few. Even after the civil war, the Military Government under General Yakubu Gowon built roads and other developmental programmes to alleviate poverty and help people especially among the common man. It is still

fresh in the memories of this writer that even in the recent past, about early eighties, Nigeria still had the prospect of being among the leading nations of the world by now. The question that bugs this writer is how did Nigeria get to where it is now that it now ranks among the poorest nations in the world that, on the average, Nigerians live under American one dollar (\$1) per Day? How can this problem be addressed?

Problems Associated With Developmental Programmes In Nigeria

The problems that plague developmental plans in Nigeria can better be summarized as follows:

- (a) Over-protection of Public Sectors
- (b) Improper or Untrue Federalism
- (c) Uneven Distribution of Public Fund Between the Central, State and Local Governments
- (d) Political Issues or Conflicts
- (e) Religious Issues or Conflicts

a. Over-Protection of Public Sectors

The Public Sector, according to Salisu (2009) is made up of the following:

1. The Civil Service, which is often referred to as the core service and is composed of line ministries and extra-ministerial agencies; and
2. The Public Bureaucracy, which is composed of the enlarged public service, including the following:
 - (a) Services of the state and national assemblies
 - (b) The judiciary
 - (c) The armed forces;
 - (d) The Police and security Agencies
 - (e) Paramilitaire services (immigration, customs, prisons, etc.)
 - (f) 'Parastatals' and agencies including social service, commercially corrected agencies, regulatory agencies, educational institutions, research institutes, etc.

Such establishments like Railway Cooperation, Power Holding Cooperation of Nigeria, and Nigerian Airways etc. fall into the category of Public Sectors. Oleghe (2013) is of the view that due to the fact that the Act that established Nigerian Electrical and Power Authorities (NEPA) (now Power Holding Cooperation of Nigeria) which exempts the sector from being sued to the Court of Law, the cooperation has kept degenerating to the point of being grounded. He further added that even now that the leadership of NEPA has been changed, it has not made any difference. And it is certain to all that a society without constant power supply will hardly do well in its developmental programmes. All are incapacitated because no one can take them to court. The same is true of the other similar organizations in the nation

B. Improper or Untrue Federalism

A proper or true Federalism is such that power is not concentrated in the centre. According to Denila , “true federation in the real sense of the word promotes accelerated economic development, it unifies and binds people together, it triggers intellectual dialogue and provokes a healthy rivalry in revenue generation. These laudable goals are only achieved where the federated units are allowed free access in decision making and inputs into governance” (p. 1). He further discloses that Nigeria, at independence, embraced regionalistic federalism. Here, the country was grouped into regions and each region operated independently without undue interference and hindrance from the top. The system provided dynamism in economic development and as such human and material resources were mobilized towards revenue generation. The result was that each region could identify its areas of strength and developed plans on human capacity building which resulted in high pool of intellectual resource contributors and a highly skilled national strength. The regions then experienced massive infra-structural facelift, excellent facilities and an enviable macro and micro economic policies. But the opposite is the case today. The central government is so powerful that if it were possible it could tell the state and local government when or when not to make love with their wives. And as a result, developmental programmes are not only frustrated but hindered.

c. Uneven Distribution of Public Funds between Central, State and Local Governments

This factor is closely related to the one just discussed above. The undue concentration of power to the central government in Nigeria is expressed most in revenue allocation. While the central government collects 65% of the income monthly, the state collects 25% and the Local Government collects 15% each. Yet, with respect to responsibilities, experience has shown that Local Governments have more to do than both the state and central governments. Most pathetic of all is the fact that Local Governments do not have direct access to what should be their allocations. In certain cases, some Local governments may end up not receiving allocations for months. Yet, such have primary school teachers’ salaries to pay, roads to build and maintain, and several other things to do. The federal government most often does little or nothing throughout the year. This also affects development in the nation.

d. Political Issues or Conflicts

Political issues or conflicts are one of the major vices that have adversely bedeviled national development in Nigeria. This takes shades in different ways. God-fatherism, according to Dzurgba (2010) is one of “the great sources of crisis in Nigeria today”. Because of their great political power and influence or great wealth and influence they possess, whoever they support are always the automatic winners of the various elections. Dzurgba further says that whatever the god-son does as a

counselor, a chairman, a legislator, a governor, or a president must have been approved by the god-father.

This relationship works smoothly until the god-son begins to carry out his official duties, the god-son now discovers that his official responsibility and accountability to the voters conflict with the interests and demands of his god-father, this is the point at which the two disagree and the disagreement turns to a bitter conflict (17).

This was the true picture in the cases of Ladoja and Adebibu of Oyo state, and Chris Ngige and Chris Uba of Anambara of the same period. In each of the cases developmental activities were adversely affected. Teachers were not being paid, schools were always on strikes, roads and other infra-structures had little or no attentions. Secondly, when politicians feel cheated and their mandate stolen, Ojo-Uwa-Igbe (2013), says that politicians prefer taking to the streets wrecking havocs to going to the court of law for justice because they believe they will not have the justice they deserve. This is believed to be the main cause of Boko Haram activities in the Northern part of Nigeria that have claimed the lives of many innocent souls. Not only has it led to the deaths of many, economic cum development activities have been adversely affected. Properties worth billions and millions of Naira have been destroyed. Besides inconsistency on the part of leaders with respect to developmental programmes especially when a leader emerges from a different political party from that of the former leader is another serious issue. The experience has been that of abandonment of the programmes of the former to start another without minding the consequences on the people. Finally, ethnicity is one of the main causes of political conflict which lead to adverse situations in terms of national building and development. According to Dzurgba(2010: 17),

Ethnicity is also a source of political conflict. Ethnic groups in Nigeria give their national loyalty to their respective ethnic interests and nothing is left for nationalism and patriotism. Therefore, Political actors articulate their presidential ambition as if the office of the president were ethnic affairs. To them, Nigeria does not deserve their primary loyalty and patriotism; it is in this context that ethnic clashes occur among the various ethnic groups over elections and functions of state and federal legislatures....

This issue has been the case since the late 1960s. As a matter of fact, this was the main cause of the Nigerian Civil War in the 60s. This was the cause of Odua People's Congress (OPC) crisis in the 1990s. The Boko Haram crises in the North are especially due to this grievous evil. And this will never promote peace and stability in the nation, and where both (peace and stability) are lacking, national building or development will be difficult if not impossible.

e. Religious Issues or Conflicts

The reason for the nomenclature, Religious Issues or Conflicts, is largely due to the relationship between both terms especially in this work. While most if not all of the issues lead to conflicts, conflicts themselves constitute issues. Dzurgba (2010) names and explains several religious conflicts as well as causes of conflicts in the following narrative.

Fundamentalists, fanatics and bigots are also sources of Religious conflicts, fundamentalists are people who want the scriptures to be obeyed literally without considering the context of the scriptures, fanatics are the people who have extreme religious ideas and are dangerous persons in their religious opinions. Bigots are the people who hold strong religious opinions and they are not willing to listen to any other person's religious opinions (p. 15).

According to him, these people, or anyone found in any of the categories mentioned above, are prepared to die for their religious faith if need be. It is from among them that militant religious organizations which engage in violent activities aiming at destroying lives and properties arise. As they do such, they believe they are defending God, scriptures, doctrines, beliefs and practices of their individual religions. In addition to issues discussed above, that is, fundamentalists, fanatics, and bigots, according to Dzurgba (2010) are the conservatives, dogmatists, and intolerants. In his words:

These persons also have aggressive behavior in relation to religious matters; conservatives reject change and new ideas while dogmatists impose their ideas or beliefs on other persons. Intolerants are the people who are not willing to accept the ways of thinking and behavior that are different from their own (p. 20).

Any of such group of people is highly inimical to societal development. The experience in the northern part of Nigeria is a good example of this. Although most scholars have argued that the crisis in the North are not religious but political. This view is implied when Dzurgba (2010) in another narrative said "in pursuit of politics, the manipulation of religions may lead to religious conflict between Christians and Muslims, or African Religions and Christians" (p 40). Politicians, no doubt, have often manipulated the ignorant youths to carry out their mischievous and dastardly deeds and intentions under the guise of religion. The question, then, is how can this be addressed? How can these be reasonably controlled? These questions and more may be answered in the segment below.

The Way Foreward

The reverse of all of the voices explained above and any other such thing like unpatriotic acts etc. will hasten national development. For instance, if those concerned can remove the so called immunity clauses that unduly protect the PHCN (formally NEPA), or decentralize its operations like in the case of the Nigerian Tele-Communications, the nation will have regular supply of electricity power, and industries and industrialization will improve significantly.

Again, if there could be true or proper federalism, and power becomes fully decentralized as there was in the first Republic; and in other federated states like the United States of America, there will be accelerated economic development. In the same vein, if revenue could be distributed evenly, according to needs, things will be better economically. As it is clear, the large bulk of developmental needs in the states and local government areas are greatly hindered due to inadequate funding. If adequate fund could be allocated to them, rural and urban development would be encouraged and the mass movement of people, youths in particular, will drastically reduce and the various vices experienced in the rural areas will be reasonably controlled.

In the same token, when issues in politics and religion become better, national development will be inevitable. Imagine when people cannot freely move about in certain regions of the nation. Sunday Services are now attended with fears. People are, for the fear of the unknown, forced to leave where they have lived most of their days in life due to politics or religious issues. The so-called conservatives and fundamentalists in the northern part of the country who are strictly opposed to Western education and civilization use phone and internet facilities. If they were truly fundamental and conservative as they claim nothing should make them use of such amenities. Besides, most of them write and speak goof English, where did they learn such?

These are political and not religious and must be discouraged by the appropriate quarters.

Conclusion

Nigeria, as explains this paper, is not only large in land expanse and population, it is about the most endowed among the comity of nations or one of the most endowed in terms of natural resources and man-power. The paper also established that the nation has lately not shown all these endowments in its developmental programmes and processes. This is largely due to several problems explained in the course of this work. The political issue with respect to inconsistency on the part of the leaders especially when a leader particularly of another party assumes power is seen in this paper as one of the most inimical issues to national development. The paper, however, advises a reversal in all these which the writer calls vices that have adversely plagued the nation.

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