

# Religious Ethical Values: A Sine Qua Non for a Developed Nigerian Nation

Patricia Mwuese Saluun PhD\*, Luther Anum Timin

Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Benue State University, Makurdi

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\*Corresponding author: Patricia Mwuese Saluun, PhD

## Abstract

Ethics is an inherent feature of a well cultured and civilised society. It develops the mind to distinguish between good or bad behaviour, character and practices running around our society, country or the world at large. Religious ethics is vital for the proper functioning of the economic, political and social network and, therefore, for the wellbeing and development of the potential of every Nigerian citizen. This goes to mean that, the extent to which Nigeria nurtures religious principles such as integrity, self-discipline, tolerance, patience in its citizens beginning from the smallest unit of the society – the home – will determine the extent of its socio-political and economic growth. The socio-economic and political backwardness of Nigeria today is an indication for a lack of instilled ethics and moral standards in the citizens. This paper examined religious ethical values as a *sine qua non* for a developed Nigerian nation. The paper employed the use of comparative and analytical methods. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used. The findings are that, religious values are important for the growth of Nigeria. It is also established that the dissemination and adoption of shared ethical and moral values is essential in order to take advantage of the enormous opportunities that will lead to the growth and sustainability of the Nigerian nation.

**Keywords:** Ethics, Ethical Values, Religion, Development.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian society is currently witnessing ethical crisis in all spheres of life. Crisis of varying dimensions exists that bothers squarely on unethical behaviours. It is altruism that human societies have always been governed or guided by some set of ideas, based on what is good or bad. In other words, every human society has behaviours that are considered good and responsible. Such moral values have always been kept in the forefront of human consideration particularly when the various expectations of both the individual and the co-operate organization that constitute the society have to do with behavioral pattern and consequences of action which invariably makes for harmonious, stable, peaceful communal life and development. The socio-economic and political backwardness in Nigeria today is an indication for lack of instilled ethics and religious values in the citizens. Religion as a moral agent has very important role to play to this effect, by inculcating good moral standard that will change the Nigerian nation positively and pave way for development.

It is the contention of this paper that religion still plays a very important role in the society. Therefore, such religious values like integrity, self-discipline, tolerance, patience, peace, justice, fairness; equality etc must be straightened to enhance a peaceful co-existence in a developed Nigerian society.

### Clarification of Concepts

**Religious values:** These are morally ethical principles of behaviour that are founded in religious traditions, texts and beliefs. Religious values are based on scriptures and religion's established norms. Common religious values include kindness, piety, self-discipline, courage, faith, a generosity, respect for one's religious symbols and leaders, compliance with religious instructions, openness to correction/discipline when one is in error.

**Ethics:** Is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which means wisdom, conduct, culture or way of life. The words ethics and ethical are often used as synonyms for words like morals and morality especially in contexts which make references to the standard of right conduct regarding an individual or group. This

synonym has a clear etymological basis and justification because the Greek word *ethos* derives from the Latin word *mores* from which the English word 'morals' is derived; both *ethos* and *mores* have the essential meaning of customs, habits, rules, etc. The ethics of morality of a person or group, however, consists not merely in what they habitually or customarily do but also to what they think is fitting, right, and good or obligatory [1].

Development: The word 'development' shall be used in this work to connote all such programmes that can lead to an improvement in the lives of the common man in Nigeria leading to an enhanced style of living of everyone in the nation. Emphasis will be placed on policy formulations, social welfare programmes, employment generation activities, and the continuous fight against corruption and mismanagement of financial resources of Nigeria. The word development has been conceived differently by both scholars in the West and Africa. However, it is pertinent to note that the root of the word comes from the French verb "veloper" which means to wrap. In other words, to develop is "to cause to grow gradually, fuller, larger, stronger and better [2]".

Development is a process to which some value judgement is attached; positive judgement as in the application of the phrase "well developed" to a thing or state and negative judgement as in the application of the phrase "underdeveloped" to a thing or state [3].

Nation: According to James, a nation is a stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common culture. It is distinct from a people and is more abstract and more overtly political than an ethnic group. It is a cultural political community that has become conscious of its autonomy, unity and particular interests (23).

A nation could also be seen as a large area of land that is controlled by its own government. It is a tribe or a group of native tribes that share the same history, traditions or language, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, ethnicity or psychological make-up [9].

Nigeria: is a federal republic in West Africa, bordering Niger in the North, Chad in the North East, Cameroon in the East, and Benin in the West. Its coast in the South is located on the gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. Nigeria comprises of 36 states and one (1) federal capital territory, where the capital Abuja is located. Nigeria is a democratic secular state which a population of about 186 million inhabitants, over 250 ethnic groups which speak over 250 different languages and are identified with a wide variety of cultures [10].

### **The Role of Religious Values in the Society**

As people grow up, the family, school, religious organizations play a part in the formation of their value systems. Through religion, the individual is taught such values as courage, devotion to God and respect for others. In Christianity for instance, people are taught to worship God, renounce greed and materialism. They are also taught to forgive their enemies even in the face of persecution. Christians are to show unconditional love to all people and to preach the gospel to them unto salvation.

As Ogah rightly pointed out, values entails general orientation about notions of right and wrong, proper and improper, desirable and undesirable which guides actions and behaviour in society, the "ought" what an individual should do, have or attain as a mark of success [8]. An individual could have a good or bad character. Character entails several moral attitudes such as discipline, honesty, truthfulness, faithfulness, loyalty, fidelity, probity, sincerity, commitments, dedication, peacefulness and kindness. These and similar other attitudes make an individual a person of integrity. Character is a great concern of both the family and the community. This is because a good character leads to honour, respect, prestige and reputation. A good character provides a basis for a network of good social relationship, mutual understanding and co-operation. It leads to confidence and trusts among persons, family and communities. A person of good character has an adequate moral conscience; the inner voice guides him in his daily living [4].

Religion is also known to play a deep-role in the development of the society. Most of the societal changes are controlled by religion. The presence of religion in the society has contributed to the gradual evolution of moral codes. Religious values if properly applied, have guided the relationship with men and God. This is not what religion only does to mankind, the provision for the motive and sustaining force of executing moral decisions. It also carries men through the temptation of life as well as introduces in men the experience of judgement. It draws us to critically examine the attitudes of people around us and ourselves. In view of this fact, Omoregbe maintained that, it must be admitted that religion exercises a useful function in society and this consists of mainly in helping people to find meaning and purpose in life and helping or encouraging them to live a moral life by providing them with the incentives to do so. The quality of religion is judged by its power to produce worthy character. It follows that, members of such a society are classified as models. They serve as models because of their high moral standard which provides enabling environment for any meaningful thing to strive. Thus, religious values have been effective tool in the transformation of societies. It provides the people with an enabling environment to settle their differences amicably without resorting to violence.

Conversely, for Nigeria to be fully developed all these factors must be considered;

### **Sense of communality**

Nigeria must place high value on communal living, communal values express the growth and appreciation of the community, the value which guide the social interpersonal bonds go beyond biological affinity in expressing the value of communality. They must care for one another. Whatever happens to one happens to the community as a whole. The joy and sorrow of one extends to other members of the community in profound ways.

### **Respect for Authority and Elders**

Though it is natural for Nigerians to respect authority and elders, this respect in some cases, can be relative to what we can find and admire in elders. It is true that respect for elders start within one's immediate family. They are however, respected for many reasons. Some believed to be the teachers and directors of the young. Some elders are taken to be the repository of communal wisdom and therefore they are conceded leadership in the affairs of the people. According to Ngbea, Nigeria are a religiously fertile land and the most religious nation in the world, since Nigerians hold onto their religious faiths and practices with vigour and zest (127). It then means that all religious values must be adhered to for the benefit and development of the Nigerian nation. Looking at this critically, something is wrong, all is not well, more needs to be done, since religion can serve as a strong force in boosting societal development [5].

### **Religious Values and the Development of Nigeria**

Though religion plays a vital role for the development of Nigeria, there are still challenges ahead. Religion needs not to retrogress; the people of very high pedigree operating the ruling level do need moral teachings alongside religious counselling for the betterment of the nation. Some clergy have lost the dignity of their calling. Some religious leaders are now lovers of money and corrupters of religion. They live in mansions and move about in flashy cars in steep contrast to their religious calling. They hardly have time for poor, and if they do, the session is full of fake prophecies aimed at cajoling the adherents to offer more or indirectly sponsor their intended debauchery. Apathy and discrimination has taken over the religious sphere. Religion has become a lucrative business and all manner of cranks across the land, veritable devil's advocates, social misfits and drop-outs profess divine inspiration and extra-ordinary powers to heal and confer good fortunes. The religious arena is now filled with insincere leaders and adherents that connive with political leaders to the poor, as such; this has been a major bane in the search for national development [3].

It is obvious that religion has not been able to put in its best in this search for a just Nigerian society. To begin with, where do the Mallams and Imams get the resources to obtain their fancy cars and well fed horses? Where do the pastors and priests get the millions to build their mansions when their members languish in poverty and cannot afford the basic necessities of life which is food, shelter and clothing? These poignant questions when answered, will obviously point to the fact that religion is manipulated and employed as a license by some to gain access to the national treasury.

Clearly, the failure of religion to perform its role in the fight against corruption in Nigeria has been devastating (112). This has actually paved way and affected development in Nigeria. It has been responsible for the collapse of the economy, the infrastructure, educational and health sectors and has actually impoverished the populace.

### **Harnessing Religious Values for Development in Nigeria**

Our religious leaders must renew their understanding of their calling conceiving it according to the highest standard and understanding that they will be held accountable to that standard. They should not look at worldly values but heavenly values. Since moral values are laudable virtues which every ideal society tries to inculcate in its members through churches, Omoregbe affirms that, a very important aspect of the development of human personality is moral development. Moral development on the part of the citizens of a country is pre-requisites for the development of that country. Moral development is the most important aspect of national development, for there can be no development of a country if its citizens are morally underdeveloped [7]. Neither science nor technology can develop a country if its citizens are not morally developed. How can there be development in which public funds are embezzled by those who control them and who are supposed to use them for developmental projects? How can there be development in a country in which self-interest is the dominant rule of action? Nor can the economy of any country develop if its citizens lack a moral sense of duty, the right attitude to work and a sense of moral responsibility to the society? How can there be development in a country in which bribery and corruption, break down of law and order? It is simply an illusion to expect development in a society in which devotion to duty and efficiency yields to self-interest and the craving for self-enrichment.

To achieve any meaningful thing in Nigeria, religious values must be straightened, proactive steps be taken using strategic management policy, it is the continuous monitoring, analysing and assessment of all that is necessary for a society to meet its goals and objectives. The strategic management policy processes

could involve modes of analyzing and monitoring cross-functional behaviour that are morally right or wrong and how to deal with such that is considered to be wrong. Strategic management policy necessitates a commitment to moral reformation which will determine a society's sanity. This has to do with identifying specific areas and causes of moral deformation [6]. In doing this, a combination and cooperation of the different agents of moral development must be put in place. These includes religious leaders, the state, education and parents where they will come together and see themselves as moral models for children or youth and they must behave accordingly, youth are quick to pick up the values that adults hold dear. It is therefore important that they behave in a way that the youth will benefit which in turn help the society's growth.

### CONCLUSION

Having taken a critical look at religious values and development in Nigeria, the paper observes that negligence of these values has given birth to corruption, hatred, greed, violence, unfaithfulness etc. and affected development to some extent. Therefore, there is need for religious groups in Nigeria to seek the common values inherent in them towards a variable and peaceful co-existence capable of enhancing holistic development of the Nigerian nation. Their capacity if properly reckoned can facilitate unprecedented nation building that can eliminate the vices and tendencies that affect development.

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