

The Role of Religion in Youth Formation and National Development in Nigeria

By

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Abstract

This essay examined the role of religion on youth's formation in national development. The paper argues that unemployment, peer group, impatience and quick rich syndrome, etc are noticeable factors responsible for youth's indulgence in crimes and criminalities instead of channeling their potential to the development of the nation. The paper contends that religion by exerting its influence has helped not only to reshape the youths, but also mould them to contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation by inculcating its values in them. The study adopts historical approach as an aid to ascertain the factors responsible for youth's indulgence in crimes. Findings from the study reveal that youth's indulgence in crime is due to unemployment, etc. The paper recommends that the Nigerian government should create job opportunities for the youths to reduce youth's restiveness.

Key Words: Religion, Youth, Youth Formation, and National Development.

Introduction

Youth's development and nation building has been a major concern of every nation, Nigeria inclusive. In Nigeria, the youths constitute greater

percentage of the population. This explains why the youths have been described as a people on which tomorrow's leadership will be established. With these admirable qualities, the youths are meant to be environmental friendly by protecting government property from destruction, accord respects to constitutional provision to enhance national interests and unity. Their thought and action should be such that can promote the nation's image in the global scene.

Unfortunately, the youths have become leading actors in perpetrating crimes instead of channeling their potential and wisdom in national development. Thus, the attitudes, action and behavior of our leaders which have resulted in corrupt practices such as embezzlement of public funds, bad leadership, high cost of governance, etc are other factors which drag national development to a standstill. The thrust of this essay therefore, is on the examination of the role of religion on youth's formation in national development.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, the youths constitute overwhelming number of the Nigerian population. This explains why the youths have been described as a people on which tomorrow's government will be built. As a people endowed with potential, it is expected that they can launch the society into the highest pedestal of development. Despite this, the youths have taking active part into different kinds of crimes such as robbery, crude oil theft and refining, oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism, drug abuse and drug trafficking, etc. Therefore, this essay aimed at examining the factors responsible for youth's indulgence in crimes.

My Aim in the Present Study and Methodology Adopted for this Study

Two things attracted my attention. The first was to examine the factors responsible for youth's indulgence in crimes and criminalities instead of channeling their potential to the development of the nation. The second was to examine the role of religion and to see how this has helped to mould the

youths to contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation, especially in this era of moral decadence. In this study I adopted historical approach which helped to ascertain the factors responsible for youth's indulgence in crimes.

Conceptual Clarification

Religion

One of the most difficult concepts in terms of definition is the religion. This is essentially because no one definition by a scholar has successfully and adequately taken care of the various aspects of this 'enigma' called Religion. However, it is worthwhile to give a few of the various views expressed about the meaning of religion. Eliade (2010) defined it as "a unified system of beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, ultimate non material fact and has a 'dynamogenic' quality".

Deton (2006) defines religion as a fixed relationship between the human and non-human entities, the sacred, the supernatural, the self existent, the absolute or simply, God. William James (1902) defines religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider the divine" In Durkheim's own view (1947), religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, to things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community all those who adhere to them.

St. Thomas Aquinas defines religion as the virtue, which prompts them to render to God the worship and reverence that is his by right. Immanuel Kant sees religion simply as man's recognition of his duties as divine command. For Harry (2006) religion in its essence gives meaning to life and serves as an instrument for promoting social solidity, value consensus, harmony and tolerance in the society. According to him, it strengthens the unity of a group or country and much of the norms of the social system are integrated by religious beliefs. Religion can therefore be

understood as a regulated pattern of life of a people in which experiences, beliefs and knowledge are reflected in man's conception of himself in relation to others, his social world, the physical as well as the metaphysical world (Okwueze, 2003).

Youth

There are divergent views in the definitions of who a youth is. One school of thought defines a youth as a set of beings between the age range of 18 (eighteen) and 65 (sixty five). Another school of thought argues that youths are a set of people that falls between the age of 18 (eighteen) and 40 (forty). In Nigeria, youth constitutes overwhelming number of the Nigerian population. Any wonder, the youths have been described as a people on which tomorrow's government will be built. Thus, in Nigeria and other clans, youths have been known for certain qualities: they are full of strength and energy. They are progressive thinkers and practically vibrant. Youths are key driver of the nation's destiny. This means that the youths have potential that can transform the fortune of this country (internet source www.investinganswers.com/whosayouth/ extracted 24 February, 2020).

Youth Formation

In the words of Haralambos and Heald (2004) youth formation is the development of positive attitude that prepares a young person to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood and achieves his or her full potential. According to them, youth formation is promoted through activities and experiences that help youth develop social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive competencies. For Ubani (2003) this developmental phase constitute part of the youth's development process. For him, this process supports the young person in developing: (a) the ability to analyze his or her own strengths and weaknesses, set personal and vocational goals, and have the self-esteem, confidence, motivation and abilities to carry them out (including the ability to establish support networks in order to fully

participate in community life and effect positive social change). (b) the ability to guide or direct others on a course of action, influence the opinions and behaviors of others, and serve as a role model capable of influencing others positively.

According to Wehmeyer, et.al (1998) “conditions that promote healthy” youth formation are supported through programs and activities in schools and communities. For Wehmeyer, et.al, such programs not only recognize youth’s strengths but also seek to promote positive development rather than addressing risks in isolation. According to Maman (1990), it is the collective responsibility of the families, schools and communities to provide the necessary conditions for positive youth’s attitudinal formation that will be of beneficial in nation building.

National Development

According to Munasinghe (2004), national development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individuals, humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems.

Lawal (2011), defines national development as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of the country or nation. For Sunday (2010) is “the ability of a country or countries to improve on the welfare of the people, e.g. by providing social amenities like good education, pipe born water, etc.

Factors responsible for youth’s indulgence in crimes

One noticeable factor that impinge negatively on youths is unemployment. Unemployment rate is high in Nigeria. Every year hordes of youths graduate from secondary and tertiary institutions with no prospects of employment. After years of walking the streets in search of non-existent jobs, they are ready to go anywhere to do anything just as long as they can be gainfully employed. The negative influence of

unemployment has exposed many Nigerian youths into different kinds of crimes such as kidnapping, drug abuse, drug trafficking, robbery, prostitution, child trafficking, crude oil theft and refining (Eum and Anugwom, 2002).

In addition to this is peer group. The effect of peer group on youths is quite enormous. As Mason (2003) would say "if you run with wolves, you will learn how to howl, but if you associate with eagles; you will learn how to soar to great heights". This is a truism because youths become like those they associate with. In a peer group where most members are into rape, secret cult, stealing by false pretence, gambling, excess consumption of alcohol, sniffing of cocaine, etc there is the tendency for the few who may not have the penchant to join them just to please their friends. Obviously, many Nigerian youths have done what they ought not to have done intentionally just to retain relevance among their peers. Following closely is indecision syndrome. Every accomplishment, great or small, starts with a decision. Nothing great was ever done without act of decision. Unfortunately, many of the young person lack clarity of vision of their goal. The ability to take a decisive decision has eluded many Nigerian youths due to lack of clarity of vision. That is why many Nigerian youths go through in life not knowing what they want. The youths often are like wheelbarrows, trailers or canoes; until they are pushed, pulled or paddled they will not take a decisive decision. This state of dilemma has lured many Nigerian youths into act that left them with ugly marks in their entire adult life (Mason, 2003).

Following this is impatience syndrome. Many Nigerian youths have mesmerized themselves due to in ability to wait for the right time. They want to have everything in a platter of gold while neglecting the importance of patience. A youth may aim at becoming a lawyer, doctor, engineer, etc there is nothing absolutely wrong with that but he lacks patience to start from the scratch. This has led many Nigerian youths into regrettable disaster. In addition to this is quick rich syndrome. Nowadays, many Nigerian youths wants popularity, they also want to be celebrated almost

at the same time due to societal outlook. Our society today is such that place much value on wealth. They respect and pour encomiums on those that have money in the society without minding the source of their wealth. Nowadays, many Nigerian youths have come to engage their inner minds on quest for materialism. To own the latest car in town, to marry the most beautiful woman on earth, to own the biggest mansion in the world, to wear the latest designer suites and shoes, etc occupies their minds. These inordinate ambitions have played negatively on Nigerian youths.

Factors that Hinders National Development

Bad Leadership

Bad leadership has become the bane of national development. Achebe (1983) averred that “the problem with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership”. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigeria land, or climate; water, air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness and inability of its leaders to rise to the existential needs and challenges of the people; selfless care and concern for those under their charge which are the indices of good leadership. It is unfortunate that bad leadership has affected the nation so much that most of the existing infrastructures have been ignored, jettisoned, under-utilized or misused. A good leader should have the welfare of the citizens as his priority and not to amass wealth to the detriment of the masses.

Corruption

Corruption is another cog on the wheel of national development. It is a cankerworm that has eaten into the fabric of our society at all levels. It has caused decay and dereliction within the infrastructure of government and indeed in the society generally especially when one considers its deplorable effects on the physical, social and human development of the country (Nkechinyere, 2009). Those who are in control of power enrich themselves; mismanage national resources to the detriment of the masses. This

consequently, has marred the socio-economic development of the country and unleashed insecurity in the nation.

Embezzlement

The worst killer of a nation's development is the embezzlement of public funds earmarked for national development. This has become a tradition in the Nigerian polity. Often, funds disbursed to spend on infrastructure like roads, educational and medical facilities, water, electricity and other developmental projects are stolen by few Nigerians to enrich themselves, their children and generation unborn to the detriment of the masses. More often, these stolen monies are being stashed overseas banks to boost other country's economies while Nigeria continues to remain impoverished and underdeveloped. More worrisome is that in Nigeria, looters of public treasuries commit this heinous act with impunity and they are not being punished (Uju, 2002).

High Cost of Governance

It is no long new in Nigeria that chunk of the budget which runs into billions are being spent on the legislators both at the national and state levels annually to cover their refreshments and meals, for maintenance of vehicles and procurement of fuel for vehicles. Also, billions are being earmarked to cover their medical trips/checks abroad (Celestine, 2010). Money that would have been used to invest in other purposeful venture for sustainable national growth and development goes into pocket of few Nigerians.

The Role of Religion on Youth's Formation in National Development

One important role of religion on youth's formation is by integrating the youths with God, the ultimate Being on whom man in society depend. It does this not only by establishing the intimacy between the father (God) and the son (youths), but also to mask the youths with face of God. Another significant role of religion on youth's formation is polishing the youths with

sound religious cum moral values such as honesty, justice, kindness, selflessness, truth, generosity, tolerance, courage, respect for elders and ultimately, love for all (Anyancho, 1994).

With these values, youth/youths will no longer be used as armed thug during the election. Rather he will actively involved in the electoral process to elect tested, trusted and people- oriented leaders that will grantee selfless and equitable representation to the nation at all levels. With these sentiments of love, honesty, and truth youths will no longer see politics (i.e. leadership) as an avenue for exploitation and embezzlement of national treasuries to the detriment of the masses. Rather, leadership will be viewed as an expression of love, kindness, honesty and truth for the masses.

Thus, with this moral basis youth/youths will actively initiate constructive ideas that will transform the economy to a better state instead of looting and leading it to disintegration. Such a youth/youths in the present Nigerian context will be actively involved in improving the existing deteriorating infrastructure like roads, electricity, educational facilities, respect constitutional provision, and so on. He will be so committed to the common good of Nigerians at all times. Consequently, a youth/youths with this image of God will be inspired to relate with people in other religious organizations in love. Also, with these religious foundation a youth/youths will be selflessly encouraged to relate with people in other ethnic groups, tribes and cultures in justice thereby promoting a healthy and harmonious nation (Ekwunife, 1995).

Recommendations

1. The Nigerian Government should create job opportunities for the youths to reduce youth's restiveness.
2. There should be routine value- re-orientation to conscientize the youths on the danger associated with impatience, indecision, and value on wealth.
3. There should be ethical re-orientation to conscientize our leaders on the importance of moral principles as tools for good leadership.

Conclusion

Unemployment, peer group, impatience, indecision, and quick rich syndrome are noticeable factors responsible for youth's indulgence in crimes and criminalities instead of channeling their potential to the development of the nation. Religion by exerting its influence has helped to mould the youths, inspires them to contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation by injecting its values in them.

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