

Institutional Decay and Religious Proliferation in Nigeria: A Critical Examination

Kelly Bryan Ovie Ejumudo, Ph.D

Department of Political Science, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

E-mail: drkellypaulovieejumudo@yahoo.com

Abstract

Institutions are inevitably critical to the functioning of societies. In the face of religious proliferation in Nigeria, institutional decay is common place. The level of decay is not only frightening, worrisome, endemic and ingrained; it is gradually threatening the legitimacy, rationality and functionality of religion as the threshold of moral formation, attitudinal change and behavioural transformation in Nigeria. This paper therefore examined the relationship between institutional decay and religious proliferation and the role that religious proliferation has played in the erosion of morality in the Nigerian society. This paper, which utilized relevant secondary sources of data, contended that religious proliferation has culminated in mere formalism, sterility, powerlessness such that; rather than strengthening the moral fabric of the Nigerian society, it has become incapacitated and, as a consequence, it is itself a channel and a facilitator of decay. The paper concluded with some useful recommendations including the exigency of a sense of cohesion and collaboration among religious groups so as to forge a united front for the creation and sustenance of a genial climate that will facilitate individual and institutional transformation through societal value re-orientation, attitudinal change and behavioral re-predisposition.

Keywords: institution, decay, religious proliferation, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The importance of institutions in the development process has for long attracted a lot of attention. It is therefore not surprising that the World Development Report 2002 focused on “Building institutions for Markets” (World Bank 2010). The most common understanding of institutions in the empirical literature is the thinking that they are the rules of the game in a society or, put more formally, they are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction (North 1990). This explains the contention that the survival and sustenance of any society depends largely on the efficiency and effectiveness of its various and diverse institutions. After all, the underlying philosophy behind the existence of modern societies is the attainment of public good. Therefore, societies require the proper placement and effective functioning of their institutions.

In Nigeria, such institutions include the governmental which covers ministries, ministerial departments, parastatals, public corporations and enterprises, public utilities, the legislature, judiciary, security and other agencies as well as regulatory bodies. Other institutions are private including economic and financial and non-governmental such as religious and family institutions. While the governmental institutions are ridden with crises of poor management, inefficiency, corruption, nepotism, manipulation, unhealthy politicization and unethical practices, the organized private, religious and family institutions are not only prone to corruption and corruptive practices, fraud and politicization, they have also been afflicted by the same decadence that is the characteristic feature of governmental institutions. As for the governmental institutions in Nigeria, decadence in the form and shape of corruption, inefficiency and mismanagement has become so endemic that the cost of governance is not only fraudulently increasing, governance is impaired and destabilized such that democracy is threatened and economic development needed to sustain democratic governance and institutions are distorted and paralyzed.

Surprisingly, the level of institutional decay in Nigeria belies the extent of religious proliferation that is evident. It is instructive to add that instead of religion strengthening the moral and behavioural disposition of the Nigerian society; it has in a dysfunctional fashion contributed largely to the erosion of morality and sound behavioural ethics. This development is traceable to the mere formalism, sterility, powerlessness and poor capacity that have become the characteristic feature of religion. This explains why religion has become a channel and a facilitator of decay in the

Nigerian society. Thus, it is the weakened status of religion owing largely to its balkanization, lack of cohesion and divisionism that has constrained it from playing its functional role as media for transformation and development of the Nigerian society and the value re-orientation and attitudinal modification of its members.

2. Institutions: A Conceptual Explanation

Institutions are defined and classified according to some basic components such as their morphology (Darbel and Schnapper 1972) or their degree of development (Riggs 1971). Institutions constitute a kind of iconography of order (Orren and Skowronek 1994) and they function as crucial and vital determinants of society's essential character, history and future development and provide stability. Institutions are conceived as being in a state of equilibrium, unless crises or disruptive periods take place that occasion rapid and visible adaptations (Theonig 2007). By implication, it is believed that they do not generate change in an endogenous way, but that changes or innovations are a product of interactions between institutions and society in which they are embedded. Institutions of society which seek the fulfillment of basic needs include the family, education, economy, religion and politics. Each of these institutions has social groups and associations that execute their goals in order to meet the needs of society. The behaviour of the people in these groups and associations is organized and patterned by the relevant social institutions that is the ordered social relationship which grow out of the values, norms, statuses, and roles. Institutions also organize the activities that fulfill society's fundamental needs. The inevitably critical role of institutions to the functioning of societies notwithstanding, there is the problematic of decay which has not only permeated social institutions in Nigeria, their effectiveness in the light of role performance has been seriously constrained. And despite religious proliferation in Nigeria, institutional decay is endemic, frightening, worrisome and ingrained in our general culture thereby casting questions on the legitimacy, rationality and functionality of religion as the basis of moral formation, attitudinal change and behaviour transformation in Nigeria. The pertinent question remains "why is institutional decay and religious proliferation operating paripassu?"

2. The Importance of Institutions to Society

The importance of institutions in the development process has for long attracted a lot of attention. It is therefore not surprising that the World Development Report 2002 focused on "Building institutions for Markets" (World Bank 2010). The most common understanding of institutions in the empirical literature is the thinking that they are the rules of the game in a society or, put more formally, they are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction (North 1990). Institutional change therefore shape the way societies develop over time and they include any form of constraint that human beings devise. Institutions, in fact, do not only impose constraints; they also provide opportunities in societies, shape human interaction. These constraints could be formal such as the rules and regulations devised by human beings or informal like the conventions or codes, norms and customs that are culture-specific (Acemoglu *et al.* 2011). Hence, the same formal rules and constitutions could produce different outcomes if they are applied to different societies (North 1990). According to North, the sources of slow growth are associated with the inability of societies to transform institutional structures in response to new technological and market opportunities. They affect the performance of society in every known and imaginable sector and their weakness is symptomatic of and manifest in tangled laws, corrupt laws, biased credit systems and elaborate business registration requirements which hinders development and hurt poor people (Ali 2011). Building relevant institutions is, as a consequence, generally recognized as part and parcel of the development process. These institutions which evolve over long periods of time in response to the changing demands of social, political and economic interactions are influenced by the history and culture of the respective societies.

3. Institutional Functions in Societies

Institutions are a system of norms to achieve some goal or activity that is considered important by people or an organized cluster of folkways and mores centred on a major human activity. They are equally structured processes through which people execute their activities. They emerge as the largely unplanned outgrowth of social living. As people grope for pragmatic ways of satisfying their needs, they discover some workable patterns which harden through routinization into standardized customs with the passage of time. These patterns acquire a body of supporting folklore which justifies and sanctions them (Horton and Hunt 2004). Institutionalization therefore, demands the replacement of spontaneous or experimental behaviour with behaviour that is expected, patterned, regular, predictable and standardized. Societies are complex with inter-related functions and consequences. These institutions have both manifest and latent functions. While the manifest functions are the professed objectives of the institutions, the latent functions are the unintended and may be unrecognized or if recognized, they are regarded as by-products (Merton 1957). The manifest functions, for instance, expects the family institutions to care for the

children, economic institutions to produce and distribute goods and direct the flow of capital where it is needed, educational institutions to educate the young, political institutions to deal with law-making and law-execution, judicial institutions to take to law adjudication, financial institutions to provide an intermediation between the household of surplus and the household of deficit and religious institutions to provide the moral foundation that is expected to shape and affect the other institutions for the good of society. The latent functions, on the other hand, can also support or inhibit and undermine the manifest functions of institutions. For example, economic institutions do not only produce and distribute goods; they sometime promote technological change and philanthropy or unemployment and inequality. Also, the manifest function of the civil service regulations which is to secure a competent and dedicated army of public employees in order to make government more efficient and result-oriented can be undermined by the latent function of the civil service which is to establish an entrenched bureaucracy that may protect incompetent employees and frustrate the programmes of elected officials (Horton and Hunt 2004). On the whole, institutions contribute to the social, political and economic development and advancement of societies.

4. Institutional Autonomy and Interlinkage

Those who occupy leadership positions in the various institutions of society jealously guard their boundaries and at the same time, they invade the territory of other institutions. Private institutions, for example, resist government controls while seeking government favours, incentives and subsidies. Educational institutions also desire a continuous expansion of educational programmes, while uneasily defending academic freedom. Religious institutions equally defend freedom of religion, while anker for religious education. In fact, the battle for institutional autonomy is unending (Horton and Hunt 2004). Beyond the efforts at achieving institutional autonomy, there is the inevitability of inter-linkage between and among institutions. The exigency of this inter-relationship is evident in the fact that institutions do not exist in a vacuum; rather, they are affected by the rest of the culture and structure of society. Changes in one institution will therefore compel or occasion changes in others. This explains why despite the dichotomy created by the functionalists who assume that a healthy society will show strong support for the society's social institutions (a consensus upon existing institutions) and the conflict theorists that contend that such a consensus may conceal grave injustices and serve to lend moral approval to exploitative practices. Consensus upon institutions is a sign of cultural stability, while a low level of confidence in existing institutions is a symptom of approaching changes as Horton and Hunt (2004) explicitly articulated. Thus, institutions are critical to the functioning, operation and sustenance of societies.

5. Institutional Decay in Nigeria

Institutions in Nigeria are varied and diverse. These institutions are often embodied in the constitution that defines their roles, functions and responsibilities and confers legitimacy on them (Jega 2010). The institutions which include the executive and the legislature in the political realm, the judiciary, the administrative that incorporates the public and civil services and other governmental agencies as well as the family, religious, economic, educational, and financial are bedeviled with corruption, inefficiency, bribery, nepotism, extortion, fraud, manipulation, dysfunctional politicization, unethical practices and other maladies such that decay has taken roots and become a condition per excellence in Nigeria. Corruption, for instance, which exists in both the public and private sectors of the Nigerian society has become institutionalized, systemic and structural and it has a holistic effect on the country because it pollutes our politics, undermines our economy, biases government spending away from socially valuable goods like education, diverts public resources from infrastructure investments that could benefit the poor such as health, undermines public service delivery and constitutes a major factor in the progressive decay that has become an integral part of our culture (World Bank 2001).

The survival and sustenance of any society depends largely on the efficiency and effectiveness of its various and diverse institutions. After all, the underlying philosophy behind the existence of modern societies is the attainment of public good. Therefore, societies require the proper placement and effective functioning of their institutions. In Nigeria, such institutions include the governmental which covers ministries, ministerial departments, parastatals, public corporations and enterprises, public utilities, the legislature, judiciary, security and other agencies as well as regulatory bodies. Other institutions are private including economic and financial and non-governmental such as religious and family institutions. While the governmental institutions are ridden with crises of poor management, inefficiency, corruption, nepotism, manipulation, unhealthy politicization and unethical practices, the organized private, religious and family institutions are not only prone to corruption and corruptive practices, fraud and politicization, they have also been afflicted by the same decadence that is the characteristic feature of governmental institutions. As for the governmental institutions in Nigeria, decadence in the form and shape of corruption, inefficiency and mismanagement has become so endemic that the cost of governance is not only fraudulently increasing, governance is impaired and destabilized such that democracy is threatened and economic development

needed to sustain democratic governance and institutions are distorted and paralyzed. At least, the leakage channels created by corruption and its associated vices impact on the availability of public funds needed for infrastructural development and the stimulation of growth in Nigeria. The poor performance of the Nigerian legislature is, for example, attributable to the corrupt tendencies of the legislators (Baba 2011). The notoriety of this corruptive vice is evident in the fact that the funds meant for running and maintaining the legislature are not judiciously utilized; instead they are squandered on legislators under the guise of outrageous allowances and incentives which does not impact positively on performance.

Corruption by the executive and their agencies in Nigeria is even more celebrated. This is because it has become a celebrated malaise not only amongst top government functionaries like presidents, governors, ministers and commissioners, but also the public and civil services, including the police, customs, immigration and army as Chukwumezie (2010) explicitly noted. Corruption and its associated ills have, in fact, found a fertile breeding ground in all governmental institutions including the educational so much so, that the level of decay that is now a constituent part of our ingrained culture in Nigeria is not only worrisome and frightening, the much-desired development that is expected against the background of the abundant natural resources has become an illusion or a mirage. In the educational sector, for instance, it is common place to hear of “sorting” or “settlement” which is a euphemism for corruptive practices like merchandized or commercialized admissions, award of bloated and outrageous grades to undeserving students and other unethical practices. Even in the civil service, the decay is so alarming that one person in a department has to offer bribe to a worker in another department in order to effect the release of his department’s allocation and all kinds of kicks, including ten percent kick-back, kick-centre and kick-front are offered to facilitate all kinds of approvals and releases.

In the same vein, the financial recklessness and patent corruption of the executive in all kinds of dubious lobbying and settlement including various legislatures particularly for the passage of their budgets in Nigeria is worthy of note. In fact, executive governors loot the treasury with impunity and starch same in foreign accounts. The then minister of finance, Mrs Esther Nenadi Usman, confirmed the gross financial abuses by the then sitting governors who divert the monthly allocations of their states to private foreign accounts. Even the United Nations (Obi and Obikeze 2006) estimated that of the \$400 billion starched in foreign banks by Africans, Nigerians contributed \$100 billion. The judiciary is also infested by corruptive practices in the administration of justice. Essentially, the high level of fraudulent impeachment of state governors during the Obasanjo administration that involved the judiciary as well as the spurious judgments and clear miscarriage of justice typified by many of the electoral tribunal and appeal panel decisions are testimonial to the depth of decay in the judicial institution in Nigeria. Generally, government functionaries misappropriate funds, even those earmarked for salaries and pensions.

Essentially too, corruption and all kinds of unethical practices exist in organized private institutions. Cases of fraudulent and corruptive practices, shady deals and transactions are also known to be rocking private institutions, particularly the financial. Mismanagement of depositors’ funds by banks top management and directors leading, to their collapse and subsequent extinction is also common knowledge. Tax deals and evasion, nepotism, bribery, gross manipulation of established procedures and dysfunctional politicization are also ubiquitous in private sector institutions including oil companies and their servicing partners as well as banks. Corruption and associated vices or ills of the Nigerian society are also visibly glaring in the familial institutions to the extent that it has become institutionalized. And the family is a basic institution and the primary socializing agent in all societies including Nigeria (Giddens and Duneier 2010; Otite and Ogionwo 2010) and it is so critical because it plays a vital part within societies.

The family as an institution is evidently very indispensable for the survival of society; for society is composed of families linked together. In short, the integrative process of socialization, the internalization of behaviour patterns and values occurs primarily within the family (Hale 1990). Despite the basic societal function of the family institution in Nigeria, it has become the bedrock of corruption and decay. The fact that the other institutions in Nigeria are an aggregation or conglomeration of the various families and the Nigerian society is the totality of the diverse families linked together is a pointer to the above assertion. Thus, the family institution in Nigeria has become the harbour of juvenile delinquency, criminality and parental negligence and delinquency. The Nigerian family setting has also become so corrupted that its moral foundation and value basis is seriously threatened.

As for the religious institution, it is not only basic primary, basic and central to the Nigerian society and its several institutions, it is also expected to provide the moral foundation that ordinarily shapes and directs the activities,

operations and processes of the other institutions that are critically vital to the effective operationality and functionality of the country. In the face of the centrality of its role in the Nigerian society, the religious institution is beset and plagued with corruption, decadence, criminality and other forms and shapes of societal maladies. In fact, the institution has degenerated to the level where it can appropriately be labeled as impotent, prostrate, incapacitated and weak. This sordid situation in which the Nigerian religious institution is enmeshed and embroiled can be explained from many dimensions including religious proliferation. On the whole, the negative implications of corruption and institutional decay was underscored by Obasanjo (1999) when he stressed during his Independence Broadcast on October 1, 1999 that corruption is not only illegal, it corrupts the very soul of our community and makes nonsense of all planning and budgeting; it wastefully depletes our inadequate resources, breeds cynicism and promotes inequality and destroys the very fabric of the Nigerian society because it is a full-blown cancer which is one of the greatest tragedies of military rule that was allowed to grow unchallenged and unchecked. Today, corruption and institutional decay is not only a structural malady, it is also a hydra-headed monster.

6. Religious Proliferation in Nigeria

All religions are comprised of communities of believers which are organized in various ways. One of the most important typologies of religions which distinguished churches from sects was advanced by Weber and his associate, the religious historian, Troeltsch (1931 cited in Giddens and Duneier 2010). All religions, regardless of their leaning are concerned fundamentally with the principles of power and the moral basis of people's obligations toward society (Burridge 1969). Religion, in its originality, is solely functional for the sustainability of society, yet its hybridization, balkanization, manipulation and deviation from the blueprint and tenets has produced dysfunctional effects across societies in the globe. This original functionality and manipulated dysfunctionality of religion captures the rather dichotomized positions of Durkheim who saw religion mainly in its solidarity, integrative and cohesive aspects, for he contended that religion contributes to order in society by creating conditions for social well-being, self-discipline, social cohesion and the community of culture and tradition and Coser's contention which countered Durkheim by asserting that his (Durkheim's) solidarity theory of religion ignores the historical evidence which indicates that religion may draw men together, yet it may also separate them and set them against each other (Otitte and Ogionwo 2010). Thus, religion can be functional by helping to maintain social cohesion and control while satisfying the individual's need for emotional comfort, reassurance and a worldview and dysfunctional and divisive particularly in an atmosphere of competition between religious groups or segments of a group. Therefore, while religion assist the process of meeting the functional prerequisites or basic needs of society that requires a certain degree of social solidarity, value consensus, harmony and integration between its parts (Haralambos 1980), hybridization and its manipulation also serves negative purposes with dysfunctional implications for society.

In Nigeria religious pluralism, like ethnic multiplicity, has become both a dominant feature and a problematic. The religious communities of Nigeria like in many other societies are distinguished by reference to their central object of worship. In fact, a large number of religious belief systems and practices are thriving in Nigeria. They include the African Traditionalism which is indigenous and centred on the worship of ancestors and objects, ancient eastern religions such as Buddhism, newer philosophical beliefs like the Grail Movement, Christianity with God as the centre object of worship and Islam whose worship centre on Allah and significant others such as Hare Krishnism, Gurumarajism, Obuism, Godism and Elkankar. Most religious space is, however, covered by Islamic and Christian sects and movements and one of the main features of the two universal religions, is that they are both internally divided and they relate in a complex and variable geometry with other elements of plural society such as traditional African religion, ethnicity, regionalism and statism (IDEA 2010). Although the two religions have sacred texts that are somewhat accepted by virtually all sects and groups, it has not prevented the growth of serious conflicts caused by different theological interpretations. Also, factional and sectarian differences and struggles connected to ideological, political and leadership variables appear to have played a more significant role than theological differences. Nigeria has equally experienced a surge in the phenomenon of Christian and Islamic religious fundamentalism since the mid-1970s.

Today's religious pluralism in Nigeria may be interpreted as evidence of secularization, yet it could be argued that a range of competing religious institutions has reduced the power of religion as Haralambos (1980) underscored. This argument is premised on the thinking that when a single cohesive religion has a monopoly on the Truth, it can effectively reinforce social norms and values and integrate society. In a similar vein, Wilson (1966) posits that if there is a multiplicity of denominations in a society, each with its own version of the Truth, they can at best only reflect and legitimate the beliefs of a section of the population. In this way, religious values cease to be community

values and religion no longer expresses and reinforces the values of society as a whole and so ceases to perform its traditional function of promoting social solidarity. Instead of one religious institution with a single, unchallenged view of the supernatural, there are many with divergent views which weaken the influence of religion since there is no longer a single universe of meaning provided for all members of the society (Berger and Luckmann 1969).

Also, significant changes are occurring within Protestantism in Nigeria. One dimension of the change is the division of protestant denominations into Modernists and Fundamentalists. While the Modernists are liberal and do not interpret the Bible literally and have formed an intellectual commitment to their beliefs, the Fundamentalists are conservative, view the Bible literally as the Word of God and are committed emotionally to their religious values and practices. The Fundamentalists also believe the Bible is a workable guide book for all the affairs of mankind (Capps 1990 cited in Giddens and Duneier 2010) and their position is a reaction against liberal theology, an attempt at reinterpreting the existing doctrine in a way as to challenge the existing order and protest against the established order. Fundamentalism which is well represented and evident in “Born Again” Pentecostal movement involves a struggle against what is considered to be the corrupt Nigerian church, whose spirituality has been destroyed by pagan practices, materialism and hierarchical structures. Fundamentalism, in fact, re-asserts the traditional forms of morality in a world that has become increasingly cosmopolitan where, as a result of globalization, many different ideas and values are brought into constant contact with one another.

The movement toward the unity of Christian churches and denominations known as the ecumenical movement has not even reversed the trend toward religious pluralism. This desire for amalgamation reveals the weakness of the multifarious Christian groups rather than their strength and represents a declining Christianity grasping at straws (Wilson 1966). Islamic fundamentalism has also engendered schism and expansion in Islamic religion. It involves a frontal attack against the remnants of traditional African religious practices still prevalent among Muslim communities and a struggle against the mystical practices and the beliefs of Sufi brotherhoods, mainly the Tijaniyya and the Qadiriyya (IDEA 2010).

7. Institutional Decay and Religious Proliferation in Nigeria: A Critical Examination

In the face of religious fundamentalism and diversity of new groups and sects in Nigeria, religion still remains a vital force, although its influence is declining, just like in the modern world. Religious proliferation has therefore undoubtedly become a phenomenal trend in Nigeria. Worrisome however, is the concern that the multiplicity of religion is going paripasu with institutional decay which has not only assumed a frightening proportion, it has equally become structurally rooted and institutionalized in Nigeria. This brings into fore the exigency of the examination of the relationship between institutional decay and religious proliferation as well as the dysfunctional role that religious proliferation has played in the erosion of morality and the creation of decay in the Nigerian society which is the thrust of this paper. That immoral depravity and corruption have deepened into the very fabric of the contemporary Nigerian society to be appropriately labeled decadence that has potency for paralyzing its institutions is indubitable. For several years, Nigeria has been discredited as one of the most corrupt countries of the world. Specifically, in 2003, the Switzerland-Based Transparency International rated Nigeria as the second most corrupt nation in the entire globe after Bangladesh (Vanguard 2003). No matter the level of accuracy of the above rating, there is no gainsaying the fact that corruption and moral depravities as well as the decay that they have engendered are obvious to any discerning mind and apparent to all, because they stare at every Nigerian in the face.

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), an anti-corruption Organization also emphasized with particular reference to Nigeria that corruption undermines democracy; it creates a culture of impunity and destroys the rule of law, thereby creating a class of overlords who need secrecy to keep their dark deeds hidden in dark places. The organization added that crooked politicians care little for their representatives and serve those who can pay rather than those who elected them and in the worst circumstances, this leads to the criminalization of politics and the politicization of criminals (Vanguard 2003). Ironically, both phenomena institutional decay and religious proliferation are experiencing incrementalism and expansionism such that one might be constrained to conclude that there is a direct relationship between the two in Nigeria.

Perturbed by the fact that moral depravity in Nigeria is accompanied by a high level of religiosity and the proliferation of religious organizations, Orere-Clifford (2004) categorically stated that the relationship between religion and corruption is direct and very high, maybe with $r = 0.90$. The premise of his argument was bolstered by

the survey of people's beliefs conducted by ICM for the British Broadcasting Corporation Programme which revealed that 100 percent of Nigerians believe in God, pray daily and would die for God as against 91 percent in the United States, 67 percent in the United Kingdom and less than 10 percent in Russia and that 91 percent of Nigerians in contrast to 21 percent in the United Kingdom and 7 percent in Russia attend church/mosque services regularly (Vanguard 2004). While this paper which is concerned with the relationship between institutional decay and religious proliferation contends that there exist a relationship between the two, its position is that the relationship is not as direct as canvassed by Orere-Clifford. For instance, while it is reasonable to state that Christianity and Islam, the two dominant religious in Nigeria, do not have the regulatory power of the secularity of the Nigerian (Orere-Clifford 2004), secularity affects mainly the enforcement of diverse religious injunctions which Christianity, for example, does not seek from the Nigerian State. Again, although secularization implies that religious authorities have a lessened ability to influence and control societal-level institutions and individual-level beliefs and behaviours, a possible reason why modern people are less influenced by institutionalized and traditional forms of religion (Gorski 2010 cited in Giddens and Durieier 2010), it is not an adequate explanation for the mere formalism, sterility, powerlessness that religious proliferation has produced with vexatious implication. After all, all religions are supposed to be persuasive rather than compelling, seeking to indoctrinate their adherents and followers so as to be imbued with and imbibe their varying cultures, traditions, customs, and tents.

In all certitude, the multiplicity of religion in Nigeria has culminated in the asymmetric directions, divergent ways and multifarious means to the multiple ends presented by them, as typified by their explanation of and the proffered solution to man's earthly problems and his reward here-after where applicable. Apart from the reasoning that the pluralistic religious groups represent the diversity of interests that is largely responsible for the confusion that religion has come to be associated with, the various groups which claim originality and access to the ultimate truth about the purpose of man have deviated from the blueprint by emphasizing materialism, wealth, prosperity and solutions to man's diverse problems at the expense of God's true and holistic purpose for His creation on earth, and beyond. As a consequence, the balkanized religious groups have compromised, taking pleasure in worldliness, sin, iniquity and transgression and sacrificing decency, orderliness and true salvation and joy on the altar of present gain, popularity and vanity. This hybridization of true religion partly explains the change in value system that is now based principally on wealth and materialism with religious leaders encouraging corrupt enrichment in the Nigerian society, even among their followers and some of them no longer have the moral boldness, societal or public confidence and guts to openly condemn corruptive practices and decadence. In some cases they receive gifts from corrupt persons (Chukwumezie 2010).

Besides, one characteristic feature of religious proliferation in Nigeria is bastardization of moral standards, comprise, merchandize, competition and rivalry. Religious groups have, in fact, become big commercial concerns or outfits with their overseers acting as managing directors or chief executive officers with the ownership structure centered on them and their families who are also lined up in conspicuous succession plan. Many of the religious leaders are wealthy with unbelievable huge bank accounts, palatial mansions and stupendous flashy fleet of cars or jeeps which they flaunt like government functionaries, high-class politicians and high-net-worth businessmen. This extravagant life-style is discernable by their followers or congregations, and admirers who follow suit to the extent that their way of life is also more secular than religious. Spirituality is thus equated with prosperity, materialism and accumulation of wealth notwithstanding the source.

Another feature of religious proliferation in Nigeria is religiosity, sociality, immorality, worldliness, indecency, disorderliness, lawlessness, moral decay and unbridled liberty. The above vices have been encouraged, promoted and extolled so much so, that there is virtually no demarcating line between religion and worldliness, for religion has become worldly and the Nigerian world has become religious. In short, there was more fear, decency and a sense of restrain and caution in the era preceding religious proliferation in Nigeria. Religion, particularly Christianity which asserts its superiority over the others, has let down the bars by opening its doors to all kinds of worldly vices and criminal tendencies partly in the spirit of uncontrolled liberty. This trend has created an atmosphere or a climate in religious circles that is clement for the unbelieving and unregenerated majority to perpetrate their worldliness laced up with religiosity and emotionality. By implication, religious proliferation has played a notable role in the erosion of morality and the creation of decay in the Nigerian society.

8. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Arguably, religious proliferation in Nigeria has reduced the power of religion which is today plagued with asymmetric directions, divergent ways and multifarious means to the multiple envisioned ends. This pluralism in religion has constrained the potency of a cohesive religion to effectively create and enforce moral and social norms and values that will integrate the Nigerian society in the right fashion. The concomitant effect of the above development is the weakness, formalism, sterility, powerlessness of religion which has become incapacitated and resultantly provided a channel for the facilitation of institutional decay in Nigeria. There is therefore the exigency of a sense of cohesion and collaboration among religious groups so as to forge a united front for the creation and sustenance of a genial climate that will facilitate individual and institutional transformation through societal value re-orientation, attitudinal change and behavioral re-predisposition in Nigeria. This envisaged new religious regime where emphases are placed on the major areas of commonality will undoubtedly discourage the division-oriented tendencies and avoidable petty proliferation that has both weakened the moral base of the Nigerian society and facilitated the level of institutional decay that has become commonplace.

References

- Acemoglu, D.S., Johnson, J.R. and Thai Chareon, Y. (2011), "International Causes, Macro Economic Symptoms Volatility, Crises and Growth", *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 50(1), 30-34.
- Ali, A.A.G. (2005), "Growth, Poverty and Institutions: Is there a Missing Link?" in Poverty, Growth and Institutions, AERC Senior Policy Seminar VII. Nairobi: African Economic Research Consortium.
- Baba, Y.T.K. (2011), "Staffing of the Legislature, Cost of Governance and Legislative Performance in Nigeria", in A.S. Akpotor, A.O. Afolabi, M.O. Aigbokhaevbolo, B.O. Iganiga and O.S. Odiagbe (eds.) *Cost of Governance in Nigeria: An Evaluative Analysis*. Ekpoma: AAU Publishing House.
- Berger, P.L. and Luckmann, T. (1969), "Sociology of Religion. London: Free Press.
- Burridge, (1969), "New Heaven and New Earth: A Study of Millennium Activities", Toronto: Copp Clark.
- Chukwumezie, N. (2010), "Corruption as an Endemic Problem in Nigeria", in E.A. Obi and O.S.A. ObiKeze (eds.) *Contemporary Social Issues*. Onitsha: Bakpoint.
- Darbel, A. and Schapper, D. (1972), "Le Systeme Administrative", Paris: Mouton.
- Giddens, A. and Duneier, M. (2010), "Introduction to Sociology", London: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Hale, S.M. (1999), "Controversies in Sociology: A Canadian Introduction", Toronto: Longman company.
- Haralambos, M. (1980), "Sociology: Themes and Perspectives", Oxford: University Press.
- Horton, P.B. and Hunt, C.L. (2004), "Sociology", New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill.
- IDEA, (2010), "Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing Dialogue for Nation Building", Sweden IDEA Publications.
- Jega, A.M. (2010), "Democracy, Good Governance and Development in Nigeria", Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Merton, R.K. (1968), "Social Theories and Social Structure", New York: Free Press.
- Obasanjo, O. (1999), "Speech Delivered at the 1999 Independence Day Celebration", Abuja: Federal Government Press.
- Orere-Clifford, S.D. (2004), "Religion and the Paradox of Moral Depravity in Contemporary Nigeria", in V.T. Jike (eds.) *Social problems: Theoretical Paradigms in Contemporary Sociology*, Lagos: NISS Publications.

Orren, K. and Skowronek, S. (1994), “Beyond the Iconography of order: Notes for a New Institutionalism”, in L.C. Dodd and C. Jillson (eds.) *The Dynamics of American Politics*. Boulder and Co: West view Press.

Otite, O. and Ogonwo, W. (2010), “An introduction to Sociological Studies”, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.

Riggs, F. (1971), “Frontiers of Development Administration”, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Thoenig, J. C. (2007), “Institutional Theories and Public Institutions: Traditions and Appropriateness”, in B.G. Peters and J. Pierre (eds.) *The Handbook of Public Administration*. London: SAGE Publications.

Vanguard, (2003), October 12.

Vanguard, (2004), February 29.

Wilson, B. R. (1966), “Religion in a Secular Society”,

World Bank, (2001), “The World Bank’s World Development Report for 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty”, New York: Oxford University Press.

World Bank (2010), “World Development Report 2002: Building Institutions for Markets”, New York: Oxford University Press.

This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR PAPERS

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. There's no deadline for submission. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:** <http://www.iiste.org/Journals/>

The IISTE editorial team promises to review and publish all the qualified submissions in a **fast** manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

