

RELIGIOUS BOOM AND MORAL DECADENCE IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The astronomical rise in religious patronage, activities and consequent expansions of most religions in Nigeria recently, especially, Christianity, is unimaginably evident. However, irrespective of constant attendance and observance of religious events in the calendar, the moral standard of the society is increasingly on the decline. This is ironical; and has inadvertently affected the pace of development in Nigeria. This paper adopted the phenomenological approach and the services of secondary sources of data collection to unravel these trends. It discovered that religion is good in itself and is the only solution to moral decay. It recommended that Nigerians should practice the tenets of their various religions as this will help address the moral lapses in the society and make way for even development of the nation.

INTRODUCTION

The secularization theory, which according to Giddens and Duneier (2000:416) means, “a process by which society becomes more concerned with worldly than with spiritual matters and religious organisations lose their influence over social life,” does not hold in Africa and especially, Nigeria. The reverse is rather the case; because Africans are notoriously religious. Religion permeates all aspects of life, be it politics, economics, education and so on. Right from birth to death, religion controls every aspect of the individual (Mbiti, 1968).

There is noticeable decline in religious fervour in many parts of the world; but the religious enterprise appears to be thriving very much in Nigeria. It is a scenario where more and more company warehouses and private buildings are being converted to prayer houses, and stadia all over the country are being used more for religious crusades than for sporting events, streets within towns and villages, as well as interstate highways are often blocked these days by surging and enthusiastic worshippers who flock to churches and camp

meetings. In many of the urban areas, there are as many churches and mosques as there are streets.

Ehusani (2003:1) citing Onishi (2002) noted that, "Christianity is growing faster in sub-Saharan Africa than in every other place on earth. Roman Catholicism and the major Protestant denominations are gaining more followers every day, but new churches are leading the boom." Within this religious firmament, bishops, pastors, evangelist, faith healers, prophets and *visioners*, as well as sheikhs, imams and gurus of all sorts are swelling in number and having a field day. There are so many Seminaries, Monasteries and Bible colleges, churning out thousands of Christian preachers. Nigerians have even begun sending missionaries to various countries in Europe and America, where they seem to have lost the faith to the agents of secularism.

Adenuga (2003:522) observed that:

today, prayers and preaching sessions are no longer limited to churches, mosques and homes. They are held at corporate boardrooms, in government offices, in commercial buses and in open markets. Nigerians going about their daily business can be seen brandishing the Bible or the Koran, the Rosary or Islamic prayer beads. The largest billboards in our towns and cities are those advertising upcoming religious crusades and faith healing carnivals. Religious exclamations such as "to God be the glory," "praise the Lord," and "Alaahu wa ku bar," are often on the lips of Nigerians, at work or at play.

It will be seemly difficult and constraining to delve into the activities of those who patronize the indigenous religions of the African people. There is clear evidence that the *dibias* (native doctors), the priestesses and other religious officials of the African Traditional Religion are constantly attending to their clients irrespective of the influence of Christianity and Islam. Thus, from all outward indications, Nigerians and indeed Africans are a chronically religious people. There is no other nation in the modern world with as much religiosity as contemporary Nigeria.

However, the problem is that, with all this show of religiosity or outward display of piety, one would have expected to see a very high degree of social morality in Nigeria. This is because all world religions generally promote truth, justice, honesty, and probity, but this is not the case with Nigeria. There is an embarrassing contradiction between the high ethical demands of the two major religions which many Nigerians profess and the phenomenon of corruption, greed and graft among other moral depravity that have eaten deep into the fabrics of the nation. This problem of moral lapses among the many religious people in Nigeria has affected and retarded the pace at which the nation should grow.

Many Nigerians, including the seemingly pious Christians and Muslims who go to war in defence of their religions have no qualms of conscience when they cheat on their spouses, lie, and blackmail or manipulate figures in order to gain material wealth. Many of the country men and women who flock the churches on Sundays and fill the mosques on Fridays are at one time or the other in such fraudulent activities as evading tax, issuing and obtaining fake receipts, over-invoicing or under-invoicing, importation of fake drugs, petty and large scale bribery, advanced free fraud among others. All these practices are so commonplace and so widespread that many young Nigerians are today unable to distinguish between good and evil or between right and wrong (Ehusia, 2003).

Phenomenological approach which refers to the method in the study of phenomenon shall be used in this research. It is a study of fact or event in nature (or society) as it appears or is experienced by the senses (Procter, 1994). Phenomenological method deals with the true nature of the theme from inside. It will be applied in this work to enable the researcher uncover the reasons why religions boom and morality declines in the society. The work shall equally make use of the secondary sources of data collection. This is basically the use of related and relevant literature in the libraries.

This work aims among other things:

- i. To find out the reasons why religions boom
- ii. To find out the reasons why morality declines in the face of religious boom
- iii. To see how the aforementioned factors have retarded national development and finally,
- iv. To suggest ways of addressing moral decay in the society and how this can make for even development.

RELIGIOUS BOOM

A concise understanding of what religion is will be very necessary before attempting to examine the term religious boom. Ayodeji (2014:523) defines the term religion as “faith in a divinely created order of the world, agreement with which is the means of salvation of a community and thus for each individual who has a role in that community.” Furthermore, Obilor (2010:317) conceptualized religion to mean, “the whole *complexus* of attitudes, beliefs, practices, gestures, rituals, emotions, convictions, and institutions through which we express our deep fundamental relationship with reality, and not excluding the created order.”

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2007) defined the word ‘boom’ to mean an increase in how popular or successful something is, or in how often it happens. It is the flourishing, exponential growth or thriving of something.

“Religious boom” therefore, means a rapid increase and participation in the religious programmes, and activities by a given people. In Nigeria the rate at which churches, mosques, shrines and sundry prayer houses grow and multiply, coupled with the pious dispositions of the citizens have snowballed in recent times. Today, many people take part in crusades, worship sessions and vigils; offer sacrifices and observe fasting days and religious holidays. The numbers of people who embark on religious pilgrimages to Jerusalem and Mecca or desire to embark have greatly increased every year.

MORAL DECADENCE

The term ‘morality’ according to Okere (2006:38) is defined as “that quality of human life by which it can be described as good or bad, good in the sense that it must be done, or bad or evil in the sense that it must be avoided.” Morality is a spiritual dimension of human action. Animals have no morality. Iroegbu and Echekwube (2005:32) understood ‘morality’ to mean “the conventionally approved rules of behaviour in the society.”

On the other hand Nwankwo (2012:8) conceived ‘moral decadence’ as “a flight from moral virtues.” Moral virtues are good habits which incline and allow their possessors to make good moral choices. Without moral virtue, man and woman are good for nothing and public dangers.

Moral decadence is the corruption of moral consciousness. It is a flight from faith and reason. A morally decadent society upholds the philosophy of anything goes. Gbenga (2009:4) observed that “there has been a great increase in public outcry against bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public funds, the desire to get rich quick and other moral vices like sexual perversion, nudity and loss of family values in the country. Indeed all these vices are the bane of our society.”

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

‘Nation’ according to Dobin (2013:1) is defined as “a group or race of people who shared history, traditions and culture, sometimes religion, and usually language.” The people of a nation generally share a common national identity and part of national development is the building of that common identity. Nation here shall mean “that human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimacy to live within a given territory” (Dobin, 2013:1).

“National development” is that act of building the common identity of a particular nation, through a holistic approach aimed at improving the lives of the citizenry. It is the state or process of developing the political, economic, social, cultural and infrastructural condition of the nation in order to increase stability and better the lives of the people.

Nigeria as a nation needs development and rapidly too. Nwankwo (2014:29) observed that “the society we live in has experienced setbacks: politically, economically, and socio-culturally.” It is equally regrettable to note that in the

contemporary Nigerian society, things have fallen apart religiously and morally too. The moral degeneration in the society is alarming.

“Religious boom and moral decadence in Nigeria: implications for national development”, is an essay aimed at finding out the relationship between the rapid religiosity and pious dispositions of the Nigerian people (as evidenced in the constant religious activities and the proliferation of religious groups), and the decline in morality and the erosion of cherished values in the society. The task here is to uncover how these ugly trends can be remedied, to enhance rapid and speedy development. The next sub-heading shall examine in essence perceived rate of religious boom in Nigeria.

RELIGIOUS BOOM IN NIGERIA

Nigeria, the largest African country by population, with over 182 million in 2015, according to United Nations Report (2015), is nearly equally divided between Christianity and Islam; though the exact ratio is uncertain. The majority of Nigerian Muslims is Sunni and is concentrated in the northern area of the country; while the Christians dominate in the Middle Belt and South. The Pew Forum (2010:3) noted that, “the 1963 Nigerian census found that 36% of the population was Christian, 48% Muslim, and 16% other; the 2008 Measure Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) found 53% Christian, 45% Muslim, and 2% other; the 2008 Afro-barometer poll found 56% Christian, 43% Muslim, and 1% other.” Pew’s own survey found 46% Christian, 52% Muslim, and 1% other (Global Christian Report, 2015).

Most of Nigeria’s Christians are Protestant (broadly defined), though about a quarter is Roman Catholic. According to Ray (1993:266):

From the 1990s to the 2000s, there was significant growth in Protestant churches including the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Winners’ Chapel, Christ Apostolic Church (the first Aladura Movement in Nigeria), Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Evangelical Church Winning All, Mountain of Fire and Miracles, Christ Embassy, The Synagogue Church of All Nations, the Aladura Church (indigenous Christian churches being especially strong in the Yoruba and Igbo areas), and of evangelical churches in general.

These churches have spilled over into adjacent and southern areas of the Middle Belt. Denominations like the Seventh-day Adventist and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have also flourished in recent times. Hackett (1988:37) noted that:

Other leading Protestant churches in the country are the Church of Nigeria of the Anglican Communion, the Assemblies of God Church, the Nigerian Baptist Convention and The Synagogue Church of All Nations. The Yoruba area

contains a large Anglican population, while Igbo land is predominantly Catholic and the Edo area is predominantly Assemblies of God, which was introduced into Nigeria by Augustus Ehurie Wogu and his associates at Old Umuahia.

Islam dominated the north and had a number of supports in the South Western Yoruba part of the country. Nigeria has the largest Muslim population in sub-Saharan Africa. In terms of Nigeria's major ethnic groups' religious affiliations, the Hausa ethnic group in the North is mostly Muslim, the West which is the Yoruba tribe is divided among Islam, Christianity and traditional religions; while the Igbos of the East and the Ijaw in the South are predominantly Christians (Roman Catholics) and some practitioners of traditional religions. The Middle Belt of Nigeria contains the largest number of minority ethnic groups in Nigeria and they are mostly Christians and members of traditional religions with few Muslim converts.

Global Christian Report (2005) said that, "Christians form a slight majority of the nation, comprising 50% of the population, while Muslims make up 47.9%. Another source, the CIA Factbook (2015) revealed that 50% of the population is Muslim, 40% Christian and 10% follows traditional beliefs. The analysis made so far attests to the fact that Nigeria is a religiously booming nation; but the big question that must be answered is 'why are religions booming in Nigeria?'

WHY RELIGIONS ARE BOOMING IN NIGERIA

Many reasons have been adduced to the constant religious boom we experience in the country. We shall outline and examine a few of them in the following discussions.

i. Religion as the Last Hope of the Common Man

Onwuka (2013:1), tried to find out why religion booms in many parts of the country even when businesses and companies are collapsing. He said that "religion has become the last hope of the common man in the society". When all hope seem to be lost, religious organisations like the church provides hope to the faithful. The words of the religious leaders like priests and 'imams' reassure people that all is well no matter how dark the clouds are. Those whose businesses are collapsing or who experience misfortune in one way or the other flock to the churches or mosques or even shrines in search of breakthrough.

There is also the fact that churches or mosques help their members to find jobs, businesses, spouses, among other. Many people, who are in such need, flock to these religious centres to find solutions to these needs. Friends and contacts are also made in churches which prove useful in life. The more people troop to churches or mosques or even shrines, to solve these problems, the more they bring in their friends, families and the more these religious centres expand.

ii. Search for Genuine Spiritual Gratification

Another reason why religions boom in Nigeria and elsewhere is the people's true search for spiritual gratification. Originally, this point accounts for the expansion of new religious movement in Africa including Nigeria. Uche (2007:49) noted that "the expansion and constant flocking of people into various religious groups is as a result of their fulfilling mode of worship." When a particular mode of worship which comprises of prayer, praises and preaching are spiritually gratifying, people tend to move into such places of worship.

Mbon (1991:40) observed that "people like to attend such religious gatherings where they are uninhibited and exuberant; where they spent hours singing, praying, clapping, dancing and moving around the church." In such places people pray in tongues, weep and may even be in trance-like states. Africans and indeed Nigerians have a deep seated, desire for such a rather more meaningful religious experience.

Obilor (2010:322) writing on the importance the spiritual essence of religion to adherents accentuated thus, "religion, the worship of God, is the beacon which lights up all our human knowledge; our power of knowing is a reflection of the divine word". Religion is the ally of reason; of its very nature, it is on the side of intellect; it demands honesty, insists that the mind should not function in an artificial capricious, or vacillating fashion; but generously, perseveringly, penetratingly, and spiritually rejuvenating. Anything short of these, religion will not be attractive.

Iwe (1986:273) said, "man is a being endowed with rational and spiritual faculties whose potentials are realised only by the communication and acquisition of truth and knowledge. It is the order of man's nature that his spiritual powers should be progressively enriched, perfected and ennobled by the acquisition of truths, natural and supernatural." In fact any religious group that promises to enrich the spiritual side of the adherents will constantly receive patronage by seekers.

iii. Unending Quest for Signs and Wonders/Competition among Religions

Signs and wonders have become another rallying point why religions boom in Nigeria. This is more prevalent among Christianity. In the days of Jesus in John 6:26, men and women flocked around Jesus for various reasons which include: healing, food and hearing his word. But majority were coming due to signs and wonders he usually performs. Jesus said, "I tell the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."(John: 6:26 NIV) The implication of this statement is that they were following him because of the miracle of providing food not necessarily because of the import of the miracle which is their salvation and faith in Jesus.

Signs and wonders or miracles have made one church to boom and another does not. Today people like to go to that church where miracles happen, where prophecies and visions are given for the solution of one problem or the other. Uche (2007:50) noted that “prophecy, visions, signs and wonders are highly esteemed as means of looking into the future or of revealing the causes of what is actually happening to one and finally, proffering solution through miracles.” Some of the reasons why people flock to miracle churches or centres are to find solution to their sickness and misfortunes such as bareness, lack of progress, curses, premature death in the family, marriage and even wealth. People go to apparition centres, adoration grounds, conventions, crusades, revivals and Holy Ghost anointed services or programmes here and there in search of miracles. Unfortunately, many of these religious adherents are so naive and unsuspecting that they do not even know or question the sources of these miraculous powers.

Another cogent reason for religious boom is competition among religions and religious groups. Today in Nigeria, one hears the Muslims calling for prayers on Sunday morning, while Christians engage their members on marathon religious activities so that they won't have time to attend other religious programmes elsewhere. Some run their activities from Sunday to Sunday. Packaging is another factor. Many religious leaders are business minded. They package their programmes and make it more attractive to members. This is because people like to go to a place where their quests will be met holistically-spiritually as well as socially.

iv. Emphasis on Prosperity and Wealth

This is another factor that has engineered religious boom in the country especially Christianity. Onwuka (2013:1) said, “in many Christian churches, pastors lay emphasis on tithing and consequently use Malachi 3:10 to instil fear into their congregation.” Today too much emphasis has been laid on tithing as well as other offerings believed to prosper members if complied with, such as: seed sowing, seed of faith, covenant seed, dangerous giving, and donations for special projects. Through these avenues of giving, religious groups receive huge amount of money and this makes expansion easy.

Also in the past, being a priest or a pastor is synonymous with poverty. It was seen as a calling and an exercise involving extreme self-denial. But given that many pastors are rich and flamboyant these days, being a pastor has become so attractive. Many young people are daily pouring into the Seminaries and Bible Colleges that it is difficult to know those who had divine call and those who are changing businesses. The effect is that churches build more branches to find places for the large number of ministers, while individuals who do not want to be part of the existing churches open their own churches in the neighbourhood, thereby increasing the number of churches. Some go as far as sourcing for powers to boost their membership.

There are so many other reasons why religions boom in Nigeria such as: desire for true brotherhood and togetherness, security, political relevance among others. Religious boom in Nigeria can be described in form of horizontal and vertical boom- that is to say, the growth in the number of people seeking religious experience and the multiplication of religious groups like churches.

The big question is: with this religious boom, do we experience a corresponding moral aptitude expected of a deeply devout people already described? We shall address this matter in the next sub-heading.

MORAL DECADENCE IN A RELIGIOUS BOOMING SOCIETY. WHY?

Moral decadence means the process of decline or decay in a society especially in its morals. It is a state of immorality, corruption, debauchery, dissolution, self indulgence, profligacy and excess. It is the decay in ethical values and norms that govern an individual and the society at large (Afuye, 2013). Any society where there is a decline in moral values, what society abhors becomes what they uphold.

Nwankwo (2012:8) likened moral decadence to ‘vice’, which to say the least is “a practice or a behaviour or habit considered immoral, depraved, or degrading in the associated society.” Today sexual pervasion and other moral vices are becoming so pervasive in our reprobate society. The degraded, dissolute occupants of the sodomite world are no longer in their hiding caves. They come out of their closets with a raucous and unashamed insistence that decent, moral people accept them as being normal. The list of societal decadence is endless.

Corruption which is a product of moral decadence has raked and ravaged the Nigerian society. Agbom (2010:12) accentuated that, “corruption has brought setback to the nations of the world of which our nation Nigeria is one.” To him it has created room for dishonesty, non patriotism and involves betrayal of social trust, sabotage, lack of respect for reasons and human integrity (Agbom, 2010).

Why Moral Decadence?

Oikoumene (2005), outlined some of the causes of moral decadence in our society today which can be categorized into social factor; which include the interrelationship between people in a given society, erosion of cultural values or lack of it. Another factor is economic factor. This includes poverty and hunger in our society which are capable of making people do anything possible to address. We have what can be described as cognitive and technological factors. The rate at which technology increases has affected the morality of the society especially the youths. Today we hear of internet fraud,

pornography and all sorts of crimes that go on due to the infiltration of technology in our society.

Shua'ibu (2015:1) noted that:

any society that is not morally sound is bound to witness all sorts of social menace. Moral values are found in our religion, culture and traditions yet our youth, for one reason or the other are not that religious. They consider our indigenous culture outdated and our traditions barbaric. Therefore they queue up to embrace westernization in its totality; abandoning our indigenous culture and tradition

Other factors include: low level of discipline and morality in our homes and families. Most parents have relegated their primary role of children upbringing either to the house helps or people they do not know very well. The result is that these children grow up without being inculcated with the values expected of them by the society. Also included is the inability of religious leaders to give sound religious instructions and messages which can address the moral state of the society and or failure on the part of religious society to adhere to and practice the tenets of their faith traditions. All these and more are the causes of moral lapses in a seemingly growing religious society.

Whatever may be the reasons however, for the rise in moral decadence in our society, the effects of moral depravity are endemic both to the society and the nation at large. The next-sub-heading shall consider the level of moral decay in the Nigerian society today and how this has adversely affected the pace of national development.

MORAL DECAY IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY: THE BANE OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It is quite unfortunate to state unequivocally here, that the high level of religiosity experienced in Nigeria today has not been properly translated into the high level of moral standard expected of a religious booming society like ours. The legitimate godliness is quite appreciable, but the gradient of morality is fast depreciating. In Nigeria today, one find many expressions in different practical dimensions of life by which one can prove the low level of morality. This menace has equally affected the pace of development one expects from Nigeria. The religious boom with attendants upsurge in moral decadence breed corruption, which has been described as systematic in Nigeria. The unwholesome consequences are myriad. Corruption, an offshoot of moral decadence breeds inefficiency and diminishes productivity in both private and public sector of the economy. It discourages investment, fuels capital flight, increases unemployment and inflation, creates an acute degree of poverty and reduces the quality of life and life expectancy in Nigeria. Above all it has painted the image of the nation black in the international

community. We shall examine a few of these dimensions of life showing the low quality of morality and how this has affected development of the nation.

Moral Decay in Religious Life

Religion is today becoming a commerce and avenue to rise to power. Audi (2002:102), citing Oladipo (1999:8), noted that “in West Africa (including Nigeria), there are people who assume religious leadership as one chooses a business for financial gains.” Prayer houses exist where religious leaders administer religious services and totems, requesting beneficiaries to make supplies that include foodstuff, wears, money, labour, and physical lust satisfaction of the self made leader (Audi, 2002:12) Some of these religious leaders at times manipulate the psychology of these members through religious persuasions and insinuation to actions, violent or non-violent.

The results of these actions are numerous. When these people realize that their sources of economy and livelihood, dignity and worth of humanness (in a situation where one is sexually abused) have been tempered with, such a person may be psychologically affected and his/her role in nation building restricted. Today people kill, maim, destroy, and cheat in the name of religion. This is a moral lapse, and can only degenerate the society instead of making way for even development.

Moral Decay in Economic Life

In business transaction in Nigeria, either out of desperation or oppressive intent, one finds an attitude of taking advantage of human crisis to make the best financial gain. A good example is during the incessant fuel crisis we experience in Nigeria. Another instance is during religious festive periods and holidays like Christmas, Easter, and “Sala” and “Ramadan” holidays. Rather than allow the care for the less privileged in the society to find joyful attention, the little in their hands is taken for their unavoidable needs. Here is a capitalist mentality. This results in hoarding or refurbishing the outside of the needed commodity to make it look new but whose quality is below recommendation for the lowest possible output. Price hike, inflation, artificial scarcities are also part of the problem (Ibim, 1997:10).

Under this kind of moral failure in the economic life of the people, development will be a mirage. No nation grows under inflation, scarcity of essential commodities or exploitation of its citizens during economic crisis. It is quite unfortunate that these occur mainly during religious festivals.

Moral Decay in Societal Life

Socially, beginning with major realities like ethnic grouping of communities, one finds the promotion of selfish sectarian exhibition in relationships. People very often see no problem in classifying a group of socially different people as less than human. The Nigerian situation in this respect is quite obvious. We

have a stratified society under major and minor ethnic groups. Constant agitations based on ethnic and religious affiliation have not only affected the politics of this nation but have also dwindled the pace of development in Nigeria. Indeed, the religious expectation of accommodating people even for the sake of 'proselytism' gets lost at the slight opportunity to talk ill of others (Audi, 2002).

Moral Decay in Academic Life

In Nigerian academia, there is evidence of people forging results in order to seek employment or admission into higher levels of studies, including Seminaries and Bible Colleges. Similarly, people are often found writing examinations for their siblings, cousins or friends. You do find people also who will be prone to bribing the instructors in order to have good results or the instructor expecting such whether in "cash" or in "kind" of the student. Unfortunately all these actors are highly religious people in a booming religious society.

The problem of this type of moral lapse in national development is endemic. Universities and Colleges will continue to turn out academic mediocre and inefficient manpower. Many unprofessional and quacks will be employed in both government and private offices who will end up creating problem in the nation's economy.

The Problem of Corruption

Corruption in Nigeria is endemic. It has gone deep into all the sectors of the Nigerian society. Agbom (2010:13) lamenting on the mess this evil of corruption has plunged the nation into said, "corruption gives rise to people consciously doing what is wrong or what is not allowed." It makes it possible for one to get what one is not qualified for or be denied of what one is qualified to get. It creates room for dishonesty, non-patriotism and involves betrayal of social trust, sabotage, lack of respect for human reason and human integrity.

Our nation Nigeria has become lame, dumb, and deaf because of corruption. Reports of panels on corrupt charges were never implemented. No government in Nigeria has boldly caught and disciplined the "big fish" as a deterrent to others. Instead the government prefers political solution to corruption rather than judicial solution. No nation can develop in a situation like this; but there is a way out.

WAYS FORWARD

Religion as Panacea to Moral Decadence in Nigeria

"Religion," as earlier mentioned is intrinsically (in itself) good. The problem we have is that of the operators, operations and the followers of the various faith traditions in Nigeria. These operators or religious leaders have at one

time or the other used religion to manipulate their followers and thus painted religion black before many. On the other hand, many religious adherents have failed to practice the core tenets of their religions due to lack of understanding or place undue emphasis on a particular doctrinal issue, thereby creating unhealthy suspicion and projecting religion as evil.

Religion is a major solution to the myriads of problems that have plagued this nation. It is the solution to moral decadence that has destroyed the fibres of development in Nigeria. Okere (2006:38) said that, “the mother of morality is religion. For the vast majority of human beings and certainly of Africans and Nigerians, morality is religion-based.” They learn morality from their religion, frame it in religious terms and ultimately justify it by appeals to religion and God. Religion is the general description of man’s relation to God; as such, it is more than ideas or just a body of knowledge. It is rather a set of held beliefs that generates or creates values and attitudes designed to lead to specific action of final fulfilment (Okere, 2006). To address the moral decay in Nigeria today, religion is indispensable in various ways:

i. First, the communicative failure, which has encouraged the present moral situation, needs to be straightened. Specifically, the dignity associated with religious language and environment needs restoration. Besides these, those who profess belief in various religious traditions in Nigeria must live such lives as will make a difference in the society. The onus is on both the religious leaders and the followers. It is high time adherents of various religions began to practice what they learn, not just hearing or moving from one pillar to post (James 1:22) (Audi, 2002).

ii. Second, the quality of teaching and preaching need to improve. The questions most outstanding in people’s lives need answers that are stipulated in the religious books. There is need for a balancing concerning issues of life that are contemporary. The determinant of religious morality and the nature of commitment have to be re-established and upgraded through high quality religious teaching and living.

iii. The role of African Traditional Religion which emphasizes the restoration of African moral values needs to be taken into consideration. The flight of core moral values from the society among youths is a big concern which questions the roles of parents and guardians in the family. There is need for parents, religious leaders and traditional institutions to inculcate those cherished values like obedience, respect for elders, truthfulness, dignity in labour, chastity among other values into their children. This will go a long way in reducing moral decay in the society.

Religion as Key to National Development

Irrespective of the many misunderstandings, misrepresentations, accusations and counter accusation against religion as the root cause of the many woes in the nation; and why it must be discarded, ‘religion’ according to Obilor

(2010:184) “remains the one factor of survival in Nigeria.” Ilega (2001:11) puts it this way, “religion is a potent factor for peace and it should be practiced to let the nation grow, overcome differences and survive. The true practice of the tenets of our religions will make Nigeria to build a nation where peace and justice shall reign.” It is the “leaders of religion” in Nigeria that are turning religion into a weapon of human and societal disaster. It is not possible for human race to survive without religious dimensions (Obilor, 1998).

Democracy is impossible without religious values. Religion must regulate democracy for it is religion which turns democracy into the service of the people by the people and for the people. In Nigeria, we need religious minded politicians and leaders whose intellect is well attuned to what is honest, right and just. The development of the nation and the hope of survival in Nigeria begin at the electoral practices. Any good adherent to any of the major religions in Nigeria should be elected into office. We have insisted that the problem of Nigeria is not religion but operators of religion. Men and women of religious bent who carry their religious ideologies into government will definitely bring the eluded transformation and development that we desire for in Nigeria (Odumuyiwa, 2001).

Oboh (2007:21) citing Aristotle noted that, “the building of the nation is first and foremost the building of the people that make up the nation. This in effect boils down to the building of the individuals themselves.” Here religion has a lot of roles to play. Justice, love and peace which are essential ingredients for national development are products of human heart and mind. From religion, man learns these virtues and makes efforts to do good and avoid evil. Through religion, man sees himself as a creature who owes his existence to a higher power from whom man came and to whom man must render account for his/her behaviour. This knowledge will definitely endear man the desire to live a morally upright, because morals are the food and drink which keep the society alive, healthy and happy. Once there is moral breakdown, the whole integrity of the society also breaks down and the end is tragic.

The religious leaders through their preaching, teaching and other activities, should serve as watchdogs to politicians and public office holders. Their constant outcry against corruption, poverty, moral decay, and embezzlement of public funds, wickedness and all the evils that have retarded the rate of development in this country can go a long way redressing the menace. The churches, mosques and traditional institutions, through engagement in charity work can socially transform the less privileged ones in the society by offering scholarships and establishing schools and affordable health-care centres.

In order to be a truly successful nation and the “giant in the sun,” Nigeria must give God a place of honour in its national life. Every individual who is acting, whether in private or in public, whether by day or night, whether on his/her own behalf or on behalf of the nation, state, or community of which he/she

form a part, should act in full awareness that the eyes of God, divinities, spirits, and ancestors are on him/her, taking note of every moral act of his/hers and that every act posited has a corresponding reward or punishment recorded against it (Oboh, 2007). If all work in line with this knowledge of religious obligations and roles, the nation will develop evenly.

CONCLUSION

This paper has unravelled what religion is and why religious activities, programmes and involvements are flourishing in Nigeria. The work addressed the cankerworm which is moral decadence that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society. It was noted that despite the seemingly increase in religious actions in Nigeria, the moral dispositions of the people is very low. This menace raised a lot of questions bordering on the irony of religious boom and the erosion of moral values.

The paper emphasized the goodness, relevance and the indispensability of religion; and that its boom could not all be the sole factor, if at all, for the flight of moral values in the society. The problem of moral decadence came about as a result of the religious leaders' inability to play their roles properly and the adherents not keeping to the principles of the faith traditions to which they belong.

The research discovered that the solution to moral decadence which has grossly affected the development of the nation hinges on religion. Religion is the one and major factor for the survival of the nation. Religion sanitizes the consciences of the citizenry, enthrone moral aptitude, justice, peace, equity and fair play, which are ingredients for national development. The work further discovered and recommended that if every religious person in Nigeria plays the game according to the rule, Nigeria will experience a tremendous growth that will be a watershed in the annals of history. It is only when the high religious inclinations of many Nigerians and the alarming upsurge of religious houses began to translate into high moral standard of justice, love, equity, respect for elders, obedience and so on that the level of development we clamour for in the nation will begin to materialize.

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