

# **THE ROLE OF ISLAM IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE**

**BY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The task of nation building is a task that must be done. Nigeria has gone through forty six years of nation building, yet her movement is considered rather slow. The avenues for moving forward have been explored but none seems to be loftier than the religious means. This is so because it plays a decisive role in her formation. It is still contributing positively and negatively, to her progress and backwardness as a nation. In order to positively realize her ambition, goals and objectives as a nation, some Islamic principles and ideals such as those presented in this paper have to be suggested as measures to move the nation forward.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The task of any government is to think of a way its country will move forward. The task of moving forward however, is not the sole business of the government of the day but the business of all concerned citizens of a country. Religion, therefore, is one other means through which a nation can move forward. Nigeria as a multi-religious nation has many religions with different practices but the most widely recognized are Islam, Christianity and traditional religion. A cursory look at the activities of these religions and their practices in the past vis- à-vis the historical origin of Nigeria, its developmental stages, its present status as a nation and its future conditions have a link to religion. Thus, this paper intends to examine the role of

religious practices with particular emphasis on Islamic religion as a mechanism for moving Nigeria forward.

### **The Meaning and Concept of Religion**

Religion has been defined by different people in so many ways, Webster(n.d:1527) for instance has seven different definitions for religion, out which a particular one is adopted for the purpose of this paper;

*“A state of mind or way of the life expressing love for and trust in God, and one’s will and effort to act according to the will of God especially within monastic order or community”*

In a similar vein, Hornby (1995:988) defined religion as a particular system of faith and worship based on religious belief”, It also sees religions as “a controlling influence on one’s life”, or “a thing that one feels strongly about”

From the above definitions, religion may be described as a system of beliefs and practices directed towards the “ultimate concern of a society. “Ultimate concern”, a concept by Paul Tillich, has two aspects, meaning and power. It has meaning in the sense of ultimate meaning of the central values of a society, and it has power in the sense of ultimate, sacred or supernatural power which stands behind those values. What one can deduce from the foregoing is that all the revealed religions are one truth, emanating from one origin. But there are variations in some of the duties and obligations and the ways of regulating human life. The ruler of Abyssinia for instance, who knew Christianity well, was a witness to this identical sourcing and his story is recorded by Islam. When the Muslim migrants were brought in to his presence and recited some verses of the

Qur’an, he declared: “What you have recited and what Jesus brought emanate from one niche”. (Al-Balagh Foundation 1999:32).

The major Prophets in both Islam and Christianity worked to pave the way for the Prophets who came after them, to give the human movement momentum and to tie man to the creator of the universe. This basis on which all the messages stood, is quite clear. We can detect it in their texts and in their ideological pillars (in the Bible, the old and new testaments)

Islamically religion could be said to be any system which would define as a man's way of life. This is the more reason why Allah says in Suratul Kafirun (Quran 109:6) that;

*“..For you is your religion and for me is my religion”.*

With this quotation, it means that each human being who has his own ways in life and is following certain goals definitely has a religion. Thus man is by nature religious, so, many attempt to live without religion is unnatural. If we set out to build up a life and culture or where we attempt to discuss the progress of any community from which faith has been eliminated, we shall have to cut across the grain of man's make up, rejects his most creative designs, hold the different parts of society together without the dove-tailing and the glue which have accomplished it until now.

### **Religious Practices of Nigerians**

As stated above, three main religions exist in Nigeria, they are Islam, Christianity and Traditional Religion. However, two: (Islam and Christianity) are the common and the most popular religions. The country adherents of these religions are found to rebound in every part of this country with large followers

### **Traditional Religion**

Traditional religion like Sango, Ogun, Obatala and Osun among the Yoruba community for instance have their religious practices like others in other community

in Nigeria based on guesses or conjecture of persons or group of persons (NTI2000). But the Qu'ran states that such guesses or conjecture are never a substitute of truth" (Qu'ran 10:36). Even though this Traditional Religion had been in existence before the coming of Islam and Christianity, yet, civilization coupled with unrestricted loyalty to the new faith led to the gradual extinction of the old faith.

### **Christianity**

This is the religion named after Jesus Christ, (Al-Balagh) Fountain, 1990), who according to available historical records was born into a Jewish family of

Galilee, in Palestine. The followers of Christ (Christians) are found in every nook and cranny of Nigeria. This is evident by numerous numbers of Churches and Mission houses that are found scattered all over the places. Christianity came with Western oriented cum Christian education, which was the bait through which they gained a large number of converts within a very short period of time. This was confirmed by the observation made by William Boyd, which says:

...It must be kept in mind that Church undertook the business of education not because it regarded education as good in itself, but because it found that it could not do its own proper work without giving its adherents, and especially its clergy, as much of the formal learning as was required for the study of the sacred writings and for the performance of their religious duties (Boyd 1967:101). Since 1472, when the first missionary endeavor was introduced in Nigeria, (Fafunwa, 1982) Christian and Christianity had contributed immensely to the development of Nigeria.

### **Islam**

Islam is derived from an Arabic word Salam which means peace and also it means submission to the will of Allah (Abdalati, 1975). Islam is the complete acceptance of the teachings and guidance of Allah as revealed to his messenger through the ages

down to the last of the messenger, Prophet Muhammad. A Muslim on the other hand is someone who believes in Allah and strives for the total reorganization of his life according to the revealed guidance and the explanations of the Prophet. Islam according to Fafunwa (1992) was first accepted by the Kanem ruler Umme Jilmi who ruled between 1085 and 1097 at the hand of an eminent Muslim scholar Hammed Muhammed Mani. Umme Jilmi's son, Dunama I (1097-1150) also continued along the line of his father. The real Islamisation of Borno took place during the reign of Mai Idris Aloma (1570-1602)

Islam was brought to Hausa in the early fourteenth century by traders and scholars, but not until between 1463-99 during the reign of Mohammed Rumfa that it became firmly rooted. This time Islamic principles were taught in different places. It was during this time too that Muslim scholars from Timbuktu came to Kano to teach and preach Islam. It was this Islamic education which gave cultural prestige to Islam.

### **Roles of Religions in Nation Building**

As rightly observed by Nwosu, (1988:70) a definition of development or progress should embrace three fundamental elements:

- a) Some improvement in the human condition in a given community, an improvement which would either enhance the general welfare of mankind or which does not at least hinder such welfare in any way:
- b) A society's advance toward the goals it has set for itself,
- c) Connotation of material, social and spiritual/moral advancement.

Concerning element one above, Nwosu, for example gave this instance, that manufacturing of neutron bomb that can destroy an "enemy country cannot be seen as development or progress by another country since the bomb naturally threatens

the survival and overall welfare of mankind. Development according to him has to be seen in local and global contexts because experience has shown that human beings are interdependent both as persons and as nations.

As for theological foundations of the elements in discussion we need only to recall the Christian teaching that all mankind came from the same father as ably illustrated by the popular prayer, “our father” (Luke ii: 1-4). The Islam underpinnings of these elements are partly represented by the Qura’nic assertion:

“Whosoever killed a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he hath killed all mankind, and life of all mankind (Quran5:32)”

Not surprising, therefore, political theology is now placing considerable emphasis on the unity of mankind, one human race, and the like (Nwosu, 1988).

Furthermore, element (ii) and (iii) for example, have to be reckoned within a conception of development because attitudes, ideas, and beliefs provide the bedrock from which technological, agricultural, economic, medical and similar progress spring up.

Religiously speaking, spiritual/ theological considerations often lie, not only at the root of people’s general conduct and their performance at work (e.g see Cruickshank, 1979, P. 189), but also at the root of socio-economic development. So, Ahmad (1979:22), presenting the Islamic view of development, writes:

“The Islamic concept of development has a comprehensive character and includes moral, spiritual and material aspect...

The welfare that Islam seeks extends to life hereafter”

Finally, the point has to be emphasized that proper national development has an educational dimension that is hardly ever mentioned.

As pointed out by Nwosu.

“True nation building/ national development and leadership have a vital educational component - teaching the populace by example and precept, to live in accordance with God’s will, and to grow in the expertise of executing his plans which are the real guarantee for national plans and progress

Nwosu (1987:22)

Also in a morally permissive society like Nigeria, national development should entail drastic reduction of crime, on the one hand, and promotion of a disciplined or more disciplined society on the other hand.

Religion also functions as a vehicle for economic growth by being a massive employer of labour. In African continent, one readily thinks of Traditional and Christian priests i.e (Rev. Brothers and Sisters, Muslim Malams/ Imams, traditional magic-religious leaders and the elaborate medical systems of Christian and Muslim missions as well as the vast number of people employed by religious organizations in various educational institutions at various levels-all ever developing, ever multiplying (Nwosu 1988). A fraction of the value of religion in the national or global labour market appears in bolder relief when we imagine a situation in which the millions of people that earn their livelihood in the religious sector were to join the swelling crowd of the unemployed with all the natural socio-economic stress for governments and their societies. Modern economics emphasize the centrality of trained manpower in economic growth. Here again, religion is making a significant direct contribution (Nwosu 1988).

Through contribution of its educational institutions especially their technical, commercial and vocational schools, religion sometimes exerts a direct positive influence on economic progress, ushering in new forms of economic activities, new

types of employment opportunities, new services and products. In the mass media industry, for instance, the Church was a pioneer institution by launching *Iwe Irohin Yoruba*, a CMS paper, as the first newspaper in Nigeria in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and other magazines like *the catholic life* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Noting how Christian missionary education and evangelism gave rise to missionary involvement in the book industry, Igbolekwu (1981:177) report that “This marked the beginning of printing and publishing in Nigeria”. Similarly, Shendam, earned the reputation of introducing the cultivation of yams in the area in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now that the Shendam district of Plateau State has become one of the greatest yam producing areas in Nigeria, it is interesting to note that an aspect of socio- economic development has arrived on the wheels of religion (Nwosu 1988).

#### Moving Nigeria forward: the role of Islam

The history of humanity, as confirmed by the divine message and especially, the Quran has always witnessed, from the time of Adam till the message of Islam, the appearance of a religion or a divine guiding message. The mercy and kindness of Allah necessitated the sending of prophets to mankind, so as to show it the path of good, guidance and security.

The main target of the prophets, as the Qur’an states, was the conveyance of the divine messages, reform of human society and liberation of man from the clutches of perversion, crime and moral decay (which are today the bane of progress of any nation). Their objectives were to free him from the evils, tyrants and oppressors and to win his Psychology from backwardness and superstition.

The divine message is an indivisible process of rectification of man’s religious, Psychological, moral and legal aspects. The process fitted quite well



into his life, as the message issued from the creator of man, and universe, and He knows well what suit the human being's life on earth.

Divine laws and ethnics are congruent with the essence of the human personality and its development. The Qur'an sheds light on this fact: "should He not know He that created? And he is the one that understand the finest mysteries and is well acquainted with them (Qur'an 67:14). The religion of Islam is the

Divine message sent to reform human life, establish justice, and liberate man from injustice, corruption and perversion. The Qur'an expresses this fact in the following verses:

"certainly we sent our Messenger with clear arguments and sent down with them the book and the balance that people may conduct them self... (Qur 'an 7:25.)

... Indeed has come to you from Allah a light and a manifest book Where by Allah guides who ever follows His pleasure to ways of peace and brings them forth the (ulter) darkness in to light by His leave and He guides them to a straight path (Qur 'an 5:15-16).

That He may enforce the truth and pin down the false, though the guilty dislike (Qur 'an 8:8).

And corrupt not in the earth after its reformation... (Qur 'an 7:56)"

Surely Allah bids to justice, benevolence and giving to relatives and He forbids indecency evil....(Qur 'an 16:90)

For Nigeria to move forward, we need to work with the Islam principles as entrenched in the Qur'an and as exemplified by some of the above reference. Not only that, the government and people of Nigeria must work hard to reduce poverty. In Islam's view, the main reasons behind poverty are insufficient

production, poor consumption habits, a weak distribution system, etc.

1. **Insufficient production:** one basic reason for poverty is an inadequacy in manufacturing whatever man needs like food, clothing and so on. Under production is attributed to:

2. **Laziness and unemployment:** Islam warns man against laziness and unemployment and orders us to work actively, diligently and patiently to gain the means to satisfy needs (Al-balagh). Islam works as something endearing to Allah.

Allah says:

“We have distributed their live hood among them in worldly life, and have raised. Some above others in the matter of social degrees, so that some of them may utilize the services of others in their work (Qur ‘an 43;32).”

The holy Prophet is reported to have labeled work and seeking provision as the greatest Jihad.

3. **Ignorance of technicalities of work:** A man who knows how to produce machine and equipment and how to develop them and make them more efficient, can multiply his production. The eventual result would be the satisfaction of people’s basic needs. Islam urges us to seek knowledge and devise new products through invention and discoveries. The Prophet is quoted to have said: seeking knowledge is an obligation on every male and female Muslim. Doi (1981:95).

4. **Poor consumption habits:** Allah says in the Holy Quran 17:26-27:”And give to the near of kin their right and the destitute and the traveler, and squander not wastefully, surely squanderers are satan’s brother....

Extravagance, prodigality and spending money on forbidden thing like wine, dancing, singing, beauty contest, corruption, producing weapons which can wipe

mankind off the earth, are but some example of the misuse of the fruit and wealth. Such abuse of wealth lead to the depletion of means and creates poverty and destitution, so any nation that intends to develop would have to guide this act.

5. **Weak Distribution System:** Allah says: .... in order that it may not (merely) make a circuit between the wealth among you..... (Qur'an 59:7).

When a group of people monopolize a great amount of wealth, while the rest of the people can hardly make both ends meet, the communication divides into two groups: the well-off and the deprived. It is for the amelioration of all people that Islam makes it an obligation to distribute wealth fairly and equally.

### **Recommendation**

For Nigeria to really move forward and be called a developed nation the following principles of social system in Islam will be recommended:

- ❖ Love loyalty among the faithful as stated in Quran 49:10;9:71
- ❖ Respecting the rights of the individual and the group. Building the society on right, justice and mutual love and kindness as in Quran 16:90
- ❖ Strengthening the bond of unity and co-operation as stated in Quran 5:2
- ❖ Maintaining good morals, enjoining one another to do good and restraining one another from doing evil.
- ❖ Strengthening the chord of unity among family folk in line with the position of honour Allah place the family e.g Quran 30: 21; 7:31;2:228;4:19;4:34.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it is clear that religion has a greater role to play in the building of any nation. A nation without the people of God, is bound to collapse.

It is through the religion practices that fear is instilled in the mind of the wicked who are considered as enemies of progress. Many today found themselves in position of authority as leaders, heads of state, Ministers, Commissioners, Local Government executives without fear of God. They use such positions to perpetrate evils and to embezzle public funds to the detriment of the common man whom they are elected to serve. Thus, religion has a greater role to play in order to checkmate these evil acts. Islam therefore presents better options for moving forward.

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