

Cultural and Religious Values in Nigeria and Challenges Inherent Before and After Independence

Dr. Inusa Ada, Haruna Godwin Ojonemi, Asabe Akhaine Duna

Corresponding author: ojonemigodwin@gmail.com

*Christian Religious Education, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.
Federal university of Education Kontagora*

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Abstract

Nigeria as a nation had lived as an integrating entity before and after the independence in 1st October 1960 with sound religious and cultural values, despite its diversity in ethnic, religious, occupational and geographical domain. As heterogeneous as the Nigeria society, it has avalanche of sound religious and cultural values in the pre independence era which includes; respect for constituted authority, integrity, discipline, accountability, while some of these religious and cultural values have been sub changed with wrong values as; ethno- religious violence, kidnapping, banditry, fraudulent act gambling, armed robbery killings etc. this paper adopt the analytical and review method, it also tend to explore religious and cultural values, the paper also discuss the reasons for the change in sound religious and cultural values in post-independence Nigeria . The paper examine the challenges inherent at the decade of independence with the view of discussing the comprehensive and dynamic theory of religion based on the fact that religion provide value laden belief system to supply standard and criteria of behaviour base on that belief system . The paper recommends that religion and cultural values must be maintained for a better society.

Keywords: Cultural Values, Religious Values, Challenges, Before and After Independence

Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that Nigeria is a pluralistic society in all its ramifications and religion is said to be a cohesive bond between people and their cultural heritage. Since amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorate in 1914 the country was being pluralistic. The country claims to have over 250 ethnic groups, with different socio-political and economic and cultural traditions. Compared to other forms of pluralism, religion and culture are the strongest, this explains why, when each is heightened, Nigeria experiences a crisis situation. Most of the conflicting situations in the past have been traced back to the colonial period, where some scholars accused the colonial administration for collapsing divergent social groups together. As a result, the social, religious, political and economic imbalances among Nigerians have continued to create problems to the oneness in Nigeria (Umaru 2011). On the other hand, the word religion is simple and familiar as it is very difficult to define. Inusa, Haruna and Akhaine (2025) revealed that, in studying religion, there are two broad types of definition, the substantive and the functional definition. Substantively define religion in terms of theoretical content, or essence of religious thought and values. Functional religion is seen in terms of consequences or functions within the human psyche, human society or human culture in general.

Lere in Haruna, Buzaije and Akhaine (2024) sees religion as generally centred on the awareness and response to a reality that transcends human beings and their world. This means, religion is full of ideology that is generally agreed with, to submit and also debated. More so, the different forms of religion make it difficult to have an adequate definition. The questions most people asked today according to Abubakar (2017) is, what is the role of religion today in our modern society? Is the ultimate aim of religion today to destroy harmonious relationships among humanity, eliminate lives and properties of people? Is religion out to cause havoc, hatred, animosity and disrupt economic systems and activity? Or does religion uphold the idea of development among believers? for all religious practitioners in Nigeria.

However, Alagbu in Haruna and Lohnan (2025) religious and cultural values provide explanation to the essence of life. He explains that religion consists of value, cognition and skill with conceptions and images of the world all of which help to guide man in his day to day life. And to contribute to the growth of the society in which we live. Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion emphasizes

in the unity of humanity for mankind. They place emphasis on the quality of humanity and the only distinction is due to righteousness, living in peace, harmony and devoted to reconciliation with love, mercy, tenderness, and affection. Tolerance, justice, and fair play which is lacking among the religious adherents of these major religions in Nigeria. Religious and cultural values do not only prepare adherents

Religion does not only prepare adherents for life everlasting, after the existence in the physical world, but it also ensures the adherents have a holy and pure life. Hence the adherent of every religion particularly, the Christian, Muslim and African traditional religion are expected to imbibe their religious values towards nation building and unification of the country. This paper will therefore, examine some religious values in pre independence and the reasons for the change in post-independence period in Nigeria.

The Concept of Value

Values may be ideas that propel man's daily actions. In other words, they are the standard which members of the community adhere to in their personal and communal interaction towards the achievement of the goals. The values determine those who are to be praised or reprimanded for their actions. In another sense, values refer to what is 'good' or 'desired'. In the descriptive sense, value can mean the worth of something as when an article is evaluated. Values can be institutional and cherished by individuals and by a group of people.

Values can refer to the usefulness of a thing which is a function of choice-making. That is, there are options opened to one from which a choice is made. The concept of choice is preponderant to the greatest aptitude of the person making the choice (Umaru 2011). In so far as values are universal, they can be material, spiritual, religious, moral, aesthetic, communal or individualistic. Another feature is that values are found in all religions. People's values are largely based upon traditional religious and moral principles that they cling to.

Basic Religious Values

As earlier indicated, three religions are core in Nigeria; the African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity. Each of these major religions had some values that are key to them. In Nigeria, the African

Traditional Religion is the first and is as old as the Africans themselves. Islam and Christianity later joined in the list. The adaptation of Islam and Christianity by Nigerians had great effect on the African Traditional Religion since they have to some extent feast on a singular alien religion. The coming of Christianity and Islam with their civilization make them attractive to the native particularly Christianity. As a result, they withdrew their members cardinal of this attractiveness was education which both Islam and Christianity had served as a veritable tool to the advancement of the new religions. As a result, the effect of their traditional religion becomes low, giving room to the two religions to strive.

Umaru 2011 exacerbated that presently two religions are the leading religion in the country's religious space. They are both nationally recognized with national holidays and festivals. Prayers are offered in Islamic and Christian ways for the commencement of the new year and as well as other important events at the national levels. Political offices are shared among Christian and Muslim within a ratio, where the head is a Muslim the vice must be a Christian vice viser. This practice goes on unofficial, but is an arrangement and a tradition that existed throughout the history of Nigeria since independence. However, at the state or local government levels such practices do not hold well because in predominantly Muslims areas, or a Christian dominated or Muslims dominated state.

Traditional Religious Values

Godwin (1993) in Haruna and Inusa (2023) wrote that "African values may be taken to mean a set of institutionalized ideals which guide and direct the patterns of life of Africans. African values therefore are goal-oriented because they point to a desired goal, which actions are geared towards and upon which the expectation of every individual and community is hinged. Individual actions are mirrored through the approved society's values upon which the test for justification is based. This makes an action a moral one. The question of moral justification provides us with the notion of ultimate value. Society may or may not actually or consciously recognise it, yet it is a part of its moral value. Among the various African values, the sacredness of human life is of utmost importance. The respect and dignity accorded human life cannot be overemphasised. Respect for humanity spreads beyond the confines of the nuclear family. Members of extended family, community or tribe are regarded as brothers whose lives must be preserved by all in the society.

Since African culture cannot be detached from African religious belief, we will be discussing the cultural values along the African Traditional Religion values. The beliefs and practices of the traditionalist, are based on the faith of their forefathers which were handed down to the younger ones orally from generation to generation a society under the Traditional religious practice is most inherently respectfully, tolerant and peaceful. Morality among Africans deals with the questions of right and wrong. Or what is good and evil in human conduct. Members of the society are deeply sensitive to this phenomenon. As a result, over the years, it has produced customs, rules, laws, tradition and taboos which were observed in their society. Africans believe that morality is given by God.

Africans place high value on communal living. Communal values express the worth and appreciation of the community; the values which guide the social interaction of the people towards a common goal. Interpersonal bonds go beyond biological affinity in expressing the values of communality, Africans share mutually; they care for one another, they are interdependent and they solidarise. Whatever happens to one happens to the community as a whole. The joy and sorrow of one extend to everyone in the society.

Islamic Religious Values

Islamic religious values according to Al-wasewi (2003:87), Islam is a religion which has been sent to the world by Allah through his prophet Muhammad (PBH), it is a way of life that takes care of both the physical and the spiritual. It guides the activities of its adherence using sharia as an instrument. To most Nigerian Muslims, sharia is a canonical law. According to Islam, there are five values which are basic minimum way of living and must be applied at the lowest place of living, they include;

1. Right to have the ability to perform moral responsibility.
2. Right to life and protection.
3. Right to have food and security.
4. Right to clothing, shelter and education.
5. Right to have a family and earn a living.

The realisation of the above values that Islam considers work as an essential ingredient to livelihood. Kamel in Hassan Ibrahim reiterated that, Islam is religion that support work for survival.

The holy Quran adjourn believers to make use of the abundance of resources that have been created for us he discusses further that Islam orders its followers to be productive in the society. Islam belief that Muhammad made a balance of living between work and worship as a result, all Muslims are enjoined to be constant with their act of worship.

Christian Basic Values

According to Alagbu (2011) Christianity is believed to be a monotheistic religion, and have some major religious values as; justice and fair play, right and responsibilities, right to life and worthy standard of living, the right to worship God according to one's conscience, economic right, political right and as well as right to emigrate and immigrate. Inusa, Haruna and Akhaine disclosed that the basic belief in Christianity is the virgin birth of Jesus, his death and resurrection. Sin in Christianity is a state of rebellion with God by rejecting Jesus which can lead to eternal separation from God. Christianity emphasises social services to people particularly, the need to be economically, politically and socially inclined to ethics. He concludes that it is revealed through scriptures that what is wrong and right are based on the biblical principles, which the Bible made mention of as love for one another and the enemy.

The Dynamic Theory of Religion

Ethno-religious dynamic theory according to Jonathan fox (1999:443) is more coherent and scientifically testable. He states that when a religious framework is challenged, the response will be the defensive action that is prone to conflict. This is due to the fact that, religion is a belief system that organises adherents to the values, as standard and norms, build cohesiveness among its followers and the legitimate actors. Fox posits four roles religion can play in making sure, right values are inculcated. First, religion provides an ideological framework for understanding the world. Secondly, religion defines codes of behaviour that link the faithful and their activities to that framework. Thirdly, religion leads individuals to an all-encompassing story and at times, creates the institutions that organise and recruit's individuals towards realisation of these goals. Finally, religion provides legitimacy for activities and institutions in pursuit of these goals of fostering good religious and cultural values that will lead to success.

Cultural Values

African traditional societies have demonstrated retention of moral order and moral cohesion that over the centuries held the African Societies together Haruna Buzaije and Omede (2024) posits that; Africans have a foundational concept of communalism. There are some African cultural values that have dominated overtime, one of which is that of cultural values that are humanistic or anthropocentric. They revealed that the central focus on wellbeing, survival and longevity of human beings .

Abubakar 2013 in Haruna and Inusa (2025) opined that, the concept of societal taboos is what lies at the heart of every African to withstand the pressure of Western Societies and to undermine ancient cultural order. When president Obama threatened to cut off foreign aids to Nigeria in 2011 after the Nigeria Senate passed a bill that was unfavorable to homosexuality. A Nigeria law maker Zekari Mohammed, said: "We have a culture, we have a religious belief and we have a tradition. We are black people we are not white, and so the U.S. cannot impose its culture on us". Same sex marriage is alien to our culture and we can never give it a chance. So if the Western nation withheld their aid to us to hell with them (Haruna and Loknan 2025).

Reason for the Inherent Challenges after Independence

Nigeria has come a long way as a nation, many changes took place and are still taking place in our religious and cultural values. Even those values that correspond to the values in these religions in traditional African values were disparaged, the political value of Africa was dislodged and replaced with a foreign one, thus putting a round stick in a square hole. Scholars argued that the combined conspiracy of Christianity and colonialism resulted in the dereliction of African values.

Abubakar (2017) opined that; good and positive religious and cultural values such as building of harmonious relationship, mutual respect, peaceful co-existence, hard work, integrity, posterity, accountability prudence and discipline are all short-changed for quick money syndrome, terrorism, kidnapping, ritual killing, banditry, cultism, prostitution etc. The powerful media, especially of the West, have succeeded in spreading exotic values into the interior of people's bedroom. In fact, even without cable, the "content less" and "context less" colonial values have been sold cheaply to Africa. The result is the systematic erosion of traditional African values. Through the media, the sanctity of human life has been consigned to the dustbin. You could hear a statement like, "I am not of the opinion

that human life has value". This valueless opinion of human life makes life more meaningless and the struggle for survival a crude effort. Thus, we can now find corpses littering our streets abandoned. Jimoh Yunusa (2015:13), morality is the guiding principles or code of conduct on how people of a society or community behaved. The decline of moral values is catastrophic. The "society is moving toward sexual norms that give wider latitude for individual sexual gratification and individual self-expression" through in descent dressing, campus couple life, armed robbery, drug abuse and all forms of fraudulent activities. This has led to the prevalence of children in giving birth to children syndrome, which is pervading our society. Dignity of labour as a cherished value has been infested with corrupt virus of quick and lewd way to success (Awake, June 8, 2003: 4).

Conclusion

Reasons for the dereliction of religious and cultural values in Africa and Nigeria in particular, can be traced to the intrusion of colonial ideas and foreign religions and incessant quest to get wealth quickly. This position may not account for the whole truth. While it is true that colonial influence is majorly concerned with imposition of their ideas, such as rugged individualism, which has destroyed the communalistic values of Africa, with its negative effects, the gullible reception by the Africans cannot be excused. Christian values may not be too different from the traditional African ones, except in the concept of salvation. The problem was and is still our flair for "anything Western. Despite the contribution of Islam and Christianity to the development of Nigeria and her people socially, politically, economically, intellectually and spiritually. But unfortunately along the line, things derailed politicization and commercialization of religion set in and things began to dwindle which resulted to economic hardship, religious bigotry, ethnicity, ethno religious crisis which led to the wide range division among the adherents, which resultant effect was immeasurable conspiracy among one another, distrust, hatred, and destruction of life and properties worth billions of naira.

Recommendations

This paper therefore recommends that;

1. The religious clerics and adherents of each religion should reinvigorate their approach to life and religious practice in living with one another by creating a spirit of brotherhood.

2. Parents should not relent in their duties to continuously talk to their younger once on the need to imbibe good religious and cultural values so as to have a better society devoid of all forms of crimes.

3. The government must put measures in place to punish anyone that will bridge not abhor the good societal values to serve as deterrents to all in the society.

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