

Religiosity in Nigeria: Bane or Blessing to National Development

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the state of Nigerian growth, vis a vis the setbacks impeding the development to the extent that the level of religiosity of her citizens had influenced or affected it. One can ask whether it is beneficial or not. In Nigeria, more than 80 percent of the population identifies with one religion or the other and this has a major impact on how people co-exist, as religions offer both potentials and risks. However, Nigeria as a developing country still battles with the challenges of development in all spheres of its national life and this call for concerns. The study adopted historical and analytical method of research. The findings from the work revealed that Nigerians are too religious, even to the extent that issues or problems that required otherwise urgent attentions are most often spiritualized. Nigeria has therefore become a case study for how a country might be very religious yet still not be affluent. Additionally, the experiment demonstrated that people's work ethics do not align with biblical values, as stated more clearly in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, which states that "if someone would not work, neither should he eat." The majority of religious Nigerians hold this viewpoint, which is not conducive to the spirit of capitalism needed to create wealth, prosperity, and address poverty. The paper concluded with the need for religion to be more practical to ensure the development of the nation rather than guise of spirituality to solve problems.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Religiosity, National Development, Spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

A cursory look at the course of event concerning religion at recent times in Nigeria would make a sane mind to ask questions on whether religion is a blessing or a curse to Nigeria. This may also apply to Africa as a whole. A thought on the understanding of religion would suggest peace, tolerance, development and sanctity wherever it exists. However, the opposite is becoming the case at the mention of religion. History of recent event in religious practices and event is showing that religion is no longer the harbinger of peace as could be expected in Nigeria or African in general is known to be in recent time where religion is most widespread and practice. This is the extent of the people religiosity. Every facet of life is colored with religion such that some people commit evil or do evil in the guise of religion. Nigeria is notoriously known to commit every activity into religious affairs yet it does not reflect in their natural life or in the development of their lives generally.

Africa as a continent and Nigeria particularly is today reckoned with as the poorest nation or continent in terms of socio-economic and political developments. In fact, the state of under - development witnessed in Nigeria, calls for concern. However, it is sad to note that in the globalization of the world economy with the integration of the national economy, African countries

including Nigeria could not measure up. This is to say that in spite of all the religiosity, the reward of religion is negative on them. Hence, the question is asked whether religion has brought much development or retrogression into the African continent in Nigeria state. This work therefore is a follow up to research on impacts or effects religion had brought to Nigeria especially in recent time.

Terminological Investigation of the term “Religiosity and National Development”

National Development:

The word “national development” has different meanings depending on the way one understands it. It could be referred to as a situation that affects the whole country growth. In other terms, it may be characterized as the nation's potential to improve the level of living for its citizens. It could also be defined as the general advancement of a country or a nation in its socio-economic, political, and religious spheres. According to Abe the general advancement of a country could be best accomplished through development planning, which can be characterized as the nation's collection of policies outlined by the government by providing people with essential needs for their basic means of subsistence and giving them access to jobs and the likes.ⁱ

Religiosity:

Defining religiosity seems to be a difficult task basically of its equivalent to some words. This was what prompted Holdcroft to claim that there are two main factors that make the idea of religiosity difficult to define and a complicated one.ⁱⁱ The first reason is noted to be because of the uncertainty and imprecise nature of the English language. Colloquially, Roget's Thesaurusⁱⁱⁱ shows that the word "religiosity" is equivalent with words like "religiousness," "orthodoxy," "faith," "belief," "piousness," "devotion," and "holiness." Instead of using words that are synonymous with religiosity, these alternatives represent what researchers studying religiosity would refer to as its aspects.

The second reason cited is that there are now interests in the idea of religiosity across a number of academic fields; as a result, each approach religion from a distinct perspective, and few people consult one another^{iv}. For instance, a theologian may discuss religiosity from the perspective of religion^v, whereas orthodoxy and belief might be the emphasis of religious educators^{vi}. While sociologists might see the idea of religiosity to encompass church membership, church attendance, belief acceptance, doctrinal understanding, and practicing the religion, psychologists may opt to focus on the qualities of devotion, holiness, and piousness^{vii}. Giving an explicit definition from the perspective of religious education is challenging because of all the various terms used across academic disciplines.

However, in this paper, Holdcroft definition of religiosity will be adopted, and it is defined as a measure of knowledge, faith, fundamentalism, beliefs, piousness, and devotion of individuals as well as the extent to which they live and use religion for their own ends.^{viii} Religiosity was measured by using five terms indicator questions which are:

1. The dimensions of religious knowledge
2. The dimensions of religious experience
3. The dimension of faith
4. Dimension of the practice of religion
5. Dimensions of consequence.^{ix}

All of them are intended to continue demonstrating the numerous forms of religion that exist in our culture. Church attendance, denominational affiliations, social integration, a personal feeling of the divine, ritualistic behavior, and the likes are some other sociological definitions of religiosity.

The Extent of Nigerians Religiosity.

One does not need to be a Professional statistician to acknowledge that almost every Nigerian subscribes to and practices one of the three religions. (Islam, Christianity and Traditional Religion). Measuring religiosity may be a tough endeavor since religious belief is mostly a matter of personal opinion, making it challenging to quantify. Religiosity is difficult to measure because of changes in religious belief and practice. Now that we live in a postmodern society that is more individualistic and where people are more likely to practice religion in private and alone and less likely to interact with traditional religious institutions like the Christian church, does this change imply that society is less necessarily religious? No, that is not the case with Nigeria. In fact to actually determine the extent of Nigerians religiosity, the indicators of religiosity as mentioned by scholars of religion will be used in this paper to evaluate the Nigerian situations which are:

1. **Belonging:** Here efforts are being made to look at the extent to which Nigerians belong to different religious groups in the country. The extent to which different people genuinely identify with official religious institutions and belong to religious groups is a common way to gauge this element of religiosity. In Nigeria which is the focus of this study, the distribution is as follows

Distribution of Religions in Nigeria

Characteristics	Share of Population
Islam	53.3%
Roman Catholicism	10.6%
Other Christian	36.3%
Other	0.6% ^x

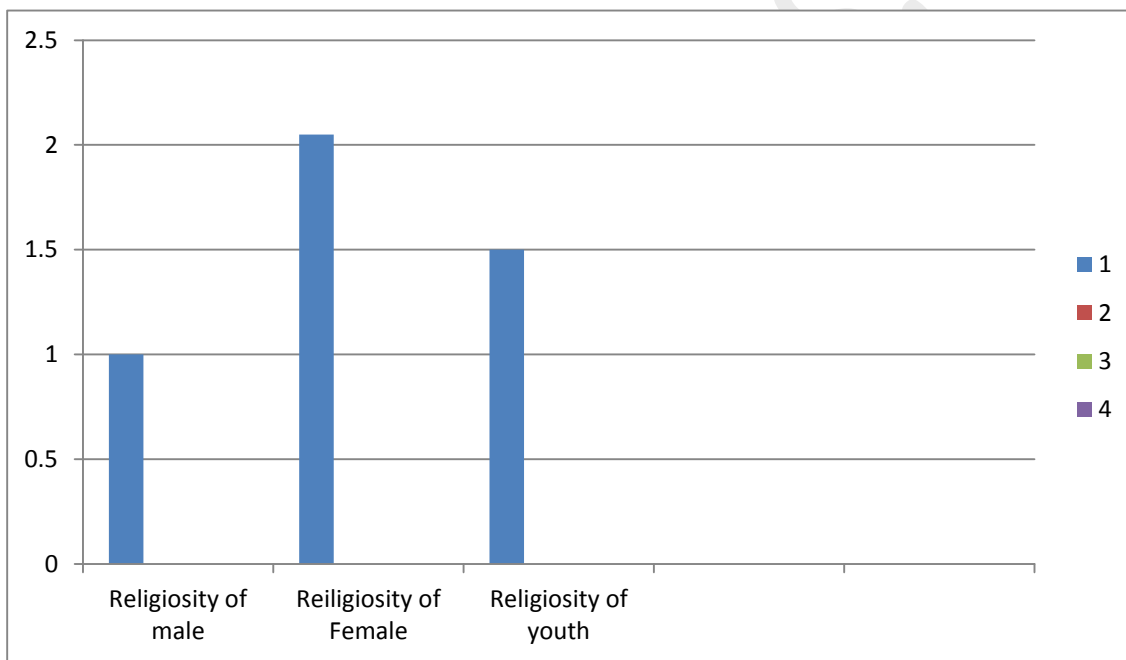
According to the aforementioned data, over half of Nigeria's population identifies as Muslim and roughly half as Christian. It could be said that Religion is central to the lives of Nigerians, whether they identify themselves as Christian or Muslim. Few topics are as important to the national character in Nigeria as religion, which is a vast country in terms of size, population, and influence on both a regional and worldwide scale. Due to its triple history of indigenous traditions, Islam, and Christianity, religious practice in Nigeria is as varied and diverse as the inhabitants, producing a complicated and intriguing scenario. Nigeria is home to more than 270 ethnic groups and 370 different languages. Although it has been said that around 50% of the population is Muslim, 40%–45% of the population is Christian, and 5–10% of the population follows indigenous religious traditions, none of these statistics can be verified with any degree of accuracy and are thus more conjecture than reality. This is especially true considering that it is typical for people to participate in several religious traditions to varying degrees.

2. **Behaving:** The people's participation in religious activities can be used to gauge this component of religiosity. The notion of religious participation is made up of a number of interconnected elements. It includes expressing one's religious affiliation (for example, by claiming membership in a particular religious organization), stating the significance of one's

religious and spiritual beliefs or values (for example, by reiterating the significance of incorporating spirituality into one's life), and engaging in religious and spiritual practices (e.g. attending religious services or taking part in devotional activities). As a result, one may have religious or spiritual beliefs and values prior to joining a religious denomination where that person believes such beliefs and values may be strengthened.

- Believing:** This part of religiosity is the most arbitrary and might include a person's belief in God, the afterlife, spirits, etc. The facts that Nigerians are religious, does that translate to absolute believe in God. What is observed about Nigerian context is that even though they believe and this could be seeing in the proliferation of religious houses, but some exhibit that because of miracles they needed and as soon as they got their miracles they back out. Most churches that has large congregation have it because of the hunger for miracles. In other words, in most cases people used religion as a means to an end, a quick way of getting solution to lingering problems. Religious centers have been turned to hospital, a place you go to get healed, leave and return to normal lives.

The Figure below show the graphical representation of Nigerians religiosity



Source: Designed by the researcher.

The aforementioned information suggests that there are gender disparities in religious participation. Females are more addicted to religion than males all over the world particularly in Nigeria. The study's findings suggest that because young people tend to be female, they will participate in religious activities more frequently. According to the McClendon research, American citizens who attend religious services are more likely to be women than males.^{xi} This could be because the church provides women with both emotional and material assistance. Also both the youths and the males are almost at par but these days' youths are now on the increase when it comes to religious

matters, few among them are more committed and some attend services to dance, catch fun and see their friends. In other words church to some is more or less a social gathering.

The State of Nigeria's Development:

The Human Development Index is the main tool used to assess a country's degree of development. A summary indicator of human progress is the Human Development Index (HDI). It gauges a nation's average performance in relation to three fundamental aspects of human development: living a long and healthy life, having access to information, and having a fair quality of living. Nigeria was ranked 152nd overall out of 188 nations according to this HDI. This is indeed a discouraging and disturbing situation. The details are given below:

Human Development Index: 0.539 low (2019) (161st)

GDP growth: 2.2% (2019); -3.0% (2020 est.); 1.5% (2021 est.);

GDP by sector: agriculture: 21.96%; industry: 23.65%; services: 54.39%; (2020 est.);

GDP per capita rank: 162nd (nominal, 2021); 172nd (PPP, 2021)

However, there are possibilities of improvements if only Nigerians guide against factors that always militate against her developments.

Below are some of the common problems of National Development in Nigeria;

1. Bad leadership.
2. The challenges of education and improper structure.
3. Insecurity challenge. Killings, kidnapping, robbery, assassinations, Ritual killings.
4. Health/ Nutrition problem
5. Poverty challenge
6. Corruption.

Nigeria as a developing country still battles with the challenge of development in all ramifications of the word. In fact, the state of underdevelopment witnessed in Nigeria calls for concern. . The achievement of a higher value level of growth in a way that her population would have a natural loyalty to her government is the pride of any administration. However, there are other prerequisites that must be met for a country to be in a stage of growth, including socio-political and economic stability.^{xii} However, it is sad to note that in the globalization of the world economy with the integration of the national economy, African counties including Nigeria could not measure up. Hence, Nigeria is so religious and yet so poor

What has Nigerian religiosity offered Nigeria in terms of national developments?

Firstly, some scholarly works on the relevance of religiosity to mankind will be considered first before focusing on what religiosity has offered Nigeria in terms of developments Actually being religious is a virtue that is very important as it carries some advantages as exemplified in the works of some writers .Religiosity is noted to affects not only specific demographic groups, but individuals as well. Beit Hallahmi^{xiii} and Argyle wrote extensively about how religion may affect an individual's happiness, quality of life, health, and mental well-being. These impacts also include the development of compassion, honesty, and altruism. In-depth study on the intersection of religion and morality was reviewed by Walker^{xiv} who came to the conclusion that the religious experience

plays a crucial role in moral behavior. According to a Roccas research, there is a strong association between religiousness and values, as well as education and health care delivery.^{xv}

In their research of teenagers, young adults, and older people, Bergan and McConatha found a marginally favorable relationship between religion and happiness in all three age groups: Overall, research studying the relationship between religion and life happiness show that those who report higher levels of religious participation and faith also experience less stressful life events and report higher levels of life satisfaction.^{xvi} According to a number of studies, including recent ones on the advantages of religiosity by Dezutter, Soenens, and Hutsebaut, Walker, and Fontaine, Duriez, Luyten, Corveleyn, and Hutsebaut, religious affiliation was found to be a significant predictor of general life satisfaction, a sense of belonging, and purpose in life.^{xvii}

All of the above statements about religion are correct; religiosity acts as a moral compass for behavioral guidelines, inspiring a life of ethics, honesty, and purposefulness as well as stirring up nationalist and patriotic fervor. Religion gives its members hope, assurance of bright future and sense of belonging. All of these become important if man will always examine and review their actions on earth, based on one's belief system. These are to a large extent the roles which religion has played in Nigeria. But the question that is begging for answers is that, did all these translate to National Development? The answer is in the affirmative. In Nigeria, places of worship could be seen everywhere, large attendance in Sunday worship, yet the country is far behind in terms of values like integrity, honesty, hard work that used to be the watch words of people in the time past. In Nigeria, religious exhibitionism and emotions predominate above actual religious experiences. Religion mostly serves business and promotional purposes, which explains the competition and demand for membership. What Nigerians still need to figure out is how to apply their spirituality to positively influencing others and facilitating behavioral changes in all areas of life.

To do this, a sharp critique of the status quo and a clear understanding of what has to be done are required. Everyone needs to gradually change their character in order for this metamorphosis to occur. Our civic and public actions must adhere to the fundamental principles of religion. Nigerians should be able to assess their own progress in terms of valuing productivity and avoiding regional or national work ethics. Are we making up justifications for absences and utilizing work time for personal projects or to be in "ori oke adura"? (Prayer Mountain). How secure are government assets in my custody, such as the vehicles? We must essentially ask ourselves, "To what degree am I putting my religious ideas into practice and obeying the major precepts of my religion?" Nigerians should continue to indulge less till transition as they become more religious or become more religious on a daily basis via their religious activities. Therefore, if religion has had an influence, the elder elite in government should be superior than the younger ones at every level. With elderly folks, public funds should be safe, but the reverse is the case in our country. Public funds are being stolen on daily basis and if one finds out those that are doing these, some of them are elders, deacons, Imams in government service, meaning they belong to different religious groups and very prominent in religious activities hence engaged in bad habits.

Regarding whether there is quantitative proof that religion has aided in the development of a nation and since there are so many churches now, the question is that; what has happened to Nigeria's growth—has it been stagnant or accelerating? What about Nigeria's living conditions? Are they getting better or becoming worse? How about corruption and other vices? What about the nation's security situation? We can truly demonstrate how religion has aided or had an influence on national

development when we can demonstrate that all of these factors are falling. Following this, we may make conclusions about how religion affects development. The HDI index indicates that Nigeria's growth is currently falling, and our educational systems are in disarray. One can imagine the number of Nigerians studying in abroad now that even refused to come home in spite of the on-going war in Ukraine. For the past eight months Academic staff of Nigerian Universities has been on strike because they want improvements in educational sectors in terms of facilities, laboratories and good living conditions for both students and staff. But the government seems insensitive to the plight of the average Nigerians.

The same thing goes to our health sector and socio –economic development that is declining on daily basis, fuel scarcity, everywhere, no job for young graduates, and the salary is not forthcoming regularly despite the little that people are earning, church too in a systematic way asking for tithe of all even when people are hungry. Prayer mountains everywhere, gigantic church buildings that offers no economic solution, the schools are built for the elites not for the common man that contribute the widow mite to the building of those structure, the goods being produced by the poor are too far for them to access and hence they justify their poverty and back it up with the scripture , “it is harder for a rich man to make it to heaven”, justifying failure with scripture instead for people to look inwardly and see this as oppression, No wonder Karl Marx says, Religion dull the senses of the followers to the pains of oppression and a device by the privilege to suppress the less privilege.

The work ethics has reduced drastically; people no longer want to work but expecting mana from heaven forgetting the fact that God created all the resources around us to make use of to live a better life. The Bible even support it that, there is dignity in labour and the people are destroyed because of lack of knowledge. There are ongoing wastage of resources and talents all in the name of religiosity. Now the question is what can be done to salvage this nation from collapsing going by the trends of things in our society coupled with the insecurity everywhere.

The way forward

Based on what has been mentioned thus far, religion has always been seen as a necessary tool to deal with the persistent problems of human life, such as happiness, suffering, and the future of mankind. Most Nigerians have the attitude that everything is under the power of the spirit, which accounts for their religion. One will sometimes misplace religion when dealing with natural issues through spiritual methods. According to the Bible, someone who doesn't work shouldn't eat. One cannot simply remain at home and pray without doing something. God has given us everything in nature to use for our personal benefits and the advancements of society.

Nigerians should learn to face their problems first, and then pray thereafter for success. Nigerians should go back to our traditional values of hard work, integrity, honesty, uprightness and discipline. Nigerians were not lazy but there is this over reliance on God to solve the problems that they could use the knowledge acquired in school to solve. They are not being idle; rather, they are wasting their energy in the wrong places. The impression of Nigeria as being too religious and dependent on God merely has to be changed. A new government is required for the nation, and the populace must have access to basic necessities.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that Nigerians are very religious and it is therefore necessary to translate their faith into actions given the facts that the country is still lagging behind in terms of developments. Religion so to say preaches the virtues of peace, love, understanding and goodness. If the individual is highly religious, his moral upbringing will impact positivity on national development. Nigerians from all over the nation share similar perspectives on good governance and development, emphasizing infrastructure improvement, educational advancement, and health care. These perspectives are influenced by Biblical and Qur'anic ideals of justice, equality, and "the fear of God," which appears to be lacking in the nation, which explains why many things don't work as they should. What should be paramount to Nigerians is the fear of God and once this is given priority, no one would ever have it in mind to engage in bad behaviors. The fear of God and the understanding of the concept of corporate being and society property which says, "since I am because we are, and it is because we are that I am"^{xviii} and thirst for development will surely help Nigeria to grow to be a developed country.

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