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SUSTAINING DEMOCRACY AND PROMOTING PEACE IN A MULTILINGUAL COUNTRY: THE ROLES OF RELIGION

By

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ABSTRACT

Some eleven years after the restoration of democracy in a nation battered by many years of military adventurism in politics, Nigeria remains at the tenterhooks of development. This paper investigates the challenges of multilingualism and religion as major factors that can potentially address the culture of peacelessness in Nigeria. While construing language and religion as critical phenomena that engender peace and development, depending on how they are used, the paper identifies ignorance, arrogance, mischief and hypocrisy, bordering on ethnicity and religion, as threats to democracy and peace in Nigeria. It submits that sustaining the gains of democracy in a multilingual country like Nigeria requires the proper conception of linguistic diversity and religious practice. It concludes by suggesting ways through which religion can be positively deployed to nation-building. Keywords: democracy, development, language, religion, multilingual, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Fifty years after the attainment of political independence, Nigeria remains on the tenterhooks with several challenges that pose serious threats to development. Despite the huge potentials that the country has to catalyze it to the zenith, it is worrisome that much progress is not being recorded as the country lags relatively behind others with similar or lesser endowments, human and material. For instance, as noted by Ndace (2009), Nigeria has 79 million hectares of fertile land; a diverse and rich vegetation capable of supporting a large livestock population, 267.7 billion m³ of surface water; 57.9 billion m³ of underground water; 3.14 million hectares of irrigable land, and a huge deposit of oil and other natural resources. Yet, as pointed out by Obanya (2011), citing 2008 figures, Nigeria ranks "abysmally low on Human Poverty Index (114 out of 135 countries), Life Expectancy at Birth (167 out of 182), GDP per capita (141 out of 182) and access to portable water (142 out of 182)."

While it was fashionable to blame the military for the challenges of development, the argument can no longer be sustained because, eleven years after uninterrupted civilian rule, Nigeria has not fared much better. As the US Secretary of State, Mrs. Hillary Clinton, said in August 2009 in Nigeria, "a country that produces two million barrels of oil a day, has the seventh largest natural gas reserves of any country in the world, but according to the United Nations, the poverty rate in Nigeria has gone up from 46 percent

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over the last 13 years” most of which fell within civilian rule (Adedimeji, 2009a).

In other words, the dream of many Nigerians of a better life after the success of a transition to democracy in 1999 remains stifled. The restoration of democracy has not resulted in the expected development, but has rather engendered more challenges. Two critical challenges that are considered to pose a threat to development border on language and religion, with several crises and violence recorded as a result of claims of ethno-linguistic and religious factors.

This paper generally overviews democracy in Nigeria as it identifies language and religion as effective tools, which have not been positively deployed to achieve their purposes, in creating a peaceful and prosperous nation. It suggests that rather being considered as problems, as the linguistic diversity and religious plurality in Nigeria seem to be considered by the Government, it is the understanding of the two along with sincerity on the part of the political leadership that is considered desirable in order to crystalise the country to the attainment of development.

NIGERIA: THE MAKING OF A LINGUISTIC PARADISE

The creation of Nigeria as a geo-political entity is a relatively recent development. What existed before the late 19th century was a conglomeration of different empires, kingdoms and communities, which included the Hausa/ Fulani states, the Oyo Empire, the Benin Kingdom, the Kanem-Borno Empire, the Borgu Kingdom, among several others. Each of these states or kingdoms had a wide expanse of territory equal to some other countries in Africa with relatively sophisticated political, economic, administrative and military systems.

British colonisation began in the middle of the 19th century and specifically, the British gunboats attacked Lagos in 1851 and a decade after, Lagos was formally declared a colony. Subsequent territories that came under the superior fire-power of the British were administered under a 'protectorate' (Obanya, 2011). By the early 20th century, the entire geographical state referred to as Nigeria was under the control of the British, who administered the territories as protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria.

Modern Nigeria came into existence with the amalgamation of the northern and southern Nigeria in 1914. The name Nigeria had been coined by Miss Flora Shaw, a journalist with the *Times* newspaper of London, in a dispatch she made on January 1, 1897 to refer to the territories controlled by the Royal Niger Companies (Adedimeji, 2009b:71). Brigadier General Lord Lugard adopted the name and it stuck till today.

The creation of Nigeria as a single political entity signified the unification of hundreds of ethno-linguistic groups/communities dotting the landscape. As the human resource is the most important wealth of a nation, it appeared that Nigeria was destined to be great as a result of its feature as the most populous black nation. However, several colonial policies bordering on divide and rule tactics did not allow a full integration of the communities. It was only natural that few years after political independence, a deadly civil war was

prosecuted between August, 1967 and January, 1970 to “go on with one Nigeria” resulting in death and destruction.

As a result of divisive politics engrained in the polity right from the colonial period, partly reflected in the partitionings of the country, multilingualism, a blessing, has been effectively made to appear to be a curse. For instance, towards the end of colonialism, a three-region structure was fabricated in 1951 as the North, the East and the West representing the three major ethnic contours of Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. In 1963, a Mid-West region was created making Nigeria a four-region country. In 1967, the country was divided into twelve states. This number increased to 19 in 1976. By 1987, two additional states were created making the states 21 in total. This number was increased to 36 (and a Federal Capital Territory) in 1991. There are still several agitations for state creations and it is being speculated that Nigeria may have 50 states like the United States, though in size she is not more than the size of two US states (like California and Kansas) brought together.

It would appear from the foregoing that the problem with Nigeria is politics and not multilingualism, just as the sheer diversity of flowers in a garden and multiplicity of animals in a zoo are considered as vitality, diversity and beauty not otherwise (Bamgbose, 1991; Adedimeji, 2009b). As such, the various languages spoken across Nigeria make the country a linguistic paradise and a cultural haven.

Determining the actual number of languages in Nigeria is problematic as a result of dearth of accurate data. In the censuses of 1991 and 2006, demographic information on language (and religion) was excluded. Nevertheless, scholars have found that Nigeria has about 400 languages and about 250 distinct ethnic groups (Wente-Lukas, 1985).

In a comprehensive, though “tentative”, register of the Nigerian languages, Adegbiya (2004) provides a list of 499 languages spoken in Nigeria apart from dialects. The “major languages”, according to him, are: Annang, Badakare, Baruba, Bekwara, Berom, Bokyì, Bolewa, Buduna, Chamba, Ebira, Fulfulde, Gwari, Hausa, Ibibio, Idoma, Igala, Igbo, Ijo, Ikwere, Itshekiri, Jarawa, Junkun, Kaje, Kalabari, Kana, Kanuri, Kilba, Kutep, Margi, Mumuye, Nupe, Shuowa Arabic, Tangale, Tere, Tiv, Urhobo, and Yoruba.

The other languages may be arranged thus:

Abama
Abim
Abom
Abum
(Abum)
Abulom
Adim
Afema
(Yekhe)
Afo
Agatu
Agbadima
Agoi
Agwagwa
Agwara
Kambem
Akaha
Akama
Ake
Akita
Akweya
Alago
Alege
Amo
Amper
Anaguta
Angas
Ankwer
Arum
Atem
Awak
Aya

A	B	C	D	E	F
Abanyom	Ba'ap	Chakfem-Mushere	Dadiya	Echie	Fa'awa
Abini	Baan	Cham-Mwana	Dakarka	Egbema	Fali
Abono	Baatonum	Chara	Dakkawa	Eggon	Fier
Abuan (Abua)	Bachama	Charawa	Das: Dur-Baraza, Dot, Wand, Zari, Lukshi	Egun	
Abuloma	Badawai	Chawai	Defaka	EhoEjam	
Adim	Bade	Chip	Degema	Ekajuk	
Afemai (Yekhee)	Bakpinka	Chomo-Karim	Dendi	Eket	
Afo	Bambuka		Dengi	Ekpedo	
Agatu	Bandawa		Deno		
Agbadarigi	Banga		Dghwede	Ekpeye	
Agoi	Bangwinji		Dibo		
Agwagwune	Banso		Dinuk	Eleme	
Agwara-Kamberi	Barawa		Dirim	Eloyi	
Akaha	Bare		Diryawa	Engenni	
Akama	Barke		Doka	Epie(Atisa)	
Ake	Barkul		Doko-Uyanga	Eruwa	
Akita	Barutun		Duguza	Esan	
Akweya	Basharawa		Duka	Etsako	
Alago	Basher		Dulbu	Etulo	
Alege	Bassa: Bassa-Kaduna		Dungi	Etung	
Amo	Bassakomo		Duwai		
Amper	Bassange		Duzka		
Anaguta	Bata: Bata-Hausa				
Angas	Bauchi				
Ankwer	Baya				
Arum	Bedde				
Atem	Bembe				
Awak	Bette				
Aya	Biase				

M	N	O	P	Q	R
Mada	Nandu- Tari	Obolo	Pai	Quas	Ribina
Magu	Naraguta	Obudu	Pan		Rindre
Mambila	Nde	Ochukwayam	Panyam		Romkulere
Mana	Ndebeni	Odual	Pero		Ron(Challa)
Mandara	Ndoni	Ofutop	Pidgin		Rukuba
Mangas	Ndoro	Ogbah(Egnih)	Pidlimdi		Ramaya
Matakam	Nembe	Ogbia	Piri		Rurama
Mbembe	Ngamawa	Ogbogolo	Piti		
Mboi	Ngamo	Ogbronuagum	Polci: Zul, Baram, Dur, Buli, Langas		
Mbube	Ngas	Ogoni	Putai		
Mbula	Ngazimawa	Eke-esanyi (Ogori- Magongo)	Pyapum		
Mbum	Nggwahyi	Okpameri	Pyem		
Mbute	Ngizim-	Okpe:Idesa,			
Meyanci	Ndhang	Oloma, Akuku			
Mgwaba	Ngwoi	Okpella			
	Ninzam	Okun: Bunu, Ijumu, Owe, Yagba			
Miango	Nyan yi	Ontal			
Mighili	Nkari	Ora			
Minda	Nkem	Oron			
Miriam	Nkoro	Ososo			
Miyawa	Nnam	Oworo			
Mober	Nselle				
Moma	Nta (Atam)				
Montel	Numana-				
	Nunku-				
	Gwantu				
Moroja	Nyamnyam				
Mumbake					
Mundang					
Munga					
Mupan					
Mwagharul					
S	T	U	V	W	Y
Sakbe	Tal	Ubagbara	Verre	Waha	Yache
Sanga	Tala	Ubokuma	Vintim	Waja	Yaddona
Sankula	Tambes	Ucinda	Vomni	Waka	Yahe
Sasaru-	Tarok	Ugep		Wawama	Yakuben
Enwan-				: Gamargu	
Igwe				, Kirawa	
Sate	Tawoka	Ukaan (Ikan)		Warjawa	Yandang

CONCEPTUAL

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CONCEPTUALISING DEMOCRACY AND PEACE

Often traced to Athens in Greece several centuries ago, democracy has come to typify the most popular system of government in the world and to some, the best system of government ever fabricated by man. According to Schumpeter (1952:269), democracy is the institutional arrangement in which individuals acquire power by means of competitive struggle for people's votes. To Dahl (1963:133), it is the rule of multiple minorities. While Plamenatz (1963) construes democracy as a system of government consisting of popular sovereignty, majority rule, protection of minorities, affability, constitutional liberties, people's participation in decision at every level and egalitarianism, Macpherson (1973) submits that democracy is all about representative parliaments, the separation of power, the rule of law, civil rights and other desirables. Andrian (1983) complements this conceptualisation by submitting that democratic politics consists of important institutions like free elections, free speech, existence of certain kinds of rights and liberties.

As a result of its attributes of being inclusive and participatory, democracy has been embraced as the pathway to development, with the United States of America and Great Britain serving as models. The power that democracy gives people, through periodic elections, to choose their leaders means that the people have the power to determine their own future through the ballot. Other components of democracy that make it attractive are the respect for individuals and provision for guaranteeing the fundamental human rights (Basiru, 2010).

Democracy is not a simple concept with a uniform interpretation. Rather, it is a *potpourri* of several forms or variations which inform such classifications as "pluralist democracy, radical democracy, liberal democracy, socialist democracy, one-party democracy, deliberative democracy, polyarchy, elitist democracy, equilibrium democracy and so on" (Weale, 1999:19). With several theories, applications, interpretations and manifestations, what makes democracy popular is that, as Oseghae (1992:40) submits, "in all its versions, whether liberal, socialist and African brand shares the fundamental objectives of how to govern the society in such a way that power actually belongs to all people."

However, as noted by Schumpeter (1952), the so-called "power belongs to the people" in democracy is relative:

Democracy does not mean and cannot mean that the people actually rule in any real sense of the terms, 'people' and 'rule'. Democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule over them. (cf. Basiru, 2010:67)

Also, Adam Michnik in a *New Yorker* article of December 9, 1996 observes:

Democracy is neither black nor red. Democracy is gray...It chooses banality over excellence, shrewdness over mobility, empty promise over true competence...It is eternal imperfection, a mixture of sinfulness, saintliness and monkey business. This is

why the seekers of a moral state and of a perfect, just society do not like democracy (cf. Danjibo, 2010:56).

Peace on the other hand transcends the narrow confines of the absence of war. It is rather the absence of conflicts, belligerence, instability, strife, hostilities, negative propaganda and insecurity (Obasanjo, 2001:258). To Ibeanu (2006), peace is a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflicts within specific societies and the wider international community.

Galtung (1990) identifies the two types of peace as positive peace and negative peace. Positive peace entails absence of unjust structures, unequal relationships, justice, etc. while negative peace is the absence of direct violence, war, fear, conflict, at individual, national, regional and international levels. According to Albert and Oloyede (2010:2): Negative peace is the absence of physical violence while positive peace is the absence of both structural and psychological violence. Negative peace is imposed; it hardly results from an open resolution of the conflicts. On the other hand, positive peace implies reconciliation and restoration through creative transformation of conflict. It is preferred to negative peace.

In his own contribution to the concept of peace, Francis (2006:18) submits that there are six meanings of peace: peace as the absence of war (absence of direct violence); peace as justice and development (absence of structural violence); peace as respect and tolerance between people; peace as *Gaia* (balance in and with ecosystem); inner peace (spiritual peace) and peace as wholeness and making whole.

Both democracy and peace are complementarily connected as the ultimate goal of democracy is the attainment of peace through people's participation while it is peace that leads to development. In other words, as Imobighe (2006:15), citing Mansbridge, puts it, "democracy is to produce peaceful, legitimate decisions about a large number of matters that might otherwise end in disruptive conflict." Thus, when democracy combines with peace, development is formed. But when there is no peace, development is stalled and there is peacelessness or violence. This peacelessness, according to Galtung (1990:4), manifests in two types of violence: direct violence (i.e. physical, emotional and psychological violence) and structural violence (i.e. deliberate policies, structures that cause human suffering).

Democracy would generally include the right to life, the right to human dignity, the right to participate in decision making, respect for the rule of law, security of life and property, the right to vote and be voted for, freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of the press, freedom to live freely anywhere, good governance and service delivery "which includes accountability, transparency, good schools, good hospitals, good roads, affordable foods, constant electricity, living wages for workers and opportunities to secure job etc." (Danjibo, 2010:52). The provision of these elements promotes peace and peace results in development as no development can take place in the absence of peace.

PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE AND RELIGION IN NIGERIA

Both language and religion are veritable means through which people express themselves and exercise their freedom of worship. The relationship between the two is symbiotic as language gives expression to the norms and teachings of religion while religion itself relies on language for impact. The two concepts are agents of mass mobilisation, a requirement for deepening the ideals of democracy.

Based on the various functions of language, the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual, and the significant roles it plays in forming, informing, reforming and transforming individuals and societies, including indoctrinating or inculcating religious values, the development of Nigerian languages was pioneered by the missionaries during the colonial rule (Adedimeji, 2005). It is on record that the missionaries initiated and advanced foundation orthographies for languages like Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, etc. They studied the Nigerian languages and translated the Bible and prayer books to the native languages. While Rev. J. F. Schon chose to study Hausa and Igbo, Samuel Ajayi Crowther studied and developed Yoruba, producing the first grammar of the language in 1843 (Adedimeji, 2010). The Yoruba orthography produced by the missionaries was revised and agreed upon at the Orthography Conference of 1875, which was the year Rev. J. C. Taylor, who volunteered for the Onitsha Mission, relieved Rev. J. F. Schon of the challenge the latter gave himself to do the same for Igbo (Adegbija, 2004:23).

Codifying Nigerian languages was part of the principal aspects of the missionary programme. As more people craved to read, the more they became Christianised. Rev. Bowen stated in 1857, as quoted in Ajayi (1965) thus:

Our designs and hopes in regard to Africa are not simply to bring as many individuals as possible to the knowledge of Christ. We desire to establish the Gospel in the hearts and minds and social life of the people... without the instrumentality of foreign missionaries. This cannot be done without civilization. To establish the Gospel among any people, they must have Bibles and therefore must have the art to make them or the money to buy them. They must read the Bible and this implies instructions.

While the missionaries were clear about what they wanted to achieve and pursued it with vigour, the successive Nigerian governments have not been able to articulate what they want to achieve through the abandonment of the indigenous languages.

Likewise, Nigeria is a religious country and the interest of Nigerians in religion predated the advent of colonialism. According to Oloyede (2008), religion remains the most powerful force of bringing people together despite geographical barriers though it can also be exploited, as it is often so used, as an instrument of hewing people apart. He also notes that "the reality of today's life is that there is no escape from religion and there is no doubt about its relevance. One must pass through it at a stage in life, at one time or the other: at birth, at marriage and at death." Both Islam and Christianity are the dominant religions in Nigeria, though there are a few that practise what is called "African

Traditional Religion". As important as language and religion are, four factors appear to make them controversial in Nigeria over the years. These are ignorance, arrogance, mischief and hypocrisy briefly discussed as follows:

Ignorance accounts for the belief in many quarters that the multiplicity of languages or plurilingualism is a curse on the polity while religion retards development as an opium to the masses. Yet, multilingualism is advantageous to individuals and nations in achieving cognitive and academic growth, helping with identity conflicts, entrenching family values, creating career opportunities and maintaining cultural vitality (Adedimeji, 2009b). This ignorance has been stretched far that there is always a tendency to undermine Nigerian languages such that millions of Nigerians who do not speak the English language are often left in the lurch as the polity does not carry them along. They do not know the constitution, they do not know their rights and they do not know anything.

Arrogance is the insistence on what is wrong based on limited knowledge. It is the extreme form of ignorance, which accounts for the insistence on pursuing a policy of Englishization with its attendant relegation and subjugation of national linguistic identity, active political participation especially at the grassroots level, linguistic imperialism and linguistic suicide. This Englishization policy of the government manifests in at least three areas, according to Lawal (2009:32):

- i) The policy of straight-for-English continues unabated in the private and nursery primary schools, while the implementation of the medium-of-instruction policy in the public primary schools is bedeviled with crisis and confusion.
- ii) The trilingual policy stimulating the learning of English, the mother-tongue and another major Nigerian language for the junior secondary school child is yet to go beyond the unity schools, thirty (30) years after the enactment of the policy.
- iii) A minimum of credit in English at the SSCE level still remains an eligibility criterion for admission into higher institutions, in spite of the policy promoting the major indigenous languages, for which little or nothing is practically done to promote.

It is in this respect that we support the recommendation of Ajayi (2009) that politicians without at least a credit pass in any of the major Nigerian languages should be barred from contesting for political offices in Nigeria.

Mischief manifests in attitudes to both language and religion, despite the hundreds of languages and the submission that Nigerians are the most religious people in the world (*Daily Independent*, 2004). Due to the fact that most Nigerians are either Muslims or Christians, the overbearing religious sensitivity and mischief would make many an analyst read religious motives to ethnic, political and economic disturbances and violence. This mischief and plain misrepresentation is evident in the submissions of Alanamu, Muhammed and Adeoye (2006) which focus on "religious violence" among adherents of religion but gives an economic background to the crisis.

According to the authors:

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It is this hypocrisy at the slightest of Islam, to cultivate and despite the disrespect mention a in such disaster particular

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The serious economic difficulties that the country has been facing for the past many years have led to the mushrooming of fundamentalist groupings, both in Christianity and Islam. Thousands of young men, uneducated and unemployed, have fallen easy prey to religious bigotry (p.138).

As typical of similar assessments, economic, ethnic and political crises are often blamed on religion even if the religious dimension to such violence is only marginal or negligible. For instance, there are economic difficulties in the Niger Delta which has been in a persistent state of direct and structural violence especially since the return to democracy in 1999 but a religious dimension is not always alluded by analysts to the violence. However, such economic imbalances and the attendant violence in the Northern part of the country are often attributed to religion. This is considered mischievous whether intentional or unintentional.

Hypocrisy is rife in Nigeria and this accounts largely for people's ambivalent attitude to religion. While there is an unprecedented proliferation of places of religious worship with hyperactive religious activities prominent among Nigerians, it is a shame that those who profess religion do not live according to the dictates of their faith. Instances of mind-boggling atrocities perpetrated not only by adherents of religions but by clerics, pastors, imams and priests are often reported in the media, though only a few of the actual occurrences manage to get to the public sphere. A recent case of a pastor, Paul John of Deeper Life Bible Church, Dawala, Kara Local Government Area of Nassarawa State, Nigeria, is a typical example. The pastor admitted he raped a three-year old girl and blamed the heinous crime on Satan (*Leadership*, March 6, 2011).

It is this hypocrisy that makes Nigerians to proclaim religion on the one hand and attack it on the slightest opportunity or undermine it on the other. As Obayan (1978:44) notes, all of Islam, Christianity and Traditional African Religion "make it obligatory for us to cultivate certain attitude towards our God and our fellow men." According to him, despite the virtues of religions such as "the avoidance of stealing, adultery, covetousness, disrespectfulness, cheating, foul language, dishonesty, greed, extortion, injustice, just to mention a few," these teachings, hypocritically "are now being grossly undermined at such disastrous magnitude to the detriment of the world in general and to Nigeria in particular" (Obayan, 1978).

It is due to this scenario that many of those who profess Islam, for instance, do not want to be governed by the Islamic way of life or *Shariah*. The introduction of *Shariah* in some twelve Muslim-majority states in Nigeria, with the return to democracy, had generated controversies among religious adherents since 1999 that Zamfara State pioneered it. Though most Nigerians are religious, Nigeria is considered a secular state and as Bello (2011) puts it, "in Nigeria, secularism is professed as the order of the day." This is perhaps to allow "irreligiousness", which Obayan (1978:45) considers as "the abandonment of spiritual excellence as dictated by the tenets of the Christian, Moslem and traditional faiths", to thrive as it currently does in the country.

What applies to religion also applies to language. Though Nigerians know they have their own languages, they prefer undermining their own and promoting what is not theirs. Indigenous languages, including what should be mother-tongues to individuals in some cases, are "foreign" to a good number of Nigerians in speech or/and in writing and it is noted that Nigerian languages are dying out as a result of such neglect. The departure of the foreign missionaries coupled with the eventual independence of Nigeria has witnessed reduced efforts at promoting Nigerian languages as those that are developed are those the missionaries had worked on or promoted.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN PROMOTING PEACE IN A PLURAL SOCIETY

Many studies have been devoted to the analysis of how religion serves to promote politics, peace and development if well utilised. Peace remains the bedrock upon which any development can be based and religion in its true sense offers, through its teachings, ways through which peace can be achieved. All of Obayan (1978), Wambutda (1978), Adeniyi (1993), Ekwenife (1993), Akanmidu (1993) and lately Adebayo (2010), Bello-Imam (2011) and Okojie (2011), among others, have explained various ways through which religion can be positively deployed to the attainment of good politics, peace and development in Nigeria. It can be gainfully surmised that religion "serves as a life-wire in our political development and decision making" (Adeniyi, 1993: 194) and we believe that the roles of religion traverse the moral, economic, educational, social and political spheres of the nation.

Morally, religion teaches human beings to be good and peace-loving. It cultivates the awareness that life is transient in people and that individuals are accountable for their deeds in the hereafter. Though it is falsely claimed that there is no morality in politics, religion insists that ethical norms set by religions have to be observed in all human affairs. All religions teach love and where there is love, there will be peace and development. Lack of morality is accountable for the various problems plaguing the Nigerian society. It is the institution of religion that makes many realise that good is rewarded by God while what is bad is punished by Him, a principle that serves as a code of conduct. Moral values like honesty, truth, kindness, love, selflessness, integrity, fairness, good neighbourliness, trust-worthiness, self-discipline and restraint, among others, are religious teachings which are crucial to the health and progress of individuals and society.

Economically, religion considers wealth and property as belonging to God for the benefit of humanity. It promotes hard work by considering legitimate business and honest work as a component of worship on the one hand and regarding selfishness and avarice as evil. Both Islam and Christianity have such economic programmes such as zakat (alms tax) and tithe through which wealth is re-distributed and goods and services are provided. As such, a truly religious person does not crave after material possessions because he knows that there is abundance, which is better than what the world offers, in the hereafter. The prevalence of corruption in all its forms in Nigeria and elsewhere lies in the failure to realise that materialism is counter-productive, ultimately. As Yusuf (2005:12-13) submits, religion is a "potent weapon through which the anti-corruption war could be

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successfully prosecuted.” Religion therefore provides what Muhibbu-din (1988:119) considers “a providential quadrilateral design” for all economic activities which peaks in righteousness: work is for production, production is for distribution, distribution is for consumption and consumption is for righteous living.

Educationally, the goal of religion is the attainment of a total person and this is also the aim of education. According to Al-Attas (1979:158), the ultimate aim of education in Islam is to facilitate “the balanced growth of the total personality of man, through the training of Man's spirit intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses.” As a matter of fact, “if education is divorced from religion and moral values, it will lead to the disintegration of and destruction of the social fabric of the society” (See Muhibbu-din, 1988:112). Religion has always emphasised knowledge and education to the extent that Islam, for example, considers knowledge superior to worship. Ignorance, as early identified, is responsible for pernicious issues like intolerance, violence and other vices that ensnare the polity. Religion encourages education because true knowledge liberates from the shackles of ignorance, arrogance, mischief and hypocrisy. Knowledge is also the foundation of peace and development as a person that does not know would only be groping in the dark, unable to understand his duties, obligations and rights.

Politically, religion ascribes all power to God. Indeed, human beings are considered the vicegerents or ambassadors of God on earth and as such, they will report back to him how they have administered. Consciousness of the nature of power as that which belongs to God alone will make leaders to be careful and thoughtful in their exercise of power. The theme of the Nigerian political climate is that the leaders who profess either Islam or Christianity do not appreciate the divine nature of their authority. The more conscious political leaders are of religion and God, the more responsible they are in the discharge of their responsibilities to humanity. The followers also know that it is God Who bestows power on whoever He wishes and would thus be satisfied with the wish of God. As such, what forms the core of activities in a situation where religion is positively deployed to the service of the people is “the thinking of an ultimate reality” (Akanmidu, 1993:131) that makes things other than being good thaw in significance.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The high hopes with which Nigerians welcomed the dawn of democracy in 1999 after a long night of military rule were considered misplaced by many because the dividends of democracy were not forthcoming as imagined. In fact, less than a year after the return to democracy, an initial assessment by Jega (2000:101) denied the practice of democracy in its entirety saying that “what Nigeria practices is not democracy, not even civil rule but centralised tyranny.” A decade after has witnessed intensity in militancy, religious intolerance, high scale violence, ethnic chauvinism, brazen-faced corruption, collapsing infrastructure, increasing unemployment and job losses occasioned by poor leadership. With such developments, that Nigeria is at peace is relative, depending mainly on the location where one lives as there are serious conflicts in some parts of the country, particularly the criminal activities in the Niger Delta region and the *Boko Haram* menace in the North East, that are akin to a war situation. Peace and development are not as

abundant and expected yet, there is a belief in some quarters that the situation remains as it is because of the diversity in language and religion. This is the view contested in this paper. What accounts for the challenges Nigeria faces is politics and the dirty way it is played.

However, the solution is not far-fetched if the cultural and religious resources are effectively utilised in the promotion of democratic ideals and developmental imperatives. The missionaries realised that the best way to reach the hearts of the people is through their own languages and strove to develop Nigerian languages such that people embraced Christianity. If the right messages are passed to Nigerians through their languages rather than through the English language only, which the touts and thugs that are the foot soldiers of violence do not understand, a new orientation would be achieved. The contributions of a body like the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC), incidentally formed in 1999 that marked the return to civil rule, are also significant in providing a forum for the Muslim and Christian religious leaders in the country to associate, interact and address issues that could degenerate into crises. Through the quarterly meetings of NIREC at various geo-political zones of the country and the interactions established with various stakeholders in such fora, a new orientation is being created that if the religious leaders can be friends and meet regularly, the followers should also interact meaningfully without rancour. While the activities of NIREC have not stopped the outbreak of religious and pseudo-religious combustion in some parts of the country, it is known that such conflagrations would have been worse if not because of the activities of NIREC.

If governments rather than undermine religion and allow irreligiosity to thrive through the influx of vices like alcoholism, prostitution and their promotion, including indecent dressing, obscene songs/music and uncouth language through the media, there is no doubt that the peace of mind that religious minds enjoy would elude the nation and negative peace will remain dominant. It is in this respect that we consider the promotion and dissemination of the benefits and messages of peace in the language(s) that people understand as a way out. If peace is not institutionalised through constant engagement, impunity would reign and development will be retarded. Good governance is essentially a critical factor that will engender a peaceful and prosperous nation, ultimately extending the mantra of "good people, great nation" beyond the narrow confines of empty sloganeering to that of actual reality.

The establishment of centres of peace studies such as the recent Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies of the University of Ilorin is also a strategy of promoting peace so that when people talk or theorise peace more, they will come to practise it. There is a need to project messages that add value to the society rather than vain, vulgar, and obscene tales and images that dominate the entertainment industry which holds a lot of attraction to the impressionistic youth. A determined and strategic national repositioning through the embrace of the traditional values of honesty, integrity, discipline, humility, morality, kindness, trustworthiness, among others, which incidentally are also religious values, would be a right step forward. This should be propagated in the languages that will reach

not only the elite but also the masses of the over-English.

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not only the elite but also the masses who are often linguistically disconnected as a result of the over-Englishisation of governance.

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