

Religion, National Transformation and the Nigerian Society: Some Reflections

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Abstract

The need for national transformation has become a necessity in Nigeria since independence (1960). Necessary Programmes, Projects and Policies (3Ps) have been put in place to achieve this which seems has proven on many occasions futile and unproductive. Transformation here does not only focus on the economic aspect, but is all encompassing which cut across the political, religious, educational, and other aspects of the Nigerian nation. However, the outcome of these 3Ps have proven to a greater extent the otherwise due to lack of Continuity, Consistency and Commitment (3Cs) on the part of both the leaders and the led who are meant to be the vanguard of transformation the nation is looking for. On the basis of some of the nagging and teething problems facing the Nigerian societies which include insecurity, poverty, corruption, false spirituality, leadership challenges among others. This study therefore examines these issues critically and how through religion, true and workable national transformation can be achieved by way of character transformation through religious values, tenets and teachings. Also, raising of leaders and followers who are agents of transformation and by way of building patriotic Nigerians who will be committed to the Nigerian dreams, policies, programmes and projects are considered as necessary. This paper therefore concludes that transformation is possible if and only if the religious adherents, organizations and leaders in Nigeria can rise to the task of practicing what their religious values demand.

Keywords: Religion, Transformation, Programmes, Projects, Policies, Continuity, Consistency, Commitment, Religious Values

Introduction

Historically, the Nigerian nation is no stranger to economic reforms. Our historic past has been littered with different reform programmes and agenda with the view to bringing the nation to a point of 'developed economies'.

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These, in most cases appear to be faced with lack of continuity with the changes in government, thereby leading to policy summersault that deepened the gamut of social, economic, religious and even political problems that are threatening the existence of the Nigerian nation rather than alleviating them.

Nigeria, being referred to as a highly religious nation, is a clear fact that is beyond debate in order to authenticate the validity of this position. This is seen in every facet of the society, both in private and public life. Religious tone is sounded in every corner of the society and even in the political terrain, such cannot be said to have been silence and not important in determining some critical issues like who holds what and gets what? The position of John Onaiyekan, a Catholic Cardinal in Nigeria in relation to the above view expresses it better. According to him:

Any casual look at our country obviously shows the all pervading presence of religion. We only need to note, for example, the number of places of worship, the volume of holy noises that are emitted everywhere, the array of religious leaders with various titles and robes and the fervor with which we not only practice our faith but at times violently confront one another. Some are wondering whether our reputation as a religious nation is something to be proud of. They suspect that there is something dubious about this record (Cardinal John Onaiyekan, 2010).

Obviously, the situation of things in Nigeria seems contrary to what the manifest function of religion is supposed to be in any given society where religion is practice like Nigeria. As a matter of fact, Ade Odumuyiwa unequivocally asserts that, "Nigeria is a religious but criminal society" (Odumuyiwa, 2002). Many people have seen reasons to justify their actions (which in most times are not in the interest of humanity) as having divine support and approval. The resultant effect of the observation above is that:

Virtually everybody claims to be an expert on the issue of religion in Nigeria. With such enviable credential as the most religious nation, it is paradoxically one of the most corrupt nations in the world.

The damning verdict on religion is that instead of serving as a resource for peace and stability, it has become a veritable resource for conflict and war and easy tool for manipulation by some politicians, elites and religious charlatans and bigots. It is such tendency that has portrayed religion as a negative force in Nigeria today (Gwamna, 2013).

However, one thing that is certain in the religious discourse in Nigeria, and in most of the nations around the globe is that, there has always been tacit acknowledgement of the functionality of religion in relation to matters which today are identifiable in the mainstream development dialogue; these include issues of morality, leadership and concerns about forging peaceful co-existence (Enweremadu, 2001). On his part, Gwamna observes that, “religion, though over the last three decades has become an instrument of promoting conflict and war, yet when properly handled, it can be constructively used to redirect our focus towards peaceful co-existence in the national life in Nigeria (Gwamna, 2010). Isiramen seems not to be different from the positions raised above. Lamenting on the situation of things in Nigeria which, though appeared to be ‘highly religious’, he observes that:

The bane of the Nigerian society today is the relegation of religious issues to the churches, the mosques and traditional abode. The nation appears to be sliding into doldrums. There is no doubt that the naive conception of civilization based on technological and scientific feats has intensified the problems attributable to civic and moral breakdown. The result is the loss of personal dignity and community sensitivity culminating in depraved behaviours (Isiramen, 2010).

By implication, the central focus of these studies points towards establishing the fact that, there is a connection between religion or religiosity and its outcomes in terms of individual attitudes and behaviour, and how it can in turn, have an enduring implication on the societal development and transformation. These concerns can be seen as been germane for Nigerian development as it reflects as the core value been projected by the Nigeria’s national motto – “Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress”. The religion here shall be focusing more on the three major faiths in Nigeria which are; African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity. Therefore, the fulcrum of this work shall reflect on the place of religious values, norms and doctrines as a major determinant in humans that influence their choice in life and thus, ultimately decides their behaviours.

Religion: Towards a Definition

Defining religion, it has over time been established that, there can be no universally acceptable definition of religion owing to its nature. However, in order to avoid vagueness of the subject matter, a working definition will be provided so as to create a perception of the subject matter in the minds of the readers. We shall briefly take a look at some definitions of religion which has been put forward by some scholars. According to Johnston and Sampson, religion may be defined as “an institutional framework within which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued, usually among a community of a like-minded believers” (Johnston, 1994).

On his part, Heynes opines that religion is ‘a system of language and practices that organises the world in terms of what is deemed holy’ (Heynes, 1993).

Gwamna also defines religion as “man’s attempt to relate with supernatural force(s) as part of man’s search for meaning, understanding and explanation of life. Such attempt led man’s coding of such forces under different names such as God, the “*wholly other*”, *Allah*, *Shékwoyi*, *Chukwu*, *Olodumare*, and so on” (Gwamna, 2013:2). Going by these definitions, one thing that is clear here is the fact that, religion is associated with belief, the unseen, life in the hereafter, rituals and practices, e.t.c.

We must also bear in mind that whenever the word ‘religion’ is mentioned, so many things run through one’s mind, but principal among them is the existence of a being called God or a deity. The fundamental content of belief in God is that there is a Mind and a Purpose behind the history of the universe and that the One whose veiled presence is intimated in this way is worthy of worship and the ground of hope (Dopamu, 2009). By and large, religion in this context has to do with the belief in the existence of the Supernatural (Supreme) Being, and how such belief can help in influencing the attitudes of religious adherents to growth and development in Nigeria. Whatever we think about the definition of religion and its function, it is generally known now that religion has always been an inescapable, inevitable, and concomitant of human life as we know it today (Dopamu, 2009:8).

Some Transformation Programmes in the Nigerian History

Transformation can be seen as a fundamental shift in the deep orientation of a person, an organization, or a society; such that the world is seen in new ways and new actions and results become possible that were impossible prior to the transformation (Asobie, 2012). It is a mandate for a radical, structural and fundamental re-arrangement and re-ordering of the building blocks of the nation. It portends a fundamental reappraisal of the basic assumptions that underlie our reforms and developmental efforts that will and should alter the essence and substance of our national life. The expectation of most Nigerians is for a development blueprint that will transform the economy, reinvent the politics of our nation, secure the polity, care for the underprivileged, and provide responsible, responsive and transformative leadership.

Fundamentally, we must bring to bear the fact that Nigeria, in the past has been known with one transformation programme or the other. These as we have earlier noted, had either through lack of continuity which were brought about by changes in government, or as a result of policy summersault had been brought to an abrupt end.

Before the 1980s, the reforms were purely in the form of extended national perspective plans that attempted to mobilize human, material and natural resources of the nation to achieve goals of national life. This was also echoed out by a onetime Vice President of Nigeria, Atiku Abubakar that; “Nigeria has joined several countries in affirming that sustainable national development depends on fostering the full capacity of all citizens, both women and men” (National Population Census, 2001). There was the 1962-68 Economic Plan, then the 1970-1974 Plan, the 1975-1980 Plan, and the 1981-1985 Plan. Often, these Plans went beyond mere economic prescriptions to address social, human and political goals. Thus, the 1970-74 Plan for example defined the national objectives to be the building of:

- a. A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- b. A great and dynamic economy;
- c. A just and egalitarian society;
- d. A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens; and
- e. A free and democratic society (Osisioma, 2012).

By the 1980s, the need for reforms paved the way for the Stabilization/Austerity Measures of the Shagari Administration. The sharp drop in the international spot market price for oil resulted in plummeting national revenues, putting in dire peril all the budgetary projections and planning for the period. The hurried and fire-brigade approach to the emerging problem has failed to address the root causes of a national economy in great distress and fundamental disequilibrium.

In 1986, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was introduced by the Babangida Administration to address the fundamental and structural imbalance in the economy, diversify the economy, strengthen the currency, and build a viable, sustainable industrial infrastructure upon which real economic growth and development can be founded. The reform exercise rested on a tripod of measures: *Liberalization* of foreign exchange transactions, *Rationalization* of public sector agencies and para-statal, and *Optimization* of the capacity for domestic production and stimulation of non-oil exports.

Next in the line was the Vision 2010 introduced by Abacha Administration in 1998. The aim was to “develop a blueprint that will transform the country and place it firmly on the route to becoming a developed nation by the year 2010” (Osisioma, 2012:6). The general objective was to transform the country into “a united, industrious, caring and God-fearing democratic society, committed to making the basic needs of life affordable for everyone, and creating Africa’s leading economy”. The Policy projected that by 2010, the Nigerian people would re-discover themselves and revert to being God-conscious and God-fearing, caring, sincere, honest, accountable in their dealing with public trust, and proud of their country and heritage.

In 2004, the Obasanjo Administration introduced NEEDS - National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy. The NEEDS’ reform programme rested on four key strategies:

- Reforming Government and Institutions;
- Growing the Private Sector;
- Implementing a Social Charter; and
- Value Re-Orientation (NEEDS, 2004).

The complimentary tools for the realization of the above goals included Pension Reforms, Energy and Power Reforms that led to the desegregation of (Nigerian Electricity Power Authority) NEPA into 18 successor companies, the GSM Telecommunications Reform, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, the Corrupt and Allied Offences Commission, Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and the Reforms in the Financial Sector. What characterise his rule was his fight against corruption and misrule that were the resultant effects of military rule that held sway for quite a long time before the return to democracy in 1999. His bid to reform the nation as well cannot given a pass mark because, after his tenure, there still exist quagmire of problems that loom the country which include high rate of unemployment, corruption, poor standard of living among others.

With the advent of the Yar'Adua's Administration in 2007, the Federal Government articulated the 7-point Agenda for national development. The policy thrust revolved around the seven-point contract of that Administration with the Nigerian people: *Energy, Education, Agriculture, Infrastructure, Wealth Creation and Poverty Alleviation, Land Reforms, and Security*. The point was further made, that these reforms would catapult Nigeria to the rank of one of the 20 most developed countries of the world by the year 2020. Though he took a giant step to reform and transform the nation through the launch of the term "Servant Leader", but his health condition could not allow him to achieve much. His untimely exit brought an abrupt end to the 7-point Agenda and all that has to do with its manifestation. Of all Nigerian leaders so far, it was he alone that declared his assets publicly.

On April 16, 2011, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan won a pan-Nigerian mandate that swept through the North and South of the nation. He ran on a promise to radically transform the nation and overhaul every aspect of the national life. The Transformation Agenda Final Report defines the goal of the reform exercise in these words:

During 2011-2015, the policies and programmes directed at addressing governance will focus on the public service, security, law and order, the legislature, anti-corruption measures and institutions, the judiciary, economic coordination, and support for private investment... These will be addressed through the implementation of the recommendations ... in the areas of public service reforms, judicial reform, anti-corruption initiative, electoral reform, land use reform, fiscal management reforms, power sector reform, police reform, financial sector reform, infra-structural development reform, and information and communication technology (Asobie, 2012: 51).

Thus, it seems that the NEEDS provided the common denominator upon which the 7-point Agenda, the Vision 20-20-20, and the Transformation Agenda rest. The expectation was that all the above reform measures would culminate in the fulfilling of the 2001 Kuru Declaration:

To build a truly great African, democratic country, politically united, integrated and stable, economically prosperous, socially organized, with equal opportunity for all, and responsibility from all, to become the catalyst of [African] Renaissance, and making adequate all-embracing contributions, sub-regionally, regionally and globally (NEEDS, 2004).

The problems confronting the incumbent president, His Excellency, Dr. Ebele Goodluck Jonathan with his Transformation Agenda to transform Nigeria and bring it to an enviable height seems insurmountable. There is an overwhelming presence of corruption and insecurity rate is quite alarming. What becomes the reoccurring decimal since the dawn of his tenure are different faces of insecurity which ranges from *Boko Haram* insurgency, rape, oil theft, kidnapping, among others. The unfortunate thing now is that, in the face of all these attacks, the security operatives are in themselves “not secured”.

In all, the nagging questions still remain, “to what extent can we say the nation Nigeria has been able to move relatively closer to an ideal state through all her different reforms and transformation programmes over the years?” To what extent can the masses boast of better living standard? Are the said leaders really concern about the national interest or selfish, regional, ethnic and religious agenda they are pursuing at the expense of the masses?

As a matter of fact, our experience today as a nation in Nigeria is a clear indication that despite all these programmes, policies and projects which (in most cases) are poorly structured, the nation is still far from its reality.

An X-Ray the Contemporary Nigerian Nation

The issue of transformation is hinged upon the fact that, there are situations that have been noticed which in a way are decaying or dying. There is a systemic failure which its effects are far too obvious beyond what one can pretend about. There is a wide gap or disparity between the ideal and the reality. This therefore presupposes the fact that, what we see today as the common reality of events is the fallout of the “unconscious or conscious” actions of some in the past and even in the present which its effects are telling hard on the state of the nation now. These situations include endemic corruption, high level of illiteracy, collapse education sector, epileptic power supply, bad governance/leadership, bribery, nepotism, corrupt judicial system, failed health sector, among others. We shall therefore look briefly into few of them.

Despite all the aforementioned reforms and transformation programmes, it is sad enough to say unequivocally here that, Nigerian nations seems to be farther away from the reality of her existence than ever before. Unfortunately, after more than fifty years of policy reforms, Nigeria has painfully and regrettably remained:

- i. A public-sector led economy with a bloated government presence in every facet of national life;
- ii. A nation with very weak private sector which has grown a “rent-seeking and unproductive culture of over-dependence on government patronage and contracts, with little or no value added” (Osisioma, 2012, 14);
- iii. A mono-crop economy with preponderant influence of one commodity in determining the nation’s revenue-expenditure profile and the balance of payment position;
- iv. An extractive and primary economy that produced unrefined raw materials for export, either in the form of agricultural products or crude oil. Manufacturing was at a very rudimentary stage, and industrialization remained an inconsequential factor in the nation’s economic equation;

- v. A nation without an effective industrial infrastructure for economic take-off - no petro-chemical industry to fuel the industrialization process, no effective iron and steel complex to produce flat steel, a deficient power and energy sector, insecure and inhospitable environment, and poor communications;
- vi. An economy with a weak and tottering national currency that remains the whipping boy of the international financial community (Osisioma, 2012:14);
- vii. For many years, Nigeria has had and still has the highest mortality in the world and particularly, of maternal deaths (McCain, 2012);
- viii. Out of 182 countries ranked by Transparency International (TI) in 2012, Nigeria was ranked 142 as one of the most corrupt nations in the world;
- ix. Since 1960s, it is alleged that Nigeria has been drained of \$400 billion by its leaders (Houston, 2009); and
- x. Since 1914 up till now, the leadership question still remains a challenge. The Nigerian leaders in many cases have got it wrong. In most cases, "they propagate ethnic politics and religious bigotry in an attempt to attain (and retain) power, while leaving behind a gap of division, which still could not be bridged up till this time" (Onabanjo, 2014).

As we move to take stock of the contemporary Nigeria, we need to quickly ask ourselves certain questions. Can we say that Nigeria has arrived, still in the process of moving to its 'promised land' or completely submerged in the slough of arrested development? Can we say Nigeria is a failed state as it is been presented in some quarters by some commentators? In line with the above observations on the situation of things in Nigeria now, an exploration of some of the nagging problems of the Nigerian nation will suffice.

It is obvious that Nigeria is besetted with myriads of problems. Though, other countries in the world might not be free from the same challenges, but what raises our concern about the Nigeria situation is the fact that, some of these problems appeared unabated and quite alarming in nature, which defy the hope of getting over them soon or even in the nearest future. The picture on the daily basis signal to us that Nigeria is looming in the delusion of an 'ideal state'.

The problem of corruption has masqueraded itself in different forms, found in different sectors and being perpetrated by virtually everyone, both the "high" and the "low" in the society. Different code-names has been coined to make the act presentable or appealing in the society.

Among them are: “brown envelop”, “settlement”, “Malachi”, “egunje”, “paying tribute”, “deal”, “kola-nut”, “pure water”, “apostolic blessing”, “appreciation”, among others. No wonder Adebisi lamented that; “even the blind knows that Nigeria is a thoroughly corrupt country. Corruption flourishes in Nigeria today; it is endemic from cradle to grave. It is noticeable in homes, markets, government offices, private organizations and even in the churches” (Adebisi, 2012). Chinua Achebe became worried about this menace and its possible impending danger on Nigeria when he reiterates that; “corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage, and Nigeria will die if we continue to pretend that she is the only slightly indisposed” (Achebe, 2012). Today, when an average man on the Nigerian street is being asked, what is the Nigeria’s major problem, no time will be wasted before ‘corruption’ will be mentioned with painful expression.

Going by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), Section 14 (2b), the first responsibility of the government to her citizens is that of security of lives and property. It states that; “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

But what becomes the daily experience now is a direct opposite, and the position of the constitution can now be seen as existing in principle but not in practice. Insecurity in the country is quite alarming. Virtually every day headline news carries one sad story or the other of how people take laws into their hands, ritual killings, kidnapping, assassination, armed robbery attack, rape cases, car theft, and harassments of different forms, among others. Even the security agents themselves are not ‘secured’.

The case of *Boko Haram* insurgency in Nigeria which has become a thing of public concern since 2009 till date has brought Nigeria into a bad light among the comity of nations. Their incessant attacks on security agents, churches, mosques, media houses, government building, prison, financial institutions, schools and students, among others has resulted to wanton destruction of lives and property. Both the national and international communities have decried such acts as sacrilegious, inhuman, man’s inhumanity to the society, and lack of respect for the sanctity of life. Human life has lost its sacredness in Nigeria today. The security problem in Nigeria can easily be established by the heavy security patrols, check points and mobile stations along the Nigerian roads all over the country.

This is “a picture of a country under siege” (Gwamna, 2013:6). It reflects a similar experience of the Israelites when “in those days, Israel had no king, everyone did as he was fit” – Judges 21:25.

The poverty level of people living in Nigeria is another pathetic and sorry case. What we have today is a paradox of an existing reality – “a rich nation blessed with natural and human resources but her citizens living in abject poverty and penury”. The poverty level in Nigeria is so pathetic to the extent that it is no longer a local issue but a global one and of a great concern to some of the developed nations especially when they try to ponder upon the natural endowment of Nigeria in comparison with the living standards of her citizens. This is captured in a report thus:

Nigeria, with its enormous resources and potentials, is currently ranked 20th among the poorest countries in the world. This was further confirmed by the United Nations Education Scientific Organization (UNESCO) in its 2010 Global Monitoring Report (GMR), which revealed that about 92% of the nation's population survives on less than 2 Dollars daily while about 75% survives on less than 1 Dollar daily... the country, according to the World Bank report, has about its 70% of its population living below the poverty line. The greatest challenge besetting Nigeria is poverty amid plenty (Amaku, 2011).

Without any doubt, we will surely agree to the above report because there is a great vacuum between the few rich ones and the majority that are wallowing in penury. These few ones live in influence and affluence in which in most cases their wealth might have been gotten through illegal means.

Many government workers and political leaders today are being indicted of carting away billions of Naira from the government coffers, thus subjecting the entire populace to abject poverty. This, to an extent helps in making the “under-privileged class” to opt for “anything” that goes (including violence) to sustain their existence in the country. It is quite disheartening that series of untold hardship has been melted on the masses resulting from the immense level of poverty in the country. Because of the nagging experiences of people, some have been lured into heinous crimes while others into some illegal trades.

It was gathered from a report that, some teenagers were found in some ‘baby making factories’ in some part of the South-East of Nigeria.

This ‘Baby Factory’ is an illegal operation where mostly, teenagers are either lured or forced into it by way of promising them mouth watering pay after they must have been impregnated in the factory, they put to birth and thereby hand over the baby to the owner of such a factory after they (the girls) must have been paid their earlier agreed pay, while some still choose to stay back for more contract due to the unemployment in the society. According to the report, the increased rate of these ‘baby factories’ operations in some parts of the country was “attributed to high rate of youth unemployment and poverty occasioned by failure of successive governments in the zone to put measures in place to empower youths by creating meaningful employment” (Ndidi, 2014).

Another disturbing issue that is rocking the Nigerian society today can be termed “insincere spirituality”. Everyone appear to be highly religious and God-conscious but in the reality, it is in most cases a reflection of ‘false spirituality’ coded in the name of God. Today, people who carry the name of God or claim to act or represent God seems not to live by what they claim to be. Evils acts are being perpetrated among the so-called clergy men. And the major concern of many now is, “who really can be trusted in our society now?” Both in the church and also in the mosque now, there is high level of hypocrisy and deception; atrocities everywhere, both on the pulpit and in the pew. What becomes the major trend in the religious circle in Nigeria today is that, many claimed to be called of God, but in the real sense of the matter, behind their actions lies poverty, unemployment, quest for money, materialism and fame. As a result, great atrocities are been perpetrated by most of them. In an interview with Bishop Makinde on the nature of proliferation of churches in Nigeria, he swiftly responded by retorting that:

Are they churches or commercial churches? Let’s qualify them. What has brought that is unemployment. Immediately people are unemployed, they float their own churches, claiming that God has called them. We still need to evangelise in Nigeria, but beware of false prophets using the name of God to work miracles under black magic. There are genuine pastors; by their fruits you will know them (Makinde, 2007).

Fundamentally, genuine religious leaders whose lives reflect uprightness, godliness, faithfulness and other positive virtues still exist, but it seems that the trend of events in our society today shows a greater proportion on the side of the falsehood than the real ones. Owing to all of the above observations and prevailing phenomena in the Nigerian experience, many have unwittingly concluded on the state of affairs of the nation and have even given up about what might seem to be the way out especially on the future of the Nigerian society. But, quickly, we must set the records straight as to know the real situation of things as against the position of many in regards to the Nigerian nation and the hope for the future generations. Karl Maier, in his work titled; "This House Has Fallen" (Maier, 2000) saw the impossibilities in the Nigerian state, while on the part of Ayo Fatubarin, Nigeria can be best described as "a land of wasted opportunities" (Fatubarin, 2010). The position of Bishop Peter A. Adebisi is not in any way different as he sees Nigeria as "a sleeping giant" (Adebisi, 2012:3) which stems from the popular slogan of Nigeria as the "giant of Africa". Cosmas Illechukwu expressly posits that Nigeria is "a failed state that work" (Illechukwu, 2011). The question now is, are all these positions completely wrong or are they really talking about the true situations of things? Absolutely, these positions are not in any way completely wrong, but there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel if and only if religions can be seen and used as a tool for character reformation, thereby bringing about societal transformation.

The Place of Religion in National Transformation

Obviously, religion is an integral part of every human society, which its importance cannot be glossed over. It is noteworthy to state equivocally here that; "experience has shown that religion exists, persists and continues to influence and determine the pace of humanity. There is hardly any part of the world that has successfully ignored religion" (Isiramen, 2010). Though, some scholars have on different occasions see no reason why we can depend on religion as a veritable tool for national transformation, instead, what they see is a complete opposite. For instance, Wole Soyinka sees religion as "one enemy of potential nationhood that requires, not just a separate address of its own...all of a frank, even brutally frank nature, since the intervention of religion in nation being has been of utmost savage, unconscionable and increasingly intolerant kind" (Soyinka, 2009).

In the work of Confucius, education is pivotal to character building (Prothero, 2010).

Since this is true that the education is not learning trade but learning to be 'human', that is, learning to become more of ourselves and transform society through others; hence, the place of religion as it is known as an agent of socialization of an individual. Through tales in the moon light, Sunday schools and the Qur'anic schools of African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam respectively, morality, ethics and good characters are formed in the life of an individual. All these can be seen as different forms of religious education in the Nigerian societies but are geared towards forming a life that is morally correct.

Another major point that must be considered is the place of religious values in enhancing national transformation. This by implication assesses the theological basis of the various religious teachings and their impacts on the formulation and implementation of key development concepts and practices, within the context in which the religious teachings are offered. Judging from the African Religion's point of view, their religious values, though not written down in any scripture, neither is it written in 'black and white', yet it is 'written' in all aspects of African life and that makes up its myths, folktales, proverbs, liturgy, songs and sayings. In all, the cardinal tenets of indigenous religion are devotion, peace and love (Akama, 1998). This becomes the basis why among the Africans, religion is life and life in itself is religious. Mbiti corroborated this when he posits that; "Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices" (Mbiti, 1967). Without mincing words, what we see as the major religious values in the traditional religion also are the common denominator in both Islam and Christianity.

As a matter of fact, these religious values are quite important in the sense that, they influence the choices people make in life and thus, decide their behaviours. Since we have earlier pointed out that there is a symmetrical relationship between religious values, character building, national transformation and development in every society, therefore, it behoves on all religious institutions and leaders to put the proper mechanism in place to impart necessary religious values that can aid growth and development. In turn, this process will bring the nation out of its doldrums of arrested growth and development. The work of Williams is apposite at this juncture.

In her work titled; “Religious Groups and the Politics of National Development” (Williams, 1992), she argued that religion and development can and do go together, and in particular that Nigeria’s development as it is today cannot be divorced from the support of religion. Though her focus is on the efforts of religious institutions, rather than an individual, but the point is that, individual’s character cannot be built along the line of religious values without the instrumentality of religious institutions. In essence, the position here is that, the religious bodies in the contemporary Nigerian society have now developed into a community of faith and dynamism, which have the potential to change people’s values and perceptions about life through their teachings. Through strict adherence to religious values, transformation of individuals can be achieved, and that will give rise to character reformation, leading to national transformation.

One of the major problems of Nigeria today is bad leadership. Many scholars have pointed this out and we will not in any way over flog the same issue but we will create another perspective out of this towards achieving a national transformation. Religion, through the instrumentality of religious organizations must be used to raise leaders who can be relied upon as agents of transformation and the change the Nigerian nation has been waiting for over decades. The truth that we must not shy away from is that, most of our leaders see the corridor of power as an avenue and opportunity to amass wealth for themselves and families.

This mentality eventually gave rise to the privatization of the state in such a way that it became a tool for servicing the private interests of the dominant faction of the elites – leaders (Ake, 1996). The late literary Icon, Chinua Achebe was quoted in the *Tell Magazine* to have succinctly maintains that; “Nigeria is what it is because its leaders are not what they should be”.⁴² This, by extension means that leaders are expected to be educated and morally grounded in order for them to effectively and efficiently discharge their duties and responsibilities. It is quite unfortunate that too many of the leaders are not doing nearly enough to drag we the followers into the 21st Century and enable us to enjoy the best possible existence. In the words of Sule Maitama, an elder-state-man in Nigeria, at a workshop, he lamented on the ugly nature of our leaders thus:

The majority of Naija (sic) leaders are blatant thieves, incompetent morons, uninspiring mediocrities... and primitive, vision-less, plan-less or just plain lazy... too many of them squander their energies on ultimately futile political shenanigans or irresponsible partying... even the few who are smart, well-intentioned and willing to control their acolytes are too easily distracted and pretty disorganized and unproductive compared to their counterparts in the western world (Kogbara, 2013).

The recklessness we see in our leaders on daily basis will not allow us to maintain a contrary view to the above expressed view. As a matter of fact, it is too obvious to be contradicted. Nevertheless, the hope that the Nigerian nation still have is that, the overwhelming religious experience, through the presence of religious organizations across board, leaders of integrity and reputable character can still be raised to lead the nation to her 'Promised Land'. This can be better understood in the words of Herbert when he captures the point most poignantly:

With transformational leadership, a landlocked country can create coastal waters and become a powerful State like Israel. With transformational leadership, Japan, a country devastated by World War II and devoid of natural resources can become a leading industrialized nation. With transformational leadership, a country can convert its desert into an oasis, like United Arab Emirate that is now a world-class tourist destination and international financial centre. With transformational leadership, a country can transit from Third World to First within 20 to 30 years, like Singapore under Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. With transformational leadership, a country can transform from a backwater, commodity exporting country to become one of Asia Tiger's economies, like Malaysia under Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad (Herbert, 2012).

Over the years, all the three major religions, especially Islam and Christianity have done greatly well in the area of rendering of services and provision of social amenities that can enhance the well-being of humanity in the society.

Among these are building of schools (from the grass root level to the highest levels of education), hospitals, construction of boreholes, drainage systems, and some provide counselling system for people either at a lower cost or free of charge. These all we praise them for their good works. However, we wish to call their attention to another dimension on this same point.

Our society can be better transformed if these provisions of social amenities can be carried out in a way to send signal to the government on the need to revitalize the government's own facilities. What we have today now is a complete annihilation of the government system in such a way that the private establishments can thrive. It is instructive to note that, in most cases, the same system that establish and control the religious-based schools, hospitals among others are the same hand running that of the government's. The mind bugging question remains, why are government's own not working as they ought to, but that of the private/religious-based establishments thriving at the peril of the state's? In answering this question, all religious organizations must be sincere enough and be ready to help, partner and support government's programmes, policies and projects (3Ps) so as to enjoy a total continuity, consistency and commitment (3Cs).

Conclusion

When properly used, religion has a lot of potentials in transforming the Nigerian nation into an enviable country among the comity of nations. Therefore, religious organizations, leaders and adherent must rise to the task of ensuring that religious values, teachings and tenets are held in high esteem and highly respected and followed to the letter. Fundamentally, the mandate to reform and transform Nigeria has been most emphatically communicated in the democratic process. The dream is for a bold and audacious transformation programme that will consciously, radically, fundamentally, structurally and massively transforms the national economy, reinvent the politics of our nation, secure the polity, care for the underprivileged, and provide responsible, responsive and credible leadership to Africa's largest and most promising economy. If this is true, then we must all rise to this challenge before us through the instrumentality of religion as a tool for character transformation, thereby enhancing a society where peace, progress and development will thrive.

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