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## CHRISTIANITY AS A CATALYST FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Christianity is one of the largest religions in the world. It is the belief and practice built on the foundation of moral rectitude that is based on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Some scholars argued that for so long a time, Christianity has not done anything tangible to affect their host communities for Christ. The paper is aimed at making Christianity to permeate into every activity of man, instill morality and usher in peace to every troubled soul.This paper adopted phenomenological method. After a logical analysis of some written works, it was observed that Christianity has contributed enough to national development of Nigeria as a nationin education, recognition of social justice, Christianity influences the moral character of the citizens, the church build hospitals where sick were given free medical treatment. The paper recommended among other things that the study of moral education/moral value should be made compulsory at all levels of education, Christianity should continually empower its agencies towards improving the living conditions of the Nigerian citizens and government should promote the culture of tolerance as this will help in promoting harmonious living among the citizens of this country*

***Keywords:*** *Christianity, catalyst, national development, and Nigeria.*

### Introduction

The word Christianity was first used at Antioch of Syria where the disciples of Jesus were first called Christians,according to Ugwu (1999) the basic belief of Christianity was stated in the apostle creed which affirms that Jesus Christ is the son of God and God sent him into the world to die for the redemption of mankind. Christianity is the belief and practice built on the foundation of moral rectitude based on the life and teaching of Christ.Christianity is one of the largest religions in the world. According to Asadu (2014) Christianity is an agent of transformation. Any human society Christianity has penetrated it must leave a remarkable impact. Christianity came to Nigeria through missionary activities in the 19th century. Today, in Nigeria, Christianity is one of the major religions with profound economic, social, religious, and political influence. It is when Christianity is seen as useful to man that it can then make meaning when it is applied to the nation since it is people that make a nation.National development is critical and essential at the instance and growth of any nation.A country is classified as developed when it can provide qualitative life for the citizens. Nigeria in the last fifty years has been battling with the problem of developments despite abundant material and natural resources in her possession.

***Christianity As A Catalyst For National Development In Nigeria***

Some scholars such as Akin-John (2010) stated that for too long a time, the Church has not done anything tangible to affect and impact on their host communities for Christ. They have merely existed, untouched and unperturbed bythe plight of their host communities.Religious intolerance also constitutes problem to national development. Many scholars have at various times argued against the roles the church has played in installing national development in Nigeria. This came partly due to their inability to view the holistic importance of the church in nation building, this paper therefore, examines the role of Christianity in national development with the aim of making Christianity to affect every activity of man, instill morality and usher in peace to every troubled soul. The paper adopted phenomenological method for proper articulation of the subject matter.

### The Concept of National Development

National development is critical and essential to the sustenance and growth of any nation. A country is classified as being developed when it can provide qualitative life for her citizen.It also refers to the ability of a country to improve the social welfare of the people, for example, by providing social amenities like quality education, infrastructure, medical care, and social service (Ekwueme, 2014). It can mean development of infrastructure such as roads, hospitals, or airports and its peoples.National development is an integral concept embracing all aspects of life in a nation. A nation’s level of development can be judged from the economic, social, cultural, political, and spiritual status of such a nation. Therefore, all round development is tantamount to development of the state (Asadu, 2014). National development is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people, for example, by providing social amenities like good education, infrastructure, medical care, road, airport, sports, and social services.

### The Role of Christianity in Promoting National Development

Nigeria is a pluralistic society. Netland (1999) describes pluralism as a condition of religious diversity in the world. There is religious pluralism in Nigeria as there are adherents of Islam, Christianity, and African traditional religion. There is also ethnic pluralism, there are Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and several others, and all of them belong to Nigeria as a nation, apart from this, each of these tribes has her own culture. All these differences make life interesting and challenging to the various religious groups. Regarding the issues of national development, people tend to bury their cultural differences and work together as a team in order to develop the country regardless of cultural and religious differences. The following are the contributions of Christianity to the development of Nigeria.

The first role Christianity played in national development of Nigeria is in educational sector of the country through the provision of nursery, primary, secondary, adult education, and mass literacy programme. At the initial stage of missionary work in Nigeria the European missionaries opened rudimentary education through the introduction of church doctrine and catechism. They were also trained to read the Bible and become daily concerned with the church,but children must go to school starting from kindergarten. Education liberated Nigerians from ignorance and brought a tremendous enlightenment to the people. The aim of western education was to uplift the people and make them to appreciate their cultural values through the purging of the traditional culture of its idolatrous connotations. Western education

***International Journal of Arts, Communication and Pedagogy Vol. 1 No 1, 2022***

through its teaching helped people to appreciate their personal worth and relevance (Ogbuehi, 2014).

Before Lagos became a British colony in 1861 christian missionaries had worked in Yoruba. They laid the foundation of primary and secondary education in Nigeria and painstakingly, the financial burden of its overall development, which includes the remunerations for teachers, provision of books and other written materials and building of physical structures (Asadu, 2014). Western education brought by Christian missionaries produced skilled personnel who served the societies as Clerks, teachers, civil servants, clergy and contributed meaningfully towards the development of the country. It also provided pastoral education, commercial and administrative opportunities for recipients (Williams, 1993). The products of western education became the nationalists like Obafemi Awolowo, Tafawa Balewa, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ahmadu Bello who fought for the independence of Nigeria. The independence liberated Nigeria from colonial rule that exploited Nigeria during colonial period. Presently, the political leaders are product of western education where they acquired basic skills in the administration of this country. While Methodist should be credited with establishing the first school in Nigeria, it was the CMS that was made the most important contribution to education in the early period (Fafunwa, 1974). The church mission society (CMS) had four schools in Lagos including the Grammar school which was opened in 1859. As at 1865 education received no assistance from government. Apparently, the Christian missionaries were most concerned about the emancipation of the poor black men and women who were locked up in abject poverty, hence, they made enormous financial sacrifice not only to converts but also to educate them (Onyeidu, 2004). Mission schools were championing western education by inculcating discipline, moral rectitude into students through moral instructions.

Christianity has been helping in the provision of good health care services. The health care of natives before the arrival of missionaries was so deplorable. According to Agaha (2004), there was no known cure for some deadly diseases causing a heavy death toll among the people besides there were total lacks knowledge concerning many of these diseases. The church delved into the provision of health care, based on the example of Jesus, who was moving around and healing all manner of diseases (lk4: 38-40). Missionaries came to the rescue of Nigerians who suffered from the attack of various diseases and epidemics. It was the outbreak of epidemics that made Nigerians to embrace the health care provided by the missionaries and other agencies. The missionaries established maternity hospitals; dispensaries that later grew to become full- fledged hospitals. The downtrodden had access to medical treatment and they were healed of their sicknesses. (Ogbuehi, 2014). The missionaries began to demonstrate more concern early enough. For example Grimad hospital, Anyigba, Immaculate Heart Maternity Dispensary, Awo-Akpahi, Holy Memorial Hospital, Ochadamu , Bishop Shanaham Hospital, Nsukka, Faith Foundation Hospital, Nsukka, K and P Hospital in Nassarawa State, and so on. These health centers and many not mentioned were controlled by Christian churches.

The church offered holistic ministry which cared for the spirit, soul, and body. In many places, the church-built hospitals where sick were given free medical treatment. The poor cannot have access to medical treatment which has reduced the high mortality rate in Nigeria. These complimentary roles of the church have contributed towards nation building (Ogbuehi. 2014).

***Christianity As A Catalyst For National Development In Nigeria***

Christianity encourages people, especially its members, to go on farming by providing fertilizer and soft loans to them. The members also encouraged the farmers by buying their harvested goods. Christianity encouraged their members to be hardworking as some religions discourage laziness. The revolution of agriculture was brought about by Christian teaching on the dignity of labour. The church prepared a seed bed that led to the springing up of industries in nooks and crannies of this country. This was made possible by the church that established skill acquisition centers were people learnt skills in their areas of specialization. The church is presently establishing skill acquisition centers where the youths are empowered, so that they can be self-employed, self-supportive and self-sufficient. (Ogbuehi, 2014). Christian missions brought to us some new weeds\grass and food crops such as pepper, guava,mango, cocoa nuts, potatoes, pawpaw, cassava, and flowers. Most of these plants were not native to Nigeria. They were imported and nurtured for us. For example,Taylor (1863) stated that he (Rev. John Christopher Taylor)the Anglican missionary agent recruited from Sierra Leon introduced cassava stick to Onitsha in 1857 from there it spread into the interior.

Morality is concerned with what is right and wrong. According to Agha in (2003)“no society can live without morals”.According to Eke, (2012) the most principles contained in Christian teaching provide a fundamental basis for other aspects of nation building since it affects all facets of life that crystallize into world – development. Christian religion advocates for peace and preach that love is fundamental for human relationship. It also leads to good life. No nation is built up without its citizens living a good life. With the fundamental teaching of Christianity, it is apparent that only religion incorporates the spiritual and the material necessary for national development.

Christianity has influenced the moral character of the citizens of this country. The church is committed in playing her prophetic role of condemning evils in the society. Consequently, has refrained people from antisocial activities and geared towards leading an upright life. The Christian churches has been emphasizing on the danger of living a corrupt life. Many Christians have imbibed the fear of God because of that which has influenced them positively in their workplaces.

The recognition of social justice implies the recognition on God in the scheme of thing and this is tantamount to progress and development. After all,God is the maker of man and the sole source of all that is good, prosperity, peace, justice, and so on. The recognition of God also presupposes social justice. From Christianity, man believes that he has peaceful obligation to himself, to his fellow human beings, and to the society to whom he belongs and above to his maker (Eke, 2012). This role of Christianity in national development is to tell the people that social, justice egalitarianism and building of the country is not merely man – conceived, but it is ordained by God (Eke, 2012).

One of the cardinal aims of development is economic self-reliance accomplished through the articulation of some productive forces to place the nation in sound economic footing, asa result, Christianity has been working in collaboration with the directorate of rural development to meet the target of Christianity to make this a reality. For example, some states have started giving the schools back to the church. This shows that government still recognizes the

***International Journal of Arts, Communication and Pedagogy Vol. 1 No 1, 2022***

importance of Christianity in Nigeria. Afforestation- tree planting and to avoid erosion. They also engage in small scale enterprise such as soap making, cream, shoe making, carpentry, fishpond, and factory. They also encourage charitable organizations to help in alleviating poverty (Agah, 2003). These efforts of Christianity have contributed to national development.

The Catholic Bishop Conference of Nigeria always calls for prayers for the nation. On 27th July 1993, they composed “prayer for Nigeria in distress” which is said everyday by millions of Catholics. In September 1998 and February 1999 Conference of Catholic Bishops of Nigeria mounted crusade against corruption. In the two sessions. They discussed the reality, causes, consequences, and the way out of bribery and corruption. At the end of the assembly, they came out with prayer against bribery and corruption (Adama, 2016). All these are geared towards national development.

Despite the above role of Christianity in national development, there are some challenges to national development. One of such challenges is religious intolerance which leads to religious disturbance in the country, religious crisis which leads to killing and destruction of property worth millions of naira threaten the existence of Nigeria as nation.

High level of corruption is another barrier to national development. Nigeria is managed by corrupt leaders who have made the country instrument for capital accumulation, rather than using it to project the interest of the citizens. Corruption and development are antithetical to each other, the two cannot cohabit, and so where one is present, the other suffers (Chuta, 2004).Lack of good governance affects national development. As a result of bad leadership in the country, there is no good governance. Most of the Nigerian leaders have no sense of commitment to national development.

### Conclusion

Christianity has made numerous contributionsin education, agriculture, healthcare, morality, social justice and so on. The role of ensuring peace and instilling morality has proved that Christianity is ideal and genuine. Through its institution, Christianity has imparted greatly on the many Nigerians. Patriotism and love of father land is part of religious virtue or

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward.

1. The study of religious education| moral value should be made compulsory at all levels of education.
2. Since the Government and Christianity are concerned with total development of man and his society, it is expedient that both should partner to achieve success. Where Christian organizations are augmenting government effort in the provision of social amenities, government should financially support them to execute their project.
3. Government should promote the culture of religious tolerance as this will help in promoting harmonious living among the citizens of the country.
4. Since it is stated in the constitution that there is freedom of worship, Government should provide security for her citizens in their place of worship.

***Christianity As A Catalyst For National Development In Nigeria***

1. Christianity should continually empower its agencies towards improving the living conditions of the Nigerian citizen.

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***International Journal of Arts, Communication and Pedagogy Vol. 1 No 1, 2022***

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