

RELIGION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The level of development of a country is affected by many factors. Economists tend to emphasize the impact of economic variables however; political and social factors can also be very important determinant of national development.

This paper therefore examined the influence of religion on the development of Nigeria. Theories such as 'the philosophical theory of religion as a theory of terrorism' and 'protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism' were used to clearly explain the influence of religion on national development.

In sum, it was noted that the relationship between religion and development is likely to be complementary as long as religious beliefs and practices promote 'moderation' rather than 'extremes'.

Keywords: *National Development, Religion, Economy, Conflict, Terrorism.*

1. Introduction

Religion is a system of social coherence commonly understood as a group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen or imaginary being, or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth, and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions, and rituals associated with such belief or system of thought. It is a framework within which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued; usually among a community of like-minded believers [10].

Religion' (*religio*) has two distinctive etymological roots [6]. Firstly, the Latin word *relegere*, from *legere*, means to bring together, to harvest or to gather. Secondly, *religare*, from *ligare*, means to tie or to bind together [3]. The first meaning recognizes the religious foundations of any social group that is gathered together. The second indicates the disciplines or morality that is necessary for controlling and regulating human beings. Kirkpatrick (2005) sees religion as psychological attachment, a powerful emotional relationship to things. Tylor (1958-1871), defined religion as a belief in spirits. Spirits were gods, animating powers, animal-spirit companions, etc, all of which seemed to have a religious cast. Durkheim (1963-1912) defined religion as a collective representation that made things sacred. Religion was a worldview that created the sacred. The power to do this resided with the society. Therefore, society created religion. Durkheim felt that religion was the foundation of society [9].

A definition of religion is difficult to make, because religion has many facets, many of which do not appear to be religious by themselves. For example, religion involves gathering in groups. It involves communal eating. It involves theoretical discourse about the nature of the universe, and so forth. Countless definitions have been proposed by theoreticians. The most interesting thing is that an average person can tell when others are engaging in religious behaviour while many scholars and scientists have problems defining it. The concept of religion is like the concept of culture. It is easy to use in ordinary discourse, but difficult to define precisely.

On the other hand, Development could be defined as a process of economic and social transformation that is based on complex cultural and environmental interactions. According to Walter Rodney, development is the process that includes: Physical development which includes man-made goods produced by use of technology, Cultural development which comprises of the values, norms and traditions of a society, and Personal development which includes the psychological directions of individuals [1].

According to Seers (1979) the purpose of development in the society is to reduce poverty, inequality, and unemployment. For Sen (1999), development involves reducing deprivation or broadening choice. Deprivation represents a multidimensional view of poverty that includes hunger, illiteracy, illness and poor health, powerlessness, voicelessness, insecurity, humiliation, and a lack of access to basic infrastructure.

From the foregoing therefore, National Development is the ability of a country or countries to improve the economic and social welfare of the people e.g. by providing security and social amenities which includes quality education, portable water, transportation infrastructure, medical care, employment etc.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

2.1 The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism is a book written by Max Weber, a German economist and sociologist in 1904 and 1905 that began as a series of essays. It is argued that the book should not be viewed as a detailed study of Protestantism but rather as an introduction into Weber's later works, especially his studies of interaction between various religious ideas and economics.

In the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Weber puts forward the thesis that Puritan ethics and ideas had influenced the development of capitalism. However, religious devotion was usually accompanied by rejection of worldly affairs, including the pursuit of wealth and possessions. Why was that not the case with Protestantism? Weber addresses this apparent paradox in the book. He defines spirit of capitalism as the ideas and habits that favour the rational pursuit of economic gain [8]. Weber points out that such a spirit is not limited to Western culture if one considers it as the attitude of individuals, but that such individuals — heroic entrepreneurs, as he calls them — could not by themselves establish a new economic order (capitalism). The most common tendencies were the greed for profit with minimum effort and the idea that work was a curse and burden to be avoided especially when it exceeded what was enough for modest life. As he wrote in his essays:

In order that a manner of life well adapted to the peculiarities of the capitalism... could come to dominate others, it had to originate somewhere, and not in isolated individuals alone, but as a way of life common to the whole groups of man [8].

After defining the 'spirit of capitalism', Weber argues that there are many reasons to find its origins in the religious ideas of the Reformation. Many observers like William Petty, Montesquieu, Henry Thomas Buckle, John Keats, and others have commented on the affinity between Protestantism and the development of commercialism.

Weber shows that certain types of Protestantism favoured rational pursuit of economic gain and that worldly activities had been given positive spiritual and moral meaning. It was not the goal of those religious ideas, but rather a by-product — the inherent logic of those doctrines and the advice based upon them both directly and indirectly encouraged planning and self-denial in the pursuit of economic gain. Weber traced the origins of the Protestant ethic to the Reformation. In his opinion, under the Roman Catholic Church, an individual could be assured of salvation by belief in the church's sacraments and the authority of its hierarchy. However, the Reformation had effectively removed such assurances.

From a purely technical and theological viewpoint, the Reformation did not remove assurances of salvation. However, from a psychological viewpoint, the average person had difficulty adjusting to this new worldview, and only the most devout believers or "religious geniuses" within Protestantism, such as Martin Luther, were able to make this adjustment [8].

According to the new Protestant religion, an individual was religiously compelled to follow a secular vocation with as much zeal as possible. A person living according to this worldview was more likely to accumulate money. The individual engages in capitalistic economizing not only for the expediency of making a living, but in the expectation that such activity would test his inner resources and thus affirm his moral worth [8]. This is evident in Nigerian (protestant) churches. Teachings in the church are centred on money and individuals capability to create wealth. Poverty is a curse and therefore not for the children of God. God owns the earth and everything in it and if you are truly his child, you cannot be poor. So being wealthy is a demonstration that one has possessed his rightful inheritance from God as his child. Poverty is affliction from the devil and one has to break out of the grip of the devil and move into the realm of wealth which is the inheritance of the children of God. For one to successfully do this, spiritual (prayers) and physical (hard work) efforts are needed.

In the long run, such teachings would have positively affected the economy of the country by making people to work hard in their various places of work not just to make a living but also to fulfil their religions calling of being successful on earth. Many churches have even gone beyond just mere teachings to show examples of how to create wealth by creating jobs through investing in different sectors of Nigerian economy such as education, transportation, agriculture, trade etc.

From the above therefore, religion has positively affected Nigerian economy through its teachings. People are taught to believe in their capability to create wealth, jobs are created both directly and indirectly by religious institutions, taxes from their investments are paid to the government etc; and all these help to boost the economy of the country and improve the living standard of the people.

2.2 The Philosophical Theory of Religion as a Theory of Terrorism

Many criminologists have pointed out that the disciplines of theology, religion, and philosophy have had important things to say about terrorism [18] [12]. It is also a fact that about a quarter of all terrorist groups and about half of the most dangerous ones on earth are primarily motivated by religious concerns (Hoffman 1993). They believe that God not only approves of their action, but that God demands their action. Their course is sacred, and consists of a combined sense of hope for the future and vengeance for the past. Of these two components, the backward-looking desire for vengeance may be the more important trigger for terrorism because the forward-looking component

(called apocalyptic thinking or eschatology) produces wild-eyed fanatics who are more a danger to themselves and their own people [13].

The trick to successful use of terrorism in the name of religion rests upon convincing believers or convertees that a "neglected duty" exists in the fundamental, mainstream part of the religion. Religious terrorism is therefore, not about extremism, fanaticism, sects, or cults, but is instead all about a fundamentalist or militant interpretation of the basic tenets [13]. Most religious traditions are filled with plenty of violent images at their core, and destruction or self-destruction is a central part of the logic behind religion-based terrorism [11]. Evil is often defined as malignant narcissism from a theological point of view, and religion easily serves as moral cover for self-cantered terrorists and psychopaths [18].

Religion has always absorbed or absolved evil and guilt in what is called theodicy, or the study of how the existence of evil can be reconciled with a good and benevolent God. Most religions theodicyize evil as: (1) A test of faith; (2) A product of free will; (3) part of God's plan; or (4) functional to let people learn right from wrong; and terrorists easily make use of these established theodicies or critiques of them [12].

Usual pattern in religious-based terrorism is for a psychopathic, spiritual leader to arise that is regarded as somewhat eccentric at first (a tendency toward messianism). But then, as this leader develops their charisma, they tend to appear more and more mainstream and scholarly. They begin to mingle political with religious issues (a tendency toward theocracy), and little-known religious symbols or pieces of sacred text take on new significance. Quite often, these symbols are claimed to be an important part of that religion's history that has somehow been neglected. The stage is then set for blaming somebody for the betrayal of this sacred heritage. First, the politicians in one's own country are blamed, but soon a foreign influence, like secularization or modernization is blamed. Militant religions quickly move to blaming a foreign influence for at least three reasons: (1) it does not serve the religion's survival interests; (2) it makes use of a long history of competition, animosity, and war between the world's different religions; and (3) any blaming to be done must occur on the symbolic or cosmic level, which is to say that the enemy cannot have a face, but must be some impersonal, evil-like force or influence. Hence, the most specific enemy a militant religion can have is some global trend like Secularization, Modernization, or Westernization. The strength of fundamentalism is its ability to guarantee that a radical change is coming without specifying exactly what it will look like. However, once a semi-vague enemy has been identified, the religious movement borrows the idea of "sovereignty" from the political realm and begins to see itself as the legitimate defender of the faith and legitimate restorer of dignity to the homeland. Most importantly, such "defenders" justify terrorist action in their accountability only to God, for it is God who has chosen them for this sacred mission in history [13].

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of religion as a theory of terrorism is how a devout believer could come to mix politics and religion. This typifies the rise and activities of religious terrorism (Boko Haram) in Northern Nigeria. First, Yusuf their dead leader came into the scene using philanthropy to attract followers by identifying gaps (poverty, corruption) in Nigerian polity. He gave the poor arms and also inculcated into them his rebellious position against Westernization and Nigerian Government; and his intention to Islamize (Sharia) the North as the only way they can escape injustice and attain the level which Allah (God) wants them to be. This is strengthened by the view that they are just tools Allah uses to do his will.

Religious terrorism can be quite extreme in its tactics. Not only does it strive to avenge a long history of persecution and injustice, but it frequently carries out pre-emptive attacks. Leading to massive destruction of lives and bombing of government, religious and individual properties. This is because a high level of paranoia is usually maintained about the actual degree of threat that the enemy trend poses.

Religious terrorism in Nigeria poses a significant threat to national development as it is evident in Northern Nigeria where economic and social activities in some of the highly volatile States (Yobe and Borno) have almost been grounded by the stream of killings, destruction of basic means of livelihood of the people and truncating of foreign and local investments; thereby becoming a cock on the wheel of development of the States and Nigeria at large. In all fairness, it should be said that most militant religious groups only adopt terrorism as a tactic of last resort. Religious terrorists demonstrate marvellous ingenuity in means, methods, and timing, but their target is flawed, and one can only wonder how strategically effective is their "symbolic" success from "striking at the heart of the infidels." Perhaps the whole reason for it is to bolster their reputation among other religious communities. This would be supported by the fact that most terrorist acts are scheduled on dates specifically designed to desecrate a competitor's religion.

In summary, the above theories are just to help understand better the role of religion to national development. The common thing in both theories is the pursuit of a better tomorrow which is positive national development. However, the means and how to go about such pursuit is different even though all is geared towards national development. While one is pursuing it through peaceful co-existence, the other through conflict and violence. Generally, they are pushing for a society where honesty, justice, improved living standard etc are guaranteed.

This brings us to Robert K. Merton's Theory of Deviance where some individuals in the society are 'Conformist' (pursuing societal goals through societal accepted means) while others are 'Innovators' (pursuing societal goals but through their own created means). While the first theory is about how religion can motivate people to work hard in order to better their living standard and the general economy of the country, the other theory explained how religion could be used to psych people to take arms to fight for so called 'better society' where everything are done as stipulated by religion. All these are just for us to understand the influence of religion on national development from both sides of the coin.

3.RELIGIOUS CONFLICT AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nigeria is usually characterized as a deeply divided state in which major political issues are vigorously – some would say violently – contested along the lines of the complex ethnic, religious, and regional divisions in the country ([17] and Robinson, 2001). The issues that generate the fiercest contestation include those that are considered fundamental to the existence and legitimacy of the state, over which competing groups tend to adopt exclusionary, winner-take-all strategies. These include the control of state power, resource allocation, and citizenship. As a consequence, deeply divided states tend to be fragile and unstable because almost by definition, there are fewer points of convergence and consensus among the constituent groups than are required to effectively mitigate or contain the centrifugal forces that tear the society apart [7].

By virtue of its complex web of politically salient identities and history of chronic and seemingly intractable conflicts and instability, Nigeria can be rightly described as one of the most deeply divided states in Africa. From its inception as a colonial state, Nigeria has faced a perennial crisis of territorial or state legitimacy, which has often challenged its efforts at national cohesion, democratization, stability and economic transformation [16].

Religious identities in Nigeria are usually classified into three – Christian, Muslim and Traditional. Of the three, traditional religion is the least politically active; numbering several hundreds of ethnic groups and subgroups, villages, clans and kin groups; and, involving the worship of different gods and goddesses. In parts of the Kogi, Kwara, and Nassarawa States, masquerade activities associated with traditional religion have been a major source of conflicts [7]. However, Christian and Muslim identities have been the mainstay of religious differentiation and conflict, with Nigerian Muslims much more likely to evince or articulate a religious identity than Christians.

Before we go further, it is pertinent to define what Religious Conflict means to this paper. Religious Conflict is all those conflicts that have religious undertone or that which one or both parties define as religious, or employs religious slogans and symbols to execute the conflict. In a religious conflict, the identity groups in the conflict organize and pursue their interests and needs under religious groups and organizations. Sympathies, loyalties and followership are religiously determined. Where the conflict is violent as it is always in Nigeria, people are usually killed and properties worth millions are destroyed; making people even poorer.

Back to the discussion, underneath the broad Christian-Muslim categories are several sub-cleavages that have at one time or the other been politically salient or have the potential to be, and have generated intra-group conflicts. Among Christians, there are several denominations, including: the Protestants (Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and Lutheran), the Catholics, the Evangelical Church of West Africa, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and a host of 'home-grown', 'white garment' (Aladura and Celestial) and Pentecostal churches.

Muslims on the other hand belong to different sects, including the Ahmadiyya, Sanusiyya, Tijanniyya and Quadriyya, among which there have been conflicts. There are also some umbrella organizations, which aim at the propagation of Islam. One of these is the Jamaatu Nasril Islam (JNI), which was founded by the Sardauna of Sokoto in 1961. Following the Iranian Islamic revolution of the 1970s, there was a surge of radical and fundamentalist activities especially among Muslim youths. This was the context within which some fundamentalist Muslim sects, notably the Maitatsine, Izala movement, the Muslim Brothers or Shiites, and most recently the Talibans, Boko Haram, emerged to demand, amongst others: pursuit of Islam based on Sharia law; the eradication of heretical innovations; and, the establishment of an Islamic state or theocracy [7]. The activities of these sects are major precipitant of the religious conflicts that proliferated Northern Nigerian political landscape since 1980s till date. Most of these involve conflicts between Muslims and Christians, with clear ethnic undertones, but some especially those involving the Izala and Boko Haram, also entailed anti-state mobilization.

The resent emergence of the new terror group (Boko Haram) in Northern Nigeria has affected negatively the political, economic, social and environmental situation of the region and in extension Nigerian economy. The continuous killing and destruction of lives and properties in Northern Nigeria in the name of Islam has a negative effect on the economy of Northern States and Nigeria at large. Economic activities have almost been grounded by series of terrorist attacks in Borno and Yobe State, living people stranded, jobless and some refugees in their homeland. Many businessmen, companies both local and foreign have left some of these 'worst hit' States depriving government millions of tax revenue that would have been collected if economic activities are booming. The

government is only left with diversion of money meant for development of the country and improvement of living standard of people to heavy spending on security. This is a clear negative influence of religion on development of Nigerian economy.

4.RELIGION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN NIGERIA

The level of development of a country is affected by many factors. Economists tend to emphasize the impact of economic variables (Alesina and Rodrick, 1994) however; political and social factors can also be important determinants of growth (Barro, 1996). Religion is a source not only of intolerance, human rights violations, and extremist violence, but also of non-violent conflict transformation, the defence of human rights, integrity in government, and reconciliation and stability in divided societies (Appleby, 1996).

Analyses of the implications of diversity in Nigeria and other countries suggest diversity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for conflict. In other words, the very fact that a country has different ethnic, communal, religious, and racial groups does not make division and conflicts inevitable [7]. In cross-country studies, economists have revisited Weber's hypothesis. Barro and McCleary (2003) assess the effect of religious participation and beliefs on a country's rate of economic progress. Using international survey data for 59 countries drawn from the World Values Survey and the International Social Sciences Program conducted between 1981 and 1999, these authors found that greater diversity of religion is associated with higher church attendance and stronger religious beliefs. For a given level of church attendance, increases in some religious beliefs – notably belief in heaven, hell and an afterlife – tends to increase economic growth [19]. This is evident in the activities of churches in Nigeria where they assist some of their devoted members not only influencing their view of success and the need to acquire wealth but also help to secure job for them; thereby helping to improve their living standard and the country at large. Other studies have focused more on particular religions in varied historical time periods. For example, very useful insights have been gained by focusing on Islam and on Judaism. For Islam, there have been detailed investigations into financial systems in the Middle East including *zakat* (alms for charity) and the manner in which Islamic banks have been using a financing method equivalent to the rate of interest to overcome adverse selection and information problems. This is also practical in Nigeria. The routine giving of arms to the needy during Christmas celebration or Ramadan is a way religion help to reduce poverty by encouraging 'the haves to give to have not' in order to be given by God. The introduction of Islamic Banking by Central Bank of Nigeria no doubt, will improve the economic power of the borrowers. A bank that shares profit and loss with the borrower will invariably reduce the risk of doing business than the conventional banks that 'wins' in any business they enter with their clients. This will make fund available for those that have idea of a profitable business to create wealth, employment and also add value to the economy by paying taxes to the government.

Religion could also foster development through encouragement of members to acquire formal education. If formal education is significant to high standard of living, then religion may explain why there are many poor people in northern Nigeria than other regions especially South-West and South-Eastern Nigeria. This is because the practice of women in Purdah in Northern Nigeria could account for the low enrolment of women in former education institution.

The apparent linkage between religion and development attracts criticism. According to [15] and [5], there is either no logical reason to link religion to economic development or insufficient empirical evidence of any actual linkage. [20] expressed high skepticism of seeing capitalist development as guided by religion. He argued that any complex system of ideas can be manipulated to serve any particular social or political objective. Any connection between religion and economics is likely the one in which the latter is cause and the former effect.

5.SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Religion and development are seemingly inseparable. Conceptually religion provides believers a guideline about life and the life-after and thus provides much-needed incentives for indulging in productive activities during lifetime. Religions can be seen as a promoter of growth as they direct people towards honesty, discipline, hard work, education, thriftiness (leading to savings essential for investment and thereby growth) and absenteeism from harmful activities; though it can also encourage violence in the name of doing the will of God. Most of the empirical studies point to a positive relationship between religion and economic growth and development. Yet, there is no consensus on the precise causal relationship (one-way or both ways) between the two.

Nevertheless, we can probably conclude that the relationship between religion and development is likely to be complementary as long as religious beliefs and practices promote 'moderation' rather than 'extremes'. Also, there should be no prejudice against any religion as the studies conducted so far have failed to prove the superiority of any single religion over others in terms of their economic performance and behavioral changes on the society at large. However, it is germane to mention that any policy (or a system) based exclusively on certain religious principles that

has potential to serve the entire global community should adopted. The recent surge of interest in Islamic finance in various non-Islamic countries (USA, UK, and Singapore) can be cited as manifestation of such a phenomenon. A peaceful coexistence of various religious groups (or sects) in a country and various nations with different religious affiliations within the global community is a prerequisite for growth and prosperity in today's highly interconnected world.

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