# RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE CHALLENGE OF DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: NEED FOR INCORPORATING RELIGIOUS VALUES INTO SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

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***Abstract***
*The paper examined religious pluralism and the challenge of development in Nigeria. The paper defined concepts such as religion, religious pluralism and development. Also, a review was done on historical conjecturing of the three religious groups in Nigeria. It was established that religious pluralism has inherent integrative powers to transform the society positively however, historical experiences reveal that societies such as Nigeria which tie political battle for supremacy, socio-economic dominance and cultural superiority complex to their religions breed developmental crises. The interactions between the three dominant religions in Nigeria, namely: Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam have been largely governed by divisiveness, hatred, bigotry and violence. The consequence is developmental deficit. It is suggested among others that tolerance and acceptance of individual religious differences is a key to peace and harmony, religious leaders should emphasize the integrative aspects of religion, and*

*religious education should be made compulsory at primary and secondary schools to expose the students to the ideals of other religions.*

**Key words:** Religion, Religious pluralism, Development, Social Studies curriculum, Religious value

## Introduction

Humans are creatures of a supreme being. This has created a natural and continuous quest to be connected to some spiritual deities. Religion is the belief in the supremacy of a deity. This belief causes humans to be affiliated in worship, honour and respect to the supreme one called god. At the creation of the world and man, God's intention was to create societies that will operate in an orderly and organized manner in form of human relation. This in turn is to impact society and the imminent changes. There are several religions in the world including: Christianity, Islam, Traditional worship, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism. However, the major religions in Nigeria are Christianity, Islam and traditional worship. The teachings of these religions are centred primarily on values of love, care for one another, honesty, equity, justice and harmonious living. Hence, adherents of these religions are expected to live in ways that foster unity and promote community development. Yet, religious pluralism is taking a negative toll on human relations and economic development, both at the international stage and in Nigeria (Akah, 2016)

This negative toll of religion on human relation is an indication that core values which promote the tenets of religious beliefs and makes for peaceful coexistence have been eroded. Any society that lacks the promotion of such values will have to grapple with societal ills, such as dishonesty, injustice, proliferation of hate speech and all its attending effects that lead to disunity and bigotry. Social Studies as a school subject teach citizens about the environment and ways of relating with one another for social and economic development. The role of Social Studies cannot be overemphasized in peaceful coexistence, nation building and economic development. According to Edinyang, Tandu and Gimba (2015), Social Studies is

a discipline that helps students become responsible citizens in a culturally diverse yet interdependent world. Social Studies equips with functional skills, desirable attitude and actions for the purpose of producing effective citizenry. Social Studies being taught as a school subject, can proffer solution to the existence of disunity and religious bigotry in the society, if religious values are incorporated in social studies curriculum. It is for this reason that this paper aims to explore the incorporation of religious values into Social Studies curriculum, as a remedy to religious pluralism and economic development in Nigeria. The objective is to explore religious pluralism, its positive and negative sides in terms of economic development, and the need to incorporate religious values into social studies curriculum, for the realization of unity, equity, fairness, honesty and peaceful coexistence for economic development.

**Conceptual Clarifications**

Religion is the belief in the existence of a supreme being. Religion is as old as the existence of man. The creation of man and its attending theories point to the fact that a supreme being was involved in creating and shaping the world as it is today. No wonder humans are naturally affiliated or aligned with a religion in honor and worship of the god perceived to be their creator. Little (2013), opines that religion is defined by its unique ability to provide individuals with answers to the ultimate questions of life, death, existence and purpose. As ardent faithfuls of a particular religion, answers should be provided to questions that borders on who we are, why we are alive, what powers our existence, what would be our purpose while alive, how can this purpose be fulfilled, on what parameters should fulfilment of purpose be measured and ultimately, what becomes of us when we cease to exist? It is the answers provided to these questions that shape the way man comports himself and relates with others in the society.

Religion according to Rexach-Rivera (2014), is an organized collection of beliefs, cultural systems, and world views that relate humanity to an order of existence. Adherents to particular religions tend to behave or act in accordance with specific cultural practices, like the way they dress, speak, act in public and the festivals or

ceremonies they celebrate. For instance the teenage Muslim girl is expected to dress appropriately in public places by wearing clothes that cover all parts of their bodies. Christians ladies are expected to put on head coverings in most assemblies at their times of worship. However, understanding religion in the broad sense highlights the following important points about it in society: it plays a crucial role of giving a person cultural identity, by way of involvement in festivals, traditions, mythologies which form a part of the tangible and intangible heritage of the country. It helps in creating an ethical framework and also a regulator for values in day to day life, thereby building character of a person. Religion acts as an agency of socialization. Thus, religion helps in building values like love, empathy, respect, and harmony. It also plays a crucial role in establishing our connection to the divine and developing the belief that there is a supreme energy that acts as a regulator in our day to day lives. Thus, the components of prayer, chants, hymns, etc. create the spiritual bond. According to Sherwood (2018), 84% of the world's population identifies with a religious group. This has created a large base of ardent followers and faithful for the world's major religions. In Nigeria, the three major religions are Christianity, Islam and traditional worship.

Religious pluralism is the existence of different religions within the same society, each adherent holding tight to his religions views, opinions and practices. Ele (2019), opines that religious pluralism implies a diverse variety and multiplicity of faith, found to exist simultaneously in a given society. Religious pluralism, in its simplest form has the advantage of each religion benefitting from what the other religion has to offer. For example, religious festivals in Islam when celebrated with Christians can help the Christians understand their religion and vice versa. However, negative religious pluralism exists in societies where believers of each religion uphold their religious belief and practices to be more superior to other religions. This creates intolerance that often results in crises. The three main religions in Nigeria have been governed by divisiveness, hatred, intolerance and bigotry. The consequence of divisiveness is development deficit.

Development**:** Any country that trivialises the development of its economy, is heading for a downward turn and poverty of its citizens. Education of citizens is one of the main drivers of development in any society. When educated, skills and knowledge acquired are utilized to create goods and services for economic development. According to Sid (2018), development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components. The purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. Society is dynamic, thus the goal or objective of any country is to seek economic development as much as possible.

According to Akah (2016), religious pluralism has inherent integrative powers to transform the society positively, however, historical experiences reveal that societies such as Nigeria which tie political battle for supremacy, socio-economic dominance and cultural superiority complex to their religions breed developmental crises. Whenever bigotry and divisiveness exists as in the case of Nigeria, there is development deficit. Development in Nigeria to a large extent has been stalemated because of the aftermaths of religious pluralism. Due to the fact that Nigeria is a multi religious nation, all regions and zones of the country have been affected by the consequences of religious pluralism. In the last decade there have been several cases of killings, kidnappings and bombing of public buildings and places, this has stalemated development in Nigeria.

## Historical Antecedents of the Major Religious Groups in Nigeria

**African Traditional Religion:** African traditional religion is the indigenous belief system that has been handed down from one generation of Africa to another by their forefathers. It originated from the African soil. It is a tolerant, accommodative and peaceful religion that fights those who attack it. Onyeidu (1999) collaborates the above view when he observed that the Traditional African

Religion is a tolerant and non-missionary religion. Its adherents were not converted but members of the society born into the religious propaganda or bigotry. Before the advent of Islam and Christianity, the traditional religion had sustained Africans for generations. Some common features of African Traditional Religion include: belief in God (theism), a system of worship (cult) prayer, sacrifices and the clear distinction between the holy (sacred) and unholy (profane). In the traditional African society, instruments of social control include: taboos, vows, secret societies and the meticulous observation of customs and traditions.

**Christianity:** The word Christianity was first used in the New Testament at Antioch where the disciples of Jesus were first called Christians meaning the followers of Christ (Acts 11:26). Christianity is based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The first contact of Christianity in Nigeria was through the activities of a set of missionaries from Portugal in the 15th century (Ryder 1969), and was first preached in Benin and Warri (Okon, 2012). Unfortunately, the attempt failed partly because of the introduction of Atlantic slave trade. The Second attempt to plant Christianity in Nigeria "took place after the abolition of slave trade in 1807 by the British parliament. Immediately after the abolition, some ex-slave from Britain, America, Brazil and Nova Scotia were taken to Sierra-Leone for resettlement. From there some of the ex-slaves who were already Christians found their way to Badagry and other towns in hinterland" (Okon, 2012). According to Ajayi, (2000) "the year 1841 was particularly remarkable in the history of missionary enterprise in what is today called Nigeria. It was the year of the first Niger expedition which marked the beginning of the missionary movement to re-establish Nigeria". Inspite of all the difficulties encountered by the missionaries," by the beginning of the 20th century, Christianity has been planted in most parts of Southern Nigeria" (Okwueze, 1995). The tenents of Christianity are recorded in the book of Christians called the "Holy Bible". The arrival of Christian religion like the Moslem religion in Africa has a far-reaching effect on the society. Thus, the successful planting of these two foreign religions

brought in different cultures and values to Nigeria and interrupted the existing socio-cultural order.

**Islam:** Islam as a religion was brought by Prophet Mohammed (Anyacho, 2005:221). Islam was introduced first into the kingdom of Kanem-Borno about the 10th century and to Hausa land about 14th century. The propagation of Islam was peaceful from inception through commercial activities and Muslim Cleric. The situation "changed in 1804 as Usman Dan Fodio, a Fulani Muslim Cleric came with the idea of purifying the religion. He waged a successful war known as Jihad from 1804-1810 which led to his conquering and Islamizing the Hausa states. The consequence was that it brought great changes which had far reaching effect on the religious, cultural, social, political and economic lives of the people (Onwubiko, 1973). Islam is both a religion and a culture, it claims total control of all aspects of life of its adherents both as individuals and as a group (Akah, 2016). The world "Islam" means submission to the will of God. The tenets of Islam are written in the holy book called Quran/ Koran.#

## Religious Pluralism and the Challenge of Development in Nigeria

Religion and being religious is an integral part of human relations and social activities. Religious belief make people align with people of same belief and perpetuates the tenets of their belief and cultural systems. For this reason, the way humans relate and carry out social and economic activities may be affected positively or negatively by religion. According to Lee and Park (2015), while the positives enhances the political and economic development of nations, the negatives may impede development. For example, bilateral trade relations are strengthened among nations with cordial relationship on religious basis. Diplomatic ties are also strengthened, giving rise to concessions and other incentives that can strengthen the economic development of member nations, like less stringent measures in immigration policies, which allows citizens of member nation to move, live, study and work with less restrictions. There can also be bilateral exchange of expertise, professional and technical knowhow

for industrial development. (Lee & Park, 2015; Apuwabi, 2018) However, there are also negative consequences of religion on human relations and economic development. Firstly, countless wars and conflicts have had an overt or covert religious dimension throughout history right up to the present day. In the past few years, we've seen Islamic extremists waging war in the Middle East, a power struggle between Sunni and Shia across the region, the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar (Sherwood, 2018), the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria to mention a few.

In Nigeria, the attendant conflicts of religious pluralism have continued to create division, hatred, unhealthy rivalry between peoples, making their coming together difficult. According to Akah (2016), the two main religions in the country- Islam and Christianity have not been able to co-exist peacefully for decades. This situation has led to the division of Nigerian Christians and Muslims as most of the Christians live in the South and Muslims in the North. This is enough to question the effectiveness of our religious belief. Religious crises which have claimed many lives in the country have left people asking if Nigeria is truly one nation? In the opinion of Ntamu, Eneji, Asor and Ochiche (2017), many find it difficult to imagine why the Southern Muslim or Christian should be killed in the name of religion in his or her own country. Cases of retaliation killings in Southern part of Nigeria are here with us.

This polarization strengthens ethnicity which is another divisive social ill within the country. This position is buttressed by Nnoli (2008) when he argued that ethnicity in Nigeria is a creation of the colonial and post-colonial order. The colonials created ethnic differences and division. According to Isiramen (2010), the important aspect of this system is that it laid emphasis on the differences among people, while encouraging unhealthy rivalry among various people of Nigerian. The result is that national integration which is an ingredient for development has been negatively affected.

Rampart religious crises and conflicts have affected the country's survival as a nation. Enejor (2000), affirms that religious conflict is one of the most serious threat to national development because it has a bearing on the county's socio-cultural, political,

science and technological development. Religious, crisis resulting from religious pluralism has continued to pose a challenge to development. This is due to the fact that human lives are lost while properties worth millions of Naira are destroyed as well. For instance, activities of the Boko Haram insurgency and the killings in Southern Kaduna has left millions of Nigerians homeless and others living as destitute without adequate health care, good shelter and territorial inclusions perpetrated by members of the same group in the Northern part of the country ( Ele, 2019). In fact, across Nigeria there have been cases of lynching and killing of people as a result of religious pluralism. Women, children, the elderly and the physically challenged are often targeted (Akah, 2016). The socio-economic contributions of the aforementioned individuals cannot be denied. Many children who were lynched or left to die could have in their later lives become useful and contributed to national development. Also, it is a fact that many old people look frail and incapable of doing certain physical activities, nonetheless, some of them despite the challenges associated with old age are capable of doing great works with the residue of knowledge and wealth of experience. These skills are wasted without any thought to their impact on the development of the society.

A good number of those who fall within the working group or labour force are lazy. Experts disagree to agree on the concept of laziness and unproductiveness among Nigerians (Oshisada, 2015). However, a good number of Nigerians seem to be lazy and unproductive. Religious pluralism has contributed to it. Success in academics, business and any other endeavor is measured with the amount of God's grace and favour and not hard work and competence. Sometimes, it is postulated that successful individuals draw inspiration and assistance from the occult world. Hard-work will only provide one enough to eat but great wealth comes from God. As rightly observed by Akah (2016), this kind of conviction could make some persons lazy and unwilling to engage in certain ventures that could make them wealthy and successful.

The overbearing effect of religious pluralism has continued to lead to decrease in investment opportunities from private individuals and other countries. No foreign investors or corporations would

want to do business in an unreceptive environment. Every investor would like to do business where there is security of lives and property. But in the case of Nigeria, religious pluralism often generates violence in form of sporadic fighting, killings, destruction of properties, looting of business private businesses and burning of public or business buildings. These will pose great loss to investors who are profit driven. This undoubtedly poses a challenge to development in the country (Gbadegesin & Adeyemi-Adejolu, 2016).

Again religious pluralism may be a threat to social integration because of the rigid stance of some fundamentalists. For instance, Christian fundamentalists believe that the only meaning of the bible is the literal meaning of the words and do not accept any alternative interpretation. Such a position becomes dangerous to the society when it turns into religious fanaticism. In this case, religious pluralism can hinder social cohesion and threaten social stability, as has been the case in Nigeria and some other parts of the world. The Christian approach to converting unbelievers, especially in southern Nigeria, has often led to religious riots – although riots have occurred in other parts of Nigeria as well. In a clear case of infringement of the fundamental human right of non-adherents, a particular Christian faction set ablaze the shrine of the traditional worshipers in Anambra State. They gathered and burned priceless artefacts, which have served as idols for the indigenous religions for centuries (Ndayambaje, 2013). This led to riots and social unrest. The Boko-Haram religious sect, a group opposed to Western education and values in place of full implementation of the Sharia law is another good example of negative effect of religion.

The mixing of religion with politics as experienced in Nigeria has not really helped the cause of governance. At the national level, many of Nigerian political officials are selected or elected on the basis of religion, not character and integrity. A good number of the electorates vote not on the competence of those vying for political offices but on religious sentiments. One of the reasons that made some persons vote for the former and incumbent President of Nigeria Goodluck Johnathan and Muhammadu Buhari was religion (Banjo, 2016). This sets a wrong precedence in the sense that individuals who are not qualified for a job may at some point be

elected. And when it occurs, the leadership style of whoever is the leader would be compromised on the altar of religion thereby leading to poor policies that may negatively affect development. Political leaders have continued to exploit the county's religious and regional diversity to consolidate political base of support. The result is that Nigeria today is a deeply divided society in terms of religion and ravaging in gross underdevelopment, as seen in the standard of living of the citizens.

## How Religious Values can be incorporated into Social Studies Curriculum for Sustainable Development

One guided by history, can positively affirm that the trends of de-secularization swooping across the world in the present era gives much premium to the vital roles of religion in the society and in the lives of individuals. Humanism, secularism and the atheists' world organized without God could not take the human person to the mirage paradise they promised humanity. In like manner, the philosophy of consumerism which wanted to mystify the human person also failed because man is more than a thing. He transcends "feelings" which atheistic psychologists summarize him to be. Man is a person created in the image of God (imago Dei); he is a religious being. The true unfolding of the human being and his environment must go the way of religion. Therefore, religion can bring about sustainable development in many ways.

According to Mufti (2019), the core values of Islam includes; honesty, kindness, leniency, fulfilment of promises, modesty, humility, decent speech and trustworthiness. The core value of Christianity as found in the Holy Bible and corroborated by Hallowell (2018) includes; love, service, thankfulness, compassion, endurance, creativity/ hardwork, justice, peace, mercy and trust. Religion has great multitude of adherents whose lives are shaped or directed by these core values. With the large populations that subscribes to religion for sound ethical living, religions can, with effortless ease, impact positively on economic development of Nigeria. The large numbers that constitute memberships of different religions are already living agents that can transform human persons and the planet through the needed obedience to their leaders and doctrines.

Recent examples are the synergy between religious leaders and the civil society, especially the health sector in the recent outbreak of COVID 19 in Nigeria. The adoption of hygienic principles against COVID 19 by the Churches for instance, helped in great measure to save lives. In the North, the Imams' teaching on the need for children's immunization against polio was understood more readily than the clarion call by the political class.

Secondly, in her various ethnic nationalities, conflicts and wars have been avoided through instruments of conflict resolution in traditional societies such as oath-taking and covenant making. Peace is fundamental to development. Both Christianity and Islam can harness the contents of their core values to promote peace and social justice. Peace goes beyond the absence of war to include those structures and systems that support authentic human existence. Religious leaders in the three religions are seen as conflict mediators; they enjoy special confidence among their followers. Consequently, they are able to influence their visions and actions. Thus, world peace can be achieved with the co-operation of religious leaders.

Furthermore, one of the challenges of sustainable development in most countries now is corruption. Corruption in its various forms and shapes are found in economy, political life, and culture and so on. When Nigerian citizens and specifically those in the political class take anti-corruption doctrines of their religious affiliations seriously, moral decay would belong only to history books. Basically, all religions inspire people towards spiritual excellence and foster the common good of all. Common good for all is a key ingredient in social stability and sustainable national development (Onah, 2014). In addition, Religions go beyond the Church, mosque or shrine to meet the needs of humans. Auza (2015) testified to this thus: "Religions and its institutions care about the whole of the human person: striving for authentic human development, they do not compartmentalize development, but work for a well-rounded flourishing of each human person. Because human progress is an integral part of their vision and mission, besides erecting places of worship they also construct community-building centres, hospitals, schools and universities". To this end, religions work to protect lives and to empower the weak and the oppressed. They help populations

develop their natural resources responsibly and protect them from the exploitation of powerful economic and political interests. These Religions, he emphasized, are creative in lifting the poor out of poverty in all its forms, in particular in helping those who are trying to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance. They are not afraid, even to the point of great sacrifices, to fight for justice and raise awareness among the powerful and the rich on the social ends of power and wealth and the universal destination of the goods of the world.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and its vision to eradicate those conditions which rob the human person of dignity got some boost of achieving its targets with the contributions of religions and faith-based organizations. With the expiration of the MDGs in 2015, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 and 169 associated targets were adopted in the meeting of the United Nations (UN) held at its headquarters in New York from 25 – 27 September, 2015 by the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives. President Mohammed Buhari of Nigeria and representatives of Religious bodies attended the meeting. The new agenda focus on people (to end extreme poverty), planet (to protect it from degradation), prosperity (to ensure prosperous life for all), peace (to foster just and inclusive societies free from fear and violence) and partnership (to mobilize the means necessary for the successful execution of the agenda) (Ele, 2019).

The Pope as the spiritual leader of 1.2 billion Catholics the world over is engaging both his flocks and all persons of goodwill to see humanity's contribution to ecological crisis as it is today. He maintains that each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations (Pope Francis, 2015, article 67). God is the creator of the world which he gave to man and woman to keep, care for, protect, oversee and preserve (Genesis 1:26-28). Islamic religion teaches Muslims to look after the environment and not to damage it. Qur'an 30:30 says" "Devote thyself single-mindedly to the faith, and thus follow the nature designed by Allah, the nature according to which He has fashioned mankind. There is no altering the creation of

Allah". The Muslims believe that human being on earth is a Khalifah, that is a vicegerent or trustee of Allah, a steward and agent on earth which belongs to Allah who created it. Islamic scholars and jurists developed laws "to safeguard water resources, prevent over-grazing, conserve forests, limit the growth of cities, protect cultural property, and so on. Islam's environmental ethics then are not limited to metaphysical notions; they provide a practical guide as well" (Musaji, 2012).

In the context of African Traditional Religion, Africans see religion as a source of environmental protection and preservation. The African worldview has no clear distinction between the sacred and the secular. The human beings could live and eat with the spirits. Practically, every aspect of traditional African life is influenced by its religion and all things – the self, the community, the environment, the invisible, the past, the present and the future, the dead, the living, the unborn, the names, the feasts, the disasters, and the prosperity, etc. are explainable through religious categories (Ele, 2019). There are traditional ways of caring for the environment in a very friendly way. From dawn to dusk, activities of the average African respect the environment, examples such as morning sanitation, kitchen and compound cleaning is a daily affair, clearing or sweeping of the village paths and squares, the grazing methods and the fallow system in the agricultural fields, the thick forests for wild animals and bushes left for shrines and spirits. The legislations to preserve trees, herbs, streams and rivers are well stipulated, most times, in oral tradition yet it is observed by all. Seeing that these values are already being promoted by the different religions, it is therefore necessary that education which is the building block of life and development further sustains them by fitting them into the social studies curriculum at the primary and secondary education level, to solidify knowledge and give students firm moral and ethical values on which to build a nation that is dynamic in development.

## Conclusion

This paper has reviewed religious pluralism and the challenges of development in Nigeria and the need to incorporate religious values into Social Studies curriculum in Nigeria. The paper attempted to

clarify concepts used in it, by defining and explanation. Furthermore the historical antecedent of the three major religions in Nigeria was explored, to give a background understanding of religious operations in Nigeria. The potentials of religious harmony in fostering national development were explained. Owing to the fact that different religions uphold core ethical and moral values, it was proposed that these religious values be incorporated into the Social Studies curriculum to further enhance students' knowledge and ethical values. Lastly, conclusion was drawn and recommendations made**.**

## Suggestions

The following suggestions have been proffered as solution to harness religious pluralism in Nigeria: Religious values should be incorporated into the Social Studies curriculum to help religious faithfuls understand and accept the unique difference between the religions and respect their beliefs; Religious leaders should emphasize the integrative aspect of our religious belief in God, festivals and celebrations that foster sharing, similar teachings of peace, love and unity; Religious education should be made compulsory in primary and secondary education; Students should also be exposed to basic teaching of other religions, other than theirs; and Politicians should emphasize on the unifying aspect of our religions, rather than exploiting religion to divide the country.

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