

# RELIGION AND EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN POLITY

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## **Abstract**

A country cannot develop in all spheres of life with citizens that are morally and intellectually bankrupt. Religion provides the people with code of moral conduct, which will enable the citizenry to live a meaningful and fulfilled life that can enable the society to progress. Education on the other hand, is a systematic process through which knowledge, skills, insights, habits values or attitudes are acquired by people. It involves development of understanding of critical awareness of an appreciation of the values and importance of certain areas of human experience, of respect for knowledge and truth, above all, of the ability to think for oneself. Religious education is needed to overcome the moral decadence that has beclouded our Nigerian polity. There is no regard for justice and equity, violence, crimes and corruption have become the order of the day in our body polity. Religious education needs to be intensified in our various institutions of learning if we want to maintain sanctity in our body polity.

## **Introduction**

One of the concepts that are so easily misunderstood in our society is religion. Religion has different meanings to different people, culture or opinion. The problem of religion therefore, is the problem of meaning. This is because as Metuh puts it, "the object of religion is invisible and spiritual beings who are not subject to observation and are different people." It is against this backdrop that hundreds of definitions litter our textbooks in the social sciences and humanities.

Etymologically, religion is derived from *Religanda* meaning refastening up or binding back, which was the opinion of Lactantius because for him, religion expresses a situation God empowers Man, therefore, binding him to himself (Madu, 1996).

Religion can be used to mean union or communion with God, it could be cult or worship rendered to God whether public or private. It could be community of worshipper in which those who profess the same faith and cult meet together to worship, be it, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism are typical examples.

In general, we can safely say that religion is the element of culture, which expresses man's relationship with transcendence or with the supernatural. This was why David Hume, traced the origins of religious beliefs to a concern with "the various contrary events of human life."

From what has been so far said, what is religion? Religion could be defined subjectively and objectively. Subjectively, religion is the very consciousness of dependence on a transcendent being and the propensity of inclination to exhibit cult or to worship.

Objectively, religion is a complex of truths, laws, and rites by which man is subordinated to transcendent being (Arinze, 1970).

In this, wise religion denotes man's relation with God. In it, man internally and freely, acknowledges his dependence on God. He also, extremely expresses acts of cults either individually or communally. Religion 'as it is the strongest element in man and exerts probably the greatest in man, says, Madu (1996).

## **Functions of Religion in Society**

Religion binds man to the unseen powers, and helps him to right relations with these man-human powers. It also, binds him to his fellow human beings. Religion acts as cement holding our society together. It also provides, the necessary stability to our societies.

Religion serves the purpose of giving meaning ultimate meaning to human life. It sacralizes the norms and values of the society and thus, functions as an efficacious means of social control. It also performs a prophetic-critical function by providing values and ideas against which social reality can be critically viewed and if possible, improved. Thus, it has a dialectical relationship to a society, acting now as an element of social control and stability, and also as a disturbing and revolutionary element.

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Ethnicity is another big problem of this nation. This has led to a sort of ethnic intolerance and crises. Once one does not come from the same ethnic group, the person remains at best, a foreigner or at most, an enemy. This explains why we always have witnessed ethnic clashes here and there. Today, it may be the Tiv and Jukum, Ukelle and Izzi. Tomorrow, it may be the Ijaw or the Ishekiri. If not the Hausa and (the Igbo, it will be the Fulani and the Yoruba. This list is endless. The irony is that some of us more readily accept and accommodate Non-Nigerians than the other fellow Nigerian outside our ethnic group.

The next is religious intolerance. Whatever happens in this country is always looked upon with some religious coloration. We no longer talk of merit and/or objectively we are more concerned in knowing one's religious affiliation in making appointments in politics and many other things we do. For one to succeed, one has to bring in unnecessary religious sentiment or the other. Religious intolerance keeps on manifesting itself in various religious clashes we have recently. The one that most readily comes to mind was the Plateau state clashes that led to the imposition of six months state of emergency. In that state, the governor was suspended from office. What about the recent Kano incident where Muslim extremists killed about twelve police men and a civilian in the name of protesting the killing of their leader (BBC News Report Thursday, 9th April, 2007).

Indiscipline and lawlessness are becoming the order of this nation. Indiscipline comes in different shapes and sizes. It manifests in the way we relate with one another, the way we drive without consideration for the road users. It can be seen in the way we dress and our lackadaisical attitude towards work especially when it is government work.

Another sign is lack of patriotism. Most of us do not love our country Nigeria, and are not committed to the well being of the country. We do not have regard for our leaders, nor do our leaders have regard to those being ruled. Most Nigerians are not ready to defend the nation not to talk of dying for the nation just as the average American or even the suicide bombers would want to do.

Our educational system has broken down because of mismanagement. Our tertiary institutions are no longer the ivory tower that used to be. They have become centers of cultism, examination malpractices, certificate racketing, and other forms of corruption. Sexual harassment on and from both sexes is fast becoming the order of the day in our institutions of learning. So looking at these, one can say without fear of contradiction that our nation is terribly sick and needs urgent treatment hence "things fall apart." It is only against this background that collective dream of rebuilding a nation characterized by sustainable economic development, political stability, social justice, moral order, and religious harmony can be realized.

### **Upholding Nigerian Values in Nigerian Polity**

Orgunakin-Fabarebo (1999), sees moral values as those concepts or pattern of behaviour, which recognize and seen to protect the supremacy of man within his environment. "Although values are diversely understood by philosophers, values are feelings about what is desirable or undesirable about what should or should not exist. What is certain, though, is that values have to do with feeling- of approval or disapproval of things or habits. In other words, value is ascribing quality of worth to things or behavior, which are consequently cherished, appreciated or, institutionalized or internalized (Usman, 2003).

We talk of Nigerian values in terms of those traits, habits or institutionalized behaviors shared and appreciated by all. The appreciation of these values ensures harmonious living, social justice and moral order leading to a building of an egalitarian Nigerian society. Upholding these values contributes immensely to building a strong and virile nation.

It is common knowledge that there is a logical connection between the religious nature: condition of a nation and its body polity. The knowledge, wisdom, skill of man without reference to divine (religion) and moral rectitude (morality) may amount to misdirected zeal because man on his own alone is depraved, corrupt and selfish. This goes to support Badmos' (1997), observation that, the strength of a nation does not lie mainly on its material achievements but in the moral quality in the individual members of that nation. He further opines that, "religious and moral education are vital prerequisites and essential ingredients for any nation in quest of meaningful development."

The Nigerian society, has a number of ethnic and linguistic groups, the nation has some certain values shared by all of them such as being our brothers keeper, extended family system, respect for elders, hospitality, cooperate children upbringing, honesty, hard work and dignity for labour (industry),

chastity before marriage and respect for human life.

A further look at these aforementioned values showed that there has been a “paradigm shift” resulting in their negligence, which calls for collective concern in the interest of national and moral rebirth, which is necessary for the Nigerian body polity.

### **The Place of Education in the Nigerian Body Polity**

Education is the bedrock of any developing nation, and it is through education that humankind!! recurses in most of our understandings are received. It is the life wire of any serious society. Education makes people easy to lead but difficult to drive, easy to govern but difficult to enslave, in the words of Oni (1999).

Education is a companion which no misfortune can depress, no enemy can eliminate, no despotism can enslave, at home a friend, abroad, an introduction, in solitude a solace and in society an element. Without it what is man? he is a speeding slave, a reasoning savage. Education raises man from the status of an animal to that of a sound and reasonable hominid. It is through education that one is prepared to face the odious of life, that one's critical sensibility is sharpened.

Education as a concept is an instrument of human development, a reformer and that, which distinguishes the enlightened from the uncivilized. It goes beyond school-based projects aimed at the development of the mind. The desire of every household is to have it that, men and women are responsible enough to develop the family status.

Therefore, education has become the critical pillar of development in every human society, and has been recognized as the key to effective human development. This means that no meaningful development can take place without education. Each society develops its education for the achievement of certain goals. Those goals must be necessary to sustain the national growth in terms of social, political, and human development.

Education is also the critical pillar for unity and cohesion. It allows individuals and society to unlock their potentials, expand their horizon and expand to a changing world, it is seen as the best legacy that parents can leave for their children or a nation can give to her citizens. It is the best possession a person can have. Without it, poverty, diseases, and ignorance can be significantly contained. The pressure of modern Nigerian, the political, technological, social, and religious development can be withstood, only if the whole population could receive and retain the benefits of effective education.

Education encourages people to live healthier lives by reducing the ignorance, which can cause disease. It makes people more aware of the political, social, intellectual, and economic trends around. Hence they should become more useful citizens and play their full role in a democratic society.

### **Relationship Between Religion, Education and the Nigerian Polity**

The magnitude and the spread of negative metamorphosis that the Nigerian nation is passing through morally, economically, politically, socially, and educationally constitute a key of gun powder that could blow up the nation and lead to the total collapse of the entity called Nigeria, if adequate diagnosis and remedies are not put in place urgently.

Pitiable, Nigerian has remained a nation state more than four decades now, and it is supposed to attain self-national awareness and identity. Unfortunately, thus, has become the case. Something has to be done and urgently too.

Religion provides the people with moral values, while education develops the mind and intellect with which the people and the nation can forge ahead. Unfortunately, the Nigerian federation of today still remains a heterogeneous people, for its divergent people and tribes are yet to chart a lasting basis for their unity.

Writing on the political value system that has lingered in the Nigerian system, Uzoechi (2004), describes it as a northernization, westernization, and easternization or in one word tribalism. He went further to say that, the culture of corruption; rigging of election and political thuggery has become the culture or value system that was rife among Nigerians in their regional or selfish tribal sentiments. Also commenting on the political value system of today's Nigeria, Odozi Obodo (2002), states categorically that, the culture of individualism and selfish interest had been the method of all actors in government since Nigeria achieved her independence. This situation does not augur well for

the Nigerian body polity. We need moral rebirth which religion can give with functional and effective educational system.

Our present culture of religious violence according to Amuchaezi (1985), is a value system, which has continued to keep Nigeria backward politically, economically and socially due to its mass destruction of lives and property. Writing on the danger of violent religious culture Oyewele (2004), stated that, a nation that is constantly on the boil cannot attract any serious investor to inject money for her national development.

People embark on religious violence because of their poor educational background which are being exploited to the advantage of the operators. With sound moral/religious education coupled with adequate knowledge of one's right which is the hallmark of an educated man Nigeria will develop more rapidly than as it is today, Nigeria has all the human and natural resources to develop like Europe and America. But with poor education for her citizens, her national goals and aspirations will always remain a mirage.

Our moral values are nothing to write home about. According to Enoh (2000), Nigeria today is extremely materialistic nation such that no emphasis is placed on building moral structures and values in the system. Where there is the problem of great economic inequality caused by greed and disintegration of traditional society, which serve as moral harbinger for the youths, has resulted in the great erosion of moral values, he further observed that, "it is therefore, not strange that today's Nigerian society is in the vogue of a total or almost the total erosion of moral values. The result in practical behaviors and philosophy of life is high wave of crime and criminal intents. The situation is not good for the Nigerian body polity.

Turning our attention to the leadership values, true leadership according to Amunadi (2003), is predicted on such qualities as humility, honesty, patience, kindness, transparency and love. Unfortunately, the philosophy of leadership in Nigeria is that built on such values as trickery, intimidation, violence, character assassination, blood shedding, bribery, and corruption at the highest quarters.

### **Challenges Ahead**

President Obasanjo in his address at the launching of the campaign of national rebirth in 1999, remarked that Nigeria has for the past fifteen years remained a nation that is infected with the following ills:

- i. Bad governance and gross use of power
- ii. Gross corruption in high and low places
- iii. High-level criminality such as drug trafficking, armed robbery, cultism, and prostitution, etc.
- iv. Indiscipline, poor work ethics, and lack of patriotism.

He promised to bring about a national rebirth stating that where other past administration has failed, he will not. However, eight years after the above pronouncement and two months into the exist of power, the Nigerian situation has worsened morally, politically, economically, and educationally. It is very evident from the foregoing that all is not well with Nigeria in terms of her value and belief system. Various past governments have made great effort to birth a Nigeria that wholly alive and well to no avail. The techniques have been considered grossly secularist by this writer, hence then inadequacy to deal with both material and non-material questions of the Nigerian nation. The time has come for the church and indeed all religious systems to chart the foundation for a new Nigeria. The creation for national identity, ideological foundation should best be carried out by those charged with the custodian of the people's conscience and morality. The church and religious bodies are no doubts best positioned to effect this development of new Nigeria through sound teachings on moral expectation for every Nigerian.

The morally educated person according to Masqsd (1983), is expected to have:

- i. A good deal of factual knowledge.
- ii. A positive commitment towards the value of morality.
- iii. An ability to communicate with others.
- iv. The ability to understand the teachings of others and those of his own.

**It is obvious that education will assist the citizens to develop appropriate skills and disposition to cope with the variety of politico-moral choices they have to encounter in a complex and technological society of this day and age.**

**Education is a valuable instrument for social change in a society contingent upon what exists and the change envisaged included freedom of speech and association, equal opportunities in all spheres of life irrespective of age, sex, creed and geographical location; acquisition of skill,**

knowledge, patriotism, an positive disposition to the acceptable values of the society.

### Suggestion

Having highlighted the importance of religion and education in the Nigerian polity, the following suggestions are brought forward;

1. Cult activities, armed robbery, and adulteration of products are mostly practiced by those that lack religious orientation. The religious group be they Christian or Islam, should engage on vigorous religious preaching to lead notorious Nigerians into the part of deep religious undertaking.
2. Moral and religious education should be intensified in our schools and colleges while moral philosophy should be made compulsory, in our tertiary institutions. Moral philosophy should be honestly taught to our students in higher institutions of learning, who will be the fixture leaders of this country. It will sensitize and sanitize the entire society and facilitate the implementation of ; the curriculum at all levels of education. There will be sanity and honesty in the choice o' educational aims and objectives, selection of content and learning experience, organization, and evaluation.

The Nigerian society needs honest and hard working people so that discipline, sincerity, fairness, good neighbourliness, friendship, etc will be introduced into our body polity.

### Conclusion

It is true that a lot of problems are caused religious intolerance. This has made some people see religion as an instrument of tearing down as against an instrument of nation building. Some have been genuinely humiliated, deprived, persecuted and harassed by adherents of one religion or the other. The religion per se should not be blamed for such vices but on operators of religion.

Religion encourages us to be good, and when we are good, our society is better for it. This is achieved as religion offers us a vision of another world more enduring than this material world we live in. By doing this, religion imposes some laws, conducts, and sanctions and redirects to the ideal action that constantly help us aiming high and thereby producing some good actions in the society. We need religious tolerance in our body polity. If we neglect the positive role of religion in our society, then our society will be bad and this will be to our detriment.

Education has already been described as vehicle of social change and develop newly if citizens are educated, they will readily see through the difficulties that beset them and meet emergencies as they arise. To achieve this, the educational system in Nigeria should aim consciously at curbing the anvils of tribalism, ethnicity, and greed, while promoting the values of national unity and national consciousness which will in turn bring about political stability in our Nigerian polity.

The educational system in Nigeria should also aim at developing in the individual spirit of service to the communities to help in their growth as well as, provide a sense responsibility to contribute to the common goods and benefits that are shared among members of the community.

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