Religion as Freedom, Unity and Ideology in National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract
The pattern and trend of religious-induced crises in recent times in Nigeria have brought some doubt in the minds of many Nigerians if truly religion is a social institution for unity and national development. Notwithstanding the ugly situation we have found ourselves now, one cannot conclude that religion is bad in all its ramifications. The paper therefore, discusses religion from the standpoint of Christianity and Islam as freedom, unity and ideology in national development in Nigeria. From theoretical understanding, the paper is predicated on the Theory of Religious Economy. Methodologically, content and documentary data analysis was employed and this was done qualitatively based on descriptive research design. One of the findings of the paper based on empirical review of literature is that religion especially Christianity and Islam in Nigeria have contributed to national development in the social, economic, educational, political, and healthcare systems. It is concluded here that religion has remained the bedrock upon which Nigeria has remained one indivisible country notwithstanding the various crises it has experienced since her political independence in 1960. One major recommendation of the paper upon which any other recommendation relies on is that the Nigerian state should have enough political will and commitment to seeing full implementation of section 38 of Nigerian 1999 Constitution as amended, which states thus: "Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice or observance."

Keyword: Religion, Unity, Ideology, Religious Ideology, National Development.

1. Introduction

Etymologically, religion is from a Latin word '*religio',* meaning relationship, which has two distinctive extractions (Derrida, 1998). First, as a Latin word '*relegere'*, from '*legere'*, means, to bring together, to harvest or to gather. Second, *religare*, from *ligare*, means to tie or to bind together (Benveniste, 1973). According to Ajaegbu (2012, p. 1), "the first meaning recognizes the religious foundations of any social group that is gathered together. The second indicates the disciplines or morality that is necessary for controlling and regulating human beings."

In Nigeria, the three major religions are African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity and Islam. African Traditional Religion is practiced by traditionalists; Christianity is for Christians- the believers of the teaching of Jesus Christ, while Islam is for the believers of the teachings of Prophet Muhammed. According to a 2001 Report of *The World Factbook* by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), about 50% of Nigeria's population is Muslim, 40% are Christians and 10% adhere to local religions. Another report released on December 12, 2012 by Pew Research Centre has it that the population of Christians is 48.3% while Muslims is 48.9% and indigenous and other religious adherents are 2.8% (Olorunda, 2019). The most recent report by Pew Research Center Forum (2018) has it that Christians in Nigeria has an estimate population of 49.3% dominantly, in the South-East, South-South, South West and North-Central. Nigeria has the highest number of Christians in Africa of over 80 million from different denominations from the Catholics, the Protestants, the Pentecostals, and the Non-Trinitarian.

In each of these religions, three things among them are common and central, namely: as a freedom of worship; each preaches and promotes unity in the society; and each is rooted in ideology of a Supreme Being. The difference between African Traditional Religion on one part, and on another part, Christianity and Islam is that African Traditional Religion does not have a common and particular document as a reference book unlike in Christianity and Islam that have the Holy Books- the Bible and Quran respectively. Notwithstanding this gap in documentation, each of them individually and collectively has played significant role in Nigeria's national development and of course, in every other African country. This paper has two objectives to achieve. First, to discuss religion as freedom that preaches unity and is ideologically based. Second, and more importantly, to discuss explain how religion has contributed to national development in Nigeria.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical Understanding: The Theory of Religious Economy

Religion as freedom, unity and ideology can be explained from various theoretical understanding, which include but not limited to Rational Choice theory, Sensitivity theory, Phenomenological theory of Religion, Cognitive theory, and the Theory of Religious Economy. These are current developments in the theories of religions, which were included in the literature of theories of religion, which according to Agbikimi (2014), started from 1970. Each of these current theories demands patronage from everybody more especially, from the believers of any religious organisation. The paper is predicated on the Theory of Religious Economy.

The central argument of the theory of religious economy hinges on the economic model of supply and demand. According to Muller (1975), the theory of religious economy has very important part to play in the development and success of the organized religions like

Christianity and Islam outside African Traditional Religion. Agbikimi (2014) argues that the religious economy is likened to a demand in a market; the same way there is demand for religion, which in most cases has supply of many religious organisations and denominations. Religious market is competitive which has free entry and free exist. The religion activities in this competitive market have suppliers who strive to meet the religious demands of the various religious consumers. Each prospective consumer is in need of a different type of religious products to fulfil his spiritual hunger or thirst. Each supplier in the religious market tries to supply an array of religious products. This brings about the competitive nature of the market that stimulates activities in the religious marketplace.

In Nigeria, this is one major factor that has made different religious organizations especially the new religious organisations and movements both in Christianity and Islam, to compete for followers in a religious economy, much like the way businesses compete for consumers in a commercial economy. Proponents of the theory of religious economy proclaim that a true religious economy is the result of religious pluralism, which supply to the Nigerian population wider variety of choices in religion (Agbikimi, 2014).

Berger (1969) writes:

> The polarization of religion brought about by secularization and the concomitant loss of commonality and/or reality *ipso facto* leads to pluralistic situation. Hence the sociological and social-psychological characteristic of the pluralistic situation is that religion can no longer be imposed but must be marketed like a commodity (p. 138).

The applicability of the theory of religious economy to this paper is that as a result of many suppliers of religious products in Nigeria, Nigerians are at freedom to make choices of the religious organisations, denominations and products that can satisfy their religious expectations. Further, each religious organisation or denomination has unity of belief system and doctrines that define their religious ideologies, notwithstanding the breakouts that are inherent and characteristic of the new religious organisations and movements especially among Christians, and in few cases, among Muslims.

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.2.1 Religion

Religion has been defined and explained in various ways by various writers from backgrounds of knowledge. For example, Ejizu (2008) understands religion as man's experience of the holy and ultimate reality as well as the expression of the awareness in concrete life. Tylor (2005) as cited in Abalogu and Okolo (2020), defines religion as belief in spiritual beings that originates as explanations of natural phenomena (Tylor, 2005). An anthropologist Clifford Geertz defines religion as a "system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz, 2000). Another definition is by Yinger (1970) who says that religion is a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of human life.

2.2.2 Religious Freedom
Religious freedom is about individuals being free to believe and practice as they choose without interference by the state, and preventing government from sanctioning or compelling the practice of a particular religion by its citizens (Ahdar & Leigh, 2004; Choper, 1980; Moore, 1969; Greenawalt, 2008). Religious freedom in Nigeria is linked to the diversity of religious organisations based on the three main religions namely African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam, which are widely practiced in the country, which dominate the daily lives of their practitioners (Akah, 2017).

2.2.3 Ideology
The concept of ideology can be explained from different schools of thought such as liberalism, socialism, conservatism, etc. For Marx, ideology is a set of ideas and beliefs that are dominant in society. These ideas and beliefs are the tools use by the ruling elites to apply and explain their power and privilege. This can be either positive or negative point of view. When ideology is used negatively it is used to hide the truth by giving people false picture about the world for the purpose of manipulation and control of the people. When used positively as done by religious organizations, ideology becomes a tool for deeper truth about God and world, which helps to shape the lives of people for better society.

The concept of ideology was an invention of Anotone Destutt de Tracy, a French philosopher for secular epistemology. He lived from 1754-1836. As at this time, de Tracy (1801 - 1815) used the term as an alternative to religion with the same intention and purpose to impact the mind of people and behavior.

2.2.4 Development
The concept of development has different meanings to different people. To Ejizu (2012), man is key issue explaining development of any country. Development therefore connotes man and his environment, his material and the infrastructure available to him. According to Rodney (1981, p. 9) development "is a many-sided process. At the level of individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. "At the level of social groups, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships" (p. 10). Thomas (2004) sees development as a process of historical change.

The three objectives of development according to Rashid (2007) are to:

   i.   increases in availability and improvements in the distribution of food, shelter, education, health, protection, etc. through relevant growth processes;

  ii.   improvements in 'levels of living, including income, jobs, education, etc. by creating conditions conducive to the growth through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions which promote human dignity and respect;

 iii.   expansions in the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nations e.g., varieties of goods and services.

2.2.5 National Development
National development according to Munasinghe (2004), is a process whereby there is a noticeable improvement of various societal opportunities that enable the citizens and communities achieve and improve in their aspirations and full potentials under a particular period of time. These aspirations and potentials include but not limited to economic, social

and environmental systems that exist. According to Ajaegbu (2012), national development is how a country is able to make remarkable improvement in the economic and social wellbeing of its citizens through the provision of some necessary amenities in the state of secured society. These social amenities include but not limited to quality and affordable education, portable and accessible drinking water, good transport infrastructure and system, available and affordable health and medical care, employment for the employable members of the society.

National development is concerned and connected with the development process of a nation like Nigeria. Hence, national development refers to Nigeria's gradual growth effort to become more advanced and stronger. In the view of Tolu & Abe (2011, p. 238) national development can be explained "the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation."

3. Discussions
3.1 Religion as Freedom and the Secularity of the Nigerian State
Religion as freedom can be explained from the standpoint of the fact it gives and guarantees freedom of association, and expression and practice of one's belief and ideology in a secular society. Through legal instruments of the state such as the constitution, most developed and underdeveloped countries across the globe allow their citizens the freedom to confess, adhere and practice any religion of their choice in their society. To this effect, religion as freedom can be explained from the secularity of the any country like Nigeria. It is on this note that the state is separated from any particular religion. This is what is known as secularity.

According to Nweke (n.d., p. 92) "one of the claims for the establishment of a secular state is the need to entrench religious freedom and human rights since religious states would be more repressive of other religions." Buckingham (2012) is of the view that the first step in developing a framework for the interface between a secular society and religion is to define the role of the "secular" state. This is because every society has a dominant culture, usually with religious roots. Nweke (n.d.) further explains that secularism is understood from two broad perspectives. First, secularism is seen as asserting rights to freedom from the rules and teachings of religion. In the second perspective, religious secularism guarantees non-imposition of any particular religion by government upon its citizens.

Section 38 of Nigerian 1999 Constitution as amended states thus:
> Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice or observance.

This constitutional provision justifies the fact that religion as freedom and to this effect, Gutman (1992), explains that in human dignity, religion is key and central. It is more than making life choice; it is the inmost part of the religious devotees. It is also one of the freedoms one enjoys and when it is denied especially when it applies to religious belief and practices, one believes that morally and constitutionally, the very core of one's being has been violated.

The constitutional provision prohibits the government at all levels from imposing a particular religion, and it bars any form of religious discrimination and allows and guarantees freedom

of worship (United States Department of State, 2020). There is a paradox in the religious secularity in Nigerian state because; this is not the case as some states in the Northern part of the country especially Zamfara and Kano States adopted Sharia, an Islamic legal system in the states. And Offiong and Ekpo (2020, p. 163), rightly observed that "the various provisions of the Constitution cited earlier in the work, Nigeria is influenced tremendously by its two antagonizing religions."

3.2 Religion as Unity

At the micro (that is, individual) level, one of the good things that religion has done in Nigeria to an extent is the promotion of ethical, law-abiding character and behaviour by the three mainline religions. This can be explained from the fact that there is unity of purpose and belief systems among the devotees that religion builds in them the respect and obedience to law and order, and submission to the constituted authorities (Sullivan, 1994). This is notwithstanding the fact that Nigeria is the most religious nation in the world, but has witnessed immorality, lawlessness, as well as all sorts of evil deeds abound among her religious adherents.

The corporative nature of religious adherents creates an atmosphere of sharing together and engendering self-sacrifice thereby building oneness among them (Kelsay & Twiss, 1994). At the macro (that is, national level), the issue of the role of religion in fostering national integration and development in Nigeria, the multi-ethnic and pluralistic nature of religious cannot be over-emphasized. Of truth, irrespective of the various religious crises in Nigeria since after her political independent in 1960, the place of religions as a unifying factor in bringing the various ethnic and political groups has remained undisputable.

The government on its part has encouraged and promoted national unity by managing pluralistic nature of our religious system. Typical of this, can be seen from the various constitutional provisions in our constitution. In confirmation to this fact, Ayinla (2003) notes that Nigerian Constitution has so far attempted to forge unity through the diversity of religion. For example, section 15 (20) of the 1999 Constitution as amended provides that: "Accordingly, national integration shall be actively encouraged, whilst discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited." From social point of view on religion as unity in Nigeria, the Nigerian state has applied public funds to encourage and promote harmonious and unifying religious co-existence. This can be explained from the various state machineries applied to expand and strengthen religions and forge national integration and peace. A typical example is the observance of religious holidays like Eid Fitr, Eid Kabir, Easter and Christmas among others as a unifying factor for different religious groups in the country. During these religious-centred public holidays, the government and religious leaders uses the opportunity to call for prayers based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammed (Oloso, 2004). These cannot be divorced as religious-based factors in unifying Nigerians.

3.3 Religion as Ideology

In the view of Thompson (2018), sociologists see religion as an ideology, meaning that religion is all about beliefs and practices, which are kept by the ruling class and their elites in power. Ideological perspective of religion is traceable to Marxist tradition and radical feminism. Marx (1844), explain that religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people' He wrote it in 1843 as a passing remark in the introduction to a book of philosophical criticism he never finished.

According to Marx, religion performs three ideological functions such as

i. Religion creates false consciousness by teaching that social inequality is God's will and thus mystifies the real cause of inequality and misery which is exploitation by the Bourgeoise.

ii. Religion is the opium of the masses, because it prevents change and keeps the elite in power by providing spiritual comfort for the poor by making a virtue out of poverty, and promising a better life after death if people obey the rules now, for example.

iii. There are direct links between the church and the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie fund the Church and the church support (ideologically) the bourgeoisie.

From the radical feminist perspective in explaining religion as Mary Daly argue that Christianity was a set of Patriarchal myths. She sees the Catholic Church as especially bad: it downplayed the role of women in the Bible and legitimated sex role segregation for example (Daly, 1991). Simone de Beauvoir argues that religion is used by men to compensate women for their second-class status as it provides them with spiritual rewards for accepting inferior social roles (de Beauvoir, 1949).

3.4 Religion and National Development in Nigeria

Recent research in the social sciences also suggests that there is a significant positive correlation between levels of religious freedom and measures of other economic, social and political goods, while, conversely, the denial of religious liberty correlates with the denial of such goods (Hertzke, n.d.). One study by Grim (2020) concludes that the presence of religious freedom in a country mathematically correlates with the longevity of democracy, and with the presence of civil and political liberty, women's advancement, press freedom, literacy, lower infant mortality, and economic freedom.

As stated earlier in this paper, there are three main religions in Nigeria namely African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. But for the purpose of this section of the paper, efforts to explain how religion has promoted national development are focused on Christianity and Islam. This shows that the two modern religions are evolutionary. From the literature reviewed, this paper identifies five key areas religion has contributed to our national development in Nigeria. These areas include among other things social, economic, educational, political, and healthcare system.

3.4.1 Economic Development

From economic perspective, religion has contributed to national development from the fact that the main thrust of what is development is for the people to have economic self-reliance, which is achieved based on intensive rural farming and coordination of other productive forces. The essence of this is to place the country on sound economic footing. This is one major area religious organisations and movements in Nigeria have identified and collaborated with the government agencies and institutions to provide infrastructure. One good example is how various state governments have returned some educational institutions especially at the primary and secondary level to Churches (Ikechi-Ekpendu, Audu, & Ekpendu, 2016).

From the Islamic perspective, literature review shows that Nigeria's national development has also benefited. For example, Falola (2009, p. 1), observes "Islam has contributed in many ways to Nigeria's development, notably in providing the sources to organize politics and

society, fostering community cohesion, and creating an ideology of change." In another case to illustrate how Islam has contributed positively to Nigeria's development is in the area of Islamic financial services. Islamic finance refers to as financial instruments based on Islamic principles and structure, the Muslims transaction structure against payment of interest, gambling and speculation (Tabash & Dhankar, 2014). It can also be defined as the structuring of financial services in accordance with Muslim tradition (Muhammad & Dauda, 2018). All federal government Sukuk-funded infrastructural projects in Nigeria are from the Islamic financial services consisting of according to "Islamic banking, Islamic insurance (Takaful) and Islamic bond" (Sukuk) (Muhammad & Dauda, 2018, p. 41).

The evidences above explain explains the reason for the recognition government accords to the religious organisations in the economic development of the country (Ikechi-Ekpendu, Audu, & Ekpendu, 2016). Other area religious organizations contribute to economic development by engaging in small and medium scale enterprises in the areas of fish farming, carpentry, soap and cream making, shoe making, hair dressing and fashion design etc. (Agha, 2003). Sam (2009) observes that some religious organisations in Nigeria have built health care centre, school and other economic infrastructure. In the view of the paper, this cuts across the two main Western religious organisations in Nigeria.

It is also good to note here that some big Churches especially among the Pentecostal do have their annual programmes, which last for some days. For example, Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) do have their Holy Ghost Conferences annually and quarterly; Living Faith Chapel (a.k.a Winners) conducts its Shiloh programme every second week of December, which lasts for five days (Tuesday – Saturday); Deeper Life Bible Church holds Christmas and Easter Retreats every year; Salvation Ministries conducts '5 Nights of Glory' every January, etc. During these programmes members and none members of these Churches are involved in the marketing and sales of varieties of goods and services. In some cases, banks and telecommunication companies also engage in business activities during these religious programmes. When this is done, it then means that efforts of the religious groups have added greatly to national development.

3.4.2 Political Role

Political education is one democratic virtue that is lacking among our political leaders in Nigeria's democratic experience. To borrow a leave from what Achebe (1983) writes in his book: The Trouble with Nigeria, the challenge of Nigeria is leadership. Religion according to Afolabi (2015) has been able to cover this gap by inculcating to the political class high sense of duty, morality, selfless service, respect for human lives, public accountability, love of one's neighbour, sense of humanity, abhorrence of violence. This is demonstrated by churches giving award to some performing Governors in Nigeria. Religion in Nigeria has added to national development politically by integrating the various parts of the country, engineered political mobilisation, reform sub national identity for national consciousness, preach peaceful and harmonious co-existence. Towing this same line of argument, Marshall (2010) observes that some changes have been made in our political system due to the inherent virtue from the political education, and has impacted development in Nigeria positively.

It is also good to state here that Islam is not left out in the political development of Nigeria from the period of our political independence in 1960 to date. Falola (2006, p. 1) succinctly puts it thus: "Nigeria cannot be understood without Islam. The areas of intersection between Islam and politics are significant."

3.4.3 Social Roles

One common and central belief of the three main religions under discussion in this paper is the worship of the supreme God irrespective of whatever names each of the three religions calls Him. This recognition of God in the affairs of man as the source of that is good, means social justice. This also entails national progress and development. One of the lessons man learns from religion is that he has some specific obligations to himself, to his fellow human being and to the society to which he belongs and above all, to his Maker (Aremu, 2003). Ezeanya (1980) believes that the key social role of religion in national development is to let the people know that, social justice, social equality and building of a country is not merely man - conceived, but it is ordained by God.

In a particular case, the *Islamiyyah* schools have helped to preserve the cultural and civilizational heritage of Islam. This is because the *Islamiyyah* schools were not hindered by the proliferation of secular schools in the country. Furthermore, the *lslämiyyah* schools have played important roles to produce cultured and well-mannered Muslim individuals. The moral and spiritual development of Muslims is very crucial. The *Islamiyyah* School in this respect illuminate the mind of Muslim children with the divine guidance of Qur'anic revelation and the exemplary model of prophetic way of life including the lives of righteous predecessors (Aliyu & Ganiy, 2013).

3.4.4 Health Care System

Religious organsations and movements, and faith-based organisations (FBO) in Nigeria have contributed immensely in our health care sector and system through building health facilities that provide efficient and affordable health care services across the country. For example, according to Jerome (2010), there is Queen Elizabeth hospital Umuahia built by Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1945, now Federal Medical Centre; Faith Clinic Foundation in Nsukka owned by the; Seventh Day Adventist Hospitals in Aba, Ife, Jengre, and Ilisan; K and P Hospital in Nassarawa State, Shendam Hospital Gombe, Leprosy Home Uzuakoli, and many others built by religious groups (Jerome 2010).There is also Royal Cross Methodist Hospital, Ugwueke in Bende Local Government of Abia State.

Islam has made also made its contributions to the healthcare system in Nigeria. There are healthcare facilities across Nigeria own by Muslims and Islamic organisations. Abbas (n.d.) rightly explains that it is very important to note that among the services which Islam commands its followers to offer to the humanity regardless of the belief, race or background of the beneficiaries are: providing health care facilities, orphanages, hospitals, schools, skills and vocational training centres, scholarship at various levels of education, constructing of roads, recreational centres, creating job chances to mention a few.

3.4.5 Educational Roles

Other area religious organisations have positive a role in national development is education. Many of them have educational institution from primary to tertiary level. Ikechi-Ekpendu et al. (2016, p. 86) states that religion has provided educational services through "the provision of Nursery, Primary, Secondary, Adult education, Sabbath and Sunday School Classes, *Almajiri* school, clubs for Boys and Girls, Mass illiteracy, program planning and training courses."

Religion in this country has been working hard to make sure that Nigeria has quality education in this country. This was made clear when some state Governments returned many schools to their original owners. Before now, our educational sector in this country has

experienced incessant strikes because of non-implementation of their agreement or non-payment of salary (Ikechi-Ekpendu, et al., 2016). Agha (2003) opined that strike is like a cankerworm to national development. Religious groups took it as a challenge to invest on educational sector by providing schools even up to university level. Consequently, today, the state government and the religious bodies pay regular salaries to their teachers.

There are about forty religious universities in Nigeria mainly owned by Christian religious organisations and mainly located in the Southern part of Nigeria. Some of these tertiary institutions include but not limited to 1. Babcock University-7th Day Adventist, 2. Madonna University-Rev Fr Ede, 3. Bowen University-Nigerian Baptist Convention, 4. Covenant University-World Mission Agency (WMA) of the Living Faith Church, 5. Benson Idahosa University-Church of God Mission, 6. Redeemers University of Nations-Redeemed Christian Church of God, 7. Ajayi Crowther University-Anglican Communion of Nigeria, 8. Caritas University-Rev Fr Ede, 9. Bingham University-Evangelical Churches Winning All (ECWA), 10. Crawford University-Apostolic Faith Mission, 11. Joseph Ayo Babalola University-Christ Apostolic Church ,12. Salem University-Foundation Faith Church, 13. Tansian University-Rev Msgr John Bosco Akam, 14. Catholic University of Nigeria (Veritas)-Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, 15. Wesley University of Science and Technology-Methodist Church Nigeria, 16. Paul's University Awka-Anglican Communion (Eastern Nigeria) ,17. Rhema University-Living Word Ministries, 18. Bishop Godfrey Okoye University-Catholic Dioceses of Enugu, 19. Obong University-Church of Christ Nigeria, 20. Landmark University-WMA of the Living Faith Church, 21. Samuel Adegboyega University-The Apostolic Church, 22. McPherson University-Foursquare Gospel Church, 23. Evangel University-Assemblies of God, Nigeria, 24. Mountain Top University-Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, 25. Anchor University-Deeper Life Bible Church, 26. Kings University (Land of Dreams)-Kingsway International Christian Centre, 27. Precious Cornerstone University-Sword of the Spirit Ministries, 28. Hezekiah University-Living Christ Mission, 29. St Augustine University-Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos, 30. Clifford University, Owerrinta, Seventh Day Adventist, 31. Dominican University, Ibadan-Order of Preachers, Nigerian Dominican Community (Catholic), 37. Spiritan University Nneochi, Abia State-the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans), Province of Nigeria South East (Catholic), 38. Dominion University, Ibadan, Oyo State. Victory International Church (Rehoboth Cathedral).

Islamic education developed in the southern part of Nigeria particularly in Yoruba land as early as the spread of Islam to the area. Qur´anic as well as Islamic education in numerous places of Yoruba and is received in the mosques (Aliyu & Ganiy, 2013).

According to Muslim News Nigeria (2019), Muslim universities in Nigeria include:
  i.   **Fountain University**: owned by Nigeria's leading elite Muslim organization, *Nasrullahi-il-Fathi Society (NASFAT)* located at Oke Osun, Osogbo, Osun State.
  ii. **Crescent University**, Abeokuta is the brainchild of a prominent legal luminary and former judge of the International Court of Justice, The Hague, His Excellency, Justice Bola Ajibola.
  iii. **Al-Hikmah University**, Ilorin, Kwara State was established in 2005 by the Abdur-Raheem Oladimeji Islamic Foundation (AROIF), Nigeria.
  iv. **Al-Qalam University** came into existence in the year 2005. It was registered and licenced first as Katsina University, Katsina by the Nigeria Universities Commission (NUC). Al-Qalam University was also categorised as a private university.
  v.   **Summit University**: A Product of Islamic Educational Renaissance. Nigeria's oldest Muslim organisation, Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria (ADSN) has no doubt

invested heavily in education through the establishment of public and private nursery (33), primary (236) and secondary schools (58) across the country, largely spread in the Southwest and Northern Nigeria. The 96-year-old organisation also has one College of Education and its efforts to establish a full-fledged private Muslim University, which began in 2004, materialised on March 5, 2015 when it obtained its provisional licence (the 59th private University) from the National Universities Commission (NUC).

Aliyu and Ganiy (2013) observe that the contribution of *Islamiyyah* schools to educational and national development cannot be over-emphasized. AI Ilori explains that the graduates of Kano school of Arabic studies who are its first products are among the high intellectuals that serve as top governmental functionaries in Nigeria. Among the products are Justice Aremu and Justice Abdul Kadir Orire, the former grand Kadi of Kwara State besides, many top government functionaries in Nigeria embodiment of Arabic and English civilization in northern are the products of the school. This is a clear indication that Islamiyyah School made remarkable contribution to educational development in Nigeria.

4. Conclusion

Religion has remained the bedrock upon which Nigeria has remained one indivisible country notwithstanding the various crises it has experienced since her political independence in 1960. This has been experienced from four key areas- religion serving as freedom; promoting and projecting unity among religious adherents and also the entire citizenry; religion has built ideological disposition on people, which has provided spiritual rewards for accepting inferior social roles; and more importantly, religion has contributed immensely to national development from different points of view. These include but not limited to social, economic, educational, political, and healthcare system.

In line with the position of this paper, Sampson (2014) contends that since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has struggled unsuccessfully to clearly articulate the relationship between religion and the Nigerian state. Nigeria at independence was a secular state, which of course was an internal contradiction which has continued and will continue to hurt the religious harmony. The action of the colonial masters alongside the assumed nationalist at independence is a paradox. Nigeria has remained a three-divided entity religiously. The North is and will remain Muslim dominated while the South, Christian dominated.

5. Recommendations

i.   The Nigerian state should have enough political will and commitment to seeing full implementation of section 38 of Nigerian 1999 Constitution as amended, which states thus: 'Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice or observance.'

ii. Nigerians and government should see religion as a promoter of growth as it directs people towards honesty, discipline, hard work, education, thriftiness (leading to savings essentially for investment and thereby growth) and absenteeism from harmful activities; though it can also encourage violence in the name of doing the will of God (Ajaegbu, 2012).

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