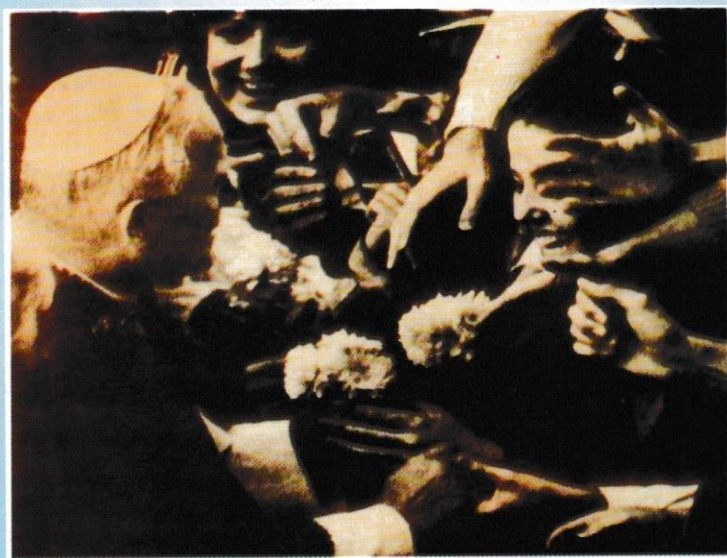




UNIVERSITY OF UYO

43RD INAUGURAL LECTURE

**REAPING THE EARTHLY DIVIDEND BEFORE THE HEAVENLY REWARD:
THE CIVIC (SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL) DIMENSION
OF THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION**



(VERY REV. FR.) PROFESSOR JOHN O. UMOH
Professor of Sociology of Religion

January 29, 2015

UNIVERSITY OF UYO



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THE CIVIC (SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL) DIMENSION
OF THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION**



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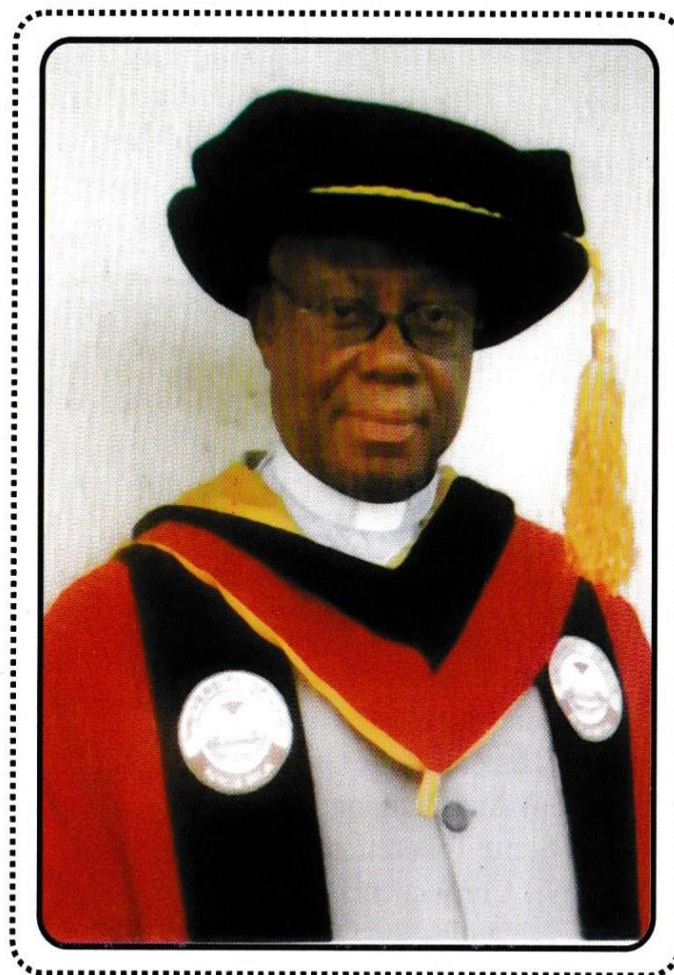
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**Reaping The Earthly Dividend before The Heavenly
Reward: The Civic (Socio-economic and Political)
Dimension of The Religious Institution**

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DEDICATION

This edition of the INAUGURAL LECTURE is happily dedicated to the Almighty God for His sustained guidance and faithfulness up to this point of my academic endeavour.

And

To members of my beloved family, living and dead

Citation

of

(Reverend Father) Professor John Oscar Umoh

Dip. (Perugia), Dip. (Toulouse), B. Phil., BD. (Rome),

M.A. (California), Ph.D. (Brookings, SD, USA)

Presented by

Professor I.. V. O. Modo

Fmr. Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences

Reverend Father John Oscar Umoh, a man of double feathers, a high-ranking Catholic Clergy and a Professor of Sociology of Religion, was born on the 13th of April in the middle of the twentieth century to the family of Late Oscar Umoh Udo Okpo and Late Madam Magdalene Aloysius Ekerete, of Ifuho village in Ikot Ekpene Clan, Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. Professor John O. Umoh was destined to be a public personality, who would touch many lives through teaching in the secular world, and the ministerial apostolate in the religious life. After successful teaching careers at the secondary levels (1968-1970 – St. Augustine’s Secondary School, Urua Inyang) and (1979 – 1981, Queen of Apostles Seminary, Afaha Obong as a graduate teacher), Professor Umoh decided to further his education beyond the shores of Nigeria, 1981-1982 with a Masters degree in San Francisco, California and 1982-1985 with a Doctoral Degree in Sociology in South Dakota in the United States of America. Since his return from the

U.S.A, and after some four years of active engagement in the ministerial apostolate, Professor Umoh has been actively engaged in the lecturing career in the University of Uyo for the past twenty-five years (1990 till date). Alongside his active involvement with the University, he is also involved in full time parish apostolate, combining both with exceptional degree of success.

Educational background:

Professor J. O. Umoh's educational background can be traced to:

- St. Anne's Primary School, Ifuho in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area (1956-1963), where he graduated with distinction in the First School Leaving Certificate Examination.
- Queen of Apostles' Seminary, Afaha Obong, Abak (1964-1967, transferring to Holy family College, Oku Abak as a result of the Civil War, 1968-1970) where he obtained in Division Two the West African School Certificate.
- Urban University, Rome (1970-1975), double Bachelor Degrees in Philosophy and Theology
- Back in Nigeria (1975-1980) for practical experience in the Priestly Apostolate after ordination to the Sacred Priesthood, and serving as Secretary to the First Anglo-Saxon West African Cardinal, Dominic Cardinal Ekandem of Blessed Memory.
- University of San Francisco (USF), California (1981-1982), where he obtained a Master of Arts degree in Theology.

- South Dakota State University, Brookings, USA (1982-1985), where he obtained his Ph.D. in Sociology of Religion with a Minor Area in Educational Administration.
- Elevated to the rank of Associate Professor of Sociology of Religion in 2004 during the Vice-Chancellorship of Professor Akpan H. Ekpo.
- Was finally raised to the highest academic rank of Full Professorship during the Vice-Chancellorship of Professor Akaneren Essien in 2008.

Academic Responsibilities: State and National

- Acting Head, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, (1991-1992; 1997-1999).
- Head, Department of Sociology and Anthropology (2010-2012).
- Member of Senate (1992-1993; 1997-1999).
- Member of Senate (2010 till date).
- Since 2011, Member of National Universities Commission (NUC) Accreditation Panels to various Departments of Sociology: Igbinedion University, Okada; Lagos State University; Nasarawa State University, Keffi.
- External Examiner (M.Sc./Ph.D.) to University of Calabar (2010 till date).
- External Examiner (M.Sc./Ph.D.) to Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki (2011 till date)
- External Examiner (Undergraduates) to University of Port Harcourt (2010 till date).

- Visiting Scholar (2002-2003; 2012-2013) to University of Calabar.
- Has published over 35 articles in national and international journals as well as 2 Books in the area of Sociology of Religion.

Responsibilities within the Faculty of Social Sciences

- Chairman, Faculty Examination Malpractice Committee (1991-1993).
- Member, Faculty Conference committee (1993-1996)
- Member, Faculty Diploma Investigation Panel (1998)
- Chairman, Departmental Disciplinary Committee on Examination Malpractice (2006)
- Chairman, Departmental Seminar/Defense Committee (2010-2012)
- Chairman, Departmental Postgraduate Supervisory Committee (2013 till date)
- Chairman, Postgraduate Departmental Board (2013 till date)

Community Responsibilities: State and National

- Chaplain, Catholic Graduates Association, Annang Branch (1990 till date)
- Chairman, Hospital Management Committee, Redeemer Cottage Hospital, Ibesit, Ukanafun Local Government Area (1982-1992)
- Member, Local Education Committee, Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area (1992-1994)

- Chairman, Clergy Welfare Committee, Ikot Ekpene (1993-2009)
- Chairman, Board of Governors, Holy Child Secondary School, Ifuho, Ikot Ekpene (1998-2000)

Parish Priest/Pastor:

- St. Alban's Parish, Inen, Oruk Anam (1988-1992)
- Assumption Parish, Ikpe Annang (1992-1994)
- St. Michael Parish, Ikot Etok Udo, Otoro Abak (1994-1999)
- Immaculate Conception Parish, Afaha Obong, Abak (1999-2004)
- St. Joseph Parish, Iwukem, Etim Ekpo Local Government Area (2004).
- Assumption Parish, Ukana, Essien Udim Local Government Area (2004-2009)
- St. Paul Parish, Ekparakwa, Oruk Anam Local Government Area (2009 till date)
- Chairman, Board of Governors, Queen of Apostles' Seminary, Afaha Obong, Abak (2001-2003)
- Member, Board of Trustees, International Center for Integrated Development Research, Ikot Ekpene (2009 till date)
- Chairman, Ikot Ekpene Catholic Diocesan Property Commission (2008 till date)

Membership of Professional Bodies

- Member, South Dakota State University Sociological Association (1983-1985)
- Member, American Sociological Association (1985 till date)

- Member, Nigerian Anthropological and Sociological Practitioners Association (1990 till date)
- Member, Social Science Academy of Nigeria (SSAN) (2004 till date).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND APPRECIATION

This can only be the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes. I would have no reason not to praise and thank the Almighty God for the Inaugural Lecture which I stand to deliver today, the 29th day of January, 2015, for it is only by His Grace that this has come to reality. For me, this wonderful and divine enablement is a rare privilege. I thank Him for His Grace and protection over my life despite odds, especially the challenges that trailed the early years after the Civil War.

Permit me to acknowledge with prayerful remembrance the immeasurable and unquantifiable contribution of my Late Parents, Mr. Oscar Umoh and Madam Magdalene Aloysius Ekerete for their huge investments in me from Day One of my being, which have culminated in this glorious moment you are witnessing today.

I want to acknowledge wholeheartedly the irreplaceable role played by my only surviving sister, Mrs. Matilda Jude Ukpong and her dear husband, My Late Brothers, Mr. Phillip Oscar Umoh and Dominic Oscar Umoh, my Late step-Sister, Mrs. Theresa Alban and other members of the family. In a wonderful and unique way they have all contributed to the 'making of the King.'

Let me thank in a very special way, the clergy members of the Jesuit Community in San Francisco in California, who came in handy when all hopes appeared lost, and His Lordship, Most Reverend Paul Dudley, the Catholic Bishop of Sioux Falls Diocese in the USA, a friend

in deed in the true sense of the word, and the faithful of St. Mary's Parish, Bryant, South Dakota, St. James, Parish, Willow Lake, all in the Diocese of Sioux Falls in the USA. Their show of friendship for the 'Stranger' among them was several points above the mean. May the Good Lord reward them accordingly.

Let me acknowledge with deepest appreciation the 'silent' contributions of my childhood and bosom friends at the early days of my formation at both the Primary and Secondary levels, whether in the minor seminary, Afaha Obong before the unfortunate outbreak of the civil war, or at the secular secondary school at the Holy Family College, Oku Abak, where the 'struggle' was forced to resume during the war. At that level, the moral support and encouragement, and otherwise of the Late Reverend Father J. C. McGuinness will be humbly remembered in perpetuity. I thank all my teachers at that level, especially Rt. Reverend Bishop Ephraim Silas Obot of Blessed Memory, a teacher and friend indeed.

Mention must duly be made of the Late Cardinal Ekandem, who trusted in my ability to measure up despite my youthful age, and decided quite early in the game to send me for studies in Europe. I am so happy and fulfilled that I never gave him cause for regret.

I thank you all, my teachers at the level of higher education in the seminary, preparing me for the much cherished vocation to the Catholic Priesthood, and in the secular University for the art of scientific inquiry in the social sciences. Bishop Camillus A. Etokudoh, the Bishop of Port Harcourt Diocese first suggested the almost

'heroic' combination of University lectureship with active apostolate in the religious ministry, a combination that demands a more than ordinary human giftedness, in order to succeed in both areas. Thank God that his initial 'proposal' has worked and yielded the anticipated dividend. I thank my present Bishop, Rt. Reverend Camillus R. Umoh, a friend and Boss for endorsing the continuation of that style of exercising the ministry and to eventually excel as a 'Jack of all trades and Master of ALL'. A listing of so many religious personalities should not surprise anybody – afterwards, the lecture topic is on Religion and the lecturer is himself a religious personality.

Let me turn now deservedly to my giants and mentors in the University culture for the roles they played and continue to play in bringing me to where I am today. I thank Professor Ekong E. Ekong under whose Deanship in the Faculty of Social Sciences I first tasted the demands of university administration as Acting Head, Department of Sociology and Anthropology. When I had to go through the routine a second time under the Faculty Deanship of Professor Akpan H. Ekpo, it was no other than a revision exercise. Providentially, it was during his Vice Chancellorship that I was raised to the Professorial cadre as Associate Professor.

Or, can I forget the man who crowned it all, Professor Akaneren I. Essien, under whose executive administration and Vice Chancellorship I became full Professor. Thank you, Sir, for approving my acceptance into the ranks of those who matter most in the Ivory Tower. As for you, my current Vice Chancellor, Professor (Mrs.)

Comfort M. Ekpo, my appreciation and thankfulness are unquantifiable for not only acknowledging my modest contribution to university administration as full Head of Department but actually encouraging the materialization of this Inaugural Lecture, through which to showcase my contribution over the years in my area of specialization as an academic. Thank you, Mma.

I equally owe a big 'Thank You' to YOU my colleagues, senior and junior, in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Uyo for all your professional show of friendliness, dispositions and expert advice toward making my tenure as Head of Department not only successful but very enjoyable. In a very special way, I cannot fail to place on record the indefatigable role of Professor I. V. O. Modo, a cherished friend and academic mentor, whose administrative expertise has gone a long way in raising many, including my humble self, to higher academic pedestals. Thank you, Prof.

Finally, permit me to extend my deepest appreciation to the Management of the University of Uyo for the assistance and understanding (you have) displayed in my regard these past twenty-five years of my involvement with the University, up to facilitating the successful delivery of this 43rd Inaugural Lecture of the University of Uyo today, the 29th January, 2015. May God Almighty, who knows how best to reward efforts bless you ALL in Jesus' Dear Name.

(Rev. Fr.) Professor John O. Umoh

Protocols

- The Vice-Chancellor and Chairperson of the Occasion, Professor (Mrs.) Comfort Ekpo
- The Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Administration and Academic)
- Other Principal Officers of the University
- The Provost of the College of Health Sciences
- The Chairman, Committee of Deans
- Dean, Post-graduate School
- Dean of Student Affairs
- Deans of Faculties
- Directors of Institutes and Units
- Heads of Departments
- Distinguished Professors and Other Members of Senate
- High Ranking Academics from the University of Uyo and Sister Institutions
- Colleagues
- The Clergy of Ikot Ekpene Catholic Diocese
- My Lords, Spiritual and Temporal
- My beloved Family of Orientation
- Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord
- My Dean and Members of the Faculty of Social Sciences
- Members of the Nigerian Students Association, University of Uyo Branch
- Friends and Well Wishers
- Gentlemen of the Press
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

PROLEGOMENON

- A young man was sitting beside an older man in a train heading toward the same direction. Between the two, there reigned a dead silence as the older man was busy doing his reading. After a while the younger man decided to break the silence.

The Young Man: *Hello Sir, What are you reading?*

The Old Man: *I am reading from Chapter 6:34-44 of St. Mark's Gospel*

The Young Man: *What does it say?*

The Old Man: *It is the story of how Jesus fed five thousand men with only five loaves and two fish.*

The Young Man: *Do you really believe that?*

The Old Man: *Yes, I do*

The Young Man: *How can! That's how you allow yourselves to be deceived with falsehood and empty stories and superstitions. You know I am a scientist. As a scientist, I do not believe what I cannot observe, or see, or test. As a scientist, I believe in empirical evidence and reliability, etc. I cannot be deceived by anybody or system, no!*

As the young man was raining his scientific acumen on the old man, the train started slowing down and it was time for

the young man to alight. Suddenly, he remembered that he had not even asked who the old man was. And immediately, he asked:

The Young Man: *By the way, Sir, who are you?*

The old man reached out for his complementary card, humbly handing it over to the young man, with the name – Louis Pasteur – **One of the greatest scientists of all ages.**

- St. Paul had a young co-worker by name Demas. Demas devoted more time for worldly interests than for the ministry. St. Paul complained about his undue attachment to the world and the possible dangers and how this affected his ministry. As a result of this inclination, Paul writes the entire history of the young Demas in eight words: **Demas had forsaken me, having loved this world (2 Tim, 4:10).**

- The example of St. Albert:

Albert the Great, the thirteenth century German Bishop and Doctor of the Church had a great interest, and specialized, in both theology and the natural sciences. While being engaged in teaching and research, Albert deepened his spiritual life, blending these two dimensions together in great harmony.

- One raging issue in the academia today is the vexing question of the dividing line between **religion** and **science**. Religion and science are two different but complementary worldviews– two different ways of arriving at truth:

Religious truth and scientific truth. Consider the following issues:

The case of the Malaysian Aircraft

Science initiates and concludes the search: **It is impossible to find it.**

Religion provides the answer: **Without me you can do nothing.**

The case of the Chibok Girls

Science initiates and concludes the search: The girls cannot be located.

Religion provides the answer: They will at least be located in the next life.

In matters like the above, when the limits of science and scientific expertise are exhausted, the appeal to religion for solution becomes inevitable for **religion begins where science ends.**

My definition of the expert: One who knows more and more about less and less until he knows **everything** about **nothing.**

-Religion calls for faith and faith is the product of religion: Both are so inextricably interwoven that you need one to develop the other. They are like two locked boxes, each

containing the key to unlock the other. We need faith to understand religious symbols because **religious language has its own inner logic.**

- For those who have faith, no explanation is necessary; but for those who have no faith, no explanation is possible.

Therefore, scientist, stop being the **Doubting Thomas** (seeing before believing) and embrace the **Thomas Theorem** (if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences).

- So permit me to **presume a certain amount of faith** from my revered audience before I begin.

UNWARD THEN WITHOUT APOLOGIES

INTRODUCTION

Religion is fundamentally about belief, a conviction that cannot be proved or disproved by ordinary means because it is founded on faith. My own suspicion is that, for starters, a preponderance of religious adherents, top to bottom, does not believe what they say or what they claim to profess. This is a heavy suspicion full of ramifications. There are, let us say, four billion Christians in the world today. If this number of people believe as profoundly and behave as steadfastly as they profess, this would be truly a significant manifestation of life on earth, not in heaven. This claim could be extended to every religion, revealed or not. NOW BACK TO BUSINESS.

The topic "Religion" and any sustained discussion on it risk serious emotional outbursts. But when one considers the centrality of it, even from ancient times one can easily conclude that there is no justification for such uncalculated reaction. A second caveat: For the first time in recent memory, we shall be faced here with an Inaugural Lecture without the benefit of graphics or other forms of visual aids. Otherwise, how does one come up with the visual representations and designs of such other-worldly concepts like heaven, hell, angels and saints or, to borrow a leaf from the Catholic encyclopedia, limbo for that matter. These are all concepts that feature prominently in any discussion on religion as another-worldly system but not on religion as a **social institution** as the case at hand. The lecture about to be delivered accordingly is free from any visual aids with the only disadvantage that the end product will be thin and the mileage therefore considerably reduced.

In general terms, the religious institution is considered globally as an important social institution, almost ranking immediately after the family because the daily lives of most people are organized seriously along religious lines. Beliefs, traditions and superstitions, which circumscribe local perceptions, creeds, folklores and values, play very important roles in shaping people's way of life, despite their disinclination to rational and logical disputations.

Owing to differential personal interests and worldviews, the religious worldview is interpreted differently by different people and cultures. The different, and sometimes incompatible, approaches to the religious outlook render any discussion on the topic of religion a highly sensitive and emotionally volatile subject matter. The following discussion is on religion as a social institution, not one that leads to, or focuses on, ultimate concerns.

Our thesis in this venture therefore is: **In addition to the professed ultimate goal of the religious institution, which is other-worldly and spiritual, because of shared experiences in beliefs and meaning, people (humanity) do benefit immensely from religious experiences and practices in the social and civic dimensions.** Put differently, there are positive social and civic derivatives and dividends associated with the religious institution, regardless of a few obvious liabilities. The above thesis will attempt to demonstrate that alongside the metaphysical benefits associated with the religious way of life by those who subscribe to its meaningfulness, religious behavior reduces the level of frustration and difficulties in

the social scene, which would otherwise overpower the individual in an attempt to go it all alone (Umoh, 1985). In a bid to do justice to our chosen topic, we shall further demonstrate that in addition to religious devotion and the pursuit of goals that are inherently spiritual in the main, and relating to man's ultimate end, the existence of such religious structures, like mosques, synagogues, temples, shrines and churches (in the different environments where they apply) also enhances the promotion of social, economic and political values and welfare.

The appeal here therefore is to be less myopic and biased in our perception and assessment of the institution in order to derive the maximum benefit that is associated with the phenomenon as testified by experience and the authorities in the field. The cumulative overview will then help us to relate the findings to the Nigerian social environment for the sake of justice and effective appraisal. In this light, we consider the Sociology of Religion, my area of specialty, to be the intellectual base of this discussion, and the best equipped discipline, more than any other, to interpret the dynamic interplay between the two systems – **religion and society**.

In line with our focus, the lecture that follows is organized to reflect the following sub captions: You are welcome!

1. Conceptual Definitions

- a) Religion
- b) Institution
- c) Social Institution
- d) Mediating Institution (Structures)

- e) Transformative Action
- f) Alienation
- 2. Brief History of Origin of Religion
- 3. Sociology and Religion –theoretical issues
- 4. The Civic Consequences of Religion: Liabilities and Dividends
 - i. The civic **liabilities** of religion
 - a) Psychological liabilities
 - b) Structural liabilities
 - ii The civic **dividends** of religion
 - a) psychological dividends
 - b) structural dividends
- 5. Religion in the Nigerian society: An Issue in National Development
- 6. Conclusion
- 7. Recommendation

1 (a) RELIGION

Several attempts to define religion have met with conflicting views. At times efforts at definition not only reflect scholar's intellectual backgrounds but directly betray the desire to project and protect undue attachment to particular academic interests. Any useful definition of any discipline should be able to distinguish the subject matter's image of itself from that of other disciplines. This is all the more difficult if the problem involved, as the case at hand, does not have its origin in a direct and simple extension of our immediate daily experience, for example as in history and economics, nor fall within the purview of an exact science like mathematics. For example, during

the classical period of the search for the meaning of religion the pioneer scholar in the field, the French Emile Durkheim defined religion to be: **A unified system of beliefs and practices concerning sacred things, i.e. things set apart and forbidden, which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them** (Emile Durkheim, 1912/1965). Academic efforts at defining and clarifying the concept of religion have in modern times reflected the intellectual interests of social scientists, most notably psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists.

Such definitional approaches albeit from different intellectual directions no doubt jointly provide what can safely be regarded as substantive interpretations of religion as *a behavioral mode between the social agent and the unseen apogee (force), as well as the flaw of society.*

Due to the various religious forms in the human society, any definition of religion should be able to encompass the various forms. But it is difficult to produce such a definition without encompassing other phenomena that are not generally thought of as religious. Our definitional approach will be both functional and substantive. Each of these two definitional types has an inherent weakness. The functional definition tends to be too inclusive and may consider all forms of movements as religious. For example the functional definition could regard Communism as a religion even when Communism explicitly rejects religious beliefs. On the other hand, the substantive definition is so exclusive that it makes it difficult for some systems to qualify as a religion. This is

so because certain belief systems commonly regarded as religions, such as Buddhism lack any attachment to supernatural systems and beliefs. Therefore, for ease of comprehension, our definition of religion will be modeled after Roland Robertson's (1970) submission as *the belief in the existence of supernatural beings that have a governing effect on life.* Any belief system that excludes the supernatural touch is automatically excluded from consideration in this discussion, for example Buddhism and Confucianism. These and such others have exclusively mundane orientations, and as such do not undergo the cynicism and doubts associated with the religious outlook and other worldliness

b) INSTITUTION

Role definition and appropriation form an integral part of our understanding of the concept of institution. Role allocation and appropriation comprise the institutional framework of any society. The roles themselves are a set of norms and expectations applied to the incumbent of a particular position. Whether roles are ascribed or achieved, their significance is most obvious when they are seen as part of a whole, that is, as integral parts of the social structure (human society). We therefore define an institution as **an arrangement or organization of roles, one or more of which function to maintain the entire system made up of a set of roles.**

Another way of looking at an institution is to consider it as *a general and relatively stable way in which activities are organized to meet critical system needs.*

This other definition understandably embodies the significance of roles within the system. In the same way as roles are building blocks of institutions, so institutions, including religious institutions are the building blocks of the social structure. If, in fact, we classify institutions according to the ends they serve, we can distinguish five types of institutional orders (Fernandez, 1975), which taken together, with religion as one of the institutional orders (which serves the need of spiritual regeneration), form the skeletal framework of any society.

The others, without prejudice to their differential degrees of weight, include the government, which serves the ends of power; the economy, which serves the ends of goods production and services; the military, which serves the ends of security and protection; the family, which serves the end of procreation and the school, the end of intellectual enlightenment.

First of all, the above arrangement, which symbolizes institutional autonomy, reflects the status of modern society because not all societies know such institutional autonomy. In fact, because many primitive and ancient societies may lack separate institutions for particular ends, this classification may be regarded merely as a sensitizer. The above classification of institutional arrangement logically brings us to the next conceptual clarification necessary for the proper understanding of the lecture – that is the concept of social institution associated with the religious outlook.

c) SOCIAL INSTITUTION

All societies are composed of what social scientists call social institutions. These are defined as “...*the major spheres of social life or societies subsystems, organized to meet basic human needs* (Macionis, 1987). The major ones in the society include the political institution, family, religious institution, the military, educational institution and the economic institution, which Karl Marx believes shapes and dominates all others and is itself the real foundation of society. (That topic is the subject matter of another discussion). **A social institution therefore as contrasted with an ordinary institution is an aspect of social life which has meaning, function, purpose and consequence for the society.** Each of the above is called an institutional order because, according to Fernandez (1975), each includes all those institutions “which have similar consequences and ends or which serve similar objective functions.” For example, included within the religious institutional framework is the Catholic Church, the various Protestant denominations, the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Synagogues. As one of the oldest institutions, **religion is classified as a social institution because the procedure and method of performing its activities in the society are organized as formal and stabilized.** This distinction between an institution (for example, the Church) and a social institution (for example, religion) is necessary as our discussion is not designed to discriminate between the different religious bodies that go by the name ‘Church’ but rather to look at their activities and their overall

functions and importance within the society in which they find themselves. This is an important caveat because religious beliefs of one sort or another are present in every known society but their variety seems to be endless. When some societies, for example, insist on the separation of church and state or the stepping down of religious institutions in schools, the idea may not necessarily be as a result of bias against religion *qua religion* but could be in order to avoid the domination of one religion by another, thereby promoting institutional discrimination.

d) MEDIATING INSTITUTIONS (STRUCTURES)

This is not a new concept in the theoretical literature as some of the earlier theoretical work on pluralism and mass society suggest a range of mediating institutions (see, for example, Toffler, 1971; Rappaport and Associates, 1985). What is new is the “systematic effort to translate it into specific public policy” (Berger and Neuhaus, 1981). Accordingly, the concept is best understood in the sense used by the above authors in their work. According to them, mediating institutions are “...*those institutions standing between the individual in his private life and the large institutions of public life*” (Berger and Neuhaus, 1981). This understanding is shared by others, for example, Rappaport and Associates, according to whom mediating institutions create friendship networks and a caring and sharing community, enabling members to enjoy meaningful lives by adopting varied roles and responsibilities in a complex organization. In a sense, such an institution becomes “a mediating structure between the individual

member and the larger community” (Rappaport and Associates, 1985). Although Berger and Neuhaus have limited their attention to just four of such institutions – neighborhood, family, religion and voluntary associations – the list of such institutions could be extended to include friendships, clubs and, even gang associations. For the purpose of this lecture, the focus is on religion, with careful attention, of course, to the obviously complex problem of interaction and cross institutional effect between one institution and others in the mediating process.

e) TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

This is a rather difficult concept to define since what can be considered transformative action can be very relative and dependent upon the actor’s point of view. Stealing and armed-robbery may be considered transformative actions by the thief and the armed robber but considered disruptive and unconstructive by the rest of the society. The meaning as intended in this lecture will be better captured by operationalization rather than by definition. Accordingly, the concept of transformative action refers to **that action in which the agent (or actor) retains personal control of the situation, the result of which is considered constructive and positively beneficial to either the agent or to the society, or to both.** It is that productive activity through which the agent is able both to develop his own personal power and to change nature so as to make it more facilitative of greater human development. It is, in other words, a positive coping behavior (the opposite of alienation?), to which we now turn.

f) ALIENATION

The concept of alienation in the social sciences is traceable beyond Karl Marx (with whom it is often associated) to the German philosopher, Georg Hegel, for whom alienation is the “*total breakdown of the interconnectedness between the worker and his product.*” Not infrequently, sociologists, psychologists and social psychologists have used the concept interchangeably with the Durkheimian concept of anomie. Although both concepts are closely related in the sense that both are concerned with, and result from, the discrepancy between socially approved norms and goals in the social system, each is concerned with somewhat different sets of social factors that contribute to its development.

Karl Marx’s idea of alienation, like Durkheim’s anomie, involves the relationship between social phenomena and individual states of mind. In this lecture, alienation will be used in the sense of “the breakdown of the individual’s sense of attachment to society”, although some contemporary literature has favored a broader conceptualization, which is either a direct function of methodological differences or a matter of philosophy of science and of theory.

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION

Religious practices have existed for as long as mankind has been around on the planet earth. Early man introduced religious behavior as a result of his inability to explain

certain unknown forces and other mysterious but natural phenomena in his immediate environment. When early men – our ancestors – worshipped such natural bodies like the moon, the sun, the weather itself, etc., they were displaying some elements of religious behavior that were to evolve into present-day complex forms of modern religious organizations

The human inquisitiveness, and rightly so, for the origin of religious behavior actually gave rise to the scientific study of religion which in turn developed the two primitive approaches – Animism and Naturism – to facilitate the venture. Both approaches traced the origin of religion to human ignorance, as primitive man needed desperately some spiritual support in the face of the mystical and overwhelming forces of nature. What started as primitive understanding of man’s mystical relationship with the forces of nature was later to evolve into a more complex and contemporary understanding of religion as “...A unified system of beliefs and practices concerning sacred things, i.e. things set apart and forbidden, which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them” (Durkheim, 1965).

In his attempt to solve the puzzle of how mankind came by the separation between the sacred (things set apart for extraordinary usage) and the profane (things for ordinary day-to-day usage), Durkheim gave himself the task of studying what has come to be recognized as the most primitive type of all religions, TOTEMISM. Totemism can be understood, not only as a religion (the practice of the separation of the sacred from the profane) but also as the

belief in the mystical and ritual relationship between certain classes or species of animals or plants/objects and a social group (Umoh, 2005). Some categories of totems include lizards, pythons, animals and plants and serve as important symbols of unity among social groups that share common totems. (These items and the superstitious practices associated with them are familiar items of our daily experiences). The practice is still common even among some contemporary cultural units. Totemism can therefore be seen as a complex religion through which man's relation to his fellow man and to nature is organized. But it all started as a primitive form of religious behavior. The intrinsic validity of the religious experience in relation to the limit situation which (early) man found himself with is, of course, of little importance to the sociologist of religion. Rather what matters to him, is the emotional role of such projection and the attainment of mystical security. And as a result of their importance, all religions contain some mystical elements. These elements, unfortunately, defy theoretical explanations due to their non-experiential nature.

3. SOCIOLOGY AND RELIGION: SOME THEORETICAL ISSUES

The academic interplay between sociology and religion, commonly referred to as sociology of religion is an intellectual attempt to examine the phenomenon of religion as a social institution, that is, in terms of its relevance in the human society without prejudice to its spiritual or other-worldly implication and relevance. Definitionally,

the sociology of religion is the study of the phenomenon of religion as a social institution, i.e. in so far as it has meaning, function and consequence for society. Those who devote themselves to this brand of study – sociologists of religion- direct their attention to uncovering the “Why” of the religious behavior and the effect of such behavior on other behavioral orientations generally. By so doing sociology of religion attempts to justify or otherwise, condemn the existence of religion in the human society. It had long been observed, unfortunately, that “less systematic sociological research had been devoted to religion than to any other major institution in our society”; particularly lacking are studies of the interrelations between modern religious institutions and other basic institutional systems” (Lenski, 1963). And long before the above claim, an authority in the field of religion, Milton J. Yinger had observed that “...a theory that maintains a continuous and systematic interest in the interaction of religion and society seems to be difficult to develop” (Yinger, 1957). This is, however no sufficient excuse for a total neglect of the area, as nothing might ever be gained by so doing. Our primary interest, therefore, is in examining how religion is organized, that is, (1) how religion affects members of the society, either positively or otherwise, (2) the relationship between systems of belief and the social structure, and (3) how such relationship changes over time (Umoh, 2005).

These issues give a new direction to sociology of religion as an academic discipline and further strengthen its relevance and invitation to credibility in contemporary society. It is the sociology of religion that brought to focus

the problem of the fate of the individual in modern society. This new direction is a far cry from the old-fashioned focus of the social sciences before the nineteenth century with their exclusive concern with only the analysis of social systems as if the individual himself is irrelevant. Although sociology as a science deals, not with the individual, but with the group, that is, with individuals-in-interaction, yet the individual in his uniqueness is never completely ignored in sociological analysis. Luckman's assertion sufficiently emphasized this important point. According to him, "...the social basis of the new emerging religions is to be found in the private sphere" (Luckman, 1967). Today, religion, in order to retain its relevance has to extend its ultimate frontiers to the attention of the autonomous individual who is the potential consumer of its product. In the view of the founders of the discipline, *the problem of individual existence is a religious problem*. That is why it became necessary to look into questions that touch directly on the individual, such questions as: **What is the impact of modern society on individual life? In what way can the individual maintain his autonomy in modern society?** Etc. Such questions are part of the concern of the religious worldview.

Both Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, the pioneers in the field, articulated the hypothesis that there is a religious component in the relation of the individual to contemporary society. Durkheim in particular postulated that man is a "HOMO DUPLEX", that is, he is not only an individual but also a social being. The change of emphasis by sociology of religion to only studies on "parish

sociology", demography of the churches, analysis of sectarian movements and ecclesiastical organizations etc. is certainly a change in the wrong direction. The state of theory, in this regard, is therefore, regressive. One cannot underestimate what Durkheim meant when he said of religion "*c'est de la vie serieuse*" – that religion is an indispensable way of life that should be reckoned with in the society. In order to give importance to the phenomenon of religion both in the society and the intellectual life, Durkheim in 'THE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE' (1912/1965) argued that the basic categories of human thought – cause, time and space – all emerged after man developed religion, which he called the cornerstone of all thought, including scientific thought and reasoning. That is a testimony to the importance of religion in the social arena.

The above explains why the sociology of religion as a scientific and academic discipline is not committed to any particular manner of faith manifestation. The sociology of religion demands no faith commitment whatsoever. It is an open discipline which should be explored by any and everybody in the interest of the entire society. This is because as a scientific discipline, it is conscious of its limits and that it is not qualified to comment on such issues as the validity of the different religions, nor attempt to answer the complex question of whether God exists or not. Such and similar issues are beyond space and time, the purview of scientific operation. There are better equipped disciplines to handle such issues – theology, metaphysics, for example, etc. As a scientific

discipline the sociology of religion assigns itself only the task of taking a sincere and honest look at the religious institution from an objective point of view in order to bring to limelight its positive and negative effects on both the society and the individual in order to determine its net balance of consequences. This then brings us to the issue that brought us here: OF WHAT USE IS THIS OTHER-WORLDLY ORIENTED SYSTEM OF BELIEF TO THE HUMAN (EARTHLY) SOCIETY?

4. THE CIVIC CONSEQUENCES OF RELIGION: LIABILITIES AND DIVIDENDS

The major problem that this lecture seeks to address is: *What are the (social) benefits and dividends derivable from the phenomenon of religion in the human society?* Or, may be, as I have argued elsewhere, the question should be framed the other way round: Are there any benefits associated with that system of belief described as religion in the human society? If “Yes”, what are they? If ‘No’, why sustain it? Accordingly, this segment of our discussion is going to take an honest look at religion and present an objective analysis of the phenomenon in respect of its negative and positive manifestations as they affect the individual as well as the society in which it operates. Accordingly, the section will be divided into the following subthemes for clarity and ease of comprehension:

- i) The Civic Liabilities of Religion
 - a) psychological liabilities
 - b) structural liabilities
- ii) The Civic dividends of religion

- a) psychological dividends
- b) structural dividends

5. RELIGION IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY: AN ISSUE IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

5.1 *The Civic Liabilities of Religion: General Overview*

It would be foolhardy to even think of any system or behavioral pattern which involves human nature that is free from associated dark side. Let us consider for a moment the following systems of belief and all they stand for: communism, democracy, politics, even education – none is free of their dark side or undesirable effects. To so believe tantamount to wishful thinking or dreaming of Champaign in the death cell, or talking of e-library without electric power. Afterwards, the real meaning of human nature (not its Dictionary meaning) is associated with weakness and the propensity to antisocial tendency. And if religion as a way of life is part of the human scene, it cannot be free of being tainted with the human dark side.

The problem (and this is associated mainly with the enemies of the system) is in making a mountain out of a moll hill, that is, overemphasizing the negative side to the extent of pretending to make nonsense of its full benefits for the good of both society and the individual. As was observed in a public lecture in the University of Edinburg in the United Kingdom by a renowned Nigerian and Professor of religious studies, “religious institutions must not be seen as incorruptible bodies, noting that since human beings were part of them, they are bound to be affected by societal vices” (The Nation. March 21, 2013. Don harps on Role of Religions. P. 36). He advised the public to look

at the religious organizations from a more objective perspective to discover their duty and function to both individual and society. When these religious organizations are looked at objectively, we will discover their social, economic and political roles. According to the Professor, aside from being religious organizations the churches and the mosques also contribute to the creation of jobs for their adherents.

What this whole point is saying is that the ills associated with religion are really not in the nature of religion itself as a belief system and ideology but in the nature of the adherents, afterwards no religion advises its adherents to kill and maim others as part of its doctrinal proclamations, not even Islam, which has been currently bastardized, misinterpreted and abused. What may be seen as the negative aspects of the religious phenomenon, as we shall see, may not necessarily be due to religious weakness but to a philosophical error, pride or ignorance. The weakness is in the individual (faithful), not in the system (religion). Explaining the character of religious conflict in Nigeria, (or anywhere else for that matter), Mohammed (2008) notes that conflict identified as religious usually does not stem from disagreement over theological issues, but from the association of religious identity and affiliation with ethnic division, economic and political factors.

One of the frequent causes of religious conflict is unregulated competition, and to argue that every religious violence results in intense damage to human life and material property (Archibong, *et al.*, 2009) is to suggest that other non religious conflicts are desired as if they

induce healthy and positive consequences just because they are nonreligious – What a fallacy!

Today, there are blind followerships of what is called Marxism as an ideology, which unfortunately has translated into a behavioral tendency. Karl Marx (1818-1883) himself wrote very little on religion because his interest on the matter was far more minimal than is generally assumed. Consequently, none of his major works, the German Ideology (1846/1947) the Communist Manifesto (1848/1960) and the Capital (1867/1973) had any direct bearing on religion as an issue. The only slight reference to religion by Marx is found in his “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right (1844/1963), in which Marx criticizes the religious implication of Hegel’s philosophy. As a result, Marx did not give religion any extensive consideration. His concern instead was to relate Protestantism in nineteenth century Europe to the development of capitalism. Therefore, any explanation on religion given by Marx must be seen in terms of that particular system of beliefs (Winter, 1977).

In connecting religion to the particular means of production in society in the nineteenth century, and seeing it to be responsible for the exploitative capacity of capitalistic structure, Marx concluded that religion is a burden placed on humanity, a burden which would be lifted only after religion is suppressed. This prediction, due to its faulty premise has turned out to be an eternal fallacy and the obituary of religion presupposed by the prediction is unfortunately premature. Those who feel that the Marxian atheistic approach should be used to pronounce

judgment and deal a fatal blow on religion fail to consider other vital issues associated with Karl Marx's early days and overall background, which certainly influenced his intellectual orientation in later life. Accordingly, it is of utmost importance to consider as follows concerning Marx before opting for him as our model and exemplar: Marx had a great passion for God in his early days as a faithful Jew and actually saw God as a caring Father. Gradually, Marx drifted into what can be described as palpable doubt having become a follower of the Greek mythological Prometheus, who hated the gods. Secondly, from a previous religious background Marx bought, and identified with Feuerbach's philosophy of absolute materialism, which considered everything to be of no value, except matter.

Additionally, Hegel's conception of human alienation from his labour played an important part in what Marx was to become. Worth considering further was his materially poor background which left him penniless at some point in his career. And, finally, as if the last straw that was to break the camel's back, Marx grew to become a victim of isolation and loneliness, having ended up as a loner due to discrimination by both the Prussians, on account of his Jewish background, and by his fellow Jews, because of defection in faith through apostasy. The counter conversion which Marx experienced – first from Judaism to Christianity and later from Christianity to atheism – left him completely helpless and abandoned by all, making him strike such a devastating blow on religion that he came to see God, the very God he earlier loved and worshipped as

an enemy of all human progress. In desperation, Marx concluded that there is no God. In fact Marx ended up voicing the most desperate and despondent pronouncement of an atheist – **Man created God out of necessity to overcome human alienation**, a concept borrowed from Hegel and understood as *the breakdown of the natural interconnectedness between man and the product of his hand*, with God singled out as the enemy of all human progress. From the foregoing it is easy to appreciate, but not excuse, Karl Marx's predicament and subsequent dismissal of both God and religion from all aspects of social life, the latter which he described as *opium (hiding place) of the masses*. Any followership of that nineteenth century social philosopher, political scientist, economist and sociologist therefore, must be interpreted as a manifestation (reflection) of ignorance of either the phenomenon of religion or of history.

The above sketchy treatment of the man, Karl Marx, and his philosophy are not meant to exonerate the religious outlook and practice from whatever real weaknesses, liabilities and disadvantages are objectively associated with it; rather it is meant to underscore the important fact that historical antecedents play an important part in our lives, and to **further remind us that not all intellectual outpouring is to be taken at its face value since logic is conditioned by the social environment in which it is produced**. Onward then without apologies.

5. (a) Psychological liabilities of Religion

By psychological liabilities is intended the personal costs

of the religious disposition to the individual who subscribes to it as a fashionable way of life. It has already been observed that no social item or structure is so sacrosanct as to be exonerated from an adverse consequence or implication in so far as it operates in the world of human beings. The twentieth century Sociologist, Robert K. Merton, was very conscious of this fact when he called for the determination or assessment of what he called the **“net balance of consequences”** of social items, for example religion, for the human society.

Although over the years, my work as a sociologist of religion has, for the most part, been directed at excavating what the benefits of the phenomenon have been for the individual, yet it does occasionally branch off into looking into the associated disadvantages for the same individual. We shall now consider what I call the psychological (individual) liabilities of the religious outlook or belief system. It is proper that we start such an analysis with the ideas or apprehension of the pioneer analyst of the system himself, the French Emile Durkheim.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), although borrowing heavily from the impetus provided by such eighteenth century social philosophers like Saint-Simon (1760-1826) and William James, the experimental psychologist, concluded that there are many advantages associated with the phenomenon of religion, without bothering to examine the corresponding dysfunctions. Later analysts, notably Thomas O'Dea and Janet Aviad (1982, in Bassis et al., 1984) did observe that despite the advantages associated with the religious belief system, the phenomenon leaves in its wake

clearly identifiable and corresponding **negative by-products**.

- Such negative and disintegrative manifestations, according to them, include religion's ability to inhibit avenues for social change through legitimate protest and revolution.
- Additionally, religion has the unique capacity to sanctify and give approval to authoritarian structure by blocking progress in science and other areas. - Furthermore, prophetic criticisms and demands for change may be so utopian and unrealistic that in the end, they become obstacles to practical reform. In its ability to create bonds of unity between individuals and the religious groups noted by Durkheim, religion can promote (social) conflict.
- The conflict theorists in their analysis of the negative social impact of religion went further to observe that religion inadvertently can induce and promote immaturity by encouraging the dependence of its adherents on religious institutions and their leaders.
- The direct outcome of the above trends is religion's ability to discourage individual responsibility and social creativity, thereby inhibiting the chances of self development (Bassis, Gilles and Levine, 1984; O'Dea (1966). Other scholars, especially historians and social philosophers, have pointed out that

religion can sometimes have a negative effect upon both the welfare of society and that of the individual (Umoh, 2006). Very specifically, O'Dea (1966) points out that religious issues have been among the most leading causes of wars; and the religious convictions have often given rise to intolerance and persecution. Afterwards, many of the wars of the Middle Ages were fought in the name of religion including the Spanish Inquisition of the same period.

- Religious loyalty has united some men only to divide others. Jonathan Swift, a clergy of the Anglican Communion once said, "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another."

All these demonstrate the dark side (negative, latent, unintended aspect) of the phenomenon of religion for the individual. It must be noted without bias, however, that although we are often inclined to blame what is purely human overzealousness on religion, objective assessment tends to point to the contrary. We can defend the above position because the problem of religious conflict may not of necessity be caused by the religious phenomenon itself but by naïve overzealousness and exuberance, of religious adherents who have turned themselves into zombies of religion by acting mostly out of sentiments and ignorance (Adelola, 1987, in Umoh, 2006). The above, however is not intended to exonerate the phenomenon from the inherent real dangers it poses to the individual as observed. For example, religious differences have a high potential

of separating people from one another. **Ironically, Sunday which should be the day that demonstrates Christian unity, turns out to be the most divisive day of the week because of the tendency to create religious and organizational cells that pit one religious group against another in an effort to prove one's religious superiority and spiritual uprightness.**

Through history, religious differences have been the basis for tension, animosity, hostility and sometimes open warfare. Since it is the duty of religion to define and ensure appropriate behavior, differential definitions by varying religious bodies' conflict with one another, thereby hampering normal and smooth human relations. **Due to the wrong interpretation of the pasturing ministry today as the most lucrative and profit inclined "business enterprise", many of the instances of religious conflict can be traced to undue attempts by some selfish religious bodies to outdo others in matters of doctrine and worship in order to have the advantage of increase in membership.** At the end of the day, members strive for recognition as the group with the more superior religion. Such behavior in most instances results in conflictual tendencies and at the end becomes hostile to others who do not subscribe to such orientation. This and similar situations breed particularism, which makes for such rigid exclusiveness that, at the end, there is no effort at toleration of other religious worldviews. The end result of this is that such religious bodies preach one form of religious morality but practice another. Many modern day religious bodies and their self-acclaimed prophets are

grossly guilty of this indictment because preaching without practicing what is preached portrays religion as a system of rhetoric rather than one of ultimate significance. This is an apology as this type of output is not in the nature of the religious system itself but a manifestation of the human element very well present in religion as a social (human) institution, as already observed.

Since conflict has been one of the most obvious negative end-products of the religious organizations in the society, we should seek to identify some more of the causes of such conflicts. Competition between religious organizations for example has been on the increase in modern societies because of the uncontrolled proliferation of the religious organizations in an alarming frequency in the society. The above trend can be associated with present-day emphasis on religious freedom carried beyond rationally tolerable limits, which demonstrates the human inability to manage freedom.

Bruce (1995; 1996) has attempted to identify the reason(s) behind the overwhelming presence of the religious organizations witnessed in the society today. According to him, **the most prominent reason responsible for the development of a range of religious institutions, including sects and cults is the offshoot of a general process of modernization and secularization.** This situation, he believes, is further traced to the weakening structures in present-day church in contrast to the situation in the Middle Ages. **The weakness drives people in search of less traditional forms and alternatives.** In addition, the many abuses

with which the leaders of some of these religious organizations have been associated further strengthen the thesis in favor of religious conflict. In this era of inclination to capitalistic philosophy and mentality, and competition for material wealth, even with the least personal effort, some leaders of religion have given into the temptation of commercializing their products for mere material advantages. These behaviors have resulted in exploitation and immoderation which, when unchecked have tended to dismember religious outfits leading to conflict at the level of the individual who has found it more expedient to abandon one-time cherished faiths in order to establish their own.

(b) Structural Liabilities of Religion

Since we have noted some disadvantages of the religious phenomenon to the individual, we now take a glance at the negative side of the religious system as associated with the society as a system. For purpose of emphasis, I dare repeat that there is yet no (social) institution, including religion that does not leave behind some dark side in its wake. We earlier noted the existence of conflict at the individual level as a result of the "divide and rule" attitude among its members. The same conflict situation can also be observed at the societal level due to ethnic nationalism as adherents of the different religions try to identify their ethnic heritage in order to outdo others. **Where ethnic nationalism is overstretched, those from other tribes are seen as perceived enemies and persecuted accordingly for failure to tow the same line of**

religious persuasion. A case in point is the Kaduna incident in the Northern part of Nigeria in 1997, which left thousands of people dead and many others displaced with property worth millions of Naira destroyed. The cause? A religious feud between Christians and Muslims. When traced, the core issue went beyond religious nationalism. It was a matter of **religious bigotry**. Similar religiously motivated conflicts but hiding under the cloak of ethnicity have been witnessed at various times in the history of many nations. For example, the Crusades of Medieval Europe immediately come to mind. Other examples include the atrocities in the Sudan and Lebanon and the present situation in Northern Ireland. History has recorded that the spread of Islam was successful because of the readiness (and willingness) of Muslims to apply the sword against infidels.

Other causes of conflict attributable to religion include **religious fanaticism** which shares the same meaning as **religious extremism**. But in fairness, it is wrong to perceive religious fanaticism as belonging to the nature of religion as religion because in consideration of religion's direct functions, fanaticism, which can equally apply to other areas of social life, politics, and business, etc, is an irrational attitude to religion, which leads the members to the practice of religion beyond the bounds of reason and moderation. Religious fanaticism is the negative display of the religious way characterized by exaggeration and manipulation, excesses and, sometimes violence. At the most extreme case, religious fanaticism can be associated with hysteria and mob action with destructive consequences and gross violation of the principles of justice and religious liberty.

Another case in point concerning the dysfunction of religion in modern society is the idea or concept of **religious pluralism**. Traditionally, religion served as a unifying force in the society as a result of its ability to bring together people of diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Today, this is no longer the case as the institution has formed itself into different and, in many instances, contrasting and conflicting worshipping camps encouraging the members of each cell to support the contradictory doctrinal cells, which invariably develop into enemy camps with contrasting ideological and doctrinal interests. This negates Durkheim's idea of religion as a group movement, bringing together, and linking, members who share a common identity. The benefits of unity as an offshoot of religion can no longer be guaranteed in the face of religious pluralism and divisiveness. In countries where people have an assortment of religious options, like the United States (Stewart, 1981) and Nigeria (Umoh, 2005) and many of the nations in the African sub region, the potential for religious conflict can be several points above the mean.

As a final indictment of the religious inspiration and its damaging effects, we should not fail to observe what has come to affect a good proportion of modern social life, when it comes to religion, that is, **religious intolerance**. When left unchecked in its early stage, religious intolerance often ends up as another form of religious conflict. It manifests as the **unwillingness of members of one religious body to tolerate the tenets of the religious beliefs and dogmas of other religions.**

(This is not to say that all religious beliefs are worth the salt). This behavior is typical of cults, sects and contemporary New Religious Movements (NRMs), which are highly critical, and at variance with, the positions of other religions, especially the orthodox editions. That explains the experiences of clashes between religious bodies, even beyond the intellectual level to the level of behavior and practice, just because of differences and variations in doctrinal ideologies. Wallis (1984) long ago observed that conflictual tendencies are common among sects and cults, which he defines as *groups that claim to be uniquely legitimate and which advocate religious doctrines that are widely regarded as deviant*.

In fact, it could be said that in countries with a proliferation of religious organizations in the forms of sects and cults, the potential for religious intolerance is equally high, making frequent religious conflicts regular occurrences in the system. This is common in the expression of ritualistic and intellectual religiosity. Many types of religious conflicts are manifested in the forms of **religious fundamentalism**, which means a return to the roots, according to the translation of the concept. Fundamentalist religion is a loosely organized religious movement, having many of the traits of cults and sects. As a result of its sect-like attribute, it has a tendency to reject the current social and political arrangements of the secular order as well as those of other religions. The argument has been advanced (Armstrong, 2001) that fundamentalist movements are mere reflections of contemporary social arrangements, which they see as attempts by Western

secular values to wipe out their religions, and the fundamentalists react by trying to struggle (fight?) for survival. What then appears as religious conflict is the end-product of the clash of this fundamentalist ideology with the Western secular values. In an attempt to keep their balance as an exclusive religious category, the fundamentalists insist on the literal interpretation of the Bible and are rather proud to see themselves as antiestablishment and anti-intellectual. By seeing themselves to be in sharp contrast to established religions they tend to be radical and critical of others. By so doing, they breed conflict in the system. A glaring instance of the radical manifestation of the fundamentalist instinct in recent times is the September 11, 2001 attack on the WTO building in the United States by Islamic militants.

Religious conflict has also been explained in terms of **differences in culture** (Beyer, 1994; Huntington, 1993). The meeting of various cultures – religion itself is a critical world culture – has a great potential in generating conflict because of overwhelming cultural differences and the increasing tendency to be culturally self-protecting and defensive. This means that the greater the chance of cultural contact the more the likelihood of religious conflict. Logically then, religious conflict must be seen as an unavoidable part of modern social arrangements. What all this means is that civic wars have been very closely linked with religious divisiveness, due to cultural contact. Sometimes, as in the medieval Crusades and the civil war today between the Muslims and Christians in Lebanon, members of different faiths directly confront themselves

in conflict. There are even occasions when wars involve different churches of the same faith like the struggle between the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. The complexity of religious warfare can be demonstrated in the conflict in Northern Ireland, which has claimed over 1,500 Protestants and Catholics (Stewart, 1981) since its outbreak in 1969. At times, though, religion is used merely as a scapegoat for what originated as political and economic issues. The Northern Ireland war is fought simply because the minority Catholics wanted equality with the dominant Protestants and ever since, the political situation had been complicated by conflicting attitudes towards British rule and the Irish Republican Army's desire to reunify the two Irelands. In the beginning, religion itself was never an issue but later the battle line was drawn along religious and social class lines. Religion then became such a factor that an Irish political scientist observed long ago **"In Ireland, an atheist must be a Protestant atheist or Catholic atheist in order to have status in the society"** (Leo, 1974). But it is not all about the ills of the religious organization. What of the benefits, which many have openly acknowledged? The skeptics will immediately ask: Like what? The next section will be an attempt to address the above question.

5.2 THE CIVIC DIVIDENDS OF RELIGION

a) Psychological Dividends

Many functions – identified as psychological functions – have been associated with religion's usefulness for the individual. Firstly, religion serves as **guide** for the

individual in an immense and confusing universe, by helping to shape behavior through moral and ethical codes. Through rituals and ceremonies (baptism, circumcision, the marriage ceremony and last and funeral rites), which mark turning points in the life process, religion helps to *organize* the life experiences of the beneficiaries. Furthermore, membership in a religious community provides an **identity** benefit. This is true of the Black Muslims in America, of whom Lincoln (1961) long testified:

The true believer casts off at last his old self and takes on a new identity. He changes his name, his religion, his homeland, his "natural" language, his moral and cultural values, his very purpose in living. He is no longer a Negro so long despised by the white man that he has come almost to despise himself. Now he is a Black man ...bearing in himself the power of the Black Nation and its glorious destiny (Lincoln, 1961).

For the Black Moslem, religion provides a sense of **identity** and **self esteem**, helping him to see himself as divinely inspired and capable of realizing his full potential as an individual. With his limited capacity to comprehend occurrences that go beyond the ordinary and scientific, religion provides some **meaningful answers** by referring the causes of such occurrences to God or to the gods, thereby being furnished with a sense of security.

In a study by Berger and Neuhaus (1981) to test the usefulness of religion in the society for the individual, the

authors provided a model which suggested that several institutions, among which the religious institution is one, have mediating potentials, particularly for those who have relatively little power in society. According to the Berger-Neuhaus theory:

The mega structures (big firms, organizations, industries, etc) are typically alienating ...; Not only are religious institutions significant "players" in the public realm, but they are singularly important to the way people order their lives and values at the most local and concrete levels of their existence... It is precisely in the interest of public policy to advance a positive approach to the church as a key mediating structure (Berger and Neuhaus, 1981). This line of reasoning clearly manifests a functional point of view according to which religion is not only a cultural universal but has its basis in innate human needs, some of which are emotional, allowing one to feel that there is a source of power and hope which is greater than one's own resources (Malinowski, 1931). Others are social psychological, providing a sense of identity and oneness to its members (Greely, 1972). The Berger-Neuhaus model of the religious institution presents a challenge to the notion of the unrelenting mass society, a concern already expressed some fifty years ago (Vidich and Bensman, 1868; Toffler, 1971 etc). Such concerns emphasize that the mega structures resulting from modernization – the modern state, large economic conglomerates of capitalist enterprise, big labor, and the growing bureaucracies that administer wide sectors of the society – while providing necessary human services, also leave behind **social evils of impersonality,**

unresponsiveness and excessive interference in private lives. Thus, in the interaction between the public and private sector, the individual is left very much to his own devices and the logical results are anxiety, uncertainty and alienation. Max Weber, at the turn of the nineteenth century expressed a similar concern over the human cost of bureaucratization, leading to its inability to result in humane societies, thereby leading to what he called an "iron cage", that is, overemphasis on the spirit of capitalism/material production and rationality in which technical and economic condition of machine production determine the lives of individuals. **It is observed that the crisis of alienation is experienced on different levels by different people, but that "many who handle it more successfully than most have access to institutions that mediate between the two spheres, particularly the religious institution"** (Berger and Neuhaus, 1981). **Here lies the need for religious intervention for successful execution of individual life in modern society, regardless of the level of individual commitment to the concept of heavenly reward in the afterlife.**

From the time of its infancy some two centuries ago, the pioneer founders of the sociological discipline, people like August Comte (1798-1857) as well as his influential master, the French economist and philosopher, Henri de Saint Simon (1760-1825), considered **social organization as incapable of existence without the binding force of some sort of spiritual ethos.**

The British anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, submitted that anxiety, emotional stress and tension, daily

human occurrences, tend to disrupt human life. Situations that produce these emotions include birth, puberty, marriage and death. He notes that in almost all societies these life crises are surrounded with religious rituals in order to cushion and minimize their traumatic effect, which would otherwise tear the individual to pieces. Using data from small-scale non-literate societies in the Trobriand islands, off the coast of New Guinea, Malinowski sees religion as **reinforcing social norms and values and promoting social solidarity** (Malinowski, 1954). The above is Malinowski's distinctive contribution to the sociology of religion.

Emile Durkheim had earlier reached the same conclusion some decades before him in a similar ethnographic study with the Arunta people of Australia. According Durkheim, in reinforcing group norms and values by adding a sacred dimension to everyday social pressure, religious rituals encourage **social solidarity** by bringing members of the society together to reaffirm their common bonds and social heritage. In addition to the above, Durkheim contends that religion has the unique ability to **regulate human needs and actions through beliefs about the sacred**.

Other functions of the religious way of life to the individual have also been identified. In his study of the religious organization of the Arunta people referred to above, Emile Durkheim came to the conclusion that religion's most important psychological usefulness is its ability to integrate people (members) into the society. The importance of integration of members for the social system

was underscored by the British Anthropologist, A. R. Radcliffe Brown. According to Brown, *one necessary condition for the survival of the social system is the minimal integration of its parts*. More than any other (social) institution, the religious system uniquely fulfils this task, that is, facilitating the integration of the individuals into the society.

Talcott Parsons, one of the proponents of the functional thesis of religion also established that as a cultural system, religious beliefs **give meaning to life**. By his standard, religion has always attempted to answer the rather complex questions about oneself and the world he lives in. This particular function of religion to the individual is paramount important in relation to the frustrations and disappointments human beings are daily exposed to, which threaten to shatter beliefs about the meaning of life and in the process make human existence meaningless. Since human life is full of contradictions that threaten the meanings that people place on life, Parsons argues that one of the major functions of religion is to **"make sense"** of all experiences, no matter how meaningless or contradictory they appear.

In the context of religion making sense of the apparently senseless, we can consider **the question of human suffering**. When confronted with suffering, people are often tempted into asking certain questions: for example, why must men suffer deprivation and pain? Human inability to address such question satisfactorily can drive the individual into hopelessness and meaningless living. In the face of (this) helplessness, religion provides

a range of answers which can help the individual to forge ahead. For example, religion can suggest and advise the individual that suffering is imposed by God to test a person's faith, or as a punishment for sins, or that suffering with fortitude and hope will yield its reward in the afterlife (heaven). Accordingly, suffering becomes meaningful and encourages a coping strategy. Furthermore, **'religion can be good for health.'** It helps healing, it gives hope. But we should not allow it to be a threat to our health' (Cosmas Odoemena, the Daily Sun, August 14, 2014). Prayer can enhance health, but it should not be a substitute for medical intervention as wrongly believed in some quarters, especially by those who look for miracle where there is need for none. Speaking on the role of religion in health care, Richard P. Slogan, a psychologist, submits as follows in the New England Journal of Medicine: *Religion may encourage magical thinking as people pray for and expect physical healing as if God were a giant genie at the beck and call of every human whim. Then if physical healing does not come immediately, the person may be disappointed and disheartened, claiming that the prayer was not answered and that God does not care, or worse, that the illness was sent by an angry, vengeful god as a punishment.* This is an unfortunate approach to religion. Very unfortunate, indeed! Religion is not a service station, where one goes to, gets treatment (health) and comes out.

According to the American Medical Association (AMA), prayer as therapy should not delay access to traditional medical care; not doing so is attempting suicide. **We pray and search earnestly for miracles but fail to**

realize that God's countless unmerited favors, which we never asked for, are themselves miracles. That one is responding to treatment is itself a miracle – not all patients do so. Sometimes God allows disease to remind us of Him and of our mortality. That is the role of the dreaded 'Ebola' outbreak. Without problems many will not serve God. So religion is important in matters of illness and health. Religion provides this same approach to the problem of evil, another universal phenomenon, which (ordinary) humanity is still struggling to grapple with: evil will receive its just deserts in the afterlife. With this understanding, mankind tries to order its behavior accordingly. Talcott Parsons in keeping with this understanding sees a major function of religion as **the provision of meaning to events that are frustrating and contradictory** (Parsons, 1965a).

Given this array of functions performed by religion for the individual in the society, which undoubtedly supersede its negative effects, it became necessary to subject some of the claims to empirical investigation as the following section demonstrates.

5.2.1. The Berger-Neuhaus model of the mediating Role of Religion: An Empirical Evidence

In the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, the concept of agriculture as both business and means of livelihood underwent an unfortunate and dramatic turn around in what the Americans define as **"family farm."** This concept is in contrast to what they conceive of as **"Corporate agribusiness."** In this context, the **"myth"** of corporate

agribusiness assumes that the agricultural enterprise and ranches should be organized on a purely industrial model: large, few in number, capital intensive, corporate, technologically oriented towards the rigorous division and eventual elimination of human labor (Strange, 1984). In contrast to the corporate agribusiness, the family farm is small and moderate-sized farm, a concept derived from the Jeffersonian ideal of democracy founded on a class of landed citizens. In its ideal form, the **Family Farm** is opposed to the corporate agribusiness ideology which is profit oriented and views food and land as commodities. The conceptual basis for family farm may be traced to Schumacher's (1973) book, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People mattered*. The idea of family farm as reflected in Schumacher's book placed priority on human needs and values over productivity *per se* and condemns the self-destructive tendency of industrial corporate agribusiness which consumes resource base.

It is agricultural technology designed with a human face or, to use Schumacher's phrase, a replacement of the technology of *mass production* with the technology of *production for and by the masses*. This idea was well appreciated and welcome by the American people. Suddenly came a change at the expense of the "family farm" and the farmers, and a tendency to backslide towards the ideal of the previous agribusiness, leading to what was defined as the "**family farm crisis**", which became a nationwide phenomenon that attracted the sympathetic attention of individuals as well as institutions, religious and political.

Both nationally and at the level of the affected States, the following statistical revelations concerning the family farm were uncovered: In the late 1930s, there were 6,800,000 farms in the United States, but by 1978, this number had dropped to 2,750,000 (Greene, 1978). In 1982, the number had dropped again to 2,240,976 (1982 Census of Agriculture, Vol. 1). Concluding from this steady trend, Green indicated that most of the family farmers had been forced to sell out by the "**corporate invasion of agriculture**." On the particular State of interest, South Dakota, the 1984 Justice Task Force uncovered the following historical trend: In the early 1930s, there were over 83,000 family farms, the highest number ever recorded. By 1982, there were 37,000 farms, a decline of some 55%, or 1.5% to 2% annual increase. The situation led to the loss of occupational livelihood for many farmers and the effects, financial as well as emotional, were untold for many families.

Family farm studies in the 1980s indicated a sudden change in farmer's personal behaviors. These behavioral changes, accordingly had adverse effects on the social lives of farm families, particularly children. Instances of emotional stress, family turmoil and violence, as well as unprecedented suicide attempts were reported in great numbers (Watertown Public Opinion, May 5, 1984:4), while some farmers simply withdrew from public and community involvement as a result of a feeling of low self esteem, meaninglessness and burnout (Catholic Bulletin, June 9-15:16). Thus the trauma of the American "farm crisis" was seen to be related to the alienating conditions

discussed earlier. This attracted my attention, not only as a clergy with pastoral calling and concern but also as a Sociologist of Religion with special interest in the interaction between the two systems, religion and society.

In the light of the above state of affairs, an empirical verification was undertaken in order to **test the relationship between religion and its ability to reduce feelings of alienation** (Umoh, 1985). Accordingly, two theoretical questions were raised as follows in order to test the relationship:

A) From the standpoint of the Church

1. Does the church, i.e. the religious system mediate between the mega-economic and political structures of society and the private lives or concerns of individual family farmers?
2. Does (the purported) mediation by the church reduce the level of alienation, and enhance transformative action (understood as active social involvement) among family farmers?

The above were seen as very testable research problems and the following sub questions were seen as related to the problems:

- i. Did the church see mediation as part of its role in the unfolding scenario of the family farm crisis?
- ii. How did the church attempt to mediate?
- iii. Did the church provide programs – counseling or support groups and services of some kind to this end?

- iv. Did the church engage in educational efforts of empowerment with farmers?

B. From the Farmers' Perspective

- i. In relation to the farm crisis, did the church mediate in their lives?
- ii. Did the farmers themselves see mediation as an appropriate role for the church?
- iii. In what kinds of church programs did they (farmers) participate?
- iv. What did they see themselves deriving from such programs?
- v. Did farmers involved in church programs of mediation demonstrate evidence of transformative action, that is, more effective behavior in their community membership, in their family lives and in other areas of their personal lives?

The study was actually a test of the Berger-Neuhaus model of the mediating role of the religious institution (the church) and given the perspective, some hypothetical and practical responses were obtained with the use of proper scientific methodological approach, that is a methodological mix – qualitative and quantitative (statistical and non statistical). From the interviews, statements were abstracted which related to each of the three major variables and hypothesized relationships viz. **church membership, feelings of alienation and transformative action.**

Data display included presentations of the data

generated from both observations and interviews with simple descriptive tables and matrices so they could be visually examined and appropriate conclusions drawn. Finally, in drawing the conclusions attempts were made to relate both types of data, statistical and non statistical, to the questions posed, and to provide some verification of those conclusions with data from observation

The conclusion from the study as observed from this particular sample in relation to the problem at hand, the social relevance of religion, tended to favor the claim that the religious institution is of immense benefit to the individual. Looking at each of the hypothetical relationships, the following findings were obtained:

RELIGION AND ALIENATION

Some alienation was observed among the family farmers sampled and the alienation appeared to be associated with different variables. **Farmers with no church membership were more alienated on the overall measure of alienation than farmers with church membership.**

RELIGION AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

The data showed that **farmers with church membership were more likely to give positive spontaneous evidence of transformative action than farmers with no church membership.**

From the findings, the study indicated that farmers with no church membership – with proper control of

possible intervening variables, example, economic condition, education, social class, religiosity, age, etc. – were more likely to be alienated than farmers with church membership. In addition, it was found that **farmers who were not alienated as a result of the religious factor, were more likely to give spontaneous evidence of transformative action than farmers who were alienated.**

In regard to the mediating role of the religious institution – the findings of the study generally tended toward the predicted direction that people exposed to the religious influence tended to be less alienated than people with no religious affiliation in times of crisis. According to Malinowski, whose idea on religion we have already referred to, life is not always smooth-sailing. If it were, religion would not have had the significance that it does. Since individuals are hit by events which they cannot foresee and prepare for, or control or both, Malinowski, like Parsons sees religion as a mechanism for adjustment to such events and as a means of restoring the normal pattern of life. The second problem area is that of “uncertainty”. This refers to endeavors in which a great deal of effort and skill have been invested, but where unknown or uncontrollable factors can threaten a successful outcome. One example is the family farmer’s exposure to the farm crisis in the above study.

This one study demonstrated empirically the capacity of the religious organizations to cushion or minimize the effect of social crisis on those with religious affiliation, because of being consoled and strengthened by

the institution to “hang in there” in the hopeful expectation of better days ahead. The three hypothesized relationships of the study on religion on social relevance were upheld thus:

- i. *Individuals involved in religious activities also participate more in community affairs than those without religious involvement.*
- ii. *Individuals involved in religious activities also give evidence of more coping behavior in their daily lives than those without the religious tendency in times of crises.*
- iii. *Individuals who are members of religious organizations experience less alienation than individuals who are not.*

5.2.2. Another Empirical Evidence of the Civic Role of Religion: the Black American Question

About a decade after the above study was undertaken, it became necessary to test the role of religion against a wider and more global crisis – affected social category, the American Black population. The pathetic condition of this group of people before the 1960s is no news to anybody. That they were living under serious stress and tension from the time of the slave deal —was more than obvious, but religion became **an instrument, not only to manage the crisis condition but actually played a major role in their eventual liberation, emancipation and integration**, thanks to the visionary and prophetic instrumentality of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. And Rev. Jesse Jackson and other Black ministers in the South.

(Umoh, 1996; 1997). Dr. King’s greatest contribution to the movement that eventually led to the liberation of the Blacks may have been his urging of the Black people to **‘use the Church as a vehicle for social advancement and for the realization of concrete political and economic goals.’** It was in this understanding that the oppressed Blacks developed the concept of **‘Black theology’** under the aegis of the Theological Commission of the National Conference of Black Churchmen. This again is another instance of the role of religion in crisis management as the encounter of Black people with God in the arena of history shows, having to do with liberation from racism, poverty, cultural and political domination and economic exploitation. **Accordingly, Black people saw the hand of God not only in future personal salvation, but in social and political deliverance** (Wilmore and Cone, 1980).

B. CIVIC DIVIDENDS OF RELIGION TO SOCIETY–STRUCTURAL

Before getting into the discussion of this important aspect of the lecture, permit me to make the following observations by two very prominent personalities, one local, and the other offshore, to use today’s academic parlance: i) At the meeting of the national body of the Nigerian Bishops of the Baptists Communion on a courtesy visit to the Nigerian President on the 25th June, 2014, the President in his remarks observed that there were progress and unity in the country when the government and church worked as one. But since the time of the separation of the

government and the church, the standard of morality has been substantially reduced and bastardized. There can be no better testimony on the role of the religious institution than that observation by the President. ii) In the 1930s, during the American presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, when there were threats of the separation of religion from other aspects of social life, the President himself in recognition of the indispensable role of religion, and the potential move towards the future danger of such risk is quoted to have said... "To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society". Obviously, the reference here is to the place of science (the intellectual life) and religion in the society. While science, abstract science, that is, is concerned with the education of the mind, the formation in morals falls in the area of religion. Science may produce technological wonders but it cannot deal with ultimate questions. It is only religion that can answer the "big questions", i.e., questions on the meaning and end of human life.

It is rather unfortunate that among the trends that determine modern industrial culture – science/technology and religion, one is rapidly increasing in strength, science/technology, while the other, religion, is experiencing unprecedented decrease in impact. While science and technology are growing in strength through increasing rationalization and bureaucratization, religion rather is decreasing dramatically through the forces of secularization, demythologization and demystification. The trends that characterize modern age – communication, atomic energy, science and technology, have no

corresponding breakthroughs in the area of religion, except, may be, the proliferation and commercialization of religion, both of which detract rather than promote its effectiveness and efficiency, as it is the case in some rural communities, like Etim Ekpo Local Government area in Akwa Ibom (Umoh, 2005a). The desire to enrich oneself using the name of religion has led to the emergence of *self-anointed* prophets with *unanointed* messages, who often preach contradictory prophecies to the people within the same religious outfit like in the days of prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah in Jerusalem (Jer. 28:1-17). This is an unfortunate development which dents the image of true religion, eclipsing its real benefits to its adherents, and painting the entire religious institution in bad light. Let us stop and take a look at the civic benefits of the religious institution, benefits which should motivate us to beef up its patronage and enact some policies to ensure its continued survival in our society today.

The importance of religion for the social scene can be seen in the attention it attracted before the Enlightenment, precisely during the Middle Ages. Human behavior, unlike the natural phenomena did not become an object of scientific inquiry until the nineteenth century. Before then, explanations of human behavior were rooted in religion, under the church's control. That explains why the history of science did not favor the early scientists: Copernicus' work was banned by the Church, Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake, Galileo was jailed by the Inquisition authorities, etc. At that time, all explanations of life were handled by theology, and the teachers then

were: God, angels, the devil, heaven, hell and saints, etc. Then came the Industrial Revolution which ushered in a growing emphasis on science and people now diverted their attention to practitioners of science for the comfort and certainty they had earlier sought from religious leaders. **Yet religion has perdured just because science is unable to address issues of ultimate concerns in life. In other words, explaining the "how" of social life is for science but the "why" is the exclusive reserve of religion.** Science and religion both offer **powerful but distinct** ways of looking at the world and its reality. It is a matter of two different kinds of truth, scientific and religious.

Although the attempt here is to illicit the effectiveness and role of religion in civic life, it would be seriously wrong to fall into the deadly trap of some modern religious forms, which, rather than challenge, focus on what one preacher calls "the Good news of the Gospel", the overemphasis on (the) material benefits at the total expense of the invitation to **spiritual regeneration**. The Gospel itself is opposed to this tendency, "...Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness and every other thing will be added unto you" (Luke. 12, 31) and Peter Berger in this same spirit in the **SACRED CANOPY** defines religion as the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established (Berger, 1967), that is, a society which is imbued with the divine canopy or protection in whatever material pursuit. In other words, regardless of the material benefits, perceived or real, that we expect, the ultimate goal of religion is not earthly but in the afterlife i.e. not this but

other worldly. This is the approach followed by such experts as Milton J. Yinger, who defined religion as "**a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggle with the ultimate problems of life.**" Looking then into the civic/social benefits of the religious institution, it can be discovered as follows:

- Religion creates and reinforces the **collective conscience**. Without shared values and moral beliefs, social life would be impossible. These lay the foundation for the collective conscience, making social order, social control and social solidarity or cooperation possible. In other words, there would be no society itself, technically speaking, because religion provides the society with the great power to direct human affairs.
- Religion creates a bond of unity among the members of the society, This is done when the members jointly express their faith in common values and beliefs, through which the integrity of society is strengthened and enhanced. By their common beliefs, the members of society express, communicate and understand the moral bonds which unite them.

The above functions were shared by ~~both~~ **Emile Durkheim** (1965) and Bronislaw Malinowski, (1954). In the area of **social change**, cases abound where the force or strength of religion has been instrumental in facilitating such change.

- In the United States of America in the 1960s, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern

Christian Leadership Council played leading roles in establishing **Civil Rights** and securing legislation that was intended to reduce racial discriminations that had rendered the system humanly useless for decades, in fact, centuries.

- During the same period, i.e. the 1960s, in Latin America, a number of radical and revolutionary groups emerged within the Roman Catholic Church which preached **Liberation Theology**. The emphasis by such groups was that it was the duty of church members to fight (oppose) unjust and oppressive dictatorships. That was the message when, in 1979 Catholic revolutionaries supported the Sandinistas when they took over control of Nicaragua.
- In Iran, Islamic fundamentalism (one of a few instances of its functional effects) played a major part in the 1979 revolution led by the Ayatollah Khomeini.
- There are yet other instances where religion has been used to bring about positive changes within the system. We can think of Poland and the use of religion in stimulating social change. The Church was in the frontline of opposing the Communist State in Poland and supported the attempts of the free trade union Solidarity to achieve changes in the (Polish) society. The result of it was that in 1979 the Communist monopoly on power was broken

when solidarity was allowed to contest and win many seats in the Polish parliament.

- Coming closer home, do we need to be reminded of the crucial role played by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in dismantling the obnoxious, not onshore-offshore oil dichotomy, but the White-Black dichotomy, infamously referred to as the Apartheid Regime in South Africa?
- On a more global level, there is the recent historic attempt by the Roman Pontiff to broker peace in the Middle East through personal intervention in the Israeli-Palestinian rift-off by the use of the compelling power of religion to arrange a round table for the two leaders in the Vatican, outside their home territories. Much hope is still being expected from this negotiation, a negotiation that no political world power over the decades has had the courage to venture into. Even those who feign atheism in matters of religion are subconsciously conscious of the greater religious power outside the self. This outside power is mediated through religion, the necessary link between the **world everlasting** and this **world never lasting**.
- Or, need we be reminded that the divinity, the object of religion has been brought closer to our daily experiences because of perceived and actual benefits? One can hardly sincerely negate the above claim when one thinks of daily religious behaviors

in much of our secular and social outings. Think of the act of committing the assembly of this Inaugural and others like it to the divine, not for placement in haven, obviously, but for the smooth execution of this earthly and civic activity. It is not for nothing that prayer sessions precede most human activities. Today, political caucuses open with prayer sessions for divine guidance and churches are seen to manage large economic conglomerates to ensure the survival of its structures into the future. What of the solemn assemblies, which have now become a regular tradition in this University and other platforms? For most of you who spared some time off to watch the 2014 World Cup a few months ago, did you notice the extravagant and profuse use of the religious symbol of the Sign of the Cross by the players, whether they believe in it or not? I am tempted to think that, that behavior (religious behavior) was not so that they might be spared the pains of hell fire but for purely civic protection.

- When someone, for instance, who has not ventured into a church for even one day of his life voices **some invocations and incantations before entering into the forest for farming or whatever, the idea is** certainly not spiritually motivated but for purely physical and social protection and coverage.

Clearly then, **religion as a social institution performs very distinctive psychological and civic functions where it is effectively implanted, harnessed and**

institutionalized regardless of its negative by-product and the human factor, particularly the human factor. The next and final segment of the lecture will bring us closer home as we examine the activities and effects of this institution in the Nigerian context.

5.3 RELIGION IN THE NIGERIA SOCIETY: AN ISSUE IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Religion generally has suffered from the forces of secularization, which like other social institutions, if not more so, is the most outstanding social development of the last several centuries. The weakening of the traditional and moral foundations on which social institutions were erected has been the most obvious effect of secularization, broadly defined here as **the process of religious decline** (Wilson, 1966). The role of religion has been differently felt in developed and underdeveloped environments in their effort to stem the forces of secularization: In simple, primitive and traditional societies, religion was a pervasive institution, as religious beliefs and rites played important parts in the people's daily activities, from family to occupation. In such societies, religion provided the overall point of view in whose context human experience was generally interpreted and understood.

As a result of secularization, human thought tends to go through a process of transformation from the mystical and mythological to the rational mode. In modern society, men are able to withhold emotional participation in their religious outlook and to develop rational and systematic cognitive statements about their religious ideas and beliefs.

This leads invariably to a situation in which the religious worldview, in contrast to what holds sway in the traditional society, is no longer the primary frame of reference for thought and action. Such is the mentality that guides modern man's conduct in his daily activities, even in the midst of his claim to religiosity. The forces of globalization and the adoption of Western values have been shown to be part of this decrease in religiosity, especially among the youth. For example, some decades ago, Brenner (1970) reported that by the time the average child is sixteen, he has watched from twelve thousand to fifteen thousand hours of television. This, he says, is the equivalent of fifteen to twenty months of watching. This behavior gradually brings him further away from the traditional life style to a more modern and electronic way of relating to reality.

In this cognitive transformation, rational and scientific referents have now become the dependable anchors of modern life rather than dependence on mythological symbols. Nigeria, like many other global communities is a multireligious nation, which plays host to three different religious bodies, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR) with varying degrees of weight. These religious persuasions are classified as foreign (Christianity and Islam), while African Traditional Religion embraces all forms of indigenous practices in the name of religion. Nigerians are reputed to be very religious with the understanding that the average Nigerian should fit himself into one or the other of these three religious organizations, with a rather insignificant others not identifying. As a secular state, there is freedom then of

worship and of identification with any of the three religious bodies.

In the light of the context of the lecture one would expect that the end-product, positive or negative would be heavily felt from the combined effect of the three religions. But first, what does history state about the meeting of the three religions in the Nigerian soil? Nwanunobi (1992) states that the external influence on the African Traditional Religion came exclusively from the Islamic and Christian fronts, which vied for converts at different periods of the nation's history. In the contact situation, African Traditional Religion while constituting an obstacle to the smooth entry of the foreign religions had also to concede and compromise certain aspects of its belief package. In terms of the two foreign religions, Islam and Christianity did not at any point in time seriously confront each other since Islam made its entry through the North, coming with the Muslim traders and nomads in the eleventh century, while Christianity settled in the South through the effort of the missionaries in the nineteenth century. Islam became widespread only after the Jihad (the Holy War) in 1812.

The above have been the two major conflict situations, religiously motivated – the resistance by the African Traditional Religionists at the moment of entry of the foreign religions and the free engagement of the sword in the search for converts during the Holy War (the Jihad) by the Muslims. Presently, it has not been documented or confirmed whether what goes by the designation, Boko Haram, has a religious or political content or both, and

how? But one can, for the moment, surmise that judging from the 'powers/personalities' behind the dreaded movement, Boko Haram is a political rather than religious instrument. This is one of the effects of the secularization of the political institution, the weakening of the traditional and moral foundation on which the political structure was built.

In terms of development, the cold war between Christianity and Islam, especially the apparent Islamization project of our Northern brothers and sisters is a great disservice to this nation as it detracts attention from national development to self-defensive hegemony. This situation, notwithstanding, the social benefits and dividends of the religious institutions in terms of their contributions to national life and development, can very well be appreciated in the following areas: (Prudence demands though that in coming to any conclusions, a certain degree of caution is essential because as noted earlier, religion can be a force of life as well as of crisis. China presently is facing both directions (An Aljazeera Interview).

- The Church's involvement in what today is called '*social evangelism*', that is, the church's relevance in earthly concerns: The contention today is **that contemporary religion must be interpreted in the language that can be understood by present-day industrial and complex societies in order to respond to the increasing needs of the present age.** This need has been sufficiently elaborated by the (Catholic) Church's pastoral Document of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 4.

According to the Decree, the church is entrusted with the responsibility of reading the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. This renewed awareness in contrast to the situation in the early days of the church would be counterfeit if the Christian message ignores the obligation to seek for justice, peace and the development of the human person since the church cannot claim to be the image of God, *Imago Dei*, in the abstract. In other words, **true religion, whether traditional or revealed (Christianity or Islam or ATR) cannot separate the spiritual from the temporal, or remain silent and indifferent in the face of social, political and economic threats inflicted upon its adherents.** In matters of religion, there is no room for a flight from the world only to hope for eternal happiness in haven, because Christians do not lead a schizophrenic kind of life, with their feet on earth and the heads in heaven (Odey, 1979). Such religious consciousness would suggest further that in addition to preaching against such personal sins as murder, theft, greed or lust, **religion must also address itself to such 'social sins' as economic exploitation, social injustice, fraudulent and sharp business practices as the Nigerian 419 currently gaining unofficial endorsement in our society.** What social benefits could be greater than these preaching and teaching positive values rather than rewarding confusion and social ills?

- **Provision of employment opportunities.** Since the church does not exist in the abstract but must be fully embedded in the human society, its administrative and management activities call for the mobilization of a relevant workforce in order to guarantee the smooth execution of its operation. Any bureaucratic structure demands the use of the human workforce. The job opportunities provided by the church (religion) to its adherents in any society is a wonderful display of civic responsibility.
- Religion can and has actually served as a **source of inspiration** in the society through the inspired lessons of the Holy Books –the Bible and the Koran. Its humanistic approach truly favors brotherly love and selfless social interaction, thereby providing a smooth and favorable environment for the human society to thrive. The concern for moral pursuit and rectitude is an aspect that supersedes the use of the force and law enforcement agents in social solidarity and integration. Religion is a humanistic institution, a system of compassion and a unifying force, despite associated shortcomings. The emphasis on self-discipline and self-control through socialization, indoctrination and persuasion has no better alternative in lasting character formation.

Christianity and Social Action

The New Testament in particular is replete with social activities engaged in by Christ in the interest of certain categories of beneficiaries. Alongside of pastoral concerns, the following instances address the social aspects of Christ's missionary undertakings:

- He cured the blind (Mk. 8:22-26), (Mt.9:27-31)
- He cured the lame (Mk. 15:29-31), (Jn.5:1-9)
- He cured the deaf (Mk 7:31-37)
- He healed the dumb (Mt. 9:32-34), Mk 7:37)
- He fed 5000 hungry people (Lk. 9:10-17), (Mk.6:31-44) (Jerusalem Bible)

The above are only some of the social actions of Christ. The Church, after the example of Christ also engages in similar actions. For example, the Church cures the blind by building eye clinics and centres, like the Mercy Hospital Eye Centre in Abak; cures the lame by building orthopedic centres, like the St. Joseph Orthopedic Rehabilitation Centre, Ukana Iba in Essien Udim Local Government Area; heals the deaf and dumb by providing a place for the rehabilitation of the deaf and dumb, like the St. Louis Centre for the deaf in Ikot Ekpene; feeds the hungry by providing food for the destitute like the Community Centre by the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy in Ikpe Ikot Nkon in Ini Local Government Area. Other more general social actions which are the derivatives of the religious institution include the following:

Health Care Concerns

Gone are those days when the church was seriously admonished to steer clear of worldly (non-spiritual) concerns. Today, the church sees herself as an active player in issues of development and social progress. Accordingly, the church has been seriously involved in health care provision especially in the rural communities. This understanding has led religious bodies to step up their role in health provision and to see themselves as supplementing government effort in the establishment of health posts in the rural communities. This explains the heavy presence of mission and church related health centers and hospitals nationwide (Umoh, 2004). Evidences abound of concrete involvement of the churches in matters of health care delivery all over the State. One thinks of the famous hospitals in the different communities of Akwa Ibom State: St. Luke's Hospital, Anua; St. Mary's Hospital, Urua Akpan in Essien Udim; Redeemer Cottage Hospital, Ibesit; The Mission Hospital, Ituk Mbang, and many others.

In this regard, **the role of African Traditional Religion** should not be overlooked. Before the arrival of the foreign religions, African Traditional religion had been developed enough to embrace all aspects of African life, physical, spiritual and psychological. The above characteristics made African Traditional Religion to assume a central position in the social well being of both the individual and the group. This understanding raised the position of the **African religious practitioners to become religious specialists and accredited health authorities**. The combination of religious expertise and

medical proficiency in given personalities ...greatly facilitates the simultaneous search for both material and spiritual items which make healing possible in the traditional contexts. Therefore, both traditional and orthodox forms of religion contribute immensely and complement each other toward health promotion in our society in the belief that a healthy population is a wealthy population and an asset in development. *Health is wealth*, it is said !

Education

In matters of education, no one disputes that apart from the government, there is any other institution that can be ranked higher in educational promotion than the religious institution. The place of religion in the intellectual life can simply be assumed rather than queried. In fact, rather than wonder whether religion has a part to play in the improvement of the intellectual life, one would seek to determine its level of moral content in the intellectual life, when it comes to matters of education. What was quoted earlier in this regard can be repeated here for the purpose of emphasis – **“to educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society”**. The meaning here is that education without a moral content, which is best provided by religion, is no education but catastrophe. Today, parents and guardians will easily spend a fortune for the education of their wards, provided the moral foundation of such upbringing is guaranteed.

In contemporary society, unlike the situation in the Middle Ages when the church was (somewhat) anti-

intellectually inclined, the church, not only encourages but actually champions the cause of educational promotion within the society. In most world religions, a direct and powerful involvement of the church in matters of education is witnessed. The following examples globally are testimonies to this claim: In **Islam**, almost invariably schools are attached to mosques. In **Jewish thought and philosophy**, Rabbis (religious personages) occupy a central position in issues bothering on education. Among the **Hindus**, the priestly caste (Brahman) is dominant in education and learning. In **Christendom**, needless to say, the issue is all too obvious, that is, the interest of the Church in matters of education is simply taken for granted. Monasteries have been renowned centers of learning and intellectual activity, and many universities have been known to be founded and supported by religious bodies, even while the critics of the religious institution are struggling to share in reaping the benefits.

In Nigeria, the complimentary relationship between the government and the church can be attested to nationwide. Religion's ambition to promote educational ventures has now been carried beyond the primary and secondary levels to the university level. A few examples immediately come to mind as follows: MADONNA University, Veritas University of Nigeria (VUNA), etc. All these and a lot more are all church educational ventures. In Akwa Ibom State, the long standing efforts made by religious organizations to open and maintain schools are on record to the credit of the missionaries. Rather than ask: How many of such schools?, one would only seek to know if there is any

segment of the state that cannot boast of, at least, one educational outfit with a religious patrimony and background. Aside from the innumerable nursery/primary levels of these outfits that flood the State, we have such prominent ones like Holy Family College, Oku Abak, St. Columbanus Secondary School, Ikwen, St. Augustine's Secondary School, Urua Inyang, Holy Trinity Secondary School, Mbiakong, Cornelia Corneli College (CCC), Uyo, St. Vincent Secondary School, Oti Oron, Adiaha Obong Secondary School, Eniong Ofot, Methodist Boy's High School, Ikot Ekpene, etc. These and many others are associated with the old missionary days and many more, too numerous to mention, are springing up by the day, e.g. Holy Child Secondary School, Ifuho, Ikot Ekpene, St. Michael's Secondary School, Ikot Etim in Ukanafun, St. Francis Secondary School, Ikot Ataku, Eket. These are a tip of the iceberg only to underscore a few of the social involvements and the benefits that accrue from religion in social life, in the area of education.

6. CONCLUSION

The attempt thus far has been an objective assessment of the phenomenon of religion in the human society. Both the strengths and weaknesses of the religious outlook and its manifestation have been carefully analyzed and identified. Comparing its existence to any other social institution, we have concluded like is the case with others, that its manifestation can be either way; this is because it exists and operates in an existential context that is heavily

affected by sin/weakness, which is an inalienable aspect of the human condition. We have been able to show that as a long-standing social institution (almost as old as (the) human history itself), it is obviously capable of performing a lot of useful functions, although in the process, it is also known to deposit some negativities in the wake. These negative aspects have not been seen to be sufficiently dysfunctional as to neutralize its benefits.

It has also been argued that the negative sides of the religious phenomenon, which critics often take advantage of, to discredit the phenomenon and downgrade its usefulness, are not really part of the nature of religion *as religion* but result from the unwarranted display by those who instead profess negative beliefs in its doctrinal apogee. As argued in the lecture, many of the dangers associated with the phenomenon can be traceable to the unfortunate occurrence of religious proliferation, which results in unhealthy competition between and among modern emergent religious bodies. Consider, for instance, the situation in Etim Ekpo clan of Akwa Ibom state, where there is a total number of 72 villages, but playing host to 470 different churches of diverse denominations (Umoh, 2005). These culminate in religious conflict.

Dismissing those human elements of conflicts occasioned by the religious factor as not being powerful enough to discredit *in toto* the entire religious system, we have been able to point out both theoretically and in practice some of the instances when religion has been very effective and useful in solving certain social inconsistencies. Among

many others the religious element has been shown to be handy in certain **crisis-prone areas** like stress, depression, oppression, exploitation, discrimination, alienation etc. These benefits apply equally at the individual as well as the collective and institutional levels.

To further make a case for the usefulness of religion, let us for a while think of a situation in ordinary social life without religion. The daily complaint today in every quarter about life in the human platform is that it is progressively getting worse by the day. We listen to these analyses everywhere - in the family, in secular institutions, on the street, and even in the church. This is only after deliberate efforts have been embarked upon by religious bodies through many tactful advocacies— preachings, admonitions and indoctrinations by the church, advocacies in both the print and electronic media, seminars, retreat sessions and conventions, all condemning social ills.

Can we judge all these efforts to be in vain? If social life is as bad as we all agree it is, let us imagine hypothetically a social scenario without religion. Even when some religious organizations are publicly criticized or condemned for want of decency and decorum in outing, we are yet to see any religious group that teaches his adherents or even commends them for anti-social acts — witchcraft, armed robbery, kidnapping, theft, murder, brotherly hatred, adultery and fornication, embezzlement, misappropriation of public funds, stealing, lying, ethnic rife and rivalry, political tussle, etc., which, tell me, which?

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

As a system of organization, religion is both spiritual and social. Since as a social institution the role it plays is seen as an indispensable part of a functional society, efforts should be made to take advantage of its rich endowment in order to further improve the social well-being of the citizens. In order, therefore to enjoy more of its social dividends, it is recommended as follows:

- Religious institutions should see their mission as a genuine call to liberate the whole person, body and soul, from earthly misery so that their efforts at evangelizing may not be construed as one-sided and hypocritical.
- Efforts by religious bodies towards the provision of social services in rural communities should be encouraged and supported by both local and State governments since these organizations are closer to the people than the civil governments, being grassroots organizations.
- The religious institutions should consider themselves to be not only instruments of spiritual salvation but also agents of community development so as to demonstrate their good intention towards the people's welfare.
- The various religious bodies should operate as partners in progress, jointly drawing up workable plans of action, rather than function independently of each other, thereby duplicating efforts and generating conflict.

- The government should direct positive policies towards the religious institutions in their efforts towards the provision of more social amenities and monitor their implementation every step of the way.
- The government should control the indiscriminate founding of churches through the requirements of licenses and permits of operation in order to control the proliferation of churches which in turn undermines community development. This can checkmate religious fraudsters who engage in business transaction in the sanctuary.
- Except that prophecy is a risky venture, I would suggest a greater commitment of government in empowering the institutions of religion as there appear sufficient indications that science may soon reach its limits, giving way once more to once-abandoned metaphysical explanations to continue from where science took over. Scientific inability to provide any meaningful answers to some of the unfolding events in recent times would appear to suggest as above. Think of our failure to provide acceptable answers to the following recent episodes: The fate of the ill-fated Malaysian Flight H370, The miraculous disappearance of the almost 300 Chibok girls from the Nigerian soil, the recent outbreak of the Ebola Virus, which spreads like wild fire etc. The answers to these wonders seem to call for divine intervention rather than continue to rely on science and its promises, even when science itself in some cases has honorably surrendered.

- Also, government should make it a point to direct policies and budgetary allocations to religious institutions as it does with other social institutions like education, the economy, politics, etc. in order to strengthen its operational base and see the religious outfit genuinely as a true partner in progress.
- Finally, the need to reinforce the religious institution is borne out of the President's address to the 2014 intending pilgrims in Jigawa State on September 7, 2014. According to the President, **'...these days Nigeria is in dire need of prayers.'**

When these steps are taken, it is hoped that society will stand in the best possible position to reap maximally from the social wealth of the religious institution. A little bit of religion, traditional or revealed, does so much good and social life without religion is like rainbow without a colour. This is the important truth which I would ask that as many of you as have honored me with your presence here today would take away with you as you depart. God bless you ALL.

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EPI-LEGOMENON

The discourse opened with a fundamental affirmation, viz. **that religion is fundamentally about belief and that belief is a conviction that is founded on faith.** Fundamentally, faith deals with the other-worldly realities. Whatever social benefits we may expect, and actually derive from, the faith experience, the primary focus of religion is directed upwards – towards HEAVEN, the ultimate end of mankind's final journey. Therefore, we should never be tempted by any worldly benefits to allow ourselves to pitch our camp permanently on worldly concerns to the point of allowing ourselves to be called fools, as a result of having missed the mark. That is why the Book of Life warns in very clear language: **Beware of Covetousness, for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.**

TIMELY WARNINGS

God Called Him A Fool

The rich man said to his soul, "*Eat, drink and be merry, you have secured many years to come.*" But God said, "*Thou fool...*"

When God calls a man a **fool** it means he is really a fool. I wonder what God calls you. I do not know God's assessment of your life. People may call you "great". But what does God call you? They may call you "an expert". But what does God call you? People may call you "a very shrewd businessman", a man who knows how to plan and execute. But what does God call you?

If your colleagues were to assess you, they would call you a **genius**, an academic genius. What does God call you? Perhaps you have a wonderful reputation. People introduce you as **Professor so and so** and then list out all your achievements, and that is actually all you spend your entire life doing. You have spent your entire life in the laboratory, in the library, just to be called a Professor. But outside the laboratory and the library your life means nothing. What does God call you, **Prof?** God called that man a fool. **Will He say concerning you "...Look at this fool. I lent him sixty years. He spent fifty-nine of it pursuing paper, ordinary paper qualification and, pursuing fame with men but he has no record with me. What a fool!**

- **Whose shall those things be?**

God asked that man a question that many have not been able to answer yet. **"Thou fool, this night, your soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"** Whose will your certificates be? Many people spend their entire life amassing wealth etc. Those many buildings, pavilions and skyscrapers, whose shall all these be? They will eventually be for rats, reptiles and careless children. What you took care to build in your life time, careless children come into the same house and mess it up.

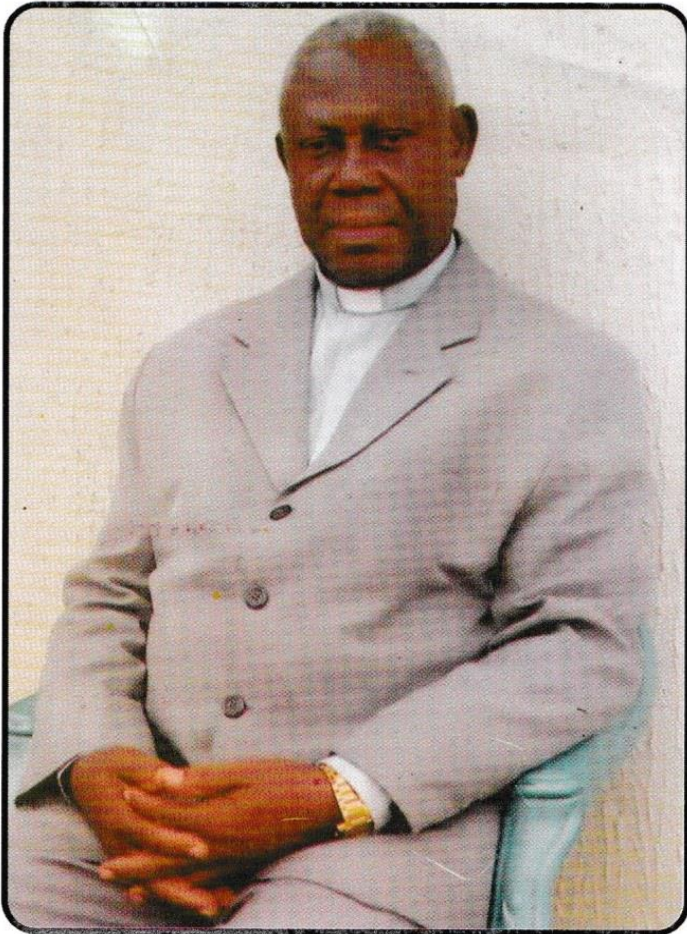
- Indeed, what shall it profit a man (or woman for that matter), if he (she) gains the whole world, beautiful houses, plumpy and "lekpa" women/babes, big cars and offices, fat bank accounts and other

sweet things of this world and finally lose his (her) soul in hell fire! Think and rekindle your faith in Jesus TODAY for tomorrow may be NO MORE.

- When you are being congratulated for **"making it"** what are the **parameters?** – Your house, your car, your children, your job opportunities, your name, your position, your title, your connections etc. What of your **FAITH** and **ETERNITY?** Where are you investing your life, your intelligence and your ability?

Culled from *Timely Warning* (Akanni, April 2013) and *Battle for The Young* (Akanni, October 2013).

- Stop gambling with your life – everything will pass away. All is vanity, nothing but vanity. Only **the Word of God will endure. THE BIG MASTER IS PATIENTLY WAITING FOR YOU.**
- **Your chance to write your name in gold in God's Kingdom is NOW.**
- **THINK!**



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