

THE PUBLICITY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND ITS RELEVANCE TO NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In our world today, we are aware of the conflict in religious differences and disagreements. Thus conflict fueled backwardness and steadiness in the development of countries. This stagnantly have really affected Nigeria as a nation so many ways be it socially, economically, educationally, religiously, etc. However, African Traditional Religion in its entirety has whatever it takes to improve on the nation building and solve the problem of conflicts. As ethical principles and sanction that follow it if imbibed by Nigeria as a nation would go a long way to solve the problems in the nation. This work would x-ray how African Traditional Religion can play a vital role in the nation building of contemporary Nigerian society through its ethical principles and practices. The work employed socio cultural approach as method which enabled the researcher to drive through the research. It was discovered that Nigerian as a nation is passing through various conflicts because they have failed to learn from the dictates and principles of African Traditional Religion. It recommends a paradigm shift from modus operandi of Nigerian Nation to that of African Traditional Religion.

Keywords: Publicity, African Traditional Religion, Relevance, Nation, Building

Introduction

In our world today, we are well aware of the propensity to conflict inherent in religious differences and disagreements. Thus, conflicts have fuelled backwardness and stagnancy in the development of countries. While this may seem to be the case as Ibenwa (2014, p. 19) emphasizes. Ekeopara and Ekpenyong (2016, p. 19) insist that it is a misconception to believe that religion and development are strange bed fellows. In line with this, this paper would argue that African traditional religion can aid nation building and development in Nigeria. This is feasible, holds Mbon (1991) through the religion's traditional ethical principles based on the communal concern for the well-being of all; principles founded not on the ethics of individualism, human autonomy and selfishness, but on a common unity-centred. Mbon further stresses that these traditional ethical principles, sanctions and eschatological beliefs regulated the behaviour, conduct, and actions of individuals in African society. Ethical principles, sanctions and eschatological concepts were the factors that kept individuals and government in check. This paper would also x-ray how African Traditional Religion can play a vital role in the nation building of contemporary Nigerian society through its ethical principles and practices.

This paper would argue that the moral salvation of Nigerians lies in their immediate and conscious return to traditional socio-religious values and morals system which is the

foundation for genuine conscience and national development. This paper argues that African Traditional Religion represents the indigenous religion of Nigerians and hence, is the most appropriate to employ in the promotion of nation building in Nigeria. This becomes evident when one considers the fact that African Traditional Religion incorporates the entirety of the Nigerian people's worldview and understanding of reality. This is an aspect which is lacking in other religions found in Nigeria. Ekeopara and Ekpenyong (2016, p. 19) accedes to this and avers that African Traditional Religion is intensely typical in the African life, world and the universe. They observe that African Traditional Religion is embedded in the African worldview as well as in the norms and values of the people.

Definition of Terms

For clarity's sake, it would be beneficial to the course of this work to clarify the important concepts with which this paper is concerned. Before proceeding, therefore, to the main thesis of this paper, a conceptual analysis and clarification would be briefly carried out.

African Traditional Religion

When we speak of African Traditional Religion, we mean the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans. African Traditional Religion is the belief system that has been handed down from one generation to another. (Ibenwa, 2014, p. 4). Ibenwa further notes that its adherents are not converted but are born into the religion. It is a religion indigenous to the Africans, that is, it belongs to the Africans. Ekeopara and Ekpenyong (2016, p. 19) posit that African Traditional Religion is called African because it is indigenous, aboriginal and foundational or handed down from generations to generations. Furthermore, Okoye and Efido (2020, p. 463) explains that traditional religion is a phenomenon that resides wherever people are found. Citing Ushe, they aver that traditional religion simply refers to "institutionalized pattern of belief and worship practiced by various societies from the time immemorial in response to the supernatural as manifested in their environment and experience." This implies that African Traditional Religion as a traditional religion is a religion that has been handed down from forebears to their descendants from time immemorial. It contains their belief system, underscores their world view and is based on their experience of the supernatural or divine within their environment.

Particularly, unlike most mainstream religions of the world, African Traditional Religion has no missionary drive nor has it any holy book which contains its tenets and doctrines. Awolalu and Doapmu (cited in Ibenwa, 2014, p. 4) aver that this religion has no written literature, yet it is everywhere for those who care to see and read Okoye and Efido (2020, p. 463) adds that the tenets of this religion is written in songs, myths, dances of the people and what have you. Hence, they readily admit that African Traditional Religion has permeated every facet of the people's life. African Traditional Religion is intertwined with the life of the people such that everything that happens is connected, directly or indirectly to religion. It is the religion, which resulted from the

sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Africans, and which is being practiced today in a variety of shades and intensities by a very great number of Africans, including individuals who claim to be Muslims or Christians (Ugwu COT, 2004). We can succinctly observe that African Traditional Religion is embedded in the African world view as well as in the norms and values of the people. The concept African Traditional Religion is intensely typical in the African life, the world and the universe.

Nation Building

Nana (2019, p. 47) strongly states that the building of a nation is first and foremost the building of the people that make up the nation. Conceding to this, Iroegbu (as cited in Ekeopara and Ekpenyong, 2014, p. 19-20) avers that development is a progressive realization of the fullest possible and balanced flourishing of human resources. From this, one can assert that nation building deals primarily with the development of the individuals who identify themselves as a nation. It is the development and full realization of their potentials and this according to Ekeopara and Ekpenyong (2014, p. 20), includes their physical, spiritual, intellectual and moral, aesthetic and psychological, personal and social, etc. When the individuals are properly built up, the harnessing of their skills and talents and the actualization of their potentials are manifested in the country's development. Hence, Nana (2019, p. 47) citing Oluwole, states that nation building is the conscious and focused application of people's collective resources, energies and knowledge to the task of liberating and developing the psychic and physical space that is identified as theirs. Nation building, thus, involves the development of the nation in order to make the citizen comfortable. This involves protecting the culture and identity of the citizens, maintenance of the value system, improvement of facilities and infrastructure and a betterment of the living conditions for the citizens. In a nutshell, Nana (2019, p. 47) posits that nation building is the conscious effort and broad process through which nations gain advancement in growth and development in all its facets.

Publicity

When a company produces a new product, they carry out advertisements in order to create awareness with regard to their new product. Publicity refers to the creation of awareness and subsequent promotion of whatever it is that is being publicized. It can be seen as an advertisement or other such activities of the media geared towards arousing or attracting public interest in something or someone (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/publicity). From its simpler forms, "public," publicity refers to the presentation of an idea, a product or a valuable to be made public with the aim of projecting its advantages and promoting its usage or applicability. The presentation to the public implies that the public is either ignorant of the valuable (idea or product), or at least takes little or no notice of it. It also presupposes some level of ignorance as regards the benefits inherent in the valuable. Publicity also refers to a reintroduction of something to the public for a better appreciation of the valuable by the public.

ATR Needs Publicity for Its Growth

African Traditional Religion As Has Been Pointed Out Earlier Has No Sacred Literature. This means that there are no holy books wherein all the major tenets of African Traditional Religion are contained. In addition to this, scholars have also averred that African Traditional Religion has no spiritual founder as in the case of Christianity and Islam (Ibenwa, 2014, p. 4). In view of this, African Traditional Religion does not engage in proselytization activities. It does not possess the missionary zeal which drives adherents to garner converts for their religion. Okoye and Efido (2020, p. 463) aver that African Traditional Religion is tolerant, accommodative and peaceful, having no room for religious propaganda and bigotry. This character of African Traditional Religion is evident in its accommodation of other religions in Nigeria and indigenes who should be adherents of African Traditional Religion. Many youths are now reluctant to take up religious functions and roles and many rites and rituals are equally forgotten and abandoned by many. Ugwu and Ugwueye (2014, pp. 132-136) discuss the reasons for the possible discontinuity of African Traditional Religion. They argue that in many localities, votaries are dying out and those to replace them are not forthcoming. These issues raise concerns for the survival and continuity of African Traditional Religion. It calls for a reappraisal and appreciation of the African Traditional Religion. It calls for a publicity of African Traditional Religion to the upcoming generation, a remainder of their roots from where they have come.

With respect to this, some movements have already begun in earnest. African scholars do not relent from grabbing any opportunity to write about the African Traditional Religion. Today, a lot of literature exist which contain the tenets and beliefs of African Traditional Religion. Several African scholars have published so many books on African Traditional Religion, explaining its origins, its tenets, its benefits and advantages. These go to some extent in publicizing African Traditional Religion. In addition, the problems which Nigerians encounter in their daily life activities lead them to return to African Traditional Religion in search of solutions to their problems. Although they might confess to be Christians or Muslims, they still return to practise some aspects of African Traditional Religion, even though as Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004, p. 135) assert, they do this hiding or coming only at nights. Consequently, Awolalu (cited in Ekeopara and Ekpenyong, 2016, p. 19) asserts that African Traditional Religion is being practiced today by a very great number of Africans, including individuals who claim to be Muslims or Christians.

This paper, thus, makes a clarion call for a massive return to the African roots. This paper is also a means to advance the work already begun by some scholars in the scholarly world. Thus, it aids the publicity of African Traditional Religion and calls other adherents and supporters to do the same. This publicity would aid in the application of African Traditional Religion towards nation building. This publicity of

African Traditional Religion will increase its chance of contributing towards nation building. Hence, there is need for the publicity of African Traditional Religion.

The Relevance of African Traditional Religion to Nation Building

African Traditional Religion possesses some potential for improving and developing the nation. Its value system, understanding of reality as interconnected and interdependent all work towards enhancing the living conditions of humans in a society. Admittedly, values and morals are the aspects of African Traditional Religion which deal with the ideas that defend or sustain the life of the people in their relationship with one another and the world around them. Values and morals cover issues like justice, right and wrong, respect for people and prosperity. truth, love, good and evil, the keeping of promises and agreements, beauty, crime and punishment, praise and blame, etc. These values and morals determine the political, economic and social behaviour of a people, the stability and development of any nation of the world. Hence, Mbon(1991) writes that, the development or otherwise of a nation to a very great amount depends on the moral and intellectual development or otherwise of its people. Supporting this assertion, Anyanwu, (2004) observes succinctly that, we are not quite aware that any society can afford to exist in the absence of morality, trust, justice, liberty, truth, goodness and faithfulness.

In Africa, ethical principles and rules of conduct have been preserved over the ages in the various customs and traditions that give explanations of the reason, motivations, values and purpose of behaviour. They supply the moral rules and point out what the people must do to live ethically (Ugwu 2004). Lending credence to this, Ekcopara and Chike see ethics as the study of the principles of conduct and moral judgments, mirror image on morality as well as a body or system of morals of a particular group (Ekeopara, Chike 2011). Ethical prescriptions in African Traditional Religion are seen as divine injunctions and penalties for contravening such injunctions, are regarded as coming from the Supreme Being. These prescriptions and disciplinary measures may be executed through the intermediaries such as the king, divinities, ancestors and elders.

Nevertheless. Africans value life so much and one can see this in the desire of the Africans to live. This echoes in the names they answer like 'ndu bu isi'. [Kanu 2012} opines that the prominent appearance of ndu in igbo proverbs, parables and personal names projects the height of the value the African places on life.p.371 It goes further to explain that this life for Africans is believed that it is from God and because it is from God, should not be tampered with anyhow by human being. Another, factor that Africans believe in and which plays a very important role in Africa is unity. There is this belief that African God in the African Cosmology unifies every other aspect of African life. The problem in our Society is borne out of greedy and separation. If all in Nigeria emulate this and come together for the purpose of achieving greatness, there is no way Nigeria will not be a great Nation

Conclusion

This work urges the Nigerian government and its citizenries to return to their traditional socio-religious values and morals systems, which are a catalyst to fast-track a change in characters and attitudes thereby giving birth to the needed national development in Nigeria. Therefore we ought to pitch our tent with African traditional religion with its ethical principles and practice, eschatological concept and traditional medicine as a viable option to bring meaningful development and social, economic, political and health sector reforms in Nigeria. The traditional ethical principles based on the communal concern for the well-being of all, principles founded not on the ethics of individualism and human autonomy and selfishness, but on a common unity-centred. It is this traditional ethical principles and sanctions that regulated the behaviour, conduct, and actions of individuals in society (Ugwu and Ugwueye, 2004).

African Traditional Religion and its ethical principles and practices have been observed to be the only ways that can fast track national development in Nigeria if introduced into the legal systems and criminal codes. Unarguably, if Nigerian government through its agencies inculcate in the citizens, legislators, judiciary and executive arm of government through workshops and seminars the African eschatology concept, this will play an important role in sustaining the moral coherence of Nigerian societies and will also act as check and balances between members and leaders of Nigeria. Thus, African Traditional Religion should not be taken for granted or treated with disdain in the quest for tourism and national development as it has the potential to bring about development in Nigeria. A conscious return to and observance of traditional ethical principles, remains the only valid option, if social order, peace, sanctity, harmony and stability must return to our dear country Nigeria. This clarion call and return to A.T.R. is more apt now than ever, especially as we go into the elections.

Also, the option of African Traditional Religion worldview as an ideology for nation-building, evokes a reconstruction of the pre-colonial Africa socio-cultural setting. It suggests that Africa had workable socio and political structures that promoted unity of purpose, community spirit, ethical values and peaceful co-existence amongst all. African Traditional Religion incites those core religious values and principles embedded in African cultures which despite the various deities involved, enabled citizens and different groups to appreciate each other based on universally accepted virtues of justice, truth, common good, love and peace. Nation-building in Africa needs to tow a cultural spirit shared by all Africans in that indigenous religion, ATR, and adopting it as ideology for proper nation building in Africa remains a noble course.

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