

Juxtapose Role of the Church and Christian Religious Studies in the Quest for Economic Diversification in Nigeria

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Abstract

Recent years have seen an increasing interest in the quest for economic diversification in Nigeria as the economy continue to fail to accommodate wide spectrum of people and sustain the basic needs of the masses. This leads to set of Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), a Medium Term Plan for 2017–2020 by the current government of Nigeria. While the ERGP is said to be developed for the purpose of restoring economic growth while leveraging the ingenuity and resilience of the Nigerian people; however, the plan failed to recognized and collaborate with important key players like the religious institutions in Nigeria. Thus, the paper sets to examine the side by side role of the Church and Christian religious studies in the quest for economic diversification in Nigeria. Through related documented material, the paper finds out that the church and Christian religious studies have been critical in the quest for economic diversification in Nigerian soil right from its inception till date. This can be verify from colossal contribution the due have done in the areas of quality education, Health care service, Agriculture, Employment, entrepreneurship and skills for self reliance as well as peace and secure environment for economy to drive. More so, the paper observes that Christian religious studies make students to imbibe the right moral, knowledge, discipline, understanding as well as psychological, social and spiritual, dispositions that lead students to develop the required skills and attitudes necessary for self reliance, human development, entrepreneurship, and wealth and job creation. The paper finally recommends among others the need for the government to encourage churches that have set up schools, hospital and Agricultural plan with loan in order to enhance successful running of the institution for economic diversification and also the need for government as a matter of urgency to recognise and collaborates with the church in the quest to diversifies the economy while given the utmost attention to Christian Religious Studies by both public and private stake holders in education and policy formulation looking at its pragmatic contribution

Key Words: Religion, Church, Christian Religious Studies and Economic Diversification

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Introduction

Since the discovery of crude oil, Nigeria has been a mono economy owing largely to its dependence on crude oil revenues. Due to instability and uncertainty in global crude oil prices, the Nigerian economy continues to vestige on the cloud of improbability. Thus, this multi-dimensional aspect of development in the various facets of the Nigerian Society as a result of over dependence on crude oil revenue has received the attention of the Church and still reckon on the Church for a deliberate action as well as critical and constructive contribution toward diversifying the economy. Christian Religious Studies on the other hand has been one of the most important subjects being taught in Nigerian schools. This is because the subject helps to streamline the thought, character, moral and aspiration of the students. It also offers hope for the future integrated, disciplined, harmonious and progressive society. Despite the neglect some people attach to the church and Christian Religious Studies as a product of ignorance, superstition and confusion, the church is still a force to reckon with everywhere in the world. Government in its effort to diversify the economy have come up with Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), a Medium Term Plan for 2017–2020, builds on the Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) and has been developed for the purpose of restoring economic growth while leveraging the ingenuity and resilience of the Nigerian people – the nation’s most priceless assets . According to Ministry of Budget and National Planning (2017:11):

The ERGP is innovative in that it signals a changing relationship between the public and private sectors based on close partnership. In implementing the Plan, the Government will collaborate closely with businesses to deepen their investments in the agriculture, power, manufacturing, solid minerals and services sectors, and support the private sector to become the engine of national growth and development. In addition, science and technology will be effectively harnessed to drive national competitiveness, productivity and economic activities in all sectors.

Sieving from the goals of the ERGP, it is clear that the ERGP recognized partnership with other private sector in boosting the economy however; the plan has no definite recognition of the role of religion in the quest to diversify the economy. In this regard, the paper advocates that any society that aspires for economic diversification and job creation among its citizens must embrace the dynamic role of the church vis-a-vis Christian religious studies. The Church and Christian religious studies have continues to create an enabling environment which creates stability in the nation. This peaceful atmosphere leads to generation of wealth and overall development of citizens. It enables people to develop their full potentials which can lead to productive, creative lives in accord with their needs and interest. It motivates people powerfully to act the way they do. The inabilities of the government to identify the side by side function of the Church and Christian religious studies in the quest for economic diversification precipitate this paper. It is in the light of these that the paper sets to bring to notice how the church has overtime leads the frontline in the quest for economic diversification in Nigeria and how Christian religious studies can lead to creation of job and wealth and, entrepreneurship skills among the masses.

Conceptual Clarification

Religion

Despite the absence of a universal definition, it is possible to identify some broad and common ways of understanding religion. However, in this paper, functionalist definition of religion seems acceptable within the context of the study. This is because functional approach highlights what religion ‘does’ to people, such as providing them with sources of identity, morality, law and order, or by linking them together into communities (Silvestri and Fba, 2015:5-6). According to Karl Marx, religion is like other social institutions in that it is dependent upon the material and economic realities in a given society. It has no independent history; instead it is the creature of productive forces. As Marx wrote, “The religious world is but the reflex of the real world.” According to Marx, religion can only be understood in relation to other social systems and the economic structures of society (Raines, 2002:5). Hence, economic diversification ought to reflect the religious institution in any given society.

Christian Religious Studies

Ogunmilade (1985:3) says that no consensus exists today on the nature, scope and definition of Religious Studies as well Christian Religious Studies. The above named scholar believe that current search to identify revolves around different usage of key terms like Christian Religious Education, Christian Religious Knowledge, Christian Religious and Moral Instruction.

Other problem is that since Religion deals with values, judgments and feelings, everyone in the society will agree with it. However, Christian Religious Studies refer to a process of developing a person's mind, in which the Christian religious teachings are studied, incorporated and are indeed central to all other aspects of knowledge or skills acquired in a particular setting (Balyage 1998:1). From on-going line of thought, one can simply say that the main task of Christian religious studies is to guide students in such a way that they can attain intellectual and moral perfection, discipline themselves physically, mentally and morally, and face their daily and future challenge with biblical instructions.

Church

The English word Church is called *Ekklesia* in the New Testament Greek and it means an assembly of the called out. It refers to a people called for a purpose. The Old Testament Hebrew equivalent is *qara* and it means to meet (Strong, 2001:7177). The Christian Church is an ecclesiological term generally used by Protestants to refer to the whole group of people belonging to Christianity throughout the history of Christianity. In this understanding, "Christian Church" does not refer to a particular Christian denomination but to the body of all believers. Some Christian traditions, however, believe that the term "Christian Church" or "Church" applies only to a specific historic Christian body or institution (Jenkins, 2011:65)

Economic Diversification

Economic diversification is a process of broadening the range of economic activities both in the production and distribution of goods and services. It does not necessarily entail increase in output but it enhances stabilisation of economies by diversifying their economic base. The issue of economic diversification should be viewed from the perspective of sustainable development to ensure long-term stability of the economy. Viewed from this angle, it has the capacity to fundamentally strengthen an economy's adaptive capacity and safeguards its long-term prospects in the face of depletion of the basic natural resources and the vagaries of economic fluctuations under the pressure of competition in globalization (Anyaehe and Areji, 2015:89). To have a strong diversified economic is to be self reliance and we become self reliant through obtaining sufficient knowledge, education, and literacy; by managing money and resources wisely, being morally strong, preparing for emergencies and eventualities; and by having physical health, social and emotional well-being (Beck, 2017:4-5).

The Church and Economic Diversification in Nigeria

There is no doubt that economic diversification leads to development and positioning of economy to address the needs of the nation. The neglect of other sectors in Nigeria is responsible for the economic hardship the masses facing daily. Anyaehe and Areji (2015:87) said, "Today petroleum accounts for over 90% of Nigeria's export revenue and over 80% of the government's budget". The implication of this is that, any time there is fall in the price of oil in the world market or fall in output as a result of militancy activities as well as oil bunkering always had it consequences in the nation's economy. This situation makes it mandatory to any serious government to diversify the economic if they are really interested in solving the economic hardship in the country. It is also important to note that among other factors require to bursts and sustains economic diversification in Nigeria attention must be given to the educational system, Health sector, Agriculture, Employment, entrepreneurship and self reliance as well as peace and secure environment for economy to drive. And all these factors have been influenced by Christian Religious Studies at one point or the other.

Dissecting these factors one after the other starting with education, it is important to note that Christianity right from its inception gave good number of Nigerian citizens a prevailing weapon through the provision of western education. Western education became the main instrument used for establishing and maintaining the new values by the missionaries in most of the mission stations. Literacy was vigorously pursued as a means of gathering the converts to read the Bible for themselves. Chidi (2011:13) claim that by building schools which range from the primary to secondary levels, the Church recognized the importance of education in economic diversification. Some of the schools and colleges were of very high quality, for example, St. Gregory College in Lagos, St Patrick's College, Calabar, Christ the king College, Onitsha, Holy Ghost College, Owerri, College of Immaculate Conception, Enugu and Stella Maris College Port Harcourt. This tradition of education continued to flourish until after the Nigerian Civil War, when the government took over schools. Currently, most people would agree that widespread illiteracy, low educational standard and inappropriate education contribute very significantly to Nigeria's economic and social problems (Kinoti, 1996: 51).

Unquestionably, education is crucial to economic and social development and it must receive top priority in any serious attempt to find lasting solution to Nigeria's problems. Only education will give the people understanding, knowledge, skills and confidence necessary for life in the modern world. This is in line with Bill Gate speech to the government of President Muhammadu Buhari to focus on education among other sector for the prosperity of the nation. A caption of the speech reads, "If you invest in their health, education, and opportunities-the "human capital" we are taking about today-then they will lay the foundation for sustained prosperity. If you don't, however, then it is very important to recognize that there will be a sharp limit on how much the country can grow (Bill Gate Speech at the Special Session of the National Economic Council, Thursday 22nd 2018). Looking at the tremendous impact Christianity has played in past and in the present on the provision of education in Nigeria gave them a pace as the major stakeholder as far education is concern in Nigeria. Today in Nigeria, churches and Christian owned Ministries holds a good number of quality primary, secondary and tertiary institution with renew effort at taken the lead in the provision of quality and accessible education to teaming populace.

Right from inception, the missionaries were concern about soul as well the physical well being of its new found members. Hence, they dedicated themselves in providing medical care to its new found territory. As the popular saying says "health is wealth", the church understand what this means to the people, hence vigorously ventured into building hospital and training of nurses and paramedical personnel to provide manpower for the increasing need of the healthcare service system. According to Chidi (2011:36), the role of the Church in providing health care in Nigeria started as early as the 1860's when the Sacred Heart Hospital was established by the Catholic Missionaries in Abeokuta. It was also the first formal introduction of Western medicine into Nigeria. At the eve of the independence mission hospitals exceeded government hospitals in number: 118 mission hospitals compared with 101 government hospitals. The Church's pioneering general education, in addition, helped to lay the groundwork for a wider distribution and acceptance of modern medical care to the natives who at the time tended to reject anything not traditional to them including education.

To diversify economy in any given society, the place of agriculture cannot be over emphasized. Because when human being is healthy and educated, the next vital thing to survive is food. The church has been critical of this and has passionately engaged the early convert in modern mechanise farming system. Enoch and Chikaodi (2016:51) observed that Sir Thomas F. Buxton, the greatest leader of the slave trade abolitionists after the death of William Wilberforce, insisted that the full ransom of Africa was to be found in her fertile soil. He suggested the establishment of a settlement at the confluence of the rivers Niger and Benue to act as an agricultural training center for Africans. Christianity was to be introduced as a necessary aspect of this programme to bring about the moral and spiritual regeneration of Africans. Hence Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton advocated the principle of the "Bible and plough" slogan which caught the imagination of the next generation. Venn became an energetic exponent of the Buxton's doctrine. St. Joseph's Topo established in Badagry in 1876 on a piece of land nine miles long between the Lagos lagoon and the ocean was intended to be "the foundation of an agricultural establishment for raising the standard of agriculture so necessary in a colony in order to make the people economically diversify. In this Christian village each inhabitant was given a plot of land to cultivate under close supervision by missionaries for his am profit, except for a little rent paid in kind. The Church from the beginning of the Christianization of Nigeria was an active participant in proposals about viable commercial ventures, and encouraged individual Christians to engage in enterprises for the improvement of their economic well-being. When the first Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionaries were dispatched to Yoruba land in Nigeria in late 1844, Venn outlined the means to be used in social development. First and most important was the Christian gospel. This was the foundation for everything else. The second means was agriculture because it contributed to the necessities of life and provided a constructive occupation that can make the people to be self reliant. In the third place, he advocated commerce to stimulate local production and create demand for imports.

Contextualizing the juxtapose role of the church in the quest for economic diversification in the present day Nigeria, Anozie (2013:183) asserts that of very important to the church was agriculture. Assimilating these missionary's agricultural activities as a catalyst for economic diversification; Onuora (2012) Anozie (2013:183) asserts that:

Agriculture has gone a long way to produce food for man and animals in Nigeria. And the church has given its supports for the benefit of its members and the country at large. Consequently it is the source of raw materials for the domestic industries and for export. Above all, agriculture has paved way for entrepreneurs to come invoke. Owing to this fact, it is important for the church to always teach—all hands on the plough for economic development.

It is noteworthy that Christian churches participate in industrial establishment. For more rapid development of industries, not only does government participate actively in industrial establishment, today also, churches do, by establishing or setting up industries or by buying shares thereby contributing to raising required fund for the industries. In the area of banking, the church is contributing immensely towards economic development. Many churches today establish a Community Banks and Micro-finance Banks, for example Uzundu Microfinance Bank Limited St Mary's Catholic Church Awka North Anambra Nigeria, Gowon's microfinance Bank owned by ECWA, The Suisse microfinance Bank owned by Christ Embassy Church, FFS microfinance Bank Limited owned by Foursquare Gospel Church, Nigeria, and other churches within their locality in order to encourage saving of funds which would be invested in business ventures, to provide the needed capital for development, to promote trading activities, and providing short and long term loans to individuals and firms. Anozie (2013:183) added that doctors, nurses, teachers, bankers and other categories of workers who work in schools, hospitals, banks and other establishments owned by the church, are paid salaries; through this means, they earn their living. This has gone a long way to reduce the problem of unemployment, because churches create employment opportunities. Additionally, these workers pay taxes used by government to develop many sectors of the economy in a country. By doing so (paying of taxes), they are contributing their quota towards national and economic development. Suffice to say, many individuals through word of God get visions on how to produce one commodity or the other, which are eventually brought to the market for people to buy and sale and make profit from thereby earning a living. Indeed Christian church has been and is still contributing to every strata of the country's development.

The need to preserve peace and stability, rehabilitate essential infrastructure, reform public institutions, jump start the economy and create employment opportunities places heavy demands on budgetary resources. At the same time, the need for a stable, balanced economy and the restoration of private investors' confidence requires that inflationary pressures be contained. This means that economic diversification needs a peaceful society to flourish. Albert (2011) in Anozie (2013:183) further claimed that the Christian tradition has made significant contributions to peace in Nigeria at a number of different levels. Among these are public statements by Church leaders, interreligious dialogue, programs of action at local and international levels, organisations dedicated to bringing about peace, courses of study, commemorative days etc. In recent decades, Church leaders have frequently made statements in support of peace building programs Nigeria. In some cases these statements have been specific appeals for peace in particular circumstances, however, on other occasions they have also published more comprehensive statements on the need for peace and the means of achieving it. The teaching of Christianity which is guided by the dictates of the bible (word of God) has constantly encouraged the members to ensure peace and harmony in the society. Whenever and wherever there is peace there tends to be development and longevity is enjoyed. To this end, Christianity which is one of the predominant religions in Nigeria today teaches peace and encourages all adherents to the faith to pursue peace and live peacefully with one another.

Christian Religious Studies and Job Creation

Christian Religious Studies has been viewed as one of the means to restore moral and social order in the society. For example, after a lengthy description of the moral decay in Nigeria which is portrayed in rampant fraud, evidence of corruption in high and low places, bribery, stealing and robbery with violence, scandalous nepotism and political patronage and abuse of power, excessive materials and general indiscipline which has undermine the quest for economic diversification, Iheomia (1995) cited in Itolondo (2012:722) concludes by saying:

...in the final analysis what matters most to a nation's well-being is its spiritual and moral health. Everything else which a nation strives for depends on this...whether it is national integration, political stability, economic development or educational, scientific and technological progress. Nigeria is a nation morally and spiritually sick. A basic aim of moral education in Nigeria schools must be to restore sanity to the nations way of life through the entrenchment in peoples' psyche such values as honesty, discipline, respect and concern for others, justice and devotion to duty. If formal and direct moral education were to become a regular feature in the curriculum at all levels of educational institutions, it could enable our schools, colleges and universities contribute significantly to the moral health of a nation.

The major focus of Christian religious studies is to assist in the all round development of individuals with the undertone of compassionate and fair minded persons that can make positive contributions to society as individuals and as members of the groups.

The pivot of common essential learning is to bring up individuals who would not only be educated, sympathetic and rational but also have sense of social responsibility for humanity and societal progress (Njoku, 2015:70). Entrepreneurship according to Oduwanje (2009) in Ilechukwu (2014:81) has to do with introduction of changes and new ideas and the ability to control resources in a way that will satisfy the objectives of the entrepreneur. To do this, there is need to develop some attitude and skill which according to Ilechukwu (2014:82) are based on

- i. Positive attitudes, high aptitude for rational critical thinking and timely decision making.
- ii. Clear vision, generation of progressive ideals drive and passion for success.
- iii. Ability to convert vision into concrete reality.
- iv. Creativity, innovativeness, courageous and self confidence;
- v. Ability to assume reasonable risk.
- vi. Mercurial ingenuity, resourcefulness and self-confidence.
- vii. Confidence and good judgement which involve taking decision and making choice.
- viii. Prudence which means due care in the management of resources, especially financial.
- ix. Willingness to learn should develop a disposition to pick up and store knowledge and use it.
- x. Hard work which is an indispensable ingredient of success in business and other review.

A careful review of the function of Christian religious studies reveals that the course has as its priority in the inculcation of these attitudes and virtues to the students. Self-reliant and prudence have been some major emphasis of Christian religious studies. For instance, through religious studies student learns obedience, self-restraint, and subordination to common course and initiative. Christian religious studies teaches student the need for accountability right attitude to wealth, dignity of labour, humility, forgiveness, loyalty, individual responsibility and patriotism. Religious studies produce students who will be better citizens, who will make justice to reign, to spread beauty, gentleness, wisdom and peace, which will widen the opportunity of increasing goodwill, to foster industry and thrift, education and culture, reference and obedience, purity and love, honesty sobriety and devotion to common good. If religious studies do all these, it means then that it has been entrepreneuring and making students self reliant creating jobs before the introduction Entrepreneurship Education in the Tertiary Institutions (Ilechukwu, 2014:82).

Conclusion

The above attempt is to examine the side by side role of the church in the quest for economic diversification. And it has been observed, the church and Christian religious studies have been critical in the quest for economic diversification in Nigerian soil right from its inception. This can be verify from enormous contribution the due have done in the areas the provision of quality education, Health, Agriculture, Employment, entrepreneurship and self reliance as well as peace and secure environment for economy to drive. More so, the paper observes that Christian religious studies make students to imbibe the right moral, knowledge, discipline, understanding as well as psychological, social and spiritual, dispositions that lead students to develop the required skills and attitudes necessary for self reliance, human development, entrepreneurship, and wealth and job creation. It is now crystal clear that the capacity and force of Church and Christian religious studies as a course, if properly reckoned with can facilitate unprecedented economic diversification in a peaceful society and thereby making the youths to be self reliant. It is no exaggeration to maintain that an inspired, honest, faithful, dedicated, converted and courageous Church, through its clergy and laity, remains a powerful agent for economic diversification, social change and liberation of the citizens of a callous, corrupt, inept and exploitative Nigerian society.

Recommendations

- i. Christian Religious Studies ought to be given the utmost attention by both public and private stake holders in education and policy formulation looking at its pragmatic contribution in guiding students to convert vision into concrete reality and help students to be self reliance which is a force in economic diversification.
- ii. There is need for the government to encourage churches that have set up schools, hospital, micro-finance banks and agricultural plan with loan in order to enhance successful running of the institution for economic diversification.

- iii. The Church ought to be commended for by well meaning Nigerians for taking a proactive stance right from its inception till date in the quest for economic diversification in Nigeria. Hence the need for government as a matter of urgency to recognise and collaborates with the church in the quest to diversifies the economy.
- iv. Finally the paper recommends that Government at all level should be caution on any attempt at pushing Christian religious studies to the background as this will be tantamount to obliterating the quest for economic diversification

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