

Religion and Challenges of Development in Nigeria in 21st Century

Enoch Olujide Gbadegesin PhD

Lecturer: Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Elizabeth Ayoola Adeyemi-Adejolu

Postgraduate Student: Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Abstract

How can we be meaningfully talking about development where religion is used, misused and abused by political elitist class and people of wealth in Nigerian socio-political and economic realm? Of what values, importance and relevance is religion to economic development in a country still engrossed in the spate of senseless killings and maiming of innocent lives orchestrated by the Boko Haram insurgency? Or how thetical is religious intolerance and violence sponsored implicitly or explicitly by the clerics and pastors of Islamic and Christian religions against the African traditional religions to national development? All these questions are being addressed in this article by using sociological functional theory of religion to problematize how religion can be a source of or contributor to national development in Nigerian nation in 21st century. By bringing Max Weber's concept of *Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism* in conversation with Clifford Geertz's *Interpretation of Culture*, this paper hopes to shed more light and makes its own contribution to how religion can be used to advance national development and assume a productive role in Nigerian society.

Keywords: economic development, Christianity, Islam, productive role, Traditional Religion

1. Introduction

Religion has passed through many critical stages from the medieval period to the modern times. It has suffered great deal in the hands of the rationalists, enlightenment and modern thinkers who have shown how irrelevant it is to societal development. Social scientists, especially seventeenth and eighteenth century's sociologists and psychologists had concluded on the demise of religion and had accepted the idea that modern society was increasingly becoming secular in character. As a matter of fact, the consternation against religion (especially Christian religion) began with the provocative publication of Darwin's theory of evolution, which challenged the traditional¹ ways of looking at and explaining reality.

In Charles Darwin's *Origins of Species*, published in 1859, the idea of Christians' creationism was challenged; he postulated instead that man was descended from apes.² Even as recent as the twentieth century, "social scientists had come to suppose that the secularity of the social system implied not only the decline of religious or supernaturalist assumptions in the operation of the social order, but also the diminution of supernaturalist dispositions on the part of individuals."³ These assumptions actually got hold of the theologians as well; their theologies reinforced the modern liberal and positivistic assumptions as evidenced in anti-traditional theologies, from Rudolf Bultmann's demythologization, and secularization theology, to eventually the "death of God" theology.

In our days, based on the increasing rise of religious bigots and extremists, one may be tempted to suggest that religion is not relevant to societal development and hence should be extricated from human social life. Religion has been used, abused and misused by political elites, and unfortunately by the so-called clerics of Christianity and Islam, so much that it has continued to cause conflagrations all over the world. Even in the so-called secular societies, religion has not only penetrated but has also continued to be a source of concern as a result of its damaging nature in those societies. Nigerian experience is one among many of the countries witnessing Islamic extremists' senseless killings and maiming of innocent lives (sadly women and children are not spared) all over the world. The question one may want to ask seeing all the negative aspects of religion in any given society is: what is the function of religion in human society? Or of what use is religion to societal advancement and national development?

If we look at the secular, sociological and psychological theories about what religion does for people as

¹ Tradition(al) as it is used here refers to Christian apologetic and dogmatic reasoning that characterized the medieval Europe before the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century.

² Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species: A Vartorium Text*, ed. Morse Pechham (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959).

³ James Davison Hunter, "The New Religions: Demodernization and the Protest Against Modernity" in Bryan Wilson (ed.), *The Social Impact of New Religious Movements* (New York: Rose of Sharon Press, Inc., 1981), p.1; see also Harvey Cox, *The Secular City, revised edition*. (New York: Macmillan, 1966)

individuals or in groups, we shall arrive at the believer's conviction that religious activity is an end in itself. In spite of their critique of religion, psychologists have even argued that religion has certain therapeutic benefits for the individual.¹ The sociologists especially the functional theorists such as Emile Durkheim would be very willing to admit that religion has a cohesive quality and that the concept of its social utility can never be denied. Many of these sociologists have even proposed that "religion reflects, sustains and legitimizes social order."² Peter Berger, in particular, believes that religion occupies a distinctive place in the enterprise of world-building.³ In fact, as Berger and other scholars claim in another respect, "a global revival of religion is afoot in many countries. This is not simply a revival of individual religious belief, but of the public role of religion in shaping modern politics, public policy, and social welfare."⁴ In what follows we shall be looking at the important functions of religion and their relevance to societal development with special reference to Nigeria. But before doing that we shall be looking at the functionalists' conception of religion.

2.1 Functionalists' Theories of Religion

The first person to be discussed is Emile Durkheim who the latter generations of social-anthropologists regarded as "the greatest figure in the history of modern sociology." For Durkheim, the essence of religion does not reside in thinking about transcendental source(s); the real essence of religion "is something eminently social."⁵ By this he means that religion is more of social dimension than the transcendental order, or that it registers in social terms. Religion for him arises from *collective representations* (from the French word "collective conscience"). By means of this concept, Durkheim called attention to the manner in which social groups form their respective patterns of conscious and articulable "we-feeling."⁶ His sociological reflection about religion in functional term shows its cohesive quality, and social utility. Durkheim's summary is that "religion is something eminently social," by which he means that "religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities." His idea of collective representations or collective conscience can be interpreted as the ultimate (our added emphasis) source and sustainer of moral values, cultural ideals, religious aspirations and all other determinants of prevailing collectivity.⁷ He defines religion based on these assumptions as:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.⁸

Looking at religion this way from Durkheimian perspective, one is bound to be confronted with reductionist conception of religion, which of course has been what other theorists have engaged in doing. The difference though is that religion in Durkheimian sense is here reduced to its social context without which it could not be understood. The social utility of religion in ringing about a moral individual through a moral community must be highly appreciated.

In turning to Max Weber, it seems to us that he did more to explain the function of religion for individuals and society at large than Durkheim. In thinking about how religion impacts the individuals and causes advancement in society, Weber turns to the question of meaning (from German word *Vestehen*). For him, neither human emancipation nor social order and integration are the central point of departure, question of meaning is. Weber's sociology of religion begins with an inquiry into the religious sources of modern capitalist culture. He uses his book, *Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit of Capitalism'* to argue that the religious ethos of inner-worldly asceticism became a motivational force contributing to the emergence of a bourgeois, modern Western type of capitalism.⁹ This ethos is characterized by self-control, methodical life conduct directed towards work in a calling, and acquisition through a regularly and rationally pursued business.

He asserts that the calling is not a condition in which the individual is born, but a strenuous and exacting enterprise to be chosen by one, and to be pursued with a sense of religious responsibility. Thus work

¹ William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (NY: Dover Publications, Inc. 2002) claims that deeply religious people take religion seriously and that it in turn yield some benefits for them. cf. Carl Jung in particular who was an heir to Freud strongly believes that religion has some therapeutic effect on the believers. cf. Carl Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956).

² See Leonard Glick, "The Anthropology of Religion: Malinowski and Beyond" pp.181-242, in Charles Glock and Phillip Hammond (eds.), *Beyond the Classics? Essays in the Scientific Study of Religion*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973)

³ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of A Sociological Theory of Religion*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), p.1.

⁴ Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. (Washington, D.C.: Grand Rapids, MI., 1999); Mark, Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

⁵ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp.42-43, 46.

⁶ Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 160

⁷ Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*, pp. 160-161

⁸ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p.46.

⁹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 2003), p.2-3.

which was once interpreted as “empty” or once regarded as perilous to the soul acquires a new sanctity.¹ Labour is not merely an economic means; it assumes a spiritual dimension. Covetousness, if a danger to the soul, is less formidable menace than *sloth* (our emphasis).² So far from poverty being meritorious, it is a duty to choose the more profitable occupation. A once assumption made that there is an inevitable conflict between money-making and piety is rejected by the Calvinism; they are instead interpreted as natural allies, for the virtues incumbent on the elect—diligence, thrift, sobriety, prudence—are the most reliable passport to commercial property. In thinking like this, the pursuit of riches, which once had been feared as the enemy of religion, was now welcomed as its ally.³

It is very doubtful if Clifford Geertz would be considered by religious scholars as a functional theorist of religion. Geertz’s conception of religion, though, is rooted in human culture and seems to synchronize both Durkheimian and Weberian conceptions of religion. Geertz argues that religion cannot be appreciated outside its cultural context; hence he proposes religion as a cultural system. He asserts that “the pathway to religion is culture, and culture is defined as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men (sic) communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”⁴For Geertz, therefore, studying mere roles of religion in society already embarked upon by seminal figures such as Durkheim, Weber, Freud and Malinowski is but one way; there is need to move beyond that and give religion expansive and much broader treatment than they had and throw it in a wider cultural context. For example, in religious belief and practice, Geertz argues, “a group’s ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world-view describes, while the world-view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well arranged to accommodate such a way of life.”⁵

One is not too surprised that Geertz defines religion in purely symbolic terms. For him, symbols seem to be the key to understanding religion in a given culture. He 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.⁶

Geertz goes on to explain what he intends his definition to convey but more importantly and perhaps relevant to our discussion here, is the idea that religion can motivate people to do unimaginable things as long as it (religion) could be made to address human problems namely; the problems of evil and suffering. Religion becomes useful and resourceful for human beings in so far as it can “tune human actions to an envisaged cosmic order and projects images of cosmic order onto the plane of human experience...”⁷ Our attempt in this paper is to weave these theorists’ conception of religion together and contextualize them into the Nigerian social reality in which we now live in.

3. Religion and Development

3.1. Religion as Liberating: Seeing God in the Secular

Religion was once interpreted as mediating influence between the God of religion and the secular world. In his 1965 controversial publication, *The Secular City*,⁸ Harvey Cox, argued that secularization, properly understood, should not be considered the enemy of the people of God; rather it ought to be viewed as the logical outcome of biblical (*perhaps also all religious*, our added emphasis) faith. For Cox, secularization represented the historical process by which society and culture are freed from tutelage to religious control and closed metaphysical worldviews. What Cox is trying to convey to us here should not be misunderstood as the removal of religion from the human society, but instead, that the world should now be seen as concrete historical context where that which is transcendent and ultimate can be experienced in the midst of the worldly and penultimate.⁹ How could that be achieved?

The effort to build a developed nation could advance dramatically if religious people advocate

¹ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, pp.2-3

² Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p.3

³ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p.3

⁴ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p.89.

⁵ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp.89-90

⁶ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p.90

⁷ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p.90

⁸ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City, revised edition*. (New York: Macmillan, 1966)

⁹ See John P. Newport, “Secularization, Secularism and Christianity,” in *Review and Expositor* (Winter 1971),pp.81-93, cited in Richard Quebedeaux, *The Worldly Evangelicals: America’s Born Again Christians—and where They’re Headed*, (San Francisco, California: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1980), p.19

sustainable development. Religious traditions in Nigeria enjoy moral authority and broad grassroots presence that put them in a powerful position to shape the worldviews and lifestyles of millions of people within the nation. As it has been rightly observed, all religions possess one or more of five sources of power:

They shape people's worldviews, wield moral authority, have the ear of multitudes of adherents, often possess strong financial and institutional assets, and are strong generators of social capital, an asset in community building. All of these assets can be used to help build a socially just and environmentally sustainable world.¹

We need not doubt that religion legitimates social institutions and controls people's behaviors by bestowing upon them an ultimately ontological status; Berger argues that location of this status can only be found within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference.² This opportunity should be used as an important avenue for religious authorities to help their teeming followers into engaging in somewhat meaningful projects that can contribute to and positively affect societal development.

Take for example, in reflecting on the Protestant Ethic of Weber, one sees the way the Calvinist' Protestant Christians took work to be part and parcel of devoted life. Work to them became something of interesting and a call; part of what God requires for believers to be counted as the elects or perhaps as requisite to get to heaven. Conversely, in our days, for some of the religious groups, with special reference to Pentecostalism, work ethic seems to be interpreted as a burden. Both in Christianity and Islam, we have many prayer houses that people who ought to be at their work places go to for one prayer or another. Night vigils are even held on week days, prayer meetings for success go on in churches on Monday and Tuesday mornings when a decent, ambitious worker should be at the source of his or her income. Precious times which are meant for productive work especially in the day time are used by many religious people hopping from one prayer house to another looking for salvation³ or miracles that they could literally bring about for themselves if they had engaged in meaningful work.

In many of these prayer houses and mountains instead of the evangelists, prophets or pastors to tell their teeming followers/members to engage in work that can help them earn good living, majority of these leaders encourage indolence and blame their members/followers' poverty and woes on the activities of demons.⁴ Some of the African Traditional Religions also encourage some people in the society to get involved in money-making ritual. This has become a common-place phenomenon in Nigeria today.

Peering through our Dailies, one is often confronted with the stories and pictures of men and women who were caught with heads, breasts, hearts, private parts, and blood of their unfortunate captives readied for delivery into the hands of the herbalists who would help them make charm that would bring about money. While many have rationalized and have interpreted this trend as part of the evil of joblessness that characterizes the modern Nigerian society, some actually interpret the trend as a result of religious leaders' implicit and explicit contribution to this way of living by those cultists.⁵ Many religious leaders in both Christianity and Islam often interpret success in terms of wealth or money one is able to amass or accumulate. This is an unfortunate trend also noticed in America by C. Wright Mills, who contended that there is "still one old American value that has not markedly declined: the value of money and of the things money can buy....Money is an unambiguous criterion of success, and such success is still the sovereign American value."⁶ Sadly, the difference in American situation and Nigerian is that the rich elites in America are gainfully engaged in legitimate businesses and thereby contributing to their nation economy, in the Nigerian case, many religious, especially young men are not willing to be gainfully employed but want to get money by all means possible. If genuine development would be achieved there is need for religious leaders to re-orientate their members into getting engaged in worthwhile jobs that could develop the country rapidly.

¹ Gary Gardner, *Invoking the Spirit: Religion and Spirituality in the Quest for a Sustainable World*, (Washington DC: Worldwatch Institute, 2002), p.5.

² Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, p.33

³ Salvation as being used here connotes deliverance or liberation as it is expressed both in the literal and spiritual senses.

⁴ We cannot generalize this trend of linking demons to the joblessness of people; many Christian churches and Islamic teaching centers sincerely teach about the dignity of labor or inculcate work ethic in their members. For example, Pastor Tunde Bakare of Latter Day Assembly often openly condemn overt belief in demons as the source of one's failure or backwardness in life; he teaches instead on being responsible and hardworking, which can put an end to many of the country joblessness. The NASFAT, one can assume not only teach members to be gainfully engaged in one job or the other, the group has contributed to the Nation's economy in terms of manufacturing consumable goods. See Eliza Griswold, "In God's Country," in <http://naijablog.blogspot.com/2008/03/in-gods-country.html>, March 4, 2008, accessed 30/6/2008.

⁵ The rate at which cultists are operating in Nigeria has become so pathetic that even some so-called ministers of God are involved. Most of the Nigerian newspapers especially The Punch of October 11, 2014 revealed how The Osun State Police Command has arrested a pastor, Clement Oyetunde, for allegedly burying a human skull at the back of his residence which he also used as a church. See <http://www.punchng.com/news/police-arrest-pastor-with-human-skull/>

⁶ C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp.344-46 quoted in Harry K. Girvetz, *Democracy and Elitism: Two Essays with Selected Readings* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p.50.

As a matter of fact, and following directly from above, there is already a disconnect between the Weber's Protestant ethic and Pentecostal ethic in the way wealth is conceived and interpreted; in the former, the desire for this worldly-goods were not part of their primary concern, whereas in the latter, the desire for material consumption has become part of their ethos, which unfortunately is becoming rampart with many other religions and not necessarily Pentecostal Christians alone. What we are saying is this; there is a major difference in philosophy regarding the value of this-worldly goods and pleasures. Sixteenth century Calvinist Protestantism was deeply ascetic; they found themselves accumulating capital and possessions unintentionally, whereas late twentieth century Pentecostal Protestantism is blatantly materialistic; they explicitly desire material wealth and abundance.¹

3.2. Equitable Wealth

While one need not doubt the fact that religion especially Christianity and Islam have contributed immensely in the areas of building social institutions such as schools and hospitals in Nigeria. Yet there is also a concern about how wealth is unfortunately distributed as far as the African nations in general and Nigeria in particular is concerned. Many religious leaders especially Christians' and Islamic leaders are enjoying excessive wealth and living flamboyant lives at the expense of their poor followers. If the nation must advance, excessive consumption of wealth must stop and such wealth need be redirected to meaningful capital projects that can move the nation forward. According to Dean Freeman, "Weber's key point ...was that in order for a new economic system – capitalism – to be taken up by people, there had to be shift in their values and subjectivity in order to motivate new behaviors and to make the new economic system seem moral, and that Protestantism unintentionally did this."² With respect to Nigeria, Pentecostal pastors and clergy in other churches and Imams need to have a rethink on how wealth could be justly distributed and teach their rich and wealthy followers to create more job opportunities for their poor members so that life can be made easy for those poor majority.

3.3. Fight against Corruption

Religion and religious leaders of all traditions must be ready to cooperate with other organs of the society such as Human Rights' activists in fighting corruption already endemic in Nigerian socio-political sphere. Corruption is already becoming a norm in a nation occupied by majority of people claiming not only to be religious but also spiritual. Religion of any tradition should not wink at the alarming rate corruption is going in this country or Africa generally. Righteousness exalts any nation..., so says the Christian Bible³; incidentally, there is no doubt that all religions also accord a place of pride to righteousness in their belief systems and creeds. As already hinted above, religion is the indispensable source of the moral strength of any civilized society. In *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State* (1997), Simeon O. Ilesanmi argues that there is no one single ethnic group that does not have some religious impact in its historic roots in Nigeria. Ilesanmi's work stresses the fact that religion in Nigeria plays an enormous role in the formation of moral values and cultural and social identity in all of the original three geopolitical regions of Nigeria.⁴

Following from Ilesanmi's sound observation, all religious traditions should be able to take a tough stand against sins such as greed, avarice, injustice, oppression, corruption and so on. One of the various reasons given as the need for a change of government in Nigeria which eventually happened in the last election that brought President Muhammadu Buhari to the throne in replacement of former President Goodluck Jonathan was blamed on excessive greed, greed and corruption of the former ruling political party. Whether the current ruling political party will be ready to change that or not is what the whole world is awaiting. Instead of unhealthy competition about which religion is the more superior, Immanuel Kant's advice could be heeded here; all human beings (irrespective of their religious beliefs and inclinations) have the duty to surround themselves with a group of people who are all working for the victory of the good tendencies over the bad. Kant actually believes that it is only religious community (a social force) that can supply a support structure for morality; the moral law, which is the key to attaining the highest good.⁵ In an atmosphere where sound morality prevails, there is no doubt that peace, unity and stable political dispensation which in turn will positively affect national development shall not

¹ See John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, "Privatizing the Millennium: New Protestant Ethics and the Spirits of Capitalism in Africa, and Elsewhere" in *Afrika Spectrum*, 35(3): 293–312; Birgit, Meyer, "Pentecostalism and Neo-Liberal Capitalism: Faith, Prosperity and Vision in African Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches." *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 20(2): 5–28.

² Dena Freeman, "The Pentecostal Ethic and the Spirit of Development" in Dena Freeman (ed.) *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.1-38 see p.20 in particular.

³ Check Proverb 28:13.

⁴ Simeon O. Ilesanmi, *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State* (Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1997), p.119

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Steve Palmquist's website, translated by Theodore M. Greene & Hoyt H. Hudson, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/religion/religion-within-reason.htm>

be lacking. If religion is the basis of sound morality, it must attack the materialism of our culture and the misdistribution of the nation's wealth and services that are being managed by the corrupt elements of the society.

3.4 Resource Management

It is also our observation that Nigeria might likely face a big economic problem very soon if the prediction made by some developed nations such as America and Europe should come true as far as the depletion of our oil-well is concerned. Nigerian government seems to be over-dependent on oil and has lost sight of other avenues that needed to be explored that can generate revenue for the country. Religious organizations can actually help in this respect. Many hectares of land that ought to be used for farming are now being used as religious camps and worship centers. Along Lagos-Ibadan Highway in particular, these church organizations and their Muslim counterparts have their religious camps and retreat centers. One can argue that from the religious leaders' vantage point of view, every space should be conquered for God because the entire landscape is the property of God—to be captured by planting churches or perhaps building mosques within a certain distance. There is no doubt that hunger and economic problems are at the heart of a lot of multiplicities of religious groups¹ claiming physical spaces for themselves in the name of God. We are in no way condemning religious traditions' yielding to the transcendental order if that was how they were being commissioned, there is however, a need for religious rethinking about how land could be put to good economic use. Religious traditions for instance, could embark on different kinds of farming systems namely cash crop farming and arable farming to complement the effort of the government. In doing so, not only enough food will be available to go round, employment opportunity would also be created in the process for teeming jobless masses.

Religious organizations should also contribute to national development by cooperating with the Nigerian government is its bid to innovate news ideas through science and Information Technology (IT). In thinking about how modernity came about, religion especially Christianity and perhaps Islam have contributed in no small measure in the modern Europe, so nothing should be different in Nigeria where the nation is still aspiring to meet up with the comity of developed nations in the world. One of the characteristics of modern society, in contrast to traditional societies, is that change not only is expected but is also encouraged. This value underlies the role of science and technology in modernizing and modernized societies.² The implication of this modernization process for the religious traditions in Nigeria is that "traditional formulations of religious truths and traditional patterns of ritual will have to be constantly modified. New technological innovations that change life patterns and styles will require a rethinking of the ethical applications of religious insights...."³

Beyond the economic aspect that land could be used for though, the question of sustainability of the earth should be put into serious consideration by all religious traditions in Nigeria. Religious traditions must be willing and humble enough to cooperate with environmentalists who are advocating for the preservation of the earth. It has been pointed out that "the checkered history of religious involvement in societal affairs—multiple episodes of warfare, oppression, intolerance, and hypocrisy—is commonly cited by environmentalists as a reason to avoid engagement with religion, even by those who acknowledge the admirable selflessness and the passionate defense of marginalized people that are major part of religious history."⁴

On the other way round, we need to agree with Geertz, who argues that culture is central to national development and that religion is central to most cultures of the world.⁵ In essence, the environmentalists should be ready to work with religious traditions that always prove that a sustainable world (earth) could not be built without the full engagement of the human spirit. It becomes very imperative then that the two communities should be able to put their differences aside and work together towards sustaining the planet and its people. The reason is very obvious, scientists have been crying hoarse, about the depletion of ozone layer thus bringing about undue ultraviolet rays (radiation), which in turn will bring about more diseases coming upon the planet earth, and this we do not want.

3.5. Religious Ecumenism

If there must be development in Africa generally and in Nigeria in particular, finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not simply a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders.

¹ In order not to risk generalization, there are sincere and genuine religious organizations who are contributing meaningfully to Nigerian society in terms of creating jobs for their members and general populace through laudable projects such as schools, hospitals, farming and printing outfit, etc. There are examples of Redeemed Christian Church of God, Winner's Chapel and Believers' Love Word Church, and Muslim body such as NASFAT and some others who are contributing to the Nigerian economy, yet there is no doubt that quite a number of religious bodies are founded with the ultimate aims of making money in a crude and illegitimate way.

² Robert C. Monk et al, *Exploring Religious Meaning, Fifth Edition*, (NJ: Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, 1998), p.279.

³ Monk et al, *Exploring Religious Meaning*, p.279.

⁴ Gardner, *Invoking the Spirit*, p.11

⁵ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, p.92

Christianity is the largest and Islam is the second largest religions in the world history¹, thus making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, as we are presently witnessing, there cannot be any meaningful development. Development in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is at stake if these two major world religions refuse to cooperate with one another. Both of these religions (Christianity and Islam) in turn should also be ready to accommodate other religious faiths especially the African Traditional Religions instead of denigrating and demonizing them.

Each individual within society is always already a neighbour to all the others, in the manner that Levinas suggests, even if we choose to ignore this.² Recognizing this relationship of obligation could therefore be transformative for the actual relationships we have with others. Levinas puts it this way:

...To the very morality of morals, indisputably! Yet the invisible concern for the other man in his destitution and his homelessness—in his nakedness—in his condition or noncondition of a proletarian, this concern escapes the suspect finality of ideologies; the search for the other man who is still far away is already the relationship with this other man, a relationship in all its rectitude—a trope specific to the approach of the neighbor, which is already proximity (ellipses ours).³

There is no doubt that Levinas is a hard reader, yet one can understand where Levinas stands as far as ethic of concern for one's neighbor is concerned. He is more concerned than anything else with the exchange of ideas where *Reason* remains. This exchange of ideas for Levinas is called conversation or dialogue, "wherein interlocutor enters, the one into the thought of the others; wherein dialogue brings someone to reason."⁴ There is no doubt that reading Levinas will encourage us to consider what the commandment to love our neighbour entails.

We also assert here that religion has the transforming power over individuals and societies especially the family. As it is already known, family is the bedrock of the society. When there are stable families, there is bound to be stable society. The perils of many societies today are the alarming rates of divorce and precarious foundation of many marriages in the modern times. One of the problems that Nigeria is now facing too is that of increasing rate of divorces and alarmingly number of single parents is also on the increase. This is where religion should be able to function as an educational institution where family stability should be taught and where at least sizeable numbers of family problems are solved. Religious leaders of all religious traditions should take the family issue very seriously, since religion's capacity to provide meaning is rooted deep in human psyche. Indeed religion is an important source of change within individuals and across societies. As agent of change, all religious traditions in Nigeria should concentrate on and address family problems so as to prevent societal disintegration through family crises as we are currently witnessing all over the world.

3.6. Gender Issue

Lastly, all religious traditions must factor gender equality (equity) into their doctrines and liturgical practices when thinking about societal development. Many of the modern-day abuses of the human rights of women are rooted in a particular religious perspective of gender, namely that men are superior and that women, because of their inferiority, need not have access to education, development and economic activity. Perhaps due to the inferior position of women, it is fair to speak of a feminization of poverty⁵ in Africa as in other parts of the developing world. Many people especially the clergy in Christianity and Islam, political circle, and women generally apart from the feminist movement have this kind of belief that women are different from men and exercise power differently. They have been socialized into thinking and accepting this as a fact and have already internalized this notion. There are different judgments of the image of man as giant, which imply different ideas about human development. Assumptions are also that, based on their sexes, women have different roles to play in the society, but does that mean they are being taught different value systems than men? There is no doubt that in spite of its patriarchal structure, some Nigerian women have performed heroic deeds and have actually occupied political positions and participated in political debate. A host of them have also engaged in production and distribution of value goods. What this paper is advocating is that more women should be empowered to take their politically and economically rightful place. The society should not be assigning particular economic and political roles to men to the neglect of women.

¹ See World Fact Book for this information; see also "Major Religions Ranked by Size", <http://www.adherents.com/>.

² Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God who Comes to Mind* translated by Bettina Bergo (California: Stanford University Press, 1986)

³ Levinas, *Of God who Comes to Mind*, p.9

⁴ Levinas, *Of God who Comes to Mind*, P.141

⁵ Feminization of poverty describes a phenomenon in which women represent disproportionate percentages of the world's poor. UNIFEM describes it as "the burden of poverty borne by women especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. See in particular Diana Pearce, "The Feminization of Poverty: Women, work and welfare". *Urban and Social Change Review*, 1978, 11:28-36.

4. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the positive roles religion can play with respect to societal development. There is no doubt that neoliberalism has, in part, stimulated renewed questioning about the role of religion and spirituality in development, precisely because it promoted such an extreme materialist, market oriented-ethic that is now being resisted. This particular re-evaluation would need to be adopted by religious traditions. Again, what this paper is concerned about and focused upon is ways and manners that religion can bring ideas to the table which will in turn contribute to the efforts of all other institutions who have as their ultimate aims the development of Nigeria in particular and African in general. Contra the absolutist stance adopted by the classic secularization hypothesis, this paper does not argue that religion is all powerful in shaping development in all places, yet it is believed that religion can contribute its own quotas in shaping and mainstreaming the society through its teaching of moral principles that are required in bringing about desired development.

That religious traditions such as Christianity and Islam have already embarked on developmental projects such as building social institutions like schools, hospitals, and have begun welfare projects is a welcome development. This should continue, yet there is a lot more to do; churches and mosques can bring their resources together to do joint projects such as constructing roads, bridges and or even donate buildings for public utilities to their respective states or local governments where they are founded or situated. They could marshal their resources together to provide city and inter-city transportations at affordable rates; this could complement government's effort both at States and Federal levels who are trying to provide mass transit for the ever-growing population of Nigeria. The only best way to respond to negative aspersions being cast on religion is to respond by reforming and restructuring the religious beliefs and practices to be adaptable to building a very virile and progressive nation where all and sundries feel fulfilled and happy.

Bibliography

- Berger, Peter L. (1990). *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of A Sociological Theory of Religion*, New York: Anchor Books
- _____. (1999). *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Washington, D.C.: Grand Rapids, MI.
- Birgit, Meyer. (2007). "Pentecostalism and Neo-Liberal Capitalism: Faith, Prosperity and Vision in African Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches." *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 20(2): 5–28
- Capps, Walter H. (1995) *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* Minneapolis: Fortress Press
- Comaroff, John and Jean Comaroff. (2002). "Privatizing the Millennium: New Protestant Ethics and the Spirits of Capitalism in Africa, and Elsewhere" in *Afrika Spectrum*, 35(3): 293–312
- Cox, Harvey. (1966). *The Secular City, revised edition*. New York: Macmillan
- Darwin, Charles. (1959). *The Origin of Species: A Variorum Text*, ed. Morse Pechham, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Durkheim, Emile. (1965). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* New York: Free Press
- Freeman, Dena. (2012). "The Pentecostal Ethic and the Spirit of Development" in Dena Freeman (ed.) *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1-38
- Freud, Sigmund. (1961). *The Future of an Illusion*, translated and edited by James Strachey with a biographical introduction by Peter Gay, New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company,
- Gardner, Gary. (2002). *Invoking the Spirit: Religion and Spirituality in the Quest for a Sustainable World*, Washington DC: Worldwatch Institute
- Geertz, Clifford. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books
- Glick, Leonard. (1973). "The Anthropology of Religion: Malinowski and Beyond" in Charles Glock and Phillip Hammond (eds.), *Beyond the Classics? Essays in the Scientific Study of Religion*, New York: Harper & Row, 181-242
- Hunter, James Davison. (1981). "The New Religions: Demodernization and the Protest against Modernity" in Bryan Wilson (ed.), *The Social Impact of New Religious Movements* New York: Rose of Sharon Press, Inc.
- Ilesanmi, Simeon O. (1997). *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies
- James, Williams. (2002). *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. NY: Dover Publications Inc.
- Jung, Carl. (1956). *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. New York: Meridian Books.
- Kant, Immanuel, (1960). *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. New York: Harper and Row
- Levinas, Emmanuel. (1986). *Of God Who Comes to Mind* translated by Bettina Bergo, California: Stanford University Press
- Mark, Juergensmeyer. (1993). *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*. Berkeley: University of California Press

- Monk, Robert C, Walter C. Hofheinz, Kenneth T. Lawrence, Joseph D. Stamey, Bert Affleck and Tetsenao Yamamori. (1998). *Exploring Religious Meaning*, Fifth Edition, NJ: Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, Newport
- John P. (1971)“Secularization, Secularism and Christianity,” in *Review and Expositor*, winter edition, 81-93
- Pearce, Diana, (1978) “The Feminization of Poverty: Women, work and welfare”. *Urban and Social Change Review*, 11:28-36.
- Quebedeaux, Richard. (1980). *The Worldly Evangelicals: America’s Born Again Christians—and where They’re Headed*, San Francisco, California: Harper and Row Publishers
- Weber, Max. (2003). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc.

Internet Resources

- <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/religion/religion-within-reason.htm> Steve Palmquist’s web site, Translated by Theodore M. Greene & Hoyt H. Hudson
- “Major Religions Ranked by Size”, <http://www.adherents.com/>. Accessed November, 10, 2014
- Femi Makinde, Police Arrest pastor with Human Skull, available online <http://www.punchng.com/news/police-arrest-pastor-with-human-skull/> accessed, October 11, 2014.
- Eliza Griswold, “In God’s Country,” in <http://naijablog.blogspot.com/2008/03/in-gods-country.html>, accessed March 4, 2008.