

## **RELIGION AND ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATIONS IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH**

**Ibenwa, Christopher N. (Ph.D)**

Social Sciences Unit, School of General Studies,  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

E-mail: [christopherndubuisi05@gmail.com](mailto:christopherndubuisi05@gmail.com)

**&**

**Akah Josephine N. (Ph.D)**

Humanity Unit, School of General,  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

E- mail: [Josephine.akah@unn.edu.ng](mailto:Josephine.akah@unn.edu.ng)

### **ABSTRACT**

In ages past religion was and at present it is still a veritable instrument for economic diversity. The activities of Jesus Christ and that of pioneer missionaries to Africa are living evidences to this fact. They came not only with the gospel but also with some sweet pills such as education, science and technology, primary health-care, agriculture, entrepreneurship and politics. But today, these diversifications are being down played upon because of oil wealth hence the present economic recession in Nigeria and the need to diversify. The study aims at examining these silent qualities that early Christian missionaries adopted that made the Nigerian economy export oriented and a very viable one then, and to proffer a solution. The work adopted qualitative descriptive method in analyzing data drawn from library and internet materials. The study found out among others that the expertise of religious leaders was not adequately explored in the matters of economic planning in Nigeria. It is the contention of the researchers that when the clerics are fully integrated in the planning processes that the economy will be better.

**Keywords:** Religion, Church, Diversification, Economy and Nigeria.

**JEL Classification:** M3

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is a well-known fact, that economic development is essential to overall national development of any country for it is through a well-developed economy that other aspects of human life will be made more useful. Corroborating this viewpoint, Rodney (1972:10) writes that “a society develops economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with their environment” Before the advent of oil wealth, Nigeria depends mainly on agriculture for food sufficiency and production of raw materials for local industries and for export. Okongwu in Uju (1998:212) argues that now with emergency of oil boom the little effort made towards agriculture before the coming of oil wealth has completely disappeared. He stresses further that before the civil war, farming dominated Nigerian economic life since it was the mainstay of the economy. By then the country was the world’s largest exporter of cocoa. Remember the huge groundnut production in the old city of Kano which gave it the name “groundnut pyramid of Kano”. Some

other huge earners of foreign exchange for Nigeria then, were cotton, rubber and timber. Agriculture in Nigeria by this period, before the civil war was so much export-oriented that the name cash crop is still being used for crops produced for export. Until the emergence of petroleum industry in the 1960s the three crops, groundnut, palm produce and cocoa provided about 70 percent of the value of Nigeria's exports. The researchers observe that this over dependence on oil has spelt doom for Nigeria economy, Nigeria that said in the 70s, under Gen. Gowon administration that problem of Nigeria is no longer money but how to spend money. To proof this, the government of the time went about throwing money around hosting festivals notable the FESTAC of 1977 by Gen Obasanjo. Now Nigeria is finding it extremely difficult to pay workers salaries, provide infrastructures, employment, food etc and the citizens are dying of hunger and starvation and abject poverty. People are committing suicide here and there, falling into carnals and rivers. Lending credence to this viewpoint Uju (1998:213) opines that,

The oil boomed very much and people at the corridors of power "drank" it to their fullest without any feeling of concern for the greater majority of the masses who continued to sink deep into poverty. However, it did not take long before the economic recession of 1977-78 which was linked to the so-called oil glut exposed the hollowness and incoherence of the Nigerian economy.

Nigerian economy has remained undiversified with only one product which is oil, until the arrival of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 and the setting in of economic recession in 2016, and life became unbearable for citizens. So in order to bring Nigeria out of recession resulting from their over dependence on oil and sudden fall on oil price world over. Therefore the much talked about Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) as per economic diversifications was brought to the fore.. Hence the carrion call for a way forward and the extension of hand of fellowship with religion as an antidote that will pull Nigeria out of recession through its multiple economic activities that has been tested trust and proven.

It is not gain-saying that from time immemorial religion has been in the vanguard of supporting, encouraging and facilitating economic diversifications particularly the church. Jesus Christ the founder of Christianity in his thirty three years ministry on earth demonstrated this in his relationships with people. He provided both spiritual and physical needs of the people. Aside, the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom for salvation of their soul, he healed the sick and provided food for them, indicating the diverse nature of the Christian gospel. The pioneer missionaries to Nigeria of early 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries came not only with the gospel but with the plough and some sweet pills like healthcare, education, science and technology, entrepreneurship and politics. The church of today has continued with the same life style. And this counts for proliferation of schools, hospitals, banks, media houses (both electronics and prints), skill acquisition centers, building of filling stations, shops, hostels and so forth. The study aims at examining these silent qualities that early Christian missionaries adopted that made the Nigerian economy export oriented and a very viable one then, and to proffer a solution. It is in a bid to achieve the purpose of this study that the scholars adopted the qualitative and descriptive phenomenological methods in the analysis of data. The descriptive phenomenological method allows an unbiased description of events as they occur.

### **Clearing the Definitional fogs in the topic**

It is usually better to begin a work by first clearing the definitional fogs that might inhibit a clear understanding of the topic under review. Hence the comment by Ugwu (2009: 159) that it is

always neat and proper to explain some terminologies that could blur a clear understanding of any research topic.

**Church Explained:** Church has not just one meaning, or use in the Christian holy bible. It has a varied and a variegated meanings as you can see in this discourse. Church is not just ordinary magnificent buildings we see as we walk about. The church goes beyond physical building to include the people that come together to worship, adore and pray to whom they see and believe to be their object worship, that is the supernatural/invisible being. Northville (2008) opines that the word Church is from a compound word derived from the verb ekkaleo. He explained further that the prepositional prefix ek means out and kales means to call, these in turn make up the compound word ekklesia (Church) meaning called out. Elwell (1996) in supporting his view argues that the most common word for church in the New Testament Greek is elklesia: which means the called-out ones. The noun would then be a called-out group or an assembly. Therefore, etymologically the term Church can be defined as the assembly of called-out people.

### **Religion defined**

Religion on the other according to Ibenwa (2014) is man's awareness of the existence of a Supernatural Being whom he believes to be his creator and controller of the universe and his willingness to worship Him through intermediary in solitariness and in group. Yet a more elaborate one was given by Durkheim (1948) as... a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

### **Economic Diversifications Described**

While economic diversification is the act of going into different areas of human endeavour with the aim of avoiding sudden collapse of a country's economy as a result of over dependence on a single goods or commodity.

## **FEASIBILITY OF ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATIONS IN NIGERIA: BY THE CHURCH.**

### **Social Aspect**

Omoregbe (1999) in emphasizing the important role religion play in all round development of mankind says, that religion is such a prominent feature in human society that it cannot be simply ignored; and the history would be incomplete without reference to religion. It has aided social programmes, education, development, interpersonal and international cooperation etc. Lending credence to this Ibenwa and Iheanacho (2017:49) opine that religion is a system of building social development and ethical culture of any given society.

### **Education**

Religion brought literacy to Nigerians. The missionaries made education one of their chief means for the spread of Christianity in Nigeria. Schools were established and converts were taught how to read and write. Apart from primary schools, secondary schools were built and universities as well. In fact, education is one of the major achievements of religion in Nigeria. The early missionaries of Christianity established educational institutions. Examples abound in the Christian church, particularly in the former Eastern region. Those early missionaries understood the importance of education in the life of those converts. According to Anyika(2000), all the missions

demonstrated great concern for the provision of Western education as the surest means of development. The CMS Grammar school in Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta among others were established by CMS. Some of them were established in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Similarly, the Methodist Church in 1905 established its first teacher training institute at Oron called Oron Boys Institute, followed by the Methodist Boys Institute Uzuakoli and Lagos in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Presbyterian Church established Hope Waddell Training Institute Calabar. Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha, St. Paul's College, Awka, St. Monica's College, Ogbunike were established by the Anglican Church. Some were established over 100 years ago. In the same way the Catholics established Christ the King College, Onitsha, Queen of the Rosary College, Onitsha, St. Charles Teachers Training College, Onitsha, College of Immaculate Conception Enugu, Queen of the Holy Ghost College, Owerri, Stella Maris, Port Harcourt, among others. The schools and colleges established by different Churches and even Muslim sects were and still are training ground for the manpower needs of the country. The missions also provided scholarships for some of the products to train in the local or oversea universities. Christianity in league with Europe brought school education, European language and culture,( including imported goods), western science and technology. These were supportive gifts (sweet pills) which accompanied their preaching (Okeke, 1998:59).

### **Media Houses**

Media house both electronic and print are established by Churches. For instance at Onitsha the Catholic Church has a radio outfit called Sapienza, Lord Chosen newspapers and Magazines. Anglican Cable Network (ACCN). Celebration TV for Omega Fire Ministry, Redeem TV Station and many others

### **HealthCare**

The efforts and contributions of the missionaries towards healthcare in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The church in time past built hospitals, health centers and maternities to take care of the people's health and to reduce mortality rate among the people. The church missionary society (CMS) built Iyi-Enu Hospital Ogidi, Anambra State, The Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) built Bishop Shannahan Hospital Nsukka, Enugu State, Borrowmew Hospital, Onitsha, Anambra State. Methodist Church built the Amachara Hospital, Umuahia, Abia State. The Anglican Communion, Enugu Diocese under Bishop Agbo, built the Faith Foundation Hospital, Nsukka. Furthermore, by 1910, according to Grooves (1958), "there were sixteen (16) leper settlements under the auspices of the various missions in Nigeria". On the issues of leper,

Njoku (2008) added that, "the efforts of the church revealed the creation of leper colonies, provision of accommodation, employment, treatments, acquisition of skill, education, feeding, re-establishing of lepers back into their towns". As a matter of fact, the missionaries established health centers, dispensaries and maternity homes that later grew to become a full fleshed hospitals. And this, afforded the poor, the needy, and the less privileged ones among us the access to medical treatment. Ahamba (2006), asserts that, "the maternities established by the church in the districts helped to reduce high mortality rate associated with child bearing which was caused by crude method of child delivery among the people.". "There is no doubt that the church has succeeded in putting smiles on faces of the poor who were homeless, financial bankrupt and hopeless. It was the Church that rescued the Biafrans from kwashiorkor, disease and death, through the Caritas International and World Council of Churches (WCC). The Nigerian Government neglected the Biafrans and abandoned them to their" (Ogbuehi, 2014).

### **Economic Development**

Economic development is the process of growth in total and capital income accompanied by fundamental changes in the economy (Oguji and Kene, 2009:9). "Directly or indirectly religion has contributed immensely to the training of the manpower needs of the nation". There is hardly any area of walk of life in this country where the products of mission institutions or beneficiaries of the mission have not featured prominently. The products of the schools and colleges were recruited as teachers and clerks and staff of industries and government departments. These men and women were and still are involved in generating wealth for the country using the experience and education in this regard. In fact, early enough, some missions established farms. Cottage industries have helped, particularly the underprivileged to earn a living (Iremeka 2005). In Northern Nigeria, by 1929, the government had 106 schools with a total of 4,578 pupils on roll; the missions ran 152 schools with a total enrolment of 4,446 pupils.

### **Agriculture**

Another area that the Church assisted also is in the area of agriculture. According to Uju (1998: 212) agricultural development is the epi-centre of any form of development strategy since it still remains the means of livelihood of a great majority of Nigeria's population particularly those in the rural areas. The main purpose of agriculture is the rapid attainment of self-sufficiency in food production and the provision of raw materials for industrial production. The Church introduced the policy of Bible and Plough which revolutionized agriculture in Nigeria. Ogbuehi(2014) said that, "the introduction of agriculture was informed by the missionary zeal to replace slave trade with legitimate trade" Nwanaju (2005) in Ibenwa(2014) expresses the view that it was through the efforts of the church that maize and cassava were introduced, and this helped in boosting the economy of Nigeria and brought in luxury goods in their household."

### **Entrepreneurship**

Skill acquisition centers were opened in various schools by the pioneer missionaries like Women Training Centre (WTC) to train house wives on some domestic skills that will help them boost their income generation capacity of their various families. In those old good days there is time allotted to hand work in our school time tables. During this time pupils were taught how to make baskets, brooms out of palm fronds, clothes making of all kinds and this has helped in diversifying our economy as a nation

### **Building of Finance Banks**

In the area of banking, churches contribute immensely towards economic development. Many churches today establish a community Bank, for example the Diocese of the Niger Anglican communion at AkuChukwu, ST. Therea's Micro Finance bank at Nsukka, Micro finance bank at All Saints Cathedral Onitsha and other churches 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. People who work in these banks and other establishments are paid salaries by the church. Through this means, they earn their living. This has gone a long way to reduce the problem of unemployment because churches



increase employment opportunities. Also, these workers pay taxes used by government to develop many sectors of the economy in the country. Indeed, Christian church has been and is still contributing to every strata of the country's development.

### **Building of Housing Estates, Commercial Complexes among Others.**

Recently, almost all the churches in Nigeria are involved in one economic advancement or the other. The Anglican Communion, Diocese on the Niger, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Onitsha, Nsukka Catholic Diocese, to mention but a few have projects that include building of affordable houses, guest houses, recreational facilities, entrepreneurship centers, clinic and hospitals and commercial complexes. The Christ Embassy and Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria are not left out. Adesina (2013:40) affirms that like many other churches, these churches have become plat forms for business interests which includes the banking, publishing, broadcasting, entertainment and hospitality industries. Adesina (2013:40) reports that in 2008, one of the business outfits of Christ Embassy had a monthly turnover of about ten million naira. These development steps could transform the people of the locality and society at large. It is in agreement to this kind of developments that Guber (2005) maintains that when such developments take place in low-income area, the increase in property values attract new residents and become magnets for diverse businesses and better-paying jobs. It is certain that church based business enterprises had rebuild a community's social infrastructure and provide much needed value-based services as child care, youth development, eldercare among others.

Some churches owe filling stations, as you can see in Anglican Communion Diocese of Nsukka. These activities lead to better public safety and an enhanced quality of life, and all these are means of economic diversifications that will help Nigeria come out of mono economy to varieties.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the foregoing, the researchers come out with the following suggestions, which they believe if strictly followed will make our economy an enviable one. The church should be actively involved in the economic planning and implementation. This is because many Nigerian leaders lack the political will to deliver due to their corrupt tendencies. Church should also be made to be supervisors in the various areas of diversifications for effective implementation. Therefore, the practice of a true and a sound ethical and moral principles are seriously required for practitioners of economic diversifications, and is only religion that can offer this.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is evidently clear from the discourse above that the issue of economic diversity requires the church to be actively involved in the process of economic planning in Nigeria. It is the view of the researchers that Nigeria should go back to the ancient landmark which is agriculture, which as we stated earlier is the epic-center of any form of development strategy since it still remains the means of livelihood of a great majority of Nigeria's population particularly those in the rural areas and take off from there and branch into other areas of human endeavour, since the main purpose of agriculture is the rapid attainment of self-sufficiency in food production and the provision of raw materials for industrial production. The study found out that the expertise of religious leaders was not adequately explored in the matters of economic planning in Nigeria. It is the contention of the researchers that when the clerics are fully integrated in the planning processes that the economy will be better.

## REFERENCES

- Adesina, O. C. (2013). "Faith, spiritualism, and materialism: Understanding the interfaces of religion and the economy in Nigeria" in Adogame, A. Chitauo, E. and Bateye, B. (Eds.). African tradition in the study of religion, diaspora and gendered societies. Farnham: Ashigate.35-46
- Ahamba, M. (2006) *The Church and State in Igbo land in centenary symposium, one hundred years of Anglicanism in Igbo Heartland. Egbu: Ofoms Press.*
- Anyika, F (2000) *The Contributions of Christianity to the Development of Post-Primary Education in Nigeria, 1882-1940. In Chuta, ,S.C. (ed) African Humanities Onitsha: Cape Publishers International Limited.*
- Anyika, F *African Humanities and Nation Building Nsukka: Afro-Orbis Publication Limited.*
- Enweremadu, F. (1991). "The Role of the Church in moral transformation of contemporary Nigerian society". B. A. Thesis, Saint Peter and Paul Catholic major seminary, Ibadan
- Gruber, J. (2005). "Religious market structure, religious participation and outcome- National bureau of economic works. Paper series No.11377
- Grovie, C. P. (1958). *The Planting of Christianity in Africa Vol. 4. Holland: Orukkerji Press.*
- Ibenwa, C.N. (2014) *Religion and Nation Building: A Critical Analysis in International Journal of African Society, and Cultures and Traditions (September, 2014) Vol.1, No.2 Pp.7-8. United Kingdom: European American Journal Press.*
- Ibenwa, C. N. (2014) *Religion and Social Change in Contemporary African Society. In P-J Ezech et al. (eds) Social Sciences in Peace and Conflict Studies Vol. 1 . Enugu: San Press Limited.*
- Ibenwa, C. N. (2017) *Religion in Contemporary African Society. In A. O Onu (eds) Social Science Perspectives to Peace and Conflict Vol. 1. Enugu: Parakletos Immunnis Drive.*
- Iremeka, Ukamaka F. (2005) "The place of Religion in National Development" in
- Kalu, O. U. (2010). "Harsh flutes: The religious dimension of the legitimacy crisis in Nigeria". 1993-1998, in Kalu, W. Wariboko, N. and Falola, T. (eds). Religions in Africa: Conflicts and social ethnics. The collected essays of Ogbu Uke Kalu, (3)Thenton NJ: Africa word press.31-64
- Ngwoke, P.N. (2018) *The Church and Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria. An M.A. Seminar Paper Presented to the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.*
- Njoku, D.I. (2008) *The Contribution of the Presbyterian Church to the improvement of Lepers in Nigeria. In Chiegboka A.B.C, Utoh-Ezeajugh T.C. et al. (eds) Nsukka Journal of Religious Studies. Vol. 21 Anambra: Rex Charles and Patrick Limited.*
- Oguyi, C. O. and Kene, G. I. (2009). "Foundation of development studies". Onitsha: West and Solomon publishers.
- Ogbuehi, F. I (2014) *A Ph.D Seminar Paper Presented to the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies University of Nigeria Nsukka.*

- Ozigbo, I. R. A (1998). “*African Responses to Christianity and Islam: The case of West Africa*”. In I.T.K. Egonu (ed). *Readings in African Humanities in World Culture*. Nigeria: Vivian and Vivian Publishers.
- Okeke, V. I (1998). Religion and Its Place in Human Society. In B.N. Iffih (ed) *Modern Textbook on Social Sciences*. Enugu: Joen Publishers.
- Omoregbe, J. I. (1999). The comparative religion: Christianity and other world religious in dialogue. Lagos. Joja Educational Research and Publication Ltd.
- Ozigbo, I. R. A. (1988). “African Responses to Christianity and Islam: The Case of West Africa”. in I.T.K. Egonu (Ed.). *Readings in African Humanities in World Culture*. Nigeria: Vivian and Vivian Publishers.
- Rodney, W.(1972).*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa .Daras Salam: Tanzania Publishers.*
- Tsele, M. (2001). “The role of Christian faith in development” in Belshaw, D. Calderisi, R. and Sugden, C. (eds). *Faith development – Partnership between the World Bank and the churches of Africa*. Oxford: Regrumm. 203-218
- Ugwu, C. O. T (2009). Religious Conflicts in Kano and Kaduna States of Nigeria. In M. Ikejiani-Clark(ed). *Peace Studies and Conflicts Resolution in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.