

DUKOR ON RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM IN NATION-BUILDING

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Abstract

Professor Maduabuchi Dukor did some critical reflections on the nature and character of the phenomena of 'religious fundamentalism', and 'nation-building' in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society like Nigeria., wherein he depicts religion as a neutral concept with a malleable nature that makes it susceptible to both positive and negative deployment. He identifies religious fundamentalism as one of the negative consequential effects of the malleable nature of religion. This paper is an appraisal of Dukor's postulations and submissions on the twin notions of religious fundamentalism and nation-building. Although its findings corroborate Dukor's positions in virtually all fronts regarding religious fundamentalism and nation-building, the corroboration is only to the extent that religious fundamentalism is construed as an inherently evil phenomenon without any good latent in it. However, relying on the twin theories of utilitarianism and dualism, the paper argues that contrary to Dukor's position, there are ways in which religious fundamentalism could be a catalyst to nation-building and sustainable development. This observed imbalance in Dukor's position constitutes the gap in his discourse which this paper fills.

Keywords: nation-building, religion, fundamentalism, fanaticism; crisis; bigotry.

Introduction

Religion occupies a central place in the affairs of man. Whereas there is no known community without a religion, virtually all known religions have belief in the existence of a supernatural deity as their foundation. Even in a nation with

religious pluralism, members of such a nation and by implication, varying religions, are expected to be united by the notion of belief in a supernatural deity as the architect of all that exists. This is why religion is said to be an integrating force. However, the inability of humans to comprehend the true nature of the supposed Supreme Being as manifested in numerous claims and counter-claims of revelations and miracles has produced fanatics/fundamentalists in these religions. While noting that fundamentalism has such negative connotations as bigotry, zealotry, militancy, extremism, and fanaticism which make it unsuitable as a category of scholarly analysis, Henry Munson conceptualized fundamentalism as a type of conservative religious movement characterized by the advocacy of strict conformity to sacred texts (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/fundamentalism>. Accessed 3 May 2022). Religious fundamentalism is prominent in virtually all faith traditions across the globe.

Dukor conceives religion as both an integrating as well as a disintegrating force. According to Dukor (2003), religious fundamentalism breeds religious violence, and the combined effects of these two factors constitute a major obstacle to Nigeria's efforts at nation-building. He adds that, when considered economically and politically, it is the absence of defined, articulated and practicable ideology or a philosophy of economic and political stability that is at the heart of the problem (p. 173). Religious fundamentalists/extremists (when construed from the angle Dukor did) are responsible for the various religious mayhems besetting different countries today, including Nigeria. To what extent are Dukor's observations and submissions correct, out of tune, or over-bloated? What follows is an appraisal of Dukor's views on religion as a potent force for unification and disintegration in nation-building. Although I agreed with Dukor in most of his observations and position vis-à-vis religion and nation-building, my agreement with him is only to the extent that religious fundamentalism is perceived purely through the lens of an inherently negative phenomenon. But there are many ways in which religious fundamentalism could become a formidable catalyst for nation-building and sustainable development. Dukor's failure to recognize and incorporate this aspect of religious fundamentalism constitutes the gap in his discourse which this paper fills. Utilitarianism and dualism form the theoretical frameworks upon which the paper is based. While utilitarianism as a theory judges the moral worth of actions

on the basis of the utility/consequences it produces, dualism is a theory which holds that reality is made up two supposedly independent stuffs or opposites. Applied to the concept of religious fundamentalism, utilitarianism makes strict/extreme adherence to religious precepts a better option to follow, if doing so will result in more peace, social cohesion, and sustainable development. As for dualism, its application helps us to appreciate the fact that there are two sides to reality. Thus, we have life and death, tall and short, male and female, the spiritual and the material, etc. It is, therefore, not surprising that religious pluralism is open to both positive and negative construction and deployment.

Conceptual Clarifications.

Religion

As a concept, religion is no doubt a controversial one. This accounts for the lack of consensus among scholars vis-à-vis its definition. It also accounts for the nuances in religious practices among various religious groups found all over the world. Be that as it may, virtually all known religions have one thing in common, and that is the notion of God, or invisible super-human power as the case may be. The notion of God equally underpins the various definitions of religion that are so far in existence.

The root meaning of the term 'religion' derives from the Latin word "religio" which means to link up. Because the idea of God can hardly be divorced from religion, one can posit that etymologically, religion means "to link up with God". By the idea of God is meant that God is the supreme power in the universe and that his worship is necessary for welfare and happiness (Visudeva, 1988: 95). Regarding religion, Mbiti (1999) notes that religion has permeated human life in all ramifications such that it is not easy to separate man from it. In fact, for him, Africans do not know how to live without religion. The idea of God is central to every religion, but then no one religion is in agreement with the other as it concerns the identify of God and the best way of worshipping him.

Since the idea of religion is to bring man to the recognition of, or an awakened sense of a higher unseen controlling power or powers, with emotion and morality connected therewith (Visudeva, 89), and since different religions do not have a common knowledge of the true identity and nature of God, with each claiming to have exclusive knowledge of him and his ways, there is bound to be one religious

crisis or the other besetting humanity. It is in this sense that Dukor (1988) rightly conceived religion as both an integrating and disintegrating force.

Fundamentalism

According to the Webster's Dictionary, Fundamentalism means, among other things, (1) the belief that all statements made in the Bible are literally true. (2). In the United States, a movement among Protestants holding that such belief is essential to Christian faith: opposed to modernism (The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language, Deluxe Encyclopedic Edition, 2004: 512). What this definition implies is that a fundamentalist is one who is prone to literal interpretation of the traditional beliefs of Christian religion, especially as contained in the Bible. For the purposes of this discourse, the usage of the term fundamentalism would not be restricted to the Christian religion alone, but would instead apply to all religions. Thus, coming from a broader perspective, Benedict conceives fundamentalism as "a concept usually applied to biblical religions, cults, sects and their literature, identifying a belief in the absolute and infallible truth of whatever authority they rest on (cf. Benedict, 2008: 192). To this end, the fundamentalism of the Bible, the Koran, the Vedas, etc, is derived from the belief that every word as contained in them is the given and inviolable word of God or Allah as the case may be. Underpinning the whole idea of fundamentalism is a supposedly unquestionable truth which, in the estimation of the fundamentalists, is only opposed by forces of evil that must be fought to a standstill. Altemeyer (1996), Kirkpatrick (1993), and Watson et al., (2003), all betray the impression that, Fundamentalism is positively related with prejudice. For Beckford (2015), fundamentalism centers on unswerving faith in the authority of fixed principles, usually embedded in sacred texts, to dictate categorical rules for the conduct of personal and public life. He adds that it is also associated with assertive leadership and deep distrust of life outside its groups of committed believers. Also in this regard, Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) conceive fundamentalism in terms of attitude. In their words which are implicative of the purport of fundamentalism, "there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity" (p. 118).

Dukor does not condemn religion per se. For him, there is nothing inherently wrong with religion as a concept. What he condemns with respect to religion is

religious fundamentalism, a phrase he uses interchangeably with “religious fanaticism.” He sees religious fanaticism as a hallmark of anti-intellectualism (Dukor, 2010: 207).

Nation and Nation-Building

In its simplest form, the term nation refers to a group of people with common history, language, customs, descent, traditions as well as culture. The French philosopher, Renan (1882: 32) states that a nation is large scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. In his 1991 work entitled: *Imagined Communities*, Benedict posits that a nation comprises a group of people so large that its members cannot know each other personally but nonetheless have come to imagine that they share important characteristics that unify them as a nation and even national self-determination (p. 46). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a nation is an extensive aggregate of persons, so closely associated with each other by common descent, language or history as to form a distinct race or people usually organized as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory (*Oxford English Dictionary*, vol vii., 1970: 30). This second conception of a nation is broader than the first for it embodies the idea that a nation can be used interchangeably with a state. In this sense, a country like Nigeria can be referred to as a nation. It is also in this sense that Dukor conceived a nation, for he categorized Nigeria as a nation even though with regret that Nigeria has neither a common culture nor a common religion (1988: 60). For him, what makes for a consistent nationhood is the interaction of such cultural elements as politics, economics, science, arts and law, etc.

Dukor’s conception of a nation as being synonymous with a state is in line with J.S Mill’s notion of a nation. Concerning a nation which he used synonymously with nationality, Mill remarked thus:

A portion of mankind may be said to constitute a nationality (nation) if they are united among themselves by common sympathies, which do not exist between them and any others- which make them cooperate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be under the same government, and desire that it should be government by themselves, or a portion of themselves, exclusively (cf. Olayiwola, 1988: 228).

There is a link between the concept of nation and nation-building, such that the degree to which one is construed (in this case, 'nation') determines the successful implementation of the other (nation-building). Scholars of different persuasions have construed the notion of 'nation-building' from their respective points of view. In this regard, Nwabughugu (2004: 54) submits that nation-building is "a process of developing national consciousness among individuals and groups to cultivate a sense of love for a given nation and to accept this as a commitment to a nation-state". Beyond this conception, he adds that nation-building involves the creation of a conducive environment that will sustain the sense of love developed by the individual and group for the nation-state. As Olayiwola (1988: 230) puts it, nation-building is a key concept that is derived from the term nation and it is seen as a dynamic process of generation among a collectivity, a community of culture, economics and politics with ability for most members to actualize their potentialities.

Still on nation-building, Ilo (2011) posits that nation-building is a project involving the "the psycho-social reconstruction of individuals, as also a process of infusing people who differ widely in language and shared identity. Whether we construe it from the economic front or political front, the concept of nation-building involves change, and the goal of the envisaged change is the emergence or birth of a modern society from the hitherto traditional society. The goal of nation-building in Nigeria pursued from the political front is to evolve nationhood, a conscious sense of patriotism, a transfer of individualistic sentiments and loyalties to a national level. On the other hand when pursued from the economic front, the goal of Nigeria's nation-building is to effect a rapid and massive increase in both individual and national productivity vis-à-vis the material and physical well-being of the nation.

Religious Fundamentalism

In the opinion of Komonchak, et al (1987: 68), Religious fundamentalism is manifestations of religious intolerance. This being the case, religious fundamentalism is a religious movement that promotes the literal interpretation of, and strict adherence to religious doctrine, especially as a return to orthodox scriptural prescriptions and doctrinal originality. It seeks strict adherence to the orthodox principles of particular faiths, just as it frowns at modernism with its propensity to adulterating or diminishing original doctrinal principles. Religious

fundamentalism, which is a derivation of the two terms; 'religious' and 'fundamentalism', may be construed as any sect of movement within a religion that emphasizes a rigid adherence to what it conceives of as the fundamental principles of it (sic) faith, usually resulting in a denouncement of alternative practices and interpretations" (cf. Mgbachu & Onwuliri 2014: 108). Religious fundamentalism occurs when one religion holds the belief that no other religion is real or instituted by God other than itself. In Nigeria, for instance, where we have Islam and Christianity as the two dominant religions, one sees religious fundamentalism in action in a supremacy battle of authenticity between actors from both sides. Fundamentalism is found even within a given religions, courtesy of the existence of different sects within that religion claiming to be espousing the real tenets and principles of the religion in question.

For the reason that religious fundamentalists tend to disparage members of other faiths or those within their faith circle, but outside their sect or group and to convince them that they are not experiencing the authentic version of their professed religion, their activities and antics are bound to bring about conflict, distrust, and violence in society. Little wonder, then, why Casanova (1994) averred that, processes of modernization are commonly identified with the separation of religions from states as a prerequisite for the development of civil society. Beckford and Cairns (2015) did not agree less. They observe (and rightly I think) that the separation between religion and the state is widely regarded as a central feature of modernization processes, albeit they regrettably contend that sociological research has tended to neglect the extent to which even 'secular states' continue to manage religion in such institutions as prisons, hospitals as well as military establishments.

Dukor on Religion as an Integrating and Disintegrating Force

The National Association for Religious Tolerance (NARETO) made a very strategic declaration which she adopts as her motto. It goes thus:

I Believe In The Supreme Being And I Subscribe To The Doctrines of My own Religion. I Declare That Adherents Of Other Religions Have Similar Natural Rights. It Is The Supreme Being Alone Who knows and Who Will Have The Last Say on Who is The Genuine Practitioner. I Pray to Him To Judge me

As Such And I Appeal To My Fellow Human Beings To Leave
That Judgement To Him And To Him Alone (cf. C.S. Momoh et
al eds., 1988: iii).

Dukor has no doubt whatsoever that religion is a potent unifying force. But he is also aware that religion is at the same time a veritable disintegrating force. In fact, he **is** aware that religion is a neutral concept like many other concepts and is, as such, subject to either positive or negative manipulations and deployment depending on whose hand it enters. Hence, bearing this in mind, and in tandem with the spirit behind the above NARETO declaration (which is to guard against religious abuse and fundamentalism), Dukor observes that,

... Religion is not a concept which is intrinsically bad. It is rather an integrating force. Religion as a disintegrating force is attributable to the organizers, the organization, the preachers, the preaching, the propagators and the propagation of religions (1988: 61).

From Dukor's utterances, it is understandable that he links religious fundamentalism/fanaticism to failure to imbibe the spirit behind the NARETO declaration in the face of religious pluralism. This lack of spirit of open-mindedness ultimately results in a quest and effort to defend the particularistic claims of one religion. Religious extremists are usually of the position that ones others do not follow their ways, they will be damned. Besides condemning the preaching and articles of faith of other religions, they more often than not resort to violence to stop these other people from the other side of the religious divide. What is more, given that religious fundamentalists do not subscribe to imaginary or perceived compromise with social change, especially social change that contradicts their religious orthodoxy, they do everything within their reach to ensure that their religious doctrines are given universal acknowledgement, just as the prevailing political, social and economic systems must conform to their religious tenets and standards. Religious extremism does not admit of any.

Dukor is of the conviction that the disintegrating force of religion manifests itself in fundamentalism, which in turn results in terrorist activities. Like most scholars, including this writer, Dukor holds the opinion that religion as a disintegrating force is man-made, and therefore superficial. Every religion tries to project itself as the only genuine religion sanctioned by God. And in a bid to project and defend

itself in that light, it goes into the business of blackmailing other religions. The corollary of such false indoctrination is the emergence of some dogmatically-oriented groups within each religion with the goal of countering the force of perceived opposing religion (s). Dukor suspects that those who fan the embers of religious fundamentalism and vandalism are only using them as a means to further their politico-religious interests. While expressing regrets that Nigeria no longer has African values and practices as the bedrock of her unity, Dukor blames the spate of religious crisis in Nigeria largely on the importation of Islam and Christianity into Africa (1988: 62).

The formation of religious associations and the organization of symposia and seminars by religious sects as a means of disseminating their dogmas was identified by Dukor as another motive force behind religions as a disintegrating force. He attributes the purpose behind these sects to mere show of superiority to opposing religions. This, he said, is coupled with the proliferation of both primary and secondary schools formed along the line of different religions and religious denominations and wherein education in the form of dogmatism, pride of one's religion and fanaticism, etc., is received. Elsewhere, and in apparent reference to the intrusion of religious fundamentalism/bigotry, ignorance, and greed into state affairs in Africa as well as the debilitating effects they have on efforts at nation-building, Dukor has these to say: "There is an ill-wind that is blowing across African continent and which disintegrate nations in Africa. This ill-wind renders multi-national democracy and federalism which are the cornerstone of modern development otiose (2003: 172, fn. 12).

In a related development, Dukor observed that religion as a disintegrating force is nothing short of religious intolerance. In other words, religion as a disintegrating force finds expression in religious intolerance. And for him, as for this writer, religious intolerance is the end product of exclusive religiosity – the propensity to believe and project the idea that one's religion, God, and religious practices are the only authentic ones, and that salvation is only possible through identification with them. Save the Nigerian Indigenous religion which Dukor accused the other two major religions (Islam and Christianity) of treating as though it has no knowledge of God, he accused different religions in the country of being avenues for breeding intolerance and disunity. Much as Dukor finds in religion a disintegrating force if wrongly embraced and manipulated, he equally opined that religion is a veritable instrument for social integration. For him, religion as an integrative force

manifests itself by way of preaching social, political and economic morality (1988: 62). Every religion, he observes, teaches virtues and moral values that are strategic to the promotion of peace, unity, progress and peaceful co-existence. It is worthy to note that all these virtues are potent weapons of integration. Dukor has no doubt that the dogmas of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Godianism, etc, have the in-built mechanism for remolding the moral, social and political temperament of mankind. This is even as religion is generally antithetical to terrorism and rascalism (1988: 64). He, therefore, submits that religious conflicts, riots, fundamentalism as well as terrorism would become a thing of the past in Nigeria, if Christians and Moslems tailor their religious preaching and practices in line with the life and teachings of Jesus and Muhammed.

Dukor on Nigerian Nationhood.

We had stated earlier that for Dukor, nationhood is a consistent whole made possible by the interaction of such cultural elements as politics, economic, science, arts, and law, etc. Bearing this in mind, he emphasizes the need for all religions including Islam, Christianity and traditional religions to interact theologically and socially, and for their respective adherents to see people from outside their fold as children of the same God. While admitting that Nigeria is a federation of multi-ethnic nationalities and that federalism has the propensity to deepen imbalances among the federating states, Dukor identifies and distinguishes between two kinds of federalism – a federation of sponsoring states, and a federation sponsored states. In the case of a federation of sponsored into which he categorizes Nigeria, there is usually the presence of an over-arching central government which supersedes the states sponsored by it (2003: 172, fn. 11). This sort of federalism, Dukor believes, has the propensity of promoting the thirst to hijack central authority by national group due to the often weak nature of such sponsored states. In his estimation, this conception of federalism should not be used to subvert the multi-national democracy and nation-building (Ibid.). Conversely, a federation of sponsoring states assumes the presence of socially, culturally and economically vibrant states empowered to minister at the grassroots to the objectively varied needs of the people. Unlike the federation of sponsored states, the idea of a federation of sponsoring states weakens the urge to hijack central authority by national groups because there is simply nothing to loot centrally (Ibid.).

Dukor is of the view that for a smooth and effective nation-building to materialize in a multi-plural and multicultural society, nothing short of a plural structure is needed. Putting any other structure other than this in place is an invitation to disintegration. As a way forward to nation-building, Dukor proposes what he calls Acculturation, Democracy, Ideology, Secularism, and Patriotism (ADISP). ADISP, for him, is an integrated process which, if adopted, will work overtime in the consciousness of the people. In proposing ADISP, Dukor notes that a theory of nation-building is an imperative in this historical period of anomy stemming from ethnic diversity, religious plurality, and bigotry, greed and ignorance.

According to Dukor, the process of integration is the process of building a new society and a new social order based on justice and fair play (2003: 173). This integration requires that socio-economic progress be made within the democratic framework and sharing of power with minorities. For him, therefore, invoking and relying on the notion of religion in a multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, and multi-religious entity like Nigeria vis-à-vis nation-building requires that we embrace the notions of universal brotherhood of all men and the universal fatherhood of God as the basis upon which Nigeria's quest for nationhood will be attained. In the absence of this, he recommends the recognition of Nigerian indigenous religions as the official religions for both domestic and foreign policies and as the possible basis for Nigeria nationhood.

How Appropriate are Dukor's Views on Religious Fundamentalism: *Towards a Discussion*

Dukor's views on religion generally and religious fundamentalism in particular as they affect nation-building are, no doubt, far-reaching. They are far-reaching because most of them are in the right direction and have the backing of many scholars, both from the old and new generation blocs, including this writer. One can say, without any fear of contradiction that Dukor's entire discourse on religion was a repudiation of fundamentalism. Dukor examined religious fundamentalism vis-à-vis nation-building from the dimension of a blind acceptance of one's religious group and teachings/precepts as the only divinely and authentically ordained religion and teachings to the point of excluding all alternative religious groups, members and their teachings. Dukor's straight-jacketed perception of religious fundamentalism as being an inherently negative phenomenon with little or no positive impact on development marks my point of departure from him. His

failure to understand religious fundamentalism both in terms of strict adherence to the known universal spiritual values believed to be recognized and present in almost all known religions and the recognition of one's own religion and teachings as the only truly ordained ones by God makes his discourse one-sided. Dukor who, from all indications, appeared to have favoured secularism seems to agree that even secularism taken to an extreme could be both anti-human and social development. In other words, he condemns fundamentalism for its exclusionist character to the point that he also moved for a rejection of a full-scale adoption of secularism. Regarding secularism, Dukor opines that its confusion and misunderstanding in the hands of many political leaders and interlocutors has portrayed it as a stumbling block to nation-building. This is notwithstanding the fact that secularism is a significant term as far as modern democratic systems and politics of developing nation-states are concerned (cf. Dukor, 2003: 173). He conceives secularism as the belief that state, moral, education, etc, should be independent of religion, the implication of which, for him, is that society where it is applied should be wholly mundane, materialistic, and scientific in her undertaking (Ibid.). Worthy of note here is that much as Dukor (at least from my estimation) condemns religious fundamentalism/extremism for being a cog on the wheels of nation-building in favour of secularism, he is also averse to an undiluted secularism. Unknowingly to him, this singular disposition to moderate religiosity and moderate secularism puts on him the toga of eclectic philosopher. Dukor's conception and discourse on religious fundamentalism in the context of nation-building is diametrically to those of some other scholars as we shall come to see later. Dukor's aversion for religious fundamentalism is not without some strong reasons.

First, he equates religious fundamentalism with fanaticism, rascalism and intolerance. Among other things, Dukor cautions against religious fundamentalism for the reason that fundamentalism is generally opposed to change, and for him, change is the only phenomena that remains constant. He alludes to the fact that religious fundamentalism surfaced as a result of the realization by religions that empires built on religious myth and miracles are now under the threat of the increasing power of scientific knowledge. The only condition upon which Dukor would have accepted religious fundamentalism is when it is adopted for the purpose of nationalistic agitation in a mono-religious and mono-cultural entity. Anything short of that smacks of intolerance and

exclusionism. For him, religious revolution in a multi-cultural and multi-religious entity can never be a replacement for nationalism. Thus, in commenting on the Islamic fundamentalism in Africa, he writes that:

Nationalistic agitation was based on African cultural unity which Islamic religion and values cannot substitute in any context without a theory of conflict and cataclysm. This is the rot and lot of Islamic revolution or agitation in a multicultural world (2010: 199).

What is more, Dukor condemns out rightly religious fundamentalism in Nigeria and in African because of its exclusionist tendency. Exclusive religiosity is a situation whereby the fundamentalist drive of one religion makes it lay claim to being the only authentic religion, thereby implying a monopoly vis-à-vis the knowledge of God and his ways. This is what Dukor says is obtainable in Africa today, where Islam and Christianity have relegated African traditional religions to the level of religiousless bodies that lack any knowledge of God.

It is worthy to note that Dukor is not alone in condemning fundamentalist-oriented religious exclusionism. This writer and some others share his views completely. For instance, the whole essence of an allegedly controversial book written by a certain author and entitled: *God Has No Religion* (Ezeora, 2010) is to demonstrate that no religion has a monopoly of the knowledge of God, and that no religion has any justifiable basis to claim superiority to others. In the said book, the author takes several stands that are similar to those of Dukor. In an attempt to back up his position that God has no singular personality, no gender, and no name, and that he dwells impartiality in all men, the author quotes, among other Biblical verses, 1 Cor. 12:4-14. Specifically, Verses 4-7 states that:

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. ... The spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.

According to the author under reference, the exclusionist character of Islam and Christianity is responsible for the current woes of Africa and the Middle East as well as the inglorious label of these countries as third world countries. He writes:

...Most professed Christians and Muslims find it very difficult to appreciate this truth (i.e of their ungodly behavior). These two religious constitute the only reasons for the third world syndrome stamped in Africa and the Middle East (Ezeora, 2010).

In the above passage, the author is actually reacting in support of Prof. Covey's observations to the effect that attending church does not necessarily mean living the principles taught in those meetings, and that one can be active in a church but inactive in its gospel (Stephen. R. Covey as cited by Ezeora, 2010). As I had mentioned earlier, Dukor's views on religion and religious Fundamentalism/extremism are also in consonance with mine. However, it has to be noted that being in consonance with my own understanding is to the extent that religious fundamentalism is understood in a purely negative sense as Dukor did. But then beyond Dukor's understanding, I am of the affirmation that some positive values are latent in religious fundamentalism. I also share the views of Ezeora and covey as expressed above. Both Koran and the Bible are replete with passages that clearly give vent to the oneness of God. Asogwa (2011: 156) corroborates this when he writes that, "God is one and that the different religious are only manifestations of different ways of getting to one destination". The Koran (Qur'an) in its chapter 3 verses 84 declares thus:

We (believers) believe in God and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Israelites and that which was given to Jesus and to all the prophets from their Lord. We do not make distinction between any of them and to God we submit.

Elsewhere, in chapter 29 Vs 46, the Koran says:

And do not argue with the people of the book, except in best terms, and not at all with those of them who are unjust. And say we believe in what has been revealed to you. Our God is one and to Him we submit.

It is obvious that the combined effect of Qur'an 3:84, 29:46, the book of Matthew 18:14, and 1 Cor. 12:4-14 are strong enough to convince any right thinking man that God is one and that different religious cleavages are only different ways of his manifestation. These verses are also enough evidences that those who fan the

embers of religious exclusionism and the attendant crisis are only action from ignorance.

Unlike Dukor and those who share his line of thought by way of conceiving religious fundamentalism as nothing other than a tool that undermines rather than develop a nation, there are scholars who are of the affirmation that religious fundamentalism and nation-building/sustainable development are inextricably connected such that the former influences the latter (Cf. Aminu, 2003; Ekeopara and Ekpenyong 2016; Mbon 1991; Okpa et al, 2018; Sunday and Mordi 2017). Since fundamentalism, according to Okpa et al, 2018 has come to mean a term applied by many “to a tendency to among certain groups, mainly, though not exclusively, in religion, which is characterized by a markedly strict literalism as it is applied to certain specific scriptures, dogmas, or ideologies”, all the aforementioned authors are of the conviction that religious values if courageously adhered to, translate to high moral and ethical values that all faiths aspire to achieve. In this regard, they are of the affirmation that religions can serve as a catalyst for the teaching and advancement of ethical principles, which are essential in the development of strong character particularly as it affect sustainable development and nation development (Okpa et al 2018: 14).

There is hardly any known religion in the world that does not preach fairness, equality, equity, tolerance, sincerity, dedication to duty, truthfulness, moral rectitude, respect for life, sacrifice for others, patriotism, among others, among its core values in line with what are widely believed to be universal spiritual principles. If strictly, faithfully, religiously or literally adhering to all these values is what amounts to one being a religious fundamentalist, it follows then that religious fundamentalists are the best materials for development-driven governance. All the aforementioned values are the core values known to be emphasized by religious fundamentalism. In fact, there is wild belief among the scholars earlier mentioned as entertaining the belief that religious fundamentalism has the propensity to enthrone sustainable development that these universal spiritual principles espoused by most religions as their core values regulate the behaviour, conduct, and actions of individuals, who are, or incidentally may become religious and socio-political leaders of their society. These spiritual virtues, if strictly obeyed, can make for social order, peace, harmony, stability, and discipline in the society, just as genuine and firm commitment to them could determine the political and socio-economic behaviour of a people as well as the

stability and development of such society. Specifically, Ekeopara and Ekpenyong (2016) contend that strict adherence to the values and morals (sic) belief system of various religious organisations is a catalyst that could bring about change in human characters and attitudes and consequently result to sustainable development anywhere in the world. And in the words of Okpa et al, "All through human history, religious fundamentalism has proven to be the principal force behind human development. Adheres are motivated by religious teachings, ethics and beliefs to develop spiritual qualities, that empowers them to sacrifice for others and to contribute to the development of their community" (2018:12).

Going forward, Okpa et al (2018) affirm the strong bond between religious fundamentalism and sustainable development when, in the paper under reference, they write thus: "religious fundamentalism inculcates spirit of hard work and industrialization, which is the foundation that brings about sustainable development. People who adhered to religious precepts, beliefs, participations, practices, rituals, behaviours, etc, often drive development activities" (p. 14). In a bid to further add weight to their claims, they cite Ogbonnaya (2012) to the effect that, "strong commitment to religious principles has the propensity to facilitate global development. Religious teachings promote common belief in the dignity of the human person under God, and emphasises committed (sic) to the promotion of the human good so as to provide basic human needs, guarantee protection of human rights and promote integral development globally" (cf. p. 14. Emphasis is mine). Okpa et al (2018) rightly observe that religion has an effect on many people's attitudes to everything, including such matters as savings, investment and a host of economic decisions. It influences area we had come to see as vital for successful development, like schooling, gender quality, and approaches to health care. For them, religion could be an important driver of change, even as it could be a break to progress. It is clear from the foregoing that Okpa et al (2018) and some scholars they cite in support of their position conceive religious fundamentalism purely from the ideal/positive perspective, whereby it purports strict adherence to the moral injunctions/positive values which, as experience has shown, are common to all known religions. There is no doubt that religious fundamentalism understood in this way is a strong driver of both human and social development.

Reflections

My examination of Dukor's views on the notions of religion and religious fundamentalism reveals that the idea that there are different religious prophets with conflicting testimonies of revelations and miracles from God does not mean that the prophets involved are lying or that the revelations are not true. It only points to the fact that God is, in the final analysis, beyond human comprehension; a being that is both immanent and transcendent; a "unity in diversity. Armed with this knowledge, humans have to be tolerant and open-minded in their dealings with people of distinct faith, religion and/or culture. I am of the affirmation that the degree to which a country succeeds in her efforts at nation-building is dependent on the degree at which her people coming from diverse backgrounds are willing to accommodate others through the principles of give and take. This expectation, however, is being constantly undermined by the disintegrative antics and propensities of those who have constituted themselves into unfortunate religious bigots. The avalanche of religious crises and killings going on in the country and around the world bears testimony to this.

I solicit for secularism in a state with a heterogeneous culture and religion. To this end, I share Dukor's view, wherein he notes that the idea of secularism in a multi-religious society like Nigeria is neither irreligious nor indifference to religion but equal respect. My reason for this is that secularism taking in its naked form (extreme) will surely result in exclusionism. The religion, the secularism, the politics, the cultural practices as well as the philosophy I envisage will be devoid of fundamentalist and exclusionist tendencies. That is the sure way of ensuring peace and stability in a multi-linguistic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious society like ours. Dukor speaks my mind (and that of numerous others, I guess) by positing that:

World peace centers on philosophical rapprochement of conceptions of secularism, fundamentalism and freedom as it affects the world and secondly, as it promotes freedom of all races... In the philosophical prognosis of this contemporary socio-political problems (sic), the philosophy of pluralism with a variation in monism, communicative rationality, democratic existentialism and globalism seems to be a pragmatic approach to

harmonizing the conflicting goals of races and religions in a circular world (2010: 207).

That is to say that, what I join Dukor in affirming here is that virtue lies in the middle and that recognizing and harmonizing the best in varying religions, cultures and the related concepts is the best way of ensuring peace and stability, not only in Africa, but the world in general. In a related development, Dukor's views on religion and religious fundamentalism finds support in a recent message from Pope Benedict xvi to the people of Lebanon as well as their Christian and Muslim faithful. (cf. Greenwell, 2012). In the said message, the Pope enjoined his audience to take note of the fact that the basis of our unity and our advocacy for peace should be sought not in revelation, but in human nature wherein the natural moral law can be found.

Among other things, the Pope noted that the desire to build peace, the innate yearning for beauty, goodness and truth, religious freedom, etc., are aspects of the natural moral law which should serve as the basis of our unity. He explains further that the family is the first school of the desire to build peace and that implied in it is respect for life which in turn makes the rejection of violence an imperative. As for the yearning for beauty, goodness and truth, the Pope says that it reflects the fact that we are made in the image of God and that each of us is in a way a reflection of the divine. This, he says, is the basis for a sound and correct notion of morality which is always centered on the person. Implied in this area of unity based on human nature is the rejection of any sort of religious fundamentalism in the negative sense Dukor viewed it. To this end, the Pope declares that, "Thoughts of peace, words of peace, and acts of peace are required if any sort of reconciliation and common life is to be expected" (Greenwell, 2012: 3). With regard to religious freedom, the Pope was in agreement with Dukor and he indeed spoke the mind of many, including this writer, when he notes that "The freedom to profess and practice one's religion without danger to life and liberty must be possible to everyone.

There are three major religions in Nigeria namely, Christianity, Muslim, and African Traditional Religion. Although these religions have their respective core values that serve as guide to their adherents in their daily private and public life, these values are in the final analysis the same as they revolve or are drawn from the acclaimed universal spiritual principles. These universal spiritual principles

are, however, given different interpretations, with some religious groups laying claim to possessing the appropriate knowledge of the requirement of each principle, courtesy of direct revelation to them by God. If the adherents of the major religions in Nigeria properly understood religion and its place in human and social development and stability, then there is no way it can be turned into a tool of intolerance and instability. It is the claim to exclusive authenticity of establishment and revelation of truth by the respective religion that brings about religious fundamentalism in the way or negative sense in which Dukor construed, thereby posing a threat to all efforts and policies geared towards sustainable development in Nigeria. The present upsurge in the killing of Christians coupled with the overall religious mayhem in the country is one of the untoward outcomes misinterpretation and misapplication of universal spiritual principles.

One cannot but join (Greenwell 2012) in agreeing with Pope Benedict that religious fundamentalism in form of religious compulsion is to be rejected. Greenwell adds that flowing from the pope's observations is the idea that the 'Qur'anic verse of the sword' which advocates the expansion of religion by the sword is contrary to the natural moral law (p. 3). From the foregoing, it follows that religious fundamentalism in the form Dukor construed it amounts to religious compulsion which, as Pope Benedict observes, is immoral. While Pope Benedict is not against religious dialogue as a way out of religious compulsion, he, however, is of the opinion that any proposed dialogue in which the participants ignore the existence of those core values that are common to all great cultures as a result of their being rooted in the nature of the human person is bound to hit the rocks. Pope Benedict ended his message with a clarion call on both the civil and political society to embrace secular tolerance and openness of mind to transcendence as a way of ensuring world peace and security. This admonition is, for me, a vindication of Dukor's position in the dimension of religious fundamentalism he is pursuing.

Conclusion

From what we have seen and said so far about Dukor's and other scholar's views concerning religion and religious fundamentalism, it is obvious enough that religion occupies a prominent and strategic space in every society's quest for nationhood. Though a unifying instrument, it (religion) is no doubt a volatile one. No society or individual can consistently and justifiably lay claim to possessing monopolistic knowledge of God and His ways. It is observable from our foregoing

observations that religious fundamentalism, which is a fall-out of humans approach to the notion of religion could take either positive or negative dimension. Since all religions are known to preach commitment to such universal spiritual precepts such as justice, truth, honesty, forgiveness, love of neighbor and of ones country, uprightness, avoidance of evils such as stealing, corruption, murder, lie, amongst others, it is only prudent to submit that religious fundamentalism in the sense of strict adherence to these religious precepts can only result in both human and social development, given that all the enunciated core values are nothing short of the basic ingredients of good governance and sustainable development. Conversely, the approach to religion by way of laying claim to exclusive authenticity of ones own religious group and teachings (which was the focus of Dukor's discourse on religious fundamentalism) will, no doubt, constitute a stumbling block on a country's way to nation-building as it has the propensity to enthrone discrimination, fanaticism, rascalism, terrorism, social tension, among other negativities. It is this negative and straight-jacketed conception of religious fundamentalism that constitutes the gap in Professor Dukor's discourse on religious fundamentalism which this paper has filled. This position is without prejudice to the fact that the paper endorses Dukor's position on virtually all fronts with reference to religious fundamentalism construed as an inherently negative phenomenon.

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