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CHURCH-MOSQUE JOINT PROJECT: A SYNERGY FOR CURBING SOCIAL VICES IN NIGERIA

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SYNERGY VIA JOINT PROJECT BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE MOSQUE: A MODEL FOR CURBING SOCIAL VICES IN NIGERIA

Abstract

This paper posits that Nigerian Muslims and Christians have a unique opportunity to shape the destiny of Nigerian state by virtue of two major advantages at their disposal. These include, first, the numerical strength as they both constitute not less than 95% of the nation's population. Secondly, there are common values in terms of basic teachings and tenets, which both Islam and Christianity share. Through empirical methods, the shared values can be utilized to re-orientate the psyche of Nigerians who have taken corruption as a norm. To the extent that corruption which has so far militated against nation building is a function of the psyche, the paper considers reorientation of the psyche the appropriate measure to tackle corruption. If corruption can be eliminated as predicted in this study thereby giving room for rapid and sustainable development, the Church and the Mosque would have made a very significant contribution to the act of nation building.

Key words

Synergy, Nation Building, Joint Project, Mindset, Shared Values, Heart Cleansing

Introduction

The phenomenon of insurgency has intermittently diverted the attention of government from its core responsibility of nation building. This includes but not limited to vandalization of oil pipelines, kidnapping, armed robbery, ritual killings and Boko Haram disturbances. These manifestations of violence have largely consumed a lot of funds and sundry resources that government could have ideally deployed to the act of nation building. Any strategies that can, therefore, be mustered to stem the trend of insurgencies will qualify as an integral part of the act of nation building. And this informs the role of the Church and the Mosque.

Basically, the Church and the Mosque should see the act of nation building as a form of worship in which both should vigorously participate being a normal and divinely prescribed function. According to Islam and Christianity, physical development such as nation building is a prerequisite to worship. "It is He Who hath produced you from the earth and settled you therein. (Q.11:61)". The word settlement in this verse means the entire mundane activities Man routinely carries out such as dressing, eating, drinking, wealth creation, wealth dispensation, raising children, politicking, farming, tourism, manufacturing, sleeping, trading, leisure, etc. Conducting these activities presupposes making the environment ready and conducive because such activities (settlement) cannot take place on the mountains, trees and in the rivers. In the same vein, the Bible prescribes land development for man (Gen.2:15). Therefore, the

development of the environment, being a commandment from God, equates to worship which is a cardinal point in both faiths. Incidentally, the successive governments in Nigeria since 1960 to date, have tinkered with the ambition of nation building as expressed in many Development Plans such as:

- (1) Ten-year development plan (before the civil war in Nigeria);
- (2) Five-year development plan (after the civil war);
- (3) Structural Adjustment Plan (SAP) by general Babangida;
- (4) Vision 2010 by General Sanni Abacha;
- (5) National Economic Empowerment Strategy (NEEDS) by President Obasanjo
- (6) 7 point agenda by President Musa Yar'adua
- (7) vision 2020; and
- (8) Transformation agenda by President Jonathan.

... all of which have not translated into development as negating factors such as social vices have remained daunting.

Common Project

As the government strives to develop the society, the Church and the Mosque should participate by tackling the social unrests that have so far thwarted the development plans. The Church/Mosque's role is encompassed in what we term "common project".

The Common project is an activity that is designed to divert the attention of Muslims and Christians from unhealthy rivalry and conflicts to a common goal. The two groups have hitherto used the Inter-Religious fora to vent grievances in terms of accusations and counter accusations at the end of which resolutions are drawn; the resolutions that are never implemented. The project is to provide a substitute activity to the old approach of accusations/counter accusations. For example, the maintenance of the earth is a divine duty prescribed onto Muslims and Christians. In the same token, the act of nation building which is a component of earth maintenance is a civic responsibility on every Nigerian irrespective of religious persuasion.

The rationale behind the project derives from the fact that social strive of any description is a function of the heart which is the source of conception of ideas. For example, any action of man, positive such as eating, drinking, traveling, trading, awarding scholarships or negative such as kidnapping, stealing, suicides, etc. is preceded by thinking; that is, before performing an action, man thinks about it first. Thinking emanates from the heart which the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (SAW) describes as *mudghatan fil jasad* (a lump of flesh in the body). This piece of flesh if, according to the Prophet, is clean and sane the whole body is clean and sane. And in case it is rotten, the body will be decayed (Hadith Bukhari). This suggests that the corrupt,

devilish and violent actions carried out by some people in the society are a reflection of the state of their hearts.

Problem Statement

Synergy is defined in the context of this paper as the much needed cooperation between the Church and the Mosque as a prerequisite for a collaborative effort to liberate Nigeria from the menace of social vices that have so far negated the act of nation building. By extension, joint project connotes a jointly planned and carefully prosecuted strategy by the Church and the Mosque as a means of curbing social vices in order to evolve the culture of stability which is a scene-qua-non for development. This is a state of ethnic and tribal integration in a manner that breeds mutual trust and peace among various confederating units of society. It means absence of anarchy, suspicion and hate. Also important to be defined is the shared values which technically means the common tenets and core values which are central in both the Bible and the Qur'an. The shared values constitute the basic components of the joint project. Incidentally, the Church and the Mosque are two highly rated and widely patronized institutions by the vast majority of Nigerians. Both of them (the Church and Mosque) are expected to package shared values into a project to conscientize, that is, to cleanse the psyche of the nation builders. Two fundamental questions emerge at this juncture, namely: what is the mechanism of packaging and executing the joint project? And, essentially, to what extent is the guarantee of the efficacy of the joint project? The two questions are addressed analytically below.

Theoretical Frame Work

Adopted for this study is what Chava and David Nachmias (1996:10), term the 'universal rule of probabilistic explanation leading to a prediction'. It states thus, X leads to the disappearance of Y. In other words if X is present, we expect absence of Y. For example, if there is an economic recession, government spends more. Similarly, job placement can culminate in the disappearance of unemployment. In the biblical and qur'anic perspective, a clean heart will not harbor dirty thoughts, that is, with the cleanliness of the heart, corruption disappears because corruption (evil thoughts) cannot coexist with cleanliness. In contrast, a dirty heart breeds and accommodates corruption. Suffice is to say that the presence of corruption means the absence of cleanliness. Therefore, keep the heart diligent and clean and send away corruption which can be conceived only in a dirty heart. But what is the methodology of keeping the heart diligent and clean? Before highlighting the methodology, a display of the shared values is expedient.

Shared values

Below is the table of some of the items from the Qur'an and the Bible that are regarded as shared values:

Table 1 (Shared Values)

Shared Values	Bible	Qur'an
God	<p>The first of all commandment is, hear o Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. There is one God; And there is none other but He. (Mark 12: 29 – 31)</p> <p>The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God (Psalm 14:1).</p>	<p>Say He is Allah (God), the One; Allah the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none unlike to Him (Q112:1-4).</p> <p>Their messengers said: Is there a doubt about Allah, the Creator of heavens and earth? (Q.14:10).</p>
Justice	But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. (Amos 5:24)	<p>Do not let hatred of a people prevent you from being just.</p> <p>Be just; that is nearer to righteousness (Q5: 8).</p>
Worship	Thou shall worship the Lord thy God and Him only shall thou worship (Matthew 4:10)	And I did not create the Jinn and mankind except to worship Me (Q51:56)
Last Day	And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall wake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel12:2-3 Rev.7:9-17)	And fear a day when you will be returned to Allah. Then every soul will be compensated for what it earned and they will not be wronged (Q2: 281)
Preaching	But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God. (Luke 9: 60) Preaching to people is not a thing I boast about, since it is a duty, which has been laid on me (I Corinthians 9:16)	Let there arise of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoying what is right and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity (Q. 3: 104)
Knowledge/ Wisdom	The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7)	He grants wisdom to whom He pleases; and to whom wisdom is granted receives indeed a benefit overflowing. But none will receive admonition but men of understanding (Q.2:269)
Heart Cleansing	Keep thy hearth with diligence; for out of it are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23)	By the soul and the proportion and order given to it and its inspiration as to its wrong and its right. Truly he succeed that purifies it and he fails that corrupts it (Q.91: 7-10)
Goodness to Parents	<p>Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old (Prov.23: 22)</p> <p>Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee (Ex. 20: 12)</p>	And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whenever one or both of them reach old age with you, say not to them <i>uff</i> and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word. And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say My lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up when I was small. (Q 17: 23-4)
Murder	Thou shall not kill. Exodus (20:13)	And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden (Q6: 151)

Shared Values	Bible	Qur'an
Adultery	Thou shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14) But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matt. 5: 28)	And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way. (Q17:32)
Interest	Thou shall not lend upon usury to thy brother, usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of anything that is lent upon usury. Unto a stranger thou shall mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shall not lend upon usury. (Deutronomy 23: 19 – 20)	But Allah has permitted trade and has forbidden usury (Q2: 275)
Shirk Polytheism	Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shall not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God. (Exodus 20: 4 – 5)	Join not in worship others with Allah, for false worship is indeed the highest wrong doing (Q. 31: 13) Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else , to whom He pleaseth. To set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed (Q.4: 48).
Alcohol	It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink. Let them drink and forget law and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be heavy hearts. Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his misery no more. Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are pointed to destruction (Prov. 23:30-1; 31:4-8; Gen19:30-8).	O ye who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, sacrificing to stones, and divination by arrows, are an abomination of Satan's handiwork: eschew such abomination that ye may prosper (Q.5:90).
Land Development	And the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to till it and keep it (Gen.2:15).	.. He brought forth from the earth and settled you therein... (Q. 11:61)

The Project Implementation

The implementation of the project is operationally preceded by a set of objectives that are stated as follows: that at the end of the execution of the project, Nigeria must have been transformed into:

- (a) A God trusting nation;
- (b) A socially well organized country;
- (c) A corruption free society;
- (d) A poverty free society.

Meanwhile, the attainment of the set objectives is necessarily anchored on the determination by the Muslims and Christians to:

- (a) make a paradigm shift in the approach to Inter-Religious Dialogue by means of replacing the tradition of trading accusations and counter accusations with common project;
- (b) use spiritual instrument to curb vices that have hitherto thwarted development plans;
- (c) put in place the right instruments for occasional evaluation of the activities to ascertain the efficacy or otherwise of the common project.

The implementation takes the following stages.

Stage One

To the extent that the project aims at fighting obstacles that have since 1960 (the year of independence) to date made attainment of nation building a mirage, the project handlers should start by making a comprehensive catalogue of the obstacles. As a matter of illustration, some of the social vices are embezzlement of the public funds, mismanagement of the nation's resources, perversion of justice, establishment of ministry of women affairs, the first lady syndrome when the wife of the president runs a parallel office to that of the president, jumbo salaries and allowances for the unproductive political office holders, inflation of contract awards, collapse of health care delivery, falling standard of education (to the extent that secondary school students now know more than their teachers), incessant mass failure in WAEC and NECO examinations, examination malpractices, escalation of insecurity as a result of unemployment, poverty and hunger etc. which are perpetrated with impunity and whenever the perpetrators of those vices are confronted, they indulge in a defensive mechanism by describing their sharp practices as a learning process. The items in the catalogue are critically analyzed with a view to ascertaining the extent of the strength of each obstacle.

Stage Two

Given the fact that the shared values listed above constitute only a tip of the ice berg, the project handlers should jointly search for more values/tenets that are common to both Islam and Christianity in their scripture. They will be amazed to find a large volume of such values.

It is part of this stage that the volumes of values so identified are published as a booklet to form an instructional material for use by the Ministers on both sides of the divide in their sermons, occasional talks and in all their interactions with congregations.

The booklet on shared values should be incorporated into the school curriculum for students at all levels of education to catch them young.

Furthermore, the shared values as detailed in the booklet must be analyzed for maximum benefit. The analysis is prefaced by a rationale that if Nigerians who excelled in all branches of knowledge and who are incredibly skillful in all professions cannot enthrone peace, progress and

development, something fundamentally is missing which may suggest that they are not in the right frame of mind. So, character training becomes expedient. The values that are common to Islam and Christianity as highlighted above can be deployed to equip Nigerians with the right frame of mind. Certainly, an exercise such as this is both divine and civic to Muslims and Christians.

Here is a brief analysis for illustration. It is credited to Jesus as having said thus: not everybody who called me Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom but those who do the will of my father who is in the heaven (Mat.7: 21). The key variable here is “doing” which connotes action, activity and performance. Doing the will of God as recommended by Jesus is to embark on programmes and projects that will bring forth peace and harmony that the two revealed religions stand for. It is not a matter of coincidence that the will of God which is emphasized in the statement credited to Jesus is equally the key variable in the definition of Islam which is the absolute surrender to the will of God.

From the Qur'an and Bible, we learn that man as God's *Khalifah* (vice-gerent) on earth is mandated to keep the earth in order, maintain it and sustain its beauty, splendour and harmony (Q11:61). The preservation of the earth's beauty is inherent in the prevention of wars and avoidance of actions that are capable of causing agony and disorder.

Stage Three

Heart cleansing

Heart cleansing is the hub of the project to which the theoretical frame work adopted and stated above is applicable in the sense that a clean heart suggests the absence of evil thoughts based on the fact that the state of the heart as the source of man's actions determines how man conducts his affairs. The act of heart cleansing is particularly focused for it has been hypothesized that a clean heart generates clean thoughts which ultimately lead to decent, positive and progressive actions. It is also hypothesized that if justice is allowed to run its normal course unhindered, there will be peace, harmony and progress in the society. (He has attained salvation he who purified his heart Q.91:9 Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are issues of life Prov.4:23)

The process of heart cleansing follows thus:

- (a) Regular reading of the scriptures.
- (b) Being God conscious.
- (c) Remembrance of death.
- (d) Being conscious of the responsibility which the status of *Khilafah* (vice-gerence of God) has placed on man.
- (e) Taking appreciation of God's benevolence to man as the essence and true meaning of worship.

- (f) Appreciating God's benevolence in its two forms of thanks giving (theoretical) and maintenance of man's environment which includes beautification of earth and prevention of skirmishes of violence (practical).
- (g) Injecting shared values in the school curriculum'
- (h) Selling the idea to the government through Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC).
- (i) Application of cleansing model to all and sundry.

The Question of Efficacy

One question that may agitate the minds of the stakeholders is that of the extent of efficacy of the project. The question was addressed through two instruments. The first Instrument is a two unit credit course (IRS 492) which is offered by both Muslim and Christian undergraduate and post graduate students. The question I asked them at the completion of the course each year in the last three decades is: What has been the impact of the course (IRS 492) on your perception of the opposite faith? Their responses are both revealing and interesting. A few excerpts from their responses suffice:

Christian Students

- (a) The Course (IRS 492) has proved to me why I should consider Muslims true believers.
- (b) I have been convinced that calling Muslims infidels is naïve
- (c) I used to see Muslims as a threat, but I have been persuaded to see how pleasant and peaceful they are as indicated in the common tenets between the two faiths.
- (d) I am amazed by the shared values between the two faiths.
- (e) The Course should be offered by all students as it will invoke in them liberal attitude towards the other religion.

Muslim Students

- (a) The Course (IRS 492) has made me relate to Christians as friends
- (b) I can now feel at home with Christians.
- (c) How I wish all Muslims participated in this course.
- (d) All Muslims should have the feeling I experience now towards Christians.
- (e) I found amazing the way and manner the Bible and the Qur'an teach the same principles and commandments

The Second Instrument

The second instrument is a questionnaire which was distributed to 50 respondents cutting across the Pastors, the Imams, the Academics and Politicians all of who are stakeholders in the Nigeria project. Out of the 50 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 47 (=96%) were returned.

Analysis of Results

Table 2: Question No 1 (Viability of the Project)

Sample	V. Viable	Viable
47	38 = 81%	9 = 19%

Table 3: Question No 2 (Efficacy of the Shared Value)

Sample	Truly Possible	Possible
47	40 = 85%	7 = 15%

Table 4: Question No 3 (Expected Impact of the Project)

Sample	Responses
47	100%

Table 5: Question No 4 (Implementation Strategy)

Sample	Responses
47	100%

Table 6: Question No 5 (Perceived Obstacles)

Sample	Yes	No
47	30 = 64%	17 = 47%

Table 7: Question No 6 (Perceived Obstacles)

(a) The places of worship that commercialize religion may resist the idea;
(b) Lack of funding may stiff the project implementation;
(c) New/fresh ideas are usually resisted out of ignorance;
(d) Religious bigotry can make some of the stakeholders indifferent.

Table 8: Question No 7 (Other capacities the respondent can help)

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Acting as a mentor(b) Acting as a supervisor;(c) Training the trainers;(d) In any capacity that may be assigned to me |
|--|

Discussion

The first instrument clearly indicates both the viability of the project as well as the efficacy of shared values when packaged into an instructional material to conscientize the adherents. The responses show that the students must have been acting out of ignorance before their exposure to the course, and when they are cured of the disease (ignorance that is) their vision becomes clear and horizon widened. This suggests that if the shared values are well packaged into instructional material and carefully administered to the subjects, a new mindset will emerge. A fresh relationship (positive that is) among adherents is created.

Regarding the second instrument, the respondents agreed on affirmation of the viability of the projects as well as the efficacy of the shared values though in varying degrees of affirmation. It is also a unanimous agreement on the possibility of the project yielding positive impact on the prospective subjects. It is on the issue of obstacles that there is a sharp disagreement; while the majority of the respondents, that is 30=64%, said there are obstacles such as possible resistance by some established places of worship on account of their commercialization of religion, the minority 17=36% saw no obstacles. The established places of worship may kick against the project.

The general impression created from the two instruments is the worthwhile-ness of the project.

Conclusions

Therefore, the thesis of this paper is that since the negating factors to the act of nation building are a function of the mindset, the Church and the Mosque can come to the rescue by means of using spiritual instrumentality to tackle the negating factors. Their antidote is the shared values which can be designed into strategic plans to work on mindsets of the nation builders.

If they (the church and mosque) succeed, as predicted in the theoretical framework, they would have achieved two feasts; first, making a unique contribution to the project of nation building and, secondly, getting their attention diverted from petty jealousies and trading accusations/counter accusations which have hitherto characterized their relationship. In the final analysis, they will become sincere worshippers of God devoid of hypocrisy.

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