



International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research (IJSBAR)

ISSN 2307-4531
(Print & Online)

<http://gssrr.org/index.php?journal=JournalOfBasicAndApplied>



Religion: Past and Present in Nigeria

Gabriel Terwase Ngbea^{a*}, Hilary Chukwuka Achunike^b

^a*Department of Religious Studies, School of Arts and Social Sciences, College of Education, Akwanga, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.*

^b*Department of Religion and Cultural studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria.*

^a*Email: gabbypush@yahoo.com*

^b*Email: frachunike@yahoo.com*

Abstract

Nigeria is a heterogenic Society with so many religions and tribes. Religion is an important phenomenon in contemporary Nigeria as it affects every segment of the Nigerian Society. There are basically three major religions in Nigeria i.e. Christianity, Islam and African traditional Religion. This study is an attempt to trace the history of the three major religions in Nigeria, to access how the major religions have been co-existing and influencing the Nigerian Society. The research methodology used in putting this Paper together is Phenomenological and historical analytical method. This Paper X-rayed the positive as well as the negative aspects Religions interaction in the history of Nigeria Through different religious groups. If offers the way forward and made recommendations that if religion is given the right attention it deserves, it would develop Nigeria as a Nation.

Keywords: Religion; Nigeria; Christianity; Islam and African traditional Religion

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: gabbypush@yahoo.com.

1 .Introduction

Nigeria is a heterogenic society with so many religions and tribes; there exist several religions in Nigeria, helping to accentuate regional and ethnic distributions.

All religions represented in Nigeria were practiced in every major city in 1990. Nigerians are almost by nature, accommodating and by habit, ecumenical. Before the advent of the missionary religions i.e. Christianity and Islam, Nigerians were practitioners of African Traditional Religion. Islam and Christianity have been accommodated by traditional religions as can be seen by the presence of adherents of these religions in very many households today. Though the toleration that indigenous religion displayed in accommodating both religions accounted for the spread of these faiths, Islam and Christianity did not do so much to reciprocate these gestures. Their propagators fired by zeal, rather sought to destroy or at most, cut these traditional beliefs and political system down to size [1].

In Nigeria, Islam dominated the North and had a number of supporters in the South Western Yoruba part of the country. Nigeria has the largest Muslim population in Sub-Saharan Africa. Protestantism and local syncretic Christianity are also evident in Yoruba areas, while Catholicism dominates and Igbo ad closely related areas [2]. This study will attempt to trace the history of African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam in Nigeria and look at positive and negative impacts of religion in Nigeria and make recommendation. The paper will use Phenomenological and historical analytical method to critically examine how the major religions are co-existing together and faring in Nigeria up to date.

2. The Meaning of Religion

The author in [3], maintains that “The study of Religion attracts people with various interests as theologians, anthropologists, Psychologists, Economists, Historians etc, each of them sees it from different perspective” (P. 13). The task of defining religion is s very difficult one, as a result, theories upon theories have been propounded by Schools of different fields of Specialization, and this gave rise to variations of definition.

Definitions of Religion tend to suffer from one or two problems. They are either too narrow and exclude many belief systems which most agree are religions or they are too vague and ambiguous, suggesting that just about any and everything is religion [4]. There are numerous definitions of religion but only few will be considered in this paper. Religion is a difficult term to define, the word ‘Religion’ is a generic term; it represents a group or class of many different religions.

Etymologically, religion is derived from the Latin ‘*religio*’, the ultimate origins of which are obscure. One possibility is derivation from a reduplicated ‘*Leligare*’, an interpretation traced to Cicero connecting Lego ‘read’ [5]. Religion is an organized collection of beliefs, cultural systems, and world views that relate humanity to the super natural and to spirituality. The authors in [6,7], defined religion as “the belief in spiritual beings” while [8], defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things. Author [9] defines religion “as a regulated pattern of life of a people in which experience, beliefs and knowledge are reflected in mans conception himself in relation to others, his social world, the Physical as well as the metaphysical World”

Author [10] attempts a definition of religion that takes care of certain factors into account, according to him;

Religion originates in an attempt to present and order beliefs, feelings, imaginings, and actions that arise in response to direct experience of the sacred and the Spiritual. As this attempt expands in its formulation and elaboration, it becomes a process that creates meaning for itself on a sustaining basis, in terms of both its originating experiences and its own continuing responses.

For the sake of this papers, we shall define Religion as follows; ‘Religion is the varied symbolic expression of and appropriate response to that which people deliberately affirm as being of unrestricted value for them’ [11].

3. African Traditional Religion in Nigeria

Before the advent of Christianity and Islam as missionary religions to African and Nigeria, many Scholars have argued that, the concept of God as a Supreme Being and creator was already universal in traditional Africa [12]. According to authors [13], Nigerians in particular Knew about God long before the Advent of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. In fact there was in existence an indigenous religion in Nigeria. The facts remain undisputable that these foreign religions did not come to meet a complete religious vacuum in Nigeria. African traditional religion arose as a result of mysteries and in comprehension that pervaded certain events and aspect of the African human life.

History has it that, before the coming of foreign religions in Nigeria, the dominant religion was the traditional religion popularly known as African Traditional Religion refers to the religious beliefs and practices of the Africans [14]. This religion is traditional and indigenous to Africa. It Originated from Africa and is primarily practiced mostly by Africans. Nigerians have been practicing this religion long before the impartation of Christianity and Islam.

The indigenous religious beliefs and practices of African people include various traditional religions. While generalizations of these religions are difficult, due to the diversity of African cultures, they do have some characteristics in common. Generally, they are oral rather than scriptural, including belief in a Supreme Being, belief in spirits and other divinities, veneration of ancestors, use of magic and traditional medicine. The role of humanity is generally seen as one of harmonizing nature with the supernatural. Traditional African religions have been passed down from one generation to another orally and can be found through arts, rituals and festivals, beliefs and customs, names of people and places, songs and dances, proverbs and myths. While adherence to traditional religion in Africa is hard to estimate, due to syncretism with Christianity and Islam, practitioners are estimated to number 100 million or 10% of the population [15].

When we speak of African Traditional Religion, we mean the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans. It is the religion which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Africans. It is the religion which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Africans, and which is practised today in various forms and various shades and intensities by a very large number of Africans, including individuals who claim to be Muslims or Christians [16].

According to [17], the religion came about as a result of the experiences and thinking of our fore-fathers. They actually responded to mysteries surrounding them in their various environments, the huge rivers, tress, rocks, mountains and all kinds of created things. They then felt a sense of awe and urge to recognise a supreme being and creator of man and all created things. It led them to the formulation of religious ideas and beliefs; consequently they began to observe religious ceremonies and festivals. The religion is a product of the African experience.

Nigerians were practising traditional religion before the coming of the foreign missionary religions. Although, there is no written document on this religion, it is a religion that is based mainly on oral transmission, it is written in people's minds, hearts, oral history, rituals, shrines and religious functions. It has no founders or reformers; it has no missionaries, or even the desire to propagate the religion. To [18] Africans including Nigerians are "A people who in all things are religions". Author [19] Observed that, it is African traditional religion that has helped in shaping the social, political and economic activities of Nigerians.

Nigeria encompasses a wide variety of traditional beliefs. Although religious customs are sometimes shared by many local societies, they are usually unique to specific populations or geographic regions. Indigenous religion in Nigeria is as old as Nigerians. No date has been mentioned concerning the origin of indigenous religion because it has been handed down from one generation to the next and is still upheld and practised by Nigerians up till date [20]. Traditional religion of Nigeria is the richest heritage which the fore bearers of Nigeria have handed down to their Children.

4. Christianity in Nigeria

Christianity is one of the two main religions in Nigeria, Christians make up 48.2% of the population. Nigeria has one of the largest Christian populations in Africa with over 70 million persons in Nigeria belonging to the church. The first Christian contact in Nigeria occurred in the fifteenth century when the Portuguese introduced Roman Catholicism. However, it was virtually extinguished over the following years until Roman Catholic Missionaries returned in the 1800s. The first protestant missionaries to Nigeria were Wesleyan Methodists. They began work in the Southern part of Nigeria among the Yoruba in 1842. Other protestant groups followed: Church missionary society (Evangelical Anglican), United Free Church of Scotland and the Southern Baptists [21].

Several attempts were made by a number of religious orders and missionary societies to establish the Christian faith in Nigeria since the fifteenth century, with varying degrees of success. About 15th century AD, Henry the Navigator of Portugal, desired to sail further in the Atlantic Ocean. He was called the Navigator because he established a navigational school for the purpose of exploration, but he himself never travelled beyond the Portuguese Colony of Centa. Pereira, a renowned historian gives three reasons for Prince Henry's exploration of Africa, which can be summarized by this acronym the 3Gs (that is, for God, for Gold and for Glory). Henry saw his mission as carrying out a divine commission to root out Muslims (enemies of God) from Africa.

Henry set out his ships accompanied by some Roman Catholic Missionaries to Nigeria. They visited Benin and Warri. Around the riverian areas in Nigeria, slave trade was the business of the day. Most of the Kings the Missionaries preached to were interested more in the Portuguese guns than were in Christianity. For this reason, the planting of Christianity by the Roman Catholic Missionaries failed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries A.D. in Nigeria. In 1455, five years before Henry's death, Pope Nicholas (v) granted the Portuguese Crown the right to "padroado or patonato" i.e. the King was to be in charge of the church in all the lands the Portuguese had discovered. He also had the powers to recruit and send missionaries; he could open mission fields wherever and whenever he wished [22].

4.1 The Benin Mission

The Portuguese had learnt about Benin between 1469 and 1475 and it is possible that Ruy de Sequeira visited Benin in 1472. However, the first definite contact between the King of Benin, Oba Uzolua and the Portuguese representative Joao Afonso de Aveiro happened in 1486. Portuguese merchants were familiar with the Benin River, its port at Ughoton, which they named "Slave river" due to the trade in slaves which began around 1480. These slaves were exchanged for gold at Costa de Mina.

With the reports collected, the Portuguese thought the King of Benin might be the Prester John they had sought to link up with. The King of Portugal had "a missionary zeal" which looked upon rulers as the most effective agents of evangelization. The missionaries arrived in Benin, August 1515 and found the Oba engaged in a war with a people outside his kingdom, probably the kingdom of Idah. He was hospitable to the priests but would not listen to their sermon. In August 1516, he sent one of his own sons with those of his chiefs to be baptized and taught to read by the missionaries. The Oba also gave an order that a church be built in Benin City. However, there is no evidence to show that a church was ever erected in Benin City at this period.

Uzolua died in one of his encounters with his enemies probably the son of the late Oba, was friendly at first. He probably late 1516 or early 1517, the next Oba, probably was one of the royals that were baptized by the Portuguese in 1515. He too became unfriendly, and all attempts by the missionaries to enter the Palace proved abortive. Benin maintained contact with Portugal in trade, few other things apart from slave had entered the Benin market. Such new items included ivory, pepper and beads. But arms the king refused to send until the Oba should have become a Christian. Christianity lingered in the Oba's court under the tutelage of the Oba himself [23].

4.2 Mission work in the Itsekiri Kingdom

The capital of the Itsekiri was Warri. Warri had trade contacts with the Portuguese from Sao Tome before missionaries were sent there. Perhaps frustrated by the collapse of the missionary venture in Benin, Portuguese turned to Warri, a rival of the kingdom of Benin. The first group of missionaries that arrived in Warri, between 1571, and 1574 were Augustinian Monks led by Fr Francisco "a matre Dei". Their first convert was the son of the Olu of Warri who was subsequently baptized and christened Sebastian. Sebastian himself becomes Olu in 1597. He appeared to be a strong Christian seen in his concern to have missionaries in Warri. The poverty of

Warri and the dreaded Malaria had prevented missionaries from staying in Warri for long. Thus survival in Warri was difficult.

Due to the economic hardship missionaries experienced in Warri, they were forced to trade slaves in ports. Some of the missionaries could not survive and died from malaria infection. The solution to the death in missionaries was the creation of a native agency which was initiated by Olu Sebastian, to raise Africans who would fill in this vacuum [24].

4.3 The establishment of Sierra Leone

The Evangelicals in Britain which were founded during the Protestant Revival among other things fought against social evils such as child labour and slavery. Most slaves in England at that time were Africans. Both John Wesley and the Quakers who were leaders of the leading Evangelical Movements had strongly condemned the enslavement of Africans. One of the evangelicals Zachary Macaulay travelled in a slave ship so he would observe the treatment given to the slaves. On his return, Macaulay painted a horrifying picture of the condition of slaves in the “middle passage”. But it was William Wilberforce (1759-1833), also a member of the sect, who was the champion of the anti-slave trade movement. Others had prepared the ground. They included Granville Sharp, a lawyer who won a case in defence of John Somerset’s right to be free from slavery in the British Isle in 1772, and Thomas Clarkson, who submitted a prize winning essay against slavery in 1786.

The significant contributions evangelicals made in the development of Africa were in the area of humanitarian actions. The freedom gained by slave in Britain as a result of Lord Mansfield’s judgment of 1772 rendered black slaves out of jobs. Survival became a problem. Freed slaves lived in slums. This is why they were called “black poor” Evangelicals began to wonder what to do with them, since they constituted a public nuisance. The Evangelicals formed a committee in 1786 to address this problem. It was called committee for Relieving the Black Poor prominent members of the committee included Granville Sharp and William Wilberforce. This committee decided that the best way to bring relief to the black poor was to repatriate them to Africa. Henry Smeathman, a botanist, suggested Sierra-Leone as a suitable area. In 1787, the committee made necessary arrangements and with 377 “black poor” sailed for Sierra Leone in West Africa. The British Government provided some support in the transportation of the Black Poor to Africa [25].

The new community faced initial problems. The climate was not suitable for them and they faced constant attacks from hostile African neighbours, who were instigated by European slave traders. The acquired land (about 52 square kilometres) was in dispute; the natives who were strongly attached to ancestral land could not sale it. Anyway, the land was occupied and the settlement was name Granville Town in honour of Granville Sharp. Within three months of arriving, a third of the entire party died. And in 1789 settlers dispersed when the local inhabitants again attacked the settlement led by their king, Jimmy. To provide protection to the settlement, the Evangelical established the St. George’s Bay, which was transformed to the Sierra-Leone Company in 1791. Through the Sierra Leone Company, a new settlement was found close to the former one. The company encourage trade relations between the colony and Britain. The colony supplied agricultural raw materials to British industries in exchange for British finished goods.

Later, the company was not making any profit. To prevent a complete collapse of the scheme, the British government took over the territory in 1807, and it became a colony of Britain. Before then, in 1782, 1,200 Nova (in Canada) ex-slaves of African descent had been brought to Sierra-Leone. In 1800 another batch made up of 550 Maroons from Jamaica were also brought to Freetown. These latter groups were enthusiastic about returning to Africa. The success of the Sierra-Leonean scheme was partly due to their determination to carve out a future in Africa, their fatherland.

The annexation of the freed slave colony of Freetown in 1807 led to British proclamation of a ban on slave trade by British citizens. This was followed by a British military campaign against trade on the Atlantic Ocean in 1808. Many ships with slaves were captured and the slaves in them brought and set free in Freetown. These were called “recaptives” or “liberated Africans”. For over 50 years of this campaign 40,000 “recaptives” were settled in Freetown. These recaptives became a mission field for many missionary bodies that flocked into Freetown.

Being strangers and without any contact with their homes, most of these “Freed slaves” became Christians and became agents for the dissemination of the Gospel in West Africa. The Christianization of Nigeria and indeed other West African countries would have been impossible without the ex-slaves. They formed bulk of the missionary agencies in Nigeria and elsewhere. One of the most notable of the “recaptives” was Samuel Ajiya Crowther, who became a missionary, translator, anthropologist and church leader in Nigeria. He spearheaded the Christianization of the Niger, the Niger-Delta and Northern Nigeria between 1857 and 1890 [26].

4.4 The Formation of the Society of the African Mission for Spreading of the Roman Catholic Faith

The formation of the Society of the African Mission for the spreading of the Roman Catholic faith helped in the planting of Christianity in Nigeria. The Society attempted to plant Christianity in Sierra-Leone around 1860, but, it failed. However, it moved from Sierra-Leone to Dahomey to plant the Roman Catholic Faith. The planting of the Catholic Faith at Dahomey, now the Republic of Benin, began with Father Borghero who was assisted by two other Missionaries. In 1860, the Italian Roman Catholic Father, Borghero who was stationed at Whydah in Dahomey, paid a visit to Abeokuta and Lagos. In 1862, he re-visited Lagos. However, on reaching Lagos, he met some of Nigerians Catholic freed slaves from Brazil who had settled there. In addition to this, Father Borghero was also surprised at meeting some Brazilians who had baptized in the Roman Catholic Church, but, were living in Lagos. Father Borghero was encouraged when he saw some of his natives and Nigerians who were adherents of the Roman Catholic faith in Lagos. He established a Mission station at Lagos. But, it has no permanent Priest. He made Lagos one of the out-stations of Ouidah in Dahomey. By 1862, Father Borghero sent a Catechist named Padre Antonio who was a freed slave from Sao Tome Island to the Lagos Mission.

While Catechist Padre was stationed in Lagos, he taught Nigerians and other nationals who lived in Lagos the Roman Catholic faith. He baptized Children, prayed with the dying and buried the dead. In 1868, Father Pierre Bouche was sent to Lagos by the Catholic Mission to resume duty as the residential Priest in Nigeria. The Roman Catholic Mission built a Chapel in Lagos in 1869 for the adherents of the Catholic Faith. The Church

also established a Primary School in Lagos the same year. From Lagos, the Roman Catholic Faith spread across Nigeria. The faith spread to Onitsha through another Father named Lutz who worked around Onitsha town. This marked the growth and expansion of the Roman Catholic faith towards the Niger Delta area. The Catholic adherents further sent Fathers Chausés and Holley from Onitsha, towards Ilorin, and Ondo.

In 1885, the Catholic Mission sent two Irish Priests who were members of the Society of the African Mission to Lagos. They were Fathers Healey who stationed at Abeokuta and Father Connaughton who was made the Lagos schools Manager in Nigeria. In 1886, Father Chausés opened a Mission Station at Oyo. In 1891, he was collated Bishop of Nigeria. He died around 1894. Father Chausés was succeeded by Bishop Paul Pellet who opened a Mission Station at Ibadan in 1895. Around the period, Father John. M. Coquard established the Sacred Heart Hospital at Ibadan [27].

4.5 The Spread of the Roman Catholic Faith to Lokoja, Onitsha and Asaba

In 1884, the Roman Catholic Mission opened a Mission station at Lokoja in Kogi State, Nigeria. Three Fathers were sent by the Catholic Mission to Lokoja to continue spreading the Catholic Faith in the area. However, one of the fathers died at Lokoja in 1885. Father Andrew Dornan was sent to replace the deceased Father. After some years, the Roman Catholic Mission Headquarters was removed from Lokoja and it was located to Asaba by Father Carlo Zappa who was placed to head the Lokoja Mission area. Father Bishop Shanahan built a Mission house at Onitsha. He spread the Catholic Faith to Oghuli, where he built a Primary School, conducted baptism classes and learnt Ibo language. His speaking the language made many Ibo people to be converted into the Catholic faith. Bishop Shanahan founded the congregation of the sisters of our Lady of the Holy Rosary in Ireland in 1920. The sisters were trained to offer service to the Catholic Missions of the Holy Ghost Fathers in the Eastern parts of Nigeria. In addition to these, Father Shanahan also converted many other Nigerians into the Catholic Faith in Ibo land. By 1924, the Catholic Church in Nigeria was staffed by natives of Ibo who were priests. In 1933, Father Shanahan consecrated the new Cathedral that was built by the Church in Nigeria.

The formation of the African Mission for the spread of the Catholic faith helped in the expansion of the faith in Nigeria. The Roman Catholic Mission began in Lagos around 1860 with Father Borghero. The Church spread from Lagos to Onitsha, Ilorin, Ondo, Oyo, Lokoja, Oghuli and other parts of Ibo land in Nigeria. The mission had established Schools in all its mission stations in the country where children were educated and converted into the Catholic faith [28].

5. Islam in Nigeria

About 85,000 Nigerians are Muslims, approximately 50% population of Nigeria, compared to Christianity and traditional religions which represents approximately the other 50% of the population. Muslims in Nigeria are predominantly *sunni* in the *Maliki* school, which is also the governing Sharia law. However there is a significant sheer minority, primarily in Sokoto. A smaller minority follow the *Ahmadiyya* Islam, a reformatory sect originating in the 19th century India. In particular, few forums on religious diversity identify 12% of sheer Muslims while 3% as *Ahmadi* Muslim. Islam came to Northern Nigeria as early as the 19th century and was

well established in the Kenem-Borno Empire during the reign of Humme Jilmi. It had spread to the major cities of the Northern part of the country by the 16th century, later moving into the country side and toward the Middle Belt uplands [29].

The spread of Islam in Nigeria dates back to the 11 century when it first appeared in Borno in the northeast of the country. Later Islam emerged in Hausa land in the northwest and its influence was evident in Kano and Katsina. Islam was for quite some time the religion of the court and commerce, and was spread peacefully by Muslims clerics and traders. Increasingly, trans-Saharan trade came to be conducted by Muslims. In the second half of the 18th century, a Muslim revival took place in Western Africa, in which Fulani cattle driving people, who had settled and adopted Islam, played a central role. In Northern Nigeria, the Fulani scholar Usman dan Fodio launched a *jihad* in 1804 that lasted for six years, aiming to revive and purify Islam. However, this religious revolution also had a political element concerning state formation and state conflict. It united the Hausa states under the Sharia law. In 1812, the Hausa dynasties became part of the Islamic state or caliphate of Sokoto [30].

A new impetus to the spread of Islam in Nigeria was provided by Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the Northern Region after Nigerian Independence in 1960, with his Islamization programme that led to the conversion of over 100,000 people in the provinces of Zaria and Niger. History has shown that Islamization was easier under military dictatorship and Islam spread quickly under Babangida (1985-1993). Most of the Muslims in Nigeria reside in the Northern part of the country consisting of the so-called 19 states which are predominantly Islamic (80% or more of the total population) in almost all the 19 states except for Plateau, Taraba, Kaduna, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) where there is slightly even balance of Christians, Muslims and Traditional religious practitioners population spread.

In the south, there exist a sizeable number of Islamic practitioners but they are limited to mostly the Yoruba speaking part of the South West Nigeria typically in Kwara, Ondo, Osun, Ogun, and Oyo States. Although there are Muslims in Ekiti State but compared to the other Yoruba speaking states, Ekiti has relatively fewer Muslims than the other Yoruba speaking states. Islam came to Nigeria long before Christianity could get a foothold and this was largely by conquest [31].

In Nigeria the head of the Islamic religion is the Sultan of the Sokoto Caliphate who along with a number of Emirs, preside over the affairs of the religion in the North. In the South there is no recognized supreme religious authority although majority of Muslims bare allegiance to the Sultan of Sokoto, they however also operate independently without necessary being subject to him. A number of Islamic movements that propagate the Islamic religion in Nigeria especially in the Southern part exist examples include: Nasfat, Hizbulahi Movement, Ansar-Udeen Society among others. In the North some sect also exist with the tendency that they become extremists movements, one of such was the infamous Boko Haram (Nigeria Al-Qaeda) whose members numbering over 700 were killed by security forces in June 2009 following a violent attempt to impose Islamic rule (Sharia) on the Nigerian State. In the north also the Islamic sets which are heterogeneous are springing up like the Izala Movement, the shia movement and many others are limited in expansion. This new sects are

opposed to the tradition of Nigerian Islamic teachings of the *sufi* brotherhood and are gradually alienating themselves from the main Islamic body [32].

6. Religion in the Present Nigeria

As a Multi-ethnic and multi-religions Country, Nigeria's broad religious geography reflects the historical exposure of its northern communities to Islam through the Trans-Saharan trade and the success of Christians Missionary enterprise in many of its southern parts. However, while historical alliances and shared ethnicities are closely associated with the adaptation of these two world religions, religions and ethno-regional identity are cross-cutting, often reinforcing each others. Beyond the engagement with local traditions, Christianity and Islam as major religions in Nigeria have expressed a high degree of political competitiveness with each other at least since the 1970s up to the Present day. [33].

Author [34] asserts that Nigerians take their religion seriously. This is because African indigenous religions had been part of them from birth. This is self evident in the way Nigerian Muslims, Christians and devotees of African traditional Religions go about their religiosity in the Present Nigeria. Religions activities are on the rise on daily basis in Nigeria. Religion at the present day Nigeria is both a major source of joy since it is playing a transformative and integrative function in Nigeria today. At the same time, Religions in Nigeria today have also generated alot of tensions, fears and up heavals among Nigerians.

Apart from Competitiveness in terms of expansion among the two major religions in Nigeria, there is another important issues of syncretic behaviours of Nigerian Muslims and Christians. According to authors [35] Islam and Christianity seem to have incorporated some traditional religious practices into their belief system many Muslims and Christians are openly seen performing certain rites of traditional religion. There have been several attempts by the independent African Churches to indigenize Christianity in Nigeria. The Cherubim and Seraphim in Nigeria for instance initiated this move by importing into the church Several Cultural elements such as Polygamy, healing, drumming, dancing, seeing visions and prophetic utterances among others. Both Muslims and Christians in Nigeria now seem to mix African practices with those of Islam and Christianity [36] Muslims adopted traditional practice of rituals, magic and medicine. Both Muslims and Christians in Nigeria now freely accommodate traditional practices with their new found religious practices.

Another dangerous dimension to Religion in Nigeria is the new gospel of prosperity that is spreading like a wild fire among the Pentecostals and other Christian denominations in Nigeria. Prosperity Gospel and African Traditional World view is one of the major influences of syncretism among Christians in Nigeria. Prosperity gospel has come to stay in Nigeria; it has become so popular that it has replaced the orthodox message of the Cross in many Pulpits. It is interesting to note that while the Nigeria economy is dwindling, the Christian religious sectors is apparently benefiting. The promises of material prosperity, confort and easy life have made Nigerians now to flood Churches run by prosperity preachers. Today in Nigeria running this kind of Church is a big business. It is believed that this brand new gospel is multi-million naira industry. The Nigerian prosperity preachers are stupendously rich and live in opulence. Author [37] expresses this idea thus: "I have not found any

reason why anybody in the Church I pastor should be richer than me because it was Jesus who rode on the colt. The disciples were following Him on foot”.

The Prosperity Churches in Nigeria have assumed a corporate identity. They now have their different logos, satellite networks, educational institutions, banks, hotels, petrol stations and directors with their founder leaders as executive directors as dividends of prosperity preaching. Nigerian prosperity Preachers are ranked among the richest pastors in the entire World. The Nigeria prosperity preachers are on a rat race to accumulate wealth, to buy a private jet is now the ambition of virtually every prosperity preacher in Nigeria and this is a Country where the vast majority of the people are ravaged by poverty. Religious festivals and Pilgrimages are relevant features of religions in the contemporary Nigeria. There are so many religions festivals observed in Nigeria as Public holidays which has a huge impact on the Nigerian Economy Added to this is the fact that pilgrimage to the holy Lands of Israel and Mecca by only Christians and Muslims with the exception of African traditional religion was until the 1900 an individual's self Sponsored but now enjoy government Sponsorship with tax pays money with each group having their separate Pilgrim welfare Board. Without any for the adherence of Africans traditional religions. There is so much religiosity in Nigeria in this 21st century. From all indications, it is quite true that Nigeria is a very fertile soil for every religion in the World. Religious Piety is at the increase in Nigeria side by side with all kind of vices.

7. Positive impact of Religion in Nigeria

Religion is known to play a deeper role in the development of the society. Most of the societal changes are controlled by religion. The presence of religion in the society has constituted to the gradual evolution of moral codes. Religious values if properly applied have guided the relationship between human beings and with God. Religion also carries men and women through the vicissitudes and temptations of life as well as introduces in human the experience of judgement and forgiveness [38]. Religion is primarily concerned with the comfort of humans in the world and in the life hereafter. This has made religion relevant to anything that has to do with formulation of new consciousness. To achieve national development in Nigeria, religions practices must be thoroughly imbibed as to have a new orientation and consciousness among Nigerians.

Religion is probably the most popular phenomenon in contemporary Nigeria. Religion has achieved this pre-eminence due to its contributions in the Nigerian society. As a notable agent of change, religions in Nigeria have undeniably exerted a great deal of influence positively and negatively on the Nigerian people. We shall now look at the positive impacts of religion in Nigeria:

Religious affiliation has been a binding force in Nigeria. It is a known fact that religion whether it is Christianity, Islam or ATR has been able to successfully unite. The different ethnic groups in Nigeria together and make them to coexist peacefully along religious lines in Nigeria. It has produced great leaders in our Country.

7.1 Contribution Religion in Education

It has been established that politics and education relate to each other in a circular fashion and hence religious groups are active participants [39]. Prior to the advent of Christianity and Islam, there was African Traditional Religion (ATR) in the Nigerian State. ATR had close collaborative relationship with virtually every aspect of communal living; economic, political and social. According to Author [40], both the material base and the super-structure of ATR contributed to the development of a nation. It is in this light that it is recognized that prior to the contribution of Islam and Christianity, practitioners of ATR ensured the proper transmission of their religious tenets and traditions through the medium of informal education of their members from one generation to the other.

Islam as a religion has strong influence on its adherents and therefore controls their way of life. It assumes the role of impacting proper Islamic education and culture to its adherents. Islamic education is a must in an *umma* (Islamic community). In the *umma*, both rudimentary and advanced Islamic education is given. Millions of both levels of quranic schools are spread all over the areas where Islam has its influence in Nigeria. With modernisation, some of these schools have been combining western education with Islamic ones. [41]

Christianity initiated formal, civilized western education in Nigeria through the establishment of educational institutions at all levels across the country before and after independence. Unlike ATR and Islam, when the Christian schools were established, they were for the converts only. However, expediency forced the situation and they became opened to everyone within their reach regardless of their faith. To meet the needs of Catechists, interpreters, teachers, nurses and clerks, Teacher Training Colleges and secondary schools were established from as far back as 1853. [42]

7.2 Health and Social Welfare

The African Traditional Religion (ATR) prior to the advent of the other two religions in Nigeria permeated the life of its adherents. Hence, it could be said that it took totally the control of their health and other social welfare services. The practitioners of ATR practiced magic and medicine in order to repair the damage to mind and body. Chief priests as custodians of gods and goddesses were consulted in serious cases of misdemeanour and they decreed the actions to be taken to propitiate the gods and goddesses. Thus, under the control of ATR, the general well-being of the community was guaranteed. [43]

Islam took complete charge of the health and social welfare condition of its members in the *umma*. The Quran is a kind of armour against all evil influences and sicknesses. However, in Nigeria, it was not unusual for unscrupulous *Alfas* and *Lemomus* to claim that certain passages of the Quran could be written on scraps paper and wrapped up in leather and used as protective amulets. On social welfare services, Islam advocates how the community could take care of its less fortunate members through the system of *zakat* (almsgiving) and method of equitable sharing of inheritance. With modernisation and other influences, Muslims have established their own health institutions and social welfare centres for motherless babies and old people. [44]

Christianity introduced orthodox methods of health care services in Nigeria. Early in the life of the various Christian missions, health care services were given in cottage hospitals, maternity homes and dispensaries in

very remote areas. They were also involved in leprosy relief work and they built leprosaria. Hospitals and welfare centres built by the Christian missions are scattered all over the country rendering efficient services to Nigerians at affordable rates to complement government efforts towards health care delivery.

7.3 Morality and Ethics

One of the basic elements in religion is morality, which is primarily concerned with conduct and duty. It presupposes rule of behaviour as well as our relationship with, and consideration for one another. Morality arouse out of man's consciousness of belonging to God. This means that morality is the offspring of religion which is a source of national development. Author [45] examines the role of the church in the moral transformation of contemporary Nigerian society. His study was conducted against the background of the problems of instability and corruption that have faced Nigeria since the Second Republic (1979-1983) and the challenges these have posed for the churches in fashioning appropriate responses to changing people's values and beliefs.

The study asserts some critical missionary roles of the church in relation to the promotion of justice, fair play and moral transformation of contemporary Nigerian society. Religious beliefs impel us to live and manifest transparent life for stability and development. Religion is used as an instrument of transformation in Nigeria; it is the key to national development.

7.4 Ecology and the Environment

A human being is essentially a natural, biological creature who has a unique relation to nature [46]. The attitudes of human beings to nature have religious roots, which can be a basis for ethical sensitivity. For example, author [47] examines the inter-relationship between religion and the environment in Nigeria from the perspective of the African Independent Churches (Aladura). Those churches have great respect for nature and its implications for the well-being of their members. Members of those churches make pilgrimages to natural sites, using mountains, hills and forests as prayer homes. The flat tops of such mountains are levelled and surfaced as sanctuaries, in a way similar to traditional shrines and groves. The preferred spiritual environment of the Aladura movement has been influenced by their appreciation of nature. Those churches make the Christian faith more relevant to their environment [48].

The place of ecology in traditional religion derives from its concept of life. Africans have a cyclical view of life, embodying a belief in reincarnation. There is recognition of a dual mode of existence, namely visible and invisible worlds. God is regarded as the ultimate power and authority behind the world and all life. Africans tend to "sacralize" nature by imbuing it with God. It follows that nature has to be "hedged around" to avoid pollution and misuse [49].

7.5 Economic and well-being

Since religion is indisputably a social phenomenon, it affects the social structure of which the economy is a part. Religion is one of many factors influencing Nigerian economic patterns. The economic roles that organized

religion plays in Nigeria includes; employer of labour, provider of services, especially in health and education, investor in real estate and manager of properties etc. Religion affects economic attitudes and behaviour through personal and business virtues as honesty, fair play and honouring one's commitments. Religion is successful in inculcating such virtues in adherents; it has an impact on the economy.

Religion also contributes towards the development of Nigeria through its impact on well being of Nigerians. Author [50] notes that organized religion has striven to alleviate some of Nigeria's socio-economic problems – though that is not their primary responsibility. Religious bodies provide educational facilities, medical services, boreholes, entertainment halls and recreational facilities. These organizations provide employment for great number of Nigerians – both skilled and unskilled. Furthermore, religious organizations are continuously involved in raising funds for the needy. Religious bodies in Nigeria play an important role in the absence of a social security system to cater for the aged, infirm and disabled.

8. Negative Impacts of Religion in Nigeria

Religion is regarded as a vanguard for propagating morals and peaceful co-existent of people in any given society. The promotion of kindness, forgiveness, peace and love is expected to be tool of stabilization of any nation. However, from the above, religions in Nigeria has been seen to have inflicted a lot of harm on the peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Seeds of discord have been planted by religions in the recent times. There exists mutual suspicion among the various religious sects in the country. Instead of religions promoting stability and tolerance, it has recently promoted serious conflict which had heightened instability in the Country. It has been observed that since the amalgamation of 1914 troubles started brewing seriously in Nigeria especially between the dominant Christian South and the dominant Muslims North of Nigeria as a nation. At the present, an Islamic terrorists group know as *Boko haram* has claimed so many lives in the Country.

Religion and politics have caused many countries to either grow or separate. In Nigeria, every government is judged by the way power is distributed. Anything contrary to attaining an equilibrium status triggers a wide cry of marginalization. The struggle for power in Nigeria predated independence, but it was based on ethnic, economic and social factors. It was in the events of 1966 coup that religious meaning and antagonism began to be associated with political activities. [51]

Within the two major religions in Nigeria (Islam and Christianity) there have been internal divisions and sub-division that sometimes produce sharp contentions. Religion which is supposed to be the agent of peace, unity and harmony is not the case in Nigeria. Nigeria has recorded series of religious crises claiming lives and properties which is a hindrance to national development. The issue of religion in Nigeria is becoming more and more pronounced with apparent hostility, friction and crises. Indeed, religion is threatening the corporate existence of the nation as well as undermining the political integrity of the country. Religious crises in Nigeria are a major obstacle to peace and development in the country.

According to author [52] religion has played a negative role in Nigeria's national life. It has divided Nigeria along religious lines in its internal and international politics, evidence for which can be seen in the individual

positions taken by key state officials on pertinent matters in Nigeria's international relations. Religion, has created tension and led the nation into bloody and destruction crises which, threaten its unity and survival.

9. The Way Forward/Recommendations

The issue of the secularity of the Nigerian state is one of the most heated debates of all generations. The tenth article of the 1999 constitution stipulates that, "The government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as a state religion". The supporting aspect of the constitution which deals with freedom of an individual or group or individuals in expressing their faith and way of worship is complementary.

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, preaching, practice and observance.

In 2000, several predominantly Muslim states in the northern Nigeria formally adopted Islamic law as part of their legal system which is against constitutional provisions. There is need for the Nigerian government to work towards upholding the constitution by not promoting any particular religion. Religion is a private affair. The Nigerian government and adherents of religious faiths need to recognize the right of individuals to freedom of religion. Nobody should be forced to practice a religion that is not his choice. No religion should be adopted as state religion. Politicians in their quest to acquire power should refrain from using religion as a tool of oppression, disunity and war. Political leaders should seek to secularize their policies and show neutrality at all times in religious affairs.

- The Nigerian government should return mission schools to the original proprietors to effectively bring discipline and moral instruction to their schools.
- The teaching of religion should be intensified in Nigerian schools while moral philosophy should be made compulsory in our tertiary institutions. The content should include ideas that emphasize love, equality, sincerity, honesty and other virtues.
- The Nigerian government should promote sincere dialogue between religions. A forum of religious leaders where they can meet from time to time to look into causes of religious conflicts and solutions reached. Such leaders should not be fanatical in their views.
- Political leaders who are inclined to a particular religion should be warned against anything that will divide the country. The government should promote religious harmony by evolving a kind of religious education where the curriculum will expose students to in-depth knowledge of other religious traditions in order to appreciate one another's religious faith.
- Nigerians must go beyond tolerate to mutual respect such a respect does not necessarily mean that I accept what the other says. But it certainly means that I respect his freedom to follow whatever religion he proposed for himself, provided he does not infringe on my own inalienable rights.
- Religions in Nigeria must learn to address shared needs irrespective of religious differences, such common concerns included; addressing poverty, misery and disease, promoting social justice,

tackling corruption at all levels, and insisting on good governance. There is need to jointly tackle the terrorist networks that are operates currently in the Country.

- We must use religion to tackle unemployment problem in Nigeria, improves the lot of people and their living conditions. To promotes peaceful co-existence of the Nigerian citizens irrespective of tribal and religions differences
- Religion should be used in Nigeria to promote the moral and social effective instrument for nation building and national development

10. Conclusion

There is no gain saying the fact that religion has played a very vital role to our Country in so many ways. There exist several religions in Nigeria, helping to accentuate regional and ethnic distinctions. All religions represented in Nigeria were practiced in every major city in 1990. There is no doubt that religion in itself is a good and useful tool for the development of a state, but religion becomes dysfunctional in any society when religions adherent misuse religion to promote sectarian views on the general populace or to promote or assist fellow adherents at the expense of non adherents and use religion to perpetrate evil in the society.

Religions Organizations in Nigeria have contributed a lot to good governance and development, both through the provision of infrastructure and development programmes and through their Public and Private criticism of corruption and indignity. Despite the problems that religion has caused in Nigeria, it still remains the most desired in Nigeria. There is need for all meaningful Nigerians to come together and address the present monster of Religious intolerance and fanaticism in the interest of peaceful co-existence. In order to continue to enjoy the gains of religion in the Nigeria state, the government should not allow itself to be negatively employed or perceived to favour any religion if it wants to enjoy the good will and support of every member of the society and to promote nation building

References

- [1] M. H. Kukah. *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1993, pp 106-107
- [2] Wikipedia. "Religion in Nigeria". <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/religion-in-nigeria>. Feb. 26. 2012 [Aug. 08, 2013]
- [3] I. E. Metuh. *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religion*. Onitsha: Imico Publishers, 1987, pp 12-13
- [4] A. Cline. "What is Religion". <http://altheism.about.com/pd/religiondefinition/a/definition.htm>. Mar. 08. 2001 [Sep. 24, 2013]
- [5] Wikipedia. "Islam in Nigeria". <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/islaminnigeria> Mar. 17, 2012 [Aug. 19, 2013]
- [6] K. Shouler. *The Everything World's Religious book*. Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2010, p.1.

- [7] T. Edward. *Primitive Culture, vol 1*. London: John Murray, 1871, p 242
- [8] E. Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. London: George Alen and Unwin, 1915, p.16
- [9] M. J. Okwueze. *Ethnic, Religion and Society*: Nsukka: Prize Publication, 2003, p.3.
- [10] P. Conelly. "Definition of Religion and Related Terms". <http://www.definitionofreligion.mht>. Oct. 6, 2012 [Sep. 9, 2013]
- [11] G. Parrinder. *Dictionary of Non-Christian Religion*. London: Italtion Educational Publications. 1972, pp.15-16.
- [12] C. Olawola. *African Traditional Religion and the Christian Faith*. Achimota: African Christian Press. 1993, p.18.
- [13] H.K. Rimansikwe and H.C. Achunike. "Religion in Nigeria from 1900 – 2013". *Journals of Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [online], 3(18), pp.45 – 46. Available: www.iiste.org/journals/index.php/RHSS/issue/view/. [Feb. 1, 2014].
- [14] C.A. Ekeopara. Class lecture, topic: "Introduction to African Traditional Religion". Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Calabar, Nigeria, Dec. 6, 1996.
- [15] Wikipedia. "Traditional African Religion". <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/traditional-african-religion>. Mar. 13, 2011. [Aug. 19, 2013].
- [16] J.O. Awolalu. *Studies in comparative Religion*. Spring: World Wisdom Inc., 1976, pp 18 – 19.
- [17] J.S. Mbiti. *African Traditional Religion*. Ibadan Spectrum, 1975, p.6.
- [18] E.B. Idowu. *African Traditional Religion: a definition*. London: SCM Press. 1973, p.5.
- [19] F.N. Nwahghi. *Religion in the Past and Present Nigeria*. An unpublished paper, Nigeria, 1998.
- [20] E.B. Idowu. *African Traditional Religion: a definition*. London: SCM Press. 1973, pp. 18-19.
- [21] P. Todd. "Christianity in Nigeria". <http://www.sim-nigeria.org/index.php>. Feb. 18, 2012. [Aug. 19, 2013].
- [22] O.U. Kalu. *The History of Christianity in West Africa*. New York: Longmans Group Ltd. 1980, pp. 22-
- [23] A.B.G. Musa. *Christianity in Africa, a study in the Christian presence in Africa up to 1900*. Jos: Ade Printing Press. 2002. Pp. 15- 18.
- [24] E.A. Ayandele. *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842 – 1914*. London: Longmans. 1966. Pp. 205 – 206.
- [25] A.B.G. Musa. *Christianity in Africa, a study in the Christian presence in Africa up to 1900*. Jos: Ade Printing Press. 2002. Pp. 105 – 106.
- [26] M. Oduyeye. *The Planting of Christianity in Yoruba Land*. Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1969, pp. 75 – 77.
- [27] J.F.A. Ajayi. *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1814 – 1819, The Making of a New Faith*. London: Longmans Group Ltd. 1964, pp. 205 – 206.
- [28] E.O. Babalola. *Christianity in West Africa*. Ibadan: Scholar Publications International Ltd. 1976, pp. 82 – 83.
- [29] Wikipedia. "Islam in Nigeria". <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/silaminnigeira>. Mar. 17, 2012 [Aug. 19, 2013].
- [30] R.A. Adeleye. *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804 – 1906. The Sokoto Caliphate and its enemies*. London: Longmans. 1971.

- [31] A.A. Adelabu. *The History of Islam in the Black History*. Ibadan: Micson's Press and Publication. 2003, pp. 115 – 117.
- [32] I.M. Lapidus. *Islam in West Africa: A History of Islam Societies*. Cambridge University Press. 2002, pp. 98 – 99.
- [33] N. Danjibo and A. Oladeji. "Religion, Politics and Governance in Nigeria." <http://www.landofsixpeoples.com/news302inc30721.htm>. Jul. 19, 2010 [Aug. 20, 2012]
- [34] J. Onaiyekan. "Religion in Ngeria" in the opening session of the 10th Anniversary of Rhodes Forum. Oct. 4, 2012. Pp. 12- 14.
- [35] H.K. Rimansikwe and H.C. Achunike. "Religion in Nigeria from 1900 – 2013". *Journals of Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [online], 3(18), pp.45 – 46. Available: www.iiste.org/journals/index.php/RHSS/issue/view/. [Feb. 1, 2014].
- [36] J.S. Mbiti. *Introduction to African Religions*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1978. Pp. 62 – 63.
- [37] D.O. Oyedepo. *Releasing the Supernatural*. Ikeja: Dominion Publishing House. 1993, pp. 82 – 83.
- [38] T.K. Anjov. *Religion and the Nigerian Nation*. Makurdi: Lanrad Print. 2008, pp. 46 – 47.
- [39] P.R.A. Adegbesan. *Awo and Politics of Education in Obafemi Awolowo: The End of an Era*. Ille-Ife: OAU Press Ltd. 1988. Pp. 102 – 103.
- [40] W. Rodney. *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. Washington: Howard University Press, 1974 pp. 178 – 179.
- [41] A.B. Fafunwa. *History of Education in Nigeria*. London: George Allen & Unwin Publishers. 1980 pp. 209 – 210.
- [42] W. Pat. (1991, Oct). "Religions groups and the Politics of National Development in Nigeria". *Research review NS* [online] 7(1 & 2), pp. 96 – 97. Available: <http://archive.lib.msu.edu/dmc/african/20> [Aug. 20, 2012].
- [43] W. Pat. (1991, Oct). "Religions groups and the Politics of National Development in Nigeria". *Research review NS* [online] 7(1 & 2), pp. 96 – 97. Available: <http://archive.lib.msu.edu/dmc/african/20> [Aug. 20, 2012].
- [44] W. Pat. (1991, Oct). "Religions groups and the Politics of National Development in Nigeria". *Research review NS* [online] 7(1 & 2), pp. 96 – 97. Available: <http://archive.lib.msu.edu/dmc/african/20> [Aug. 20, 2012].
- [45] F. Enweremadu. "The Role of the Church in Moral Transformation of Contemporary Nigerian Society. B.A. Thesis, Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Major Seminary, Ibadan, 1991.
- [46] M.A. Umeagudosu. "The Earth belongs to God: Biblical Expositions through the eyes of a Nigerian woman". E. Amoah (ed) *Where God Reign: Reflections on Women in God's world*. Accra: Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. 1997. Pp. 10 -1 9.
- [47] D. O. Olayiwola. "Religion, Ecology: The Aladura and Nature in Commensalism". P. A. Dopamu and E. A. Odumuyiwa (eds). *Religion, Science and Culture*. Ibadan: Nigeria Association for the Study of Religions, 2003, pp. 93 – 102
- [48] M. Nabofa. "Religion and Development in Nigeria: A Preliminary Literature Review". <http://www.religionanddevelopment.org/files/resources.modul>. June. 18, 2010 [Aug. 20, 2012].

- [49] M.A. Umeagudosu. "The Earth belongs to God: Biblical Expositions through the eyes of a Nigerian woman". E. Amoah (ed) *Where God Reign: Reflections on Women in God's world*. Accra: Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. 1997. Pp. 10 -1 9.
- [50] A. Adogame. "Religion and Economic Development in Nigeria". *Nigerian Journal of Economic History*, vol 2, pp. 22 – 45 Jan. 1999.
- [51] T.K. Anjov. *Religion and the Nigerian Nation*. Makurdi: Lanrad Print. 2008, pp. 46 – 47.
- [52] M. Daudu. "Inter-religious Harmony and a Sound Moral Foundation: Prerequisite for national survival". *A journal of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions*. Vol 13, pp. 62 – 70. Mar. 2001.