



# RELIGION, **ETHICS &** DEVELOPMENT

A Festschrift in Honour of  
**PROF. AKPENPUUN DZURGBA**  
PROFESSOR OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS & SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

EDITED BY **J.K. AYANTAYO**

**RELIGION, ETHICS AND DEVELOPMENT;**  
A FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR AKPENPUUN DZURGBA

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## Chapter Five

# CHURCH'S INVOLVEMENT IN INCULCATING ETHICAL VALUES: A KEY TO CHANGE AGENDA IN NIGERIA

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### Introduction

The loss of religio-ethical values such as transparency, accountability, dignity, and centrality of the human person, common good, love peace and tolerance to mention a few, among citizens of many nations, especially in Nigeria, has been monumental. Though in some Western countries, religion as a phenomenon has been downplayed as insignificant to the growth of the society, yet they imbibe moral principles that encapsulate the dignity of human beings as espoused by religious teachings. That is why in the global North till date, one can still find transparency, accountability, integrity and pursuit of common good in the public sphere. Public office holders vacate their seats as soon as an allegation of corrupt practices is levelled against them. In contrast, the African continent seems to be bereft of such religio-ethical values both in the private life and public sector, and so the society is breeding leaders and followers without the fear of God or recognition of the sanctity of life.

Nigeria today is showcasing cases of corrupt practices being perpetrated by law enforcement agents, politicians and other public office holders to the amazement of the whole world. The evils of

corruption such as economic doldrums, insurgency, kidnapping, environmental insecurity and various forms of violence have dented the image of the country in the comity of nations.

The present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, since inception, has been orchestrating a change agenda for a meaningful development of the country. It has since taken the giant stride by descending heavily on past corrupt leaders who carted away the fortunes of the country for their personal benefits /gains and threw the entire citizenry into unimaginable hardship. Although this effort which initially was applauded from many quarters in the country and outside it is beginning to receive knocks due to what seems to be selective fight against corruption. However, the change agenda lays emphasis on reorientation or attitudinal change that is believed will fast-track socio-economic development in the country.

However, this paper identifies the synergy between religion and development of Nigeria and seeks to articulate that religio-ethical values can be used as instrument to bring about attitudinal transformation that will promote economic development and peaceful co-existence. The significance of religious principles cannot be overemphasised, given the multi-religious setting of the country. Besides, in those days when religious education was given recognition in Nigeria, the current threat to life seemed to be minimal. Moral standard could also be said to be equally high. The use of constitutional means through government agencies, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Crime Commission Bureau or ICPC will remain a fluke if something is not done urgently to inculcate in Nigerians religious values that will make the change agenda a reality.

This paper intends to explore some ethical values common to the three predominant religions in Nigeria, i.e., the traditional or autochthonous religion<sup>1</sup>, Islam and Christianity, with a view that if adequately applied to the daily activities, such principles have the potency of reducing to the barest minimum the menace of corruption and violence the country is facing today. The theoretical framework on which this work is premised is the six dimensions of religion propounded by Ninian Smart<sup>2</sup> with emphasis on the third and sixth dimensions. The former argues for the recognition of ethical values in all moral actions, while the latter stresses that religion should be integrated into social life.



### **Religious Discourse in Public Sphere**

To many cynics, religion has nothing tangible to offer the socio-economic or political arena of any society. Some of them even raise questions such as; which religion are we talking about? Since not all citizens adhere to the teachings of a particular religion, how plausible will the enforcement of the values of a particular religion be? Scholars such as John Rawls and Simeon Ilesanmi are among the key proponents of the view that religion should be assigned a very restricted role, limited to being merely a curator of rituals and ceremonies, and at best a purveyor of an emotional tranquilizer on Fridays and Sundays.<sup>3</sup> While Rawls argued against the use of religion in public sphere based on the ground that religious morality is too comprehensive and divisive in nature;<sup>4</sup> Ilesanmi constructed an ideology that religion should be privatized and domesticated within the religious community on the ground that an attempt to apply religious clauses to any secular state might portend great chaos.<sup>5</sup>

However, N. J. Demerath and Rhys H. Williams brought to the fore illuminating studies on the political impact of religion. These scholars observed how religion has been able to influence and change the agendas of bureaucratic governments in Europe. Corroborating this view about the significance of religion to public or political life, Murray argued that although the interaction of religion with American government bred a structure of war and passion, religious clauses are fundamentally articles of peace, if their moral norms are adhered to in a pluralistic society.<sup>6</sup>

Hence Kenneth Mtata gave some instances of the dynamics of religion to defend what can be described today as a 'de-privatization' of religion. The first was the invitation of James Wolfensohn, the then president of the World Bank to the meeting of world religious leaders at Lambeth Palace in London charred by the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey.<sup>7</sup> The essence of inviting the Financial and Economic guru was to give new orientation about the relationship that should exist between religion and international development actors.

Sequel to the dialogue at the 1998 London meeting, the World Bank invited religious leaders to contribute to the thinking behind the annual publication known as "World Development Report" and the establishment of "Directorate on Faith" that was later renamed "The Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics".<sup>8</sup>

This synergy culminated in the publication of the report on the Role of Religion in Development Co-operation in 2005 where Walter Fust wrote that:

Religion and Spirituality are sources of worldview and views of life: they constitute creative political and social forces; they are forces for cohesion and for polarization: they create stimuli for social and development policies; they serve as instruments of political reference and legitimacy. Development cooperation cannot avoid ignoring religion and spirituality.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned was the new understanding in the regions of the world that values are not only tangible but equally spiritual. Therefore, there is the need for post-secular society to allow space for religion actors in civil society. No wonder then, that when the United Nations announced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS), the Church, realising its religious or spiritual significance, initiated Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt relief whereby the nations enslaved because of debts could be left off the hook. Politicians and aid bureaucrats were lobbied to wake up to their moral responsibility and engagement. The outcome of this commitment by the Church was debt forgiveness of many poor countries and the emergence of Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) which began to access funding from USAID in 2004.<sup>10</sup>

In South Africa, religious factor was an acknowledged and strategic dimension in development thinking and practice. Hence, the ANC government emphatically stated that, "in striving for political and economic development, the ANC recognises that social transformation cannot be separated from spiritual transformation"<sup>11</sup>.

### **Echoes from the 16th Century Reformation**

During the 16th century Reformation, among the many issues raised by Martin Luther and other reformers was that people should exhibit all acts of charity in gratitude to God for what one had already received from Him.<sup>12</sup> One's abundant resources were supposed to be used in service of the needs of the neighbour. Hence in his open letter

to the Christian nobility in 1521, Luther encouraged all the cities to take care of its own poor and that an organised system of poor relief be set up to replace the current haphazard system.<sup>13</sup> According to him, though an individual Christian had gained religious freedom through faith, yet his love for God binds him or her to serve his / her neighbour.<sup>14</sup> He berated the ills that came out of greed and avarice of the businessmen of his day and made honest effort to eradicate them by insisting on the application of Christian ethics and the principle of equity- the law of Christian love and the law of nature to business transactions. Luther's economic and social ideologies also addressed other aspects such as the credit system that impoverished the poor and the monopolistic merchants who took advantage of the people in terms of scarcity.<sup>15</sup> In reaction to such situations, Luther suggested that the interest on credit facility should be minimal while the government should curtail profits of the wealthy merchants by enforcing a just price for the necessities of life based on the daily wages of labourers.

This charity model was corroborated by John Calvin in his religious teaching about peace and development in Geneva where he encouraged the people to be industrious but however, mentioned that any gain from industry should be used for philanthropist purpose.<sup>16</sup> Like Luther and Bucer, he favoured strict government control of usury. In all, the agitation for equity by the reformers was aimed at condemning the spirit of capitalism driven by selfishness.

In concluding this aspect of the paper, the discussion so far implies that the moral principles or ethical values needed for societal development and peace are inherent in Christianity. If government can devise mechanisms by which the citizens can appropriate moral principles in their relationship with one another, the society will be better for it.

### **Some Identified Religio-Ethical Values**

Among many ethical values upheld by the three dominant religions in Nigeria, this paper identifies the culture of accountability, transparency, justice, honesty/integrity, selflessness, charity and of course recognition of the sanctity of human life and items that constitute catalyst for the change Nigerians yearns for.

In recent past, there has been a lackadaisical attitude among Nigerians most especially holders of public office who behave with impunity without any recognition that they are accountable to

anybody. Accountability, according to Adelowo, has to do with the popular dictum that says "privilege entails responsibility, where the latter is lacking the former is withdrawn"<sup>17</sup> Leadership is a privilege that requires giving account of stewardship. If the leaders and followers are conscious of this fact that they are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and that day of reckoning awaits them whereby their actions while in office will be scrutinized, it will go a long way in instilling fear and making them more transparent.

It must be mentioned that one of the obstacles in achieving accountability and transparency in the country is the concept of immunity accorded to some leaders in Nigeria. This paper notes that the entrenchment of such concept in our constitution is a disservice to nation building because majority of those who enjoy such largesse misuse the privilege and trust the populace give them. In order to make the public office holders and political actors more transparent, accountability should not be one-sided since everyone has to answer for their action or inaction.

Secondly, social justice seems to be another ethical value that is lacking in Nigeria. This permeates every aspect of our national life. There is imbalance in wealth distribution thereby widening the gap between the rich and the poor. The appointment of people into offices is often based on political or ethnic considerations, which result in the promotion of mediocrity. Furthermore, in the dispensation of justice in the law court, monetary and political underpinnings are the de facto considerations. Nigeria is not getting it right economically, educationally, and in other spheres of life because of its failure to create a society that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, a society that understands and values human rights and recognizes the dignity of every human being.<sup>18</sup> Rather than creating an environment for economic egalitarianism to thrive and equal opportunity for the citizens, many ingenious Nigerians have been greatly oppressed and devalued due to denial and incidental inequalities. Positive change will continue to elude the nation if right pegs are not put in right holes.

Furthermore, honesty and integrity are values identified as catalysts to bring about positive change in Nigeria. In years past, people preferred good name to acquisition of wealth. But the situation has changed now. The culture of honesty and integrity has been discarded. The leaders place themselves over the people and influence

projects that will help them to amass wealth with the help of the civil servants. Some individuals with questionable means of livelihood, e.g., ritual killing, kidnapping business, armed robbery etc. flaunt wealth with impunity. Good name is no longer the pursuit of many citizens but "making it by all means". To arrest this trend, the government should not only bring to book corrupt political or public office holders, but individuals with ill-gotten wealth. The menace of fuel crisis is traceable to diversion of petroleum products with the collaboration of law enforcement agencies and the activities of depots owned by dishonest cabals in Nigeria. Instead of banks charging reasonable interest on loans to farmers or other small scale business owners, the high interest rate charged in some cases has led to the collapse of such business.

Moreover, selflessness, charity and recognition of the sanctity of life are three items that will be discussed simultaneously. From the report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life constituted in Britain in 1995, selflessness means taking decisions solely to protect public interest.<sup>19</sup> This paper is using this report as a template to argue for the restoration of ethical values of selflessness, charity and recognition of life that was once imbibed and featured in our social relationship in Nigeria. The interest of other people should be taken into cognizance by lawmakers, law-enforcement agents, markets men and women, companies, religious institutions, road users and other stakeholders in their daily activities.

For the change agenda to become a reality, the citizens must be determined to pursue right values capable of improving their socio-economic life, alleviate suffering and sustain development. The benchmark is humaneness, a necessary ingredient in human relationships. Therefore, the ethical values or ethos of accountability, justice, and human dignity etc., mentioned earlier are the principles that Bragg calls characteristics of transformational development.<sup>20</sup>

### **Recommended Mechanisms for the Enforcement of Religio-ethical Values**

At this juncture, this paper recommends to the Nigerian government few mechanisms by which the moral principles discussed thus far could be inculcated into the citizens.

First and foremost is the recognition of religious education. In Nigeria, ninety per cent of the population either belong to the Church

or Mosque, and statistics show that the two institutions are very close to the citizens. It therefore stands to reason that the religious dimension is of strategic importance to the change agenda. There should be a promotion of religious teachings and education. The normative ethos of equity, justice, human dignity etc. should not be confined only to worship centres but be taught right from the nursery school by religious personnel. The entrenchment of such religious ethos in the school curriculum will go a long way in instilling in the citizens the fear of God and respect for others. This suggestion becomes imperative if one thinks of the enormous influence that religion has on its adherents.

Abe, refuting the claim of the opponents of religious education who argued that its interest is only to teach doctrines, morals and ethics,<sup>21</sup> submitted that since the school is basically the centre to disseminate knowledge and learning, it is an ideal formal and organised venue to teach morals for the good of the nation.<sup>22</sup> Idowu observed that the foundation upon which the Yoruba moral values are built is religion and that separating religion from morality is to invite disastrous consequences.<sup>23</sup> The question raised by Sangotunde, that ethos of the three religions in Nigeria do not reflect the values displayed by Nigeria citizens from the leaders to the followers,<sup>24</sup> can be effectively answered on the ground that government has been playing lip-service to religion over the years. This personal view has the support of Clarke and Olupona who point out that successive government in Nigeria, at the federal level, though courted religious support did so for purely cosmetic purposes.<sup>25</sup>

Again, if religious education is given adequate attention in our schools, government should show sincerity by establishing a directorate or agency to monitor the teaching of moral values needed for social change and development of the country. Through this avenue, the use of religious education for indoctrination and conversion will be discouraged.

Furthermore, partnership with faith-based organizations by the government in actualising the change agenda is another mechanism. For example, the Federal Road Safety Commission took a bold step in involving religious leaders on road safety. This was widely broadcast on the 10th of May 2015 on NTA 9o'clock news. The basis for such synergy is to use religious platforms for the promotion of good

neighbourliness, and instil the culture of patience and human dignity in Nigerians for the safety of road users.

To buttress this argument, Dzurgba advised that for moral values to be inculcated into the people there should be a moral discourse in society; moral norms should be exemplified by practical examples and the celebration of citizens with impeccable character as national heroes could also help in articulating moral values in the society.<sup>26</sup>

### Conclusion

Development has always been the pursuit of every sane society either at the local, state or national level. Adelowo posits that this involves two phenomena, that is, human and physical developments.<sup>27</sup> The irony is that many societies place emphasis on the latter to the detriment of the former, hence premium is placed on science, technology and technical education. As much as this is tenable, this paper observes that the pillar on which the physical development is built is the human beings who should be taught the right values right from the beginning of their lives. The Yoruba dictum supports this view that "a child that is not taught good morals will later waste the investment or resources of the family". Therefore, failure on the part of parents and governments to inculcate in the citizens, right from childhood, the culture of accountability, spirit of honesty, spirit of hard work, spirit of contentment and the fear of God will continue to make positive change a mirage. The recognition of those ethical values as espoused by religious education is key to achieving the desired change needed for holistic socio-economic development.

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<sup>1</sup> E. Dada Adelowo (2006), *Issues in Public Affairs*, Ilorin: Majab Publishers, Vol. 1, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> E.O. Ajani (2014), "Understanding Yoruba Religion through Ninian Smart's Dimensions of Religion" in S. O. Abogunrin and I. D. Ayegboyan (eds), *Under the Shelter of Olodumare*, Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd, p.140.

<sup>3</sup> S. O. Ilesanmi, (1997), *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*, Ohio, USA: Center for International Studies, p. 213.

<sup>4</sup> S. O. Ilesanmi, (1997), *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*, p. 212.

<sup>5</sup> S. O. Ilesanmi, (1997), *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*, p. 215.

<sup>6</sup> S. O. Ilesanmi, (1997), *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*, p. 89.

<sup>7</sup> K, Mtata, (2013), *Religion: Help or Hindrance to Development?* Germany: EvangelischeVerlagsanstalt, p. 226.

<sup>8</sup> K, Mtata, (2013), *Religion: Help or Hindrance to Development?* p. 226.

<sup>9</sup> Anne-Marie Holenstein, (2005), *Role and Significance of Religion and Spirituality in Development Cooperation*, Bern: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> K. Mata, (2013), *Religion: Help or Hindrance to Development?* p. 228.

<sup>11</sup> Quoting Mandela, the African National Congress made this statement in *The Moral Renewal of the Nation* in 1998, [www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2666](http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2666).

<sup>12</sup> H.T. Lehmann (ed.), (1962), *Luther's Works*, Vol 45, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, p. 161.

<sup>13</sup> H.T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, p.161.

<sup>14</sup> S.M. Mepaiyeda, (2013), *Church Reformation: A Historical Reflection*, Ibadan: Aflame Publishing House, p. 142.

<sup>15</sup> S.M. Mepaiyeda, (2013), *Church Reformation: A Historical Reflection*, p. 146

<sup>16</sup> S.M. Mepaiyeda, (2013), *Church Reformation: A Historical Reflection*, p. 95.

<sup>17</sup> E. Dada Adelowo (2006), *Issues in Public Affairs*, Lagos: Atlantic Associated Publishers, Vol. 2, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> J.A. Babalola, "Social Injustice and Insecurity in Nigeria: A Discourse (Hab 1: 1-4)" *Insight, Journal of Religious Studies* Vol 10, June/Dec. 2014, p. 86.



<sup>19</sup>Lewis S. Mudge & Thomas Wieser (eds), (2000), *Democratic Contracts for Sustainable and Caring Societies*, Geneva: WCC Publications, p. 90.

<sup>20</sup>K. Mtata, (2013), *Religion: Help or Hindrance to Development?* p.74.

<sup>21</sup>G.O. Abe, (2008), *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, vol. 2, Lagos: New-Dawn International, p. 241.

<sup>22</sup>G.O. Abe, (2008), *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, p. 242.

<sup>23</sup>E.B. Idowu, (1977), *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, London: Longman, p.141.

<sup>24</sup>S.O. Sangotunde, "Religious Education as a Panacea for Conflict Resolution and Development of the Nigerian Nation" *Insight, Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol 10, June/Dec, 2014, p.5.

<sup>25</sup>S. O. Ilesanmi, (1997), *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*, p. 212.

<sup>26</sup> A. Dzurgba, (2007), *Contemporary Ethics: Theory and Issues*, Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> E. Dada Adelowo (2006), *Issues in Public Affairs*, Ilorin: Majab Publishers, Vol. 1, p. 128.

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This book is a compendium of thirty four chapters on issues in Sociology of Religion and Religious Ethics as two distinctive areas of specialisation in Religious Studies. It begins with a personal account of Professor Akpenpuun Dzurgba's life as a background information to topical issues the chapters address, which are part and parcel of what Professor Dzurgba scholarship stands for. The book also explores Sociology of Religion as an academic discipline and Religious ethics as an area of specialization in Religious studies among other relevant topics. The last chapter is a book review of contemporary ethics: theory and issues written by Professor Dzurgba.

For this reason, this book is recommended for everyone who craves for cordial social relation, social interdependence, social interaction and moral rectitude in any social setting. As far as I know, this book will equally be of immense value to students and teachers in the fields of education, counselling, psychology, religious studies, sociology, ethics or moral philosophy and peace and conflict, from primary to tertiary institutions.



## About The Author

The author of the book, Ayantayo, Jacob Kehinde (Ph.D), is a Professor of Sociology of Religion and Religious Ethics in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. He is a scholar per excellence who has published articles and books in both local and international publication media on a number of issues regarding the interface between religion and society spanning many disciplines such as politics, economy, environment, conflicts, church activities, education, gender, ethnicity, language, and technology among others.

Prof. Ayantayo is a social critic and a radical public speaker who delivers lectures and engages in public discourse regularly in media and religious centres with emphasis on the paradoxical interface between religious, moral beliefs and practices in Nigeria.

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