Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.2 No.2 December, 2019; p.g. 39 – 48; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN RELIGION ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA.

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Abstract
Socio-economic development in the postcolonial state remains a challenge; but it also offers an invitation to all the stake holders in each country to rethink their contribution to economic development. This paper will revisit the question of economic and social development. It argues that as members of the Nigerian political community, Christian religion has an important role to play. It already plays a variety of roles in promoting integral development through her social gospel which cuts across all the regions of the country and covers a number of areas, namely education, health, agriculture, and other social amenities in which religion plays a major role as the prime mover for sustainable development. While secular discourse continues to exclude religion in its analysis of globalization, progress and development, it can be argued that Christian religion cannot be excluded from development. It brings other resources needed for development, such as promotion of a strong moral ethos for the nation. Using historical and sociological approaches, this paper strongly advocates that Nigerian Christian religion can benefit from a critical appropriation of Catholic Social Teachings. The paper discusses aspects of Catholic Social Teaching to demonstrate how its main themes remain vital to economic development.

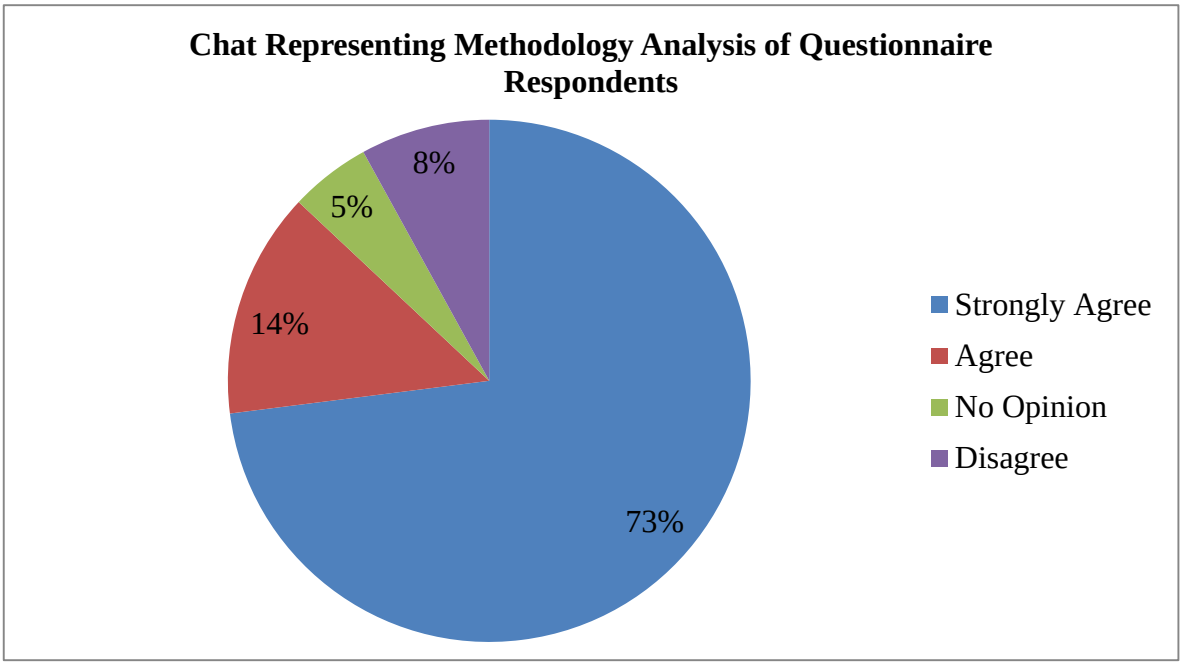
Key words: Christianity, Religious Impacts, Social Gospel, Human Development, Nigeria.

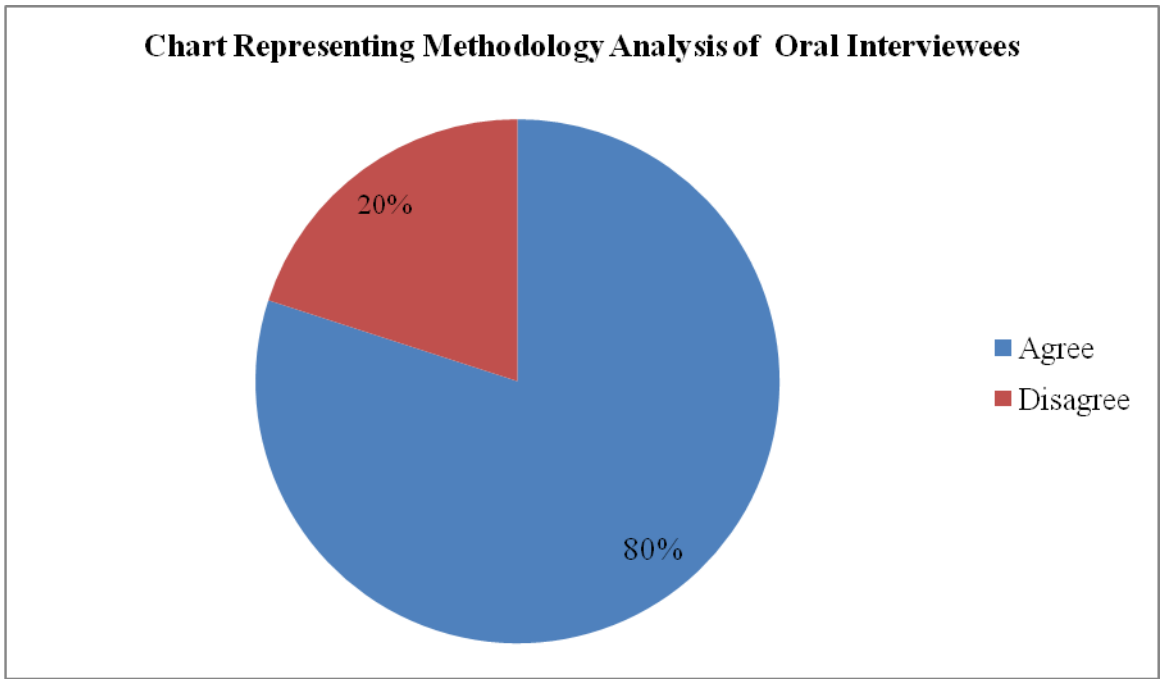
Introduction

Religion in any nation is looked unto as the watchdog of the politics and the players of it. Karl Marx in his definition of religion called it opium of the people. So, religion is expected to be the hope of the masses. There is always a voice in every religion that speaks on contemporary issues in any country. Since Christian religionists preach in their various dogmas purity, holiness, righteousness and honesty coupled with dedication and commitment, their adherents are expected to cultivate and put into practice these dogmas in order to reflect in all their deeds, words and actions. The problems facing Nigeria as a nation is multifaceted in terms of moral, ethical and attitudinal failure as well as disorientation and whereas Christian religion as an institution provides the moral and ethical standards for her followers. Whether the adherents put the dogmas into practice is another issue to look at. However, it was discovered that Nigeria in the early days of political leaders, corruption was at the zero level because they had zero tolerance for corruption. That was what made Nigeria to be the giant of Africa then, but reverse is the case today as corruption is running in the veins of majority of Nigerians – civil and religious. There cannot be any meaningful and impactful socio-economic development in any nation that is bedeviled with corruption like Nigeria.

Methodology

A mixed method, which entails the use of both historical and sociological methods, was used to find out the level of the impact of religion on socio-economic development of Nigeria. Oral interviews were conducted among selected people of the south-west geopolitical zone of Nigeria. One hundred copies of Questionnaires were also administered to respondents within the selected areas. Seventy-three people strongly agreed that religion had an impact on socio-economic development of the country representing 73% while fourteen people agreed representing 14%; five people had no opinion representing 5% and eight people disagreed claiming that religion had no impact on the socio-economic development of Nigeria representing 8%. Furthermore, interview of thirty-five people was conducted cutting across the young and the old. Twenty-eight people strongly agreed representing 80% while seven people disagreed representing 20%. Data from each of these questionnaires and interviews are presented below using pie charts.





Nigerian Nation

Nigeria is acknowledged as the most populous country in Africa and seen as the seventh in the world which made it to be called the "Giant of Africa" as it is said to have a very large population and economy Agha (2003: 69). According to the last population census, Nigerian population was estimated at about One hundred and eighty-six million people (186m) with well over five hundred ethnic groups speaking different languages apart from their tribal dialect. The largest and the most populous ethnic groups principally are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba with three principal religions of African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity. There are other numerous religions with each struggling to dominate the other in terms of principles and practices. For example, there is the Ogboni Confraternity religion, Eckankar religion, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star by Olumba Olumba Obu, Sat Guru Maharhaji, Grail Message etcetera. All these religious bodies are always at logger-heads as to which is more righteous or purified in the area of their norms and practices.

As at 2015, Nigeria was rated the 20th largest economy whose worth was more than $500 billion and $1 trillion in terms of nominal GDP and purchasing power and Parity respectively Eboh (2016:3). Nigeria is a Federal Republic in West Africa which comprises of 36 States and Federal Capital Territory (FCT). It is a democratic secular country. The modern state originated from British Colonial rule which took its present territorial shape with the merging of the Southern Nigeria Protectorate and Northern Nigeria Protectorate in 1914 by Sir Fredrick Lord Luggard. The British rulers set up administrative and legal structures whilst practicing indirect rule through traditional rulers. Nigeria attained independence on October 1st, 1960. Shortly after attaining independence, civil war broke out in Nigeria and this lasted from 1966 to 1970. The first coup was led by Igbo soldiers in 1966 while the likes of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Premier Ahmadu Bello of the Northern Region and Premier Samuel Ladoke Akintola of the Western Region were assassinated in the coup. This coup led to the proclamation of Eastern Region's

independence as a State in May 1967 which they called the Republic of Biafra under the leadership of Lt. Colonel Dim Emeka Odimegwu Ojukwu (Eboh,2016:4).

Christian Religion

It is the intention of Christianity to build moral standard in people through their faith based ideologies which emphasize the supremacy of God over the created orders Policy Forum (1997:16). So, it abhors evil practices and ungodly acts like immoral conducts such as stealing, killing, cheating, adultery, fornication, covetousness and so on and so forth.

Christian Religion helps in building moral standard in people through its beliefs in the Supreme Being Who is more powerful than humans, this faith condemns immorality such as stealing, killing, arson, maiming, cheating and the likes. It also plays fundamental roles in nation building and the fight against corruption. This is not to say that the religion itself is completely free of corruption as some are of the view that it also causes more damage and complicated the fight against corruption in Nigeria. The impact of Christian religion and its place in the socio-political life of Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. It contributes to some of the factors causing corruption in the country. Some of these are the politicization of religion. Nigeria is one of the countries in the world with religious identity evenly divided among Muslims and Christians which leads to prolonged rivalry for supremacy (Adenugba & Omolawal 2014: 45).

Christian Association of Nigeria is sub-divided into five Church groupings (blocs):

- Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN)
- Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN)
- Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria/Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria(CPFN/PFN)
- Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC)
- TEKAN/ECWA

Christianity controls millions of followers and it holds strong influence in the determination of electoral, political, economic or policy success in Nigeria, the political class patronize spiritual house for protection and powers (Uzochukwu, 2017: 10). Christian religious leaders who would have rebuked corrupt politicians and career officers are themselves guilty of corruption. This could not make them to preach the hard message of righteousness, holiness, and honesty to them because many of them are also after contract and gratis from government houses. Many sterling revelations were made open after the 2015 General elections in Nigeria as there were many allegations and counter-allegations levied against religious leaders ranging from corruption cases to aiding and abetting to receiving election bribery for campaign for a particular candidate and to win the hearts of their followers (Uzochukwu, 2017: 12).

Some of the confessions as declared open were:

- Bafawara confessed he received #4.6bn from Col. Dasuki for spiritual purposes
- Ayo Oritsejafor, erstwhile CAN President was also alleged to have received $35 million
- Pastor Dikwa, Executive Director of the Voice of Northern Christians also alleged that Christian Association of Nigeria received the sum of #7bn from former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to campaign for him as President for second term in office Okoye (2019:6).

Nigerians are seen as highly religious but may not be spiritual because their religiosity is not translated to spirituality Former WAEC Candidates (2017: 8). Christian religious identity is far more important to Nigerians than their national identity. Before Christian religion can effectively fight against corruption, there must be a clear cut demarcation between Christian religious and political leaders. There must be a forced divorce between both parties. As long as Christian religious leaders are involved in corruption cases, this will weaken them from preaching against corruption in all forms (Malami, 2016:6).

To show that Nigerians are highly religious, many warehouses, private buildings, event centres and churches are being converted to prayer houses while many stadia are being used for big religious programmes Buhari (2016:006). Many inter-state highways are being blocked on a weekly/monthly basis for worshippers who flock camp grounds for their monthly revivals. There are many churches as there are streets. Religious activities are not limited to religious houses alone but even extended to government offices, commercial buses and open markets. Religious billboards litter the streets of Nigeria and conspicuous places advertising up-coming crusades and carnivals.

Christianity in Nigeria

A lot of Christians originated from the Southern part of the country. This religion is popular among the Yoruba people of the South-West, Igbo people of the South-South and South-East, Ijaw people of the Southern area and some of the Middle Belt's areas. This is not to say that there are no Christians in the North-East, North-West and North-Central Ogundiya (2010:79). There are sizeable number of Christians in those areas but not as predominant as Muslims. The word Christianity was first used in Antioch in Syria where the disciples of Jesus were first called Christians, meaning the followers of Christ. The origin and basic beliefs of Christianity were stated in the Apostles Creed which affirms that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and God sent Him to the world to die for the redemption of mankind. There is in Nigeria a growing number of evangelicals and Pentecostal ministries apart from the orthodox or mainline denominations that have been in existence prior to these evangelicals and Pentecostals like the Roman Catholics who constitutes the largest denomination of Christians in the country, Anglicans, Methodists, Africans, Presbyterians, Baptists and Lutherans (Ogundiya, 2016:82).

Christian Religion and Socio-Economic Development

The position of Christian religion cannot be undermined in the struggle for a sustainable socio-economic development in Nigeria. Christian religion can be found in all known human societies and it has continued to be a significant part of societies and human experience, shaping how individuals react to the environments in which they live (Achebe 1983:62). Socio-economic development is a process in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are in harmony and enhance both current and the future potentials to meet the human needs and aspirations. These developments include: physical development which includes man-made goods produced by the use of technology and personal development (Achebe 1983:67). The reason for development in any given society is to reduce inequality, unemployment and poverty while national development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time (Afannamuefuna, 2006:128). Most African countries are confronted with major developmental challenges orbiting on leadership, corruption; insecurity of varied degrees like kidnapping, terrorism, child industry, ritual killing, armed robbery and the most endemic problem which is poverty is also wreaking (Afannamuefuna, 2006:132). All these indices of backwardness are similar to what is happening in Nigeria today.

Nigeria is grabbling with such problems such as illiteracy, hunger, poor health condition, humiliation, unemployment and expectations of accelerated development seem difficult to realize. Citizens of Nigeria are feeling frustrated, not cared for, basic amenities to keep life going are not seen while corruption and nepotism keep growing in the hands of the political gladiators. Nigeria economic prospects are now in grim and the economy is in recession (Afolabi, 3(2):42-49) while corruption is on the high side demoralizing every aspect of the government (Chuta 2004:77). In affirmation of these facts, President Muhammadu Buhari, addressing his ministers on the state of the nation during Eid-el-Filtri, called for prayers for Nigeria. He emphasized that the present challenges facing Nigeria as a nation are

enormous; they include economic recession, lack of development in agricultural and mining sectors, lack of patriotism, agitation from Indigenous people of Biafra (Okoye, 2017:17). The state of the nation has greatly affected her quest for improved quality of life of her citizens as poverty, unemployment and starvation still pervade the nook and cranny of the country (Okoye, 2017:17).

How can we know a country is developed?

A country is classified as developed when it is able to provide qualitative life for its citizenry. Despite the abundance of human and natural endowments of resources at the disposal of Nigeria as a nation, it has been battling with the problems of development; this is because, there is a general misconception that religion and development do not mix. Some are of the opinion that religion has a negative repercussion on development. However, this paper disagrees with this view because religion plays a prominent role in the socio-economic development of Nigeria. Without the close collaboration of Christian religion and development in the past, Nigeria would have charted and therefore taken a different course, and maybe has a slower rate of development. Christian religion has played and is still playing major role in social institutions such as economics and politics as it is an interactive force in a society because it has the power to shape collective beliefs. It provides cohesion in social order by promoting a sense of belonging in collective enterprises.

Factors Hindering Socio-Economic Development

Socio-economic development is an improvement of qualitative transportation of skills; it is also an increased skill and capacity for greater freedom and creative self-discipline, responsibility and temporal possessions (Nwabughiogu, 2016:22). Socio-economic development seeks to meet the need and aspiration of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future. It is a process in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are in harmony and enhance both current and the future potentials to meet the human needs and aspirations (Nwabughiogu, 2016:24). However, in spite of developmental strategies put in place by successive governments, and sometimes with good intentions, all attempts to generate meaningful development proved futile due to the following factors:

(1) Poor Formulation and Implementation of Policies – There are in most cases, no excessive capacity responsible for the formulation and implementation of the plan. What is usually seen are officials entrusted to such a position but without any meaningful executive authority? Some of the previous development plans failed because there was little or no consultation of the general public.
(2) Lack of good governance – This negates against national development. Where there is no good governance, development becomes a mirage. This is as a result of bad leadership in the country. Most of the leaders of Nigeria have no commitment to development.
(3) Decolonization – This allowed the crop of leaders that aligned with colonial power to take over Nigeria. These leaders had no vision of development to accompany the efficient instrument of repression they inherited. All they were interested in was access to power and privileges and not development.
(4) Corruption – High level of corruption and indiscipline is a barrier to development. Nigeria is corrupt, managed by corrupt leaders who have made the state an instrument of capital accumulation, rather than using it to project the interest of the citizenry
(5) Religious Intolerance – Nigeria has witnessed a variety of religious disturbances, some of which have threatened the existence of the country as a nation.
(6) Religious terrorism – Religious violence impedes economic developments.
(7) Rising unemployment cripples economic development

Role of Christian Religion in Promoting Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria

Even though there is religious pluralism in Nigeria but at the same time, Christian religion plays its active roles in the promotion of socio-economic development of Nigeria in one way or the other. This can be classified under the following sub-heads:

Social Roles – The recognition of social justice implies the recognition of God in the scheme of things and this tantamount to progress and development. God is the maker of man and sole source of all that is good; prosperity, peace, justice etcetera. The recognition of God also presupposes social justice. The Christian religious teachings on morality is sacrosanct to national development, man cannot develop without it. To build a nation without God is to hope to construct a massive structure upon the foundation of sand, such building will collapse at the slightest gust of wind and the fall will be great. One of the universal functions of Christian religion is to tell the people that social justice, egalitarianism and building of a country is not merely man-conceived, but it is ordained by God (Williams, 1990:16).

Christian religion can help by securing the peace of the nation and this is done by appealing to the conscience of the people through ethical teachings. Therefore, in socio-economic development of any country, religion will be continually appealing to the conscience of their members (Nigerians) to pursue peace and avoid conflict. By so doing, Nigeria will be a place where people will live in harmony both citizens and non-citizens. Foreigners can freely be coming in without any fear of being kidnapped. Nigeria will then be a country where every tourist will like to visit and such men will also come with their investments.

Furthermore, no society can live without morals because morality comprises of those standards of conduct which the reasonable man approves and whereas, Christian religion provides believers a guideline about life and the life-after and thus provides much needed incentives for indulging in productive activities during lifetime. Christian religion is a promoter of growth as they direct people towards honesty, absenteeism from harmful activities. One can conclude therefore that Christian religion plays the role of moving the nation forward by bringing the citizens together to plan for the good of the nation. Nigeria cannot develop on itself unless the citizens come together to develop it. It has contributed significantly to the evangelization of Nigerians through religious training and the principles that have been the core instrument in the socio-economic development.

Health Care System – Christian religious groups in this country have made their positive impact in terms of social roles and this can be seen in health facilities established by missionaries in this country. The motive behind the missionaries' establishment of these health care systems is to ensure that Nigeria is a better place to live in by providing and helping people to have good health care services. Some of these establishments that can be pointed out are: Babcock hospitals in Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo in Ogun State, Seventh Day Adventist hospitals in Ile-Ife, Aba, Jengre; Faith Clinic Foundation in Nsukka; Queen Elizabeth hospital, Umuahia, K and P hospital in Nasarawa State, Shendam hospital Gombe, Leprosy home Uzuakolie, Ile-Abiye hospital in Ado-Ekiti, Maria Assumpta hospital in Ado-Ekiti; Pentecost Medical Centre, Festac Town, Lagos; Lagos West hospital, Agege, Lagos and many others too numerous to mention in this paper. These establishments have saved many people in this country from untimely death because many of these hospitals were run almost free of cost just to save lives while in some cases, they charge minimally.

Economic development – One of the cardinal aims of development is to realize economic self-reliance accomplished through intensive rural farming and the articulation of other productive forces to place the nation in sound economic footing. Christian religious groups in Nigeria have been working in

collaboration with the directorate for rural development, road and infrastructural facilities to meet the target of the religious groups to make this a reality. Some religious organizations demanded for the release of their schools from state governments and some states governments have returned some of the schools to the missions for effective running. This shows that government still recognizes the importance of Christian religion in this country. Apart from this, many Christian religious organizations engage in other economic ventures like farming in semi-urban, rural and urban areas; some built health centers and hospitals; fisheries and poultries; pure water and bottled water factories; petrol stations, soap making, cream, shoe making, tailoring and carpentry. The efforts of the religious groups have added greatly to national development in terms of socio-economy.

Educational Roles – Another role of religion that is very germane to socio-economic development of Nigeria is on the educational sector. The religious groups have been involved in this right from the time of the early missionaries who came preaching their gospel and alongside, they brought western education. This was later expanded by the native missions to Nursery/Primary, Secondary, Adult Education, Sabbath and Sunday School Classes, etcetera. The efforts of Christian religious groups paid off through the products they turned out who were/are leaders of Nigeria politically, economically and religiously. Many of these Christian religious bodies also took steps further to establish tertiary institutions in many localities to ease the tension of many students who could not be accommodated in the public tertiary institutions for lack of space and facilities. The establishment of these tertiary institutions has contributed a lot to the socio-economic development of Nigeria in so many ways because the students could know when they will resume and graduate unlike the public institutions whereby industrial strikes of teaching and non-teaching staff could prolong the academic activities of students in campuses. Since industrial strike is like a cankerworm to socio-economic development of the country, Christian religious groups took it as a challenge to invest on educational sector by providing schools even up to university level

Political Role – Christian religion in Nigeria plays a major role in instilling awareness to the political class especially in the act of governance by inculcating into its members high sense of duty, morality, selfless service, respect for human lives, public accountability, love of one's neighbor, sense of humanity and abhorrence of violence. There is a sense of religious re-awakening which has got a positive impact on the political development of the country. Not only that, it has equally contributed to national integration, political mobilization, reformation of ethnic identity, nationalism, peaceful co-existence, economic, social and political development.

Agricultural Role – The Christian religious groups encourage their members who are farmers to embark on farming by providing fertilizer and soft loans to them. The members also encourage the farmers by buying their harvested goods. Not only this, they teach their members to be hard working as no religion encourages laziness.

Conclusion

One can see that Christian religion has played a major role in the socio-economic life of the people of Nigeria through its functional aspect as evidenced in morality, justice, truth, economic development, educational and social services. The principles of Catholic Social Teachings can be appropriated into the religions in Nigeria to ensure vibrancy in economic development of Nigeria. This includes:

- Life and dignity of human person as it teaches that all human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation for all the social teachings.
- Call to family, community and participation which proclaims that the human person is not only sacred but also social

- Rights and responsibilities emphasizes that human dignity can only be protected if all human rights are protected and responsibilities of all human beings are met
- Option for the poor and the vulnerable – A basic moral test is how our most valuable members are faring.
- The dignity of work and the rights of workers – The economy must serve people, not the other way round
- Solidarity states that we are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic and ideological differences
- Care for God's creation – people should show their respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation.

Recommendations

In view of the issues raised in this paper, the following recommendations are hereby proffered.

1. The government should see Christian religious bodies as partners in progress and as a result, should encourage them in every way possible to promote their yearnings and aspirations.
2. Their investments should be encouraged not to have higher taxation from government as the government must see them as employers of labour.
3. The Christian religious bodies should be empowered to promote inter-religious dialogue as well as inter-religious tolerance by organizing workshops, retreats and seminars for religious adherents which will help in building sustainable socio-economic development
4. The government should make use of the various organs in Christian religious groups provided by different denominations and associations in the country to carry its message to the people.
5. Christian religion should be carried along in government policies to always inculcate moral principles, justice, truth, equity and honesty which are a reagent to personality change.
6. It is strongly advocated that Nigerian Christian religion can have strong benefit from a critical appropriation of Catholic Social Teachings whose main themes remain vital to economic development

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