



Research Paper

Christian Religious Belief in the Holy Spirit and Its Implications for Nation-Building in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights, discusses and recommends the principles and values of leadership, unity, and diversity, solidarity, courage, freedom, and the basis for dialogue embedded in the Christian religious belief in the Holy Spirit for nation-building in Nigeria. Belief in the Holy Spirit is very fundamental to the Christian religion; however, it is usually restricted to the spiritual lives and activities of Christians and the Church. It has hardly been recognized that rooted in the belief are principles, and values capable of impacting significantly on nation-building in Nigeria. Christians constitute almost half of the population of Nigeria, and by promoting this belief among them and having all men and women of goodwill in the country adopt the values and principles entrenched in it, substantial growth will be recorded in nation-building. Using the qualitative and phenomenological methods of research, the study combines the descriptive and functional approaches to address the complexity of the religious belief and societal dynamics in question.

KEYWORDS: Christianity, Religion, Belief, Holy Spirit, Nation-building, Implications, Nigeria.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Like most countries of her age, particularly in Africa, Nigeria as a political entity is faced with the challenge of nation-building. She has gone and continues to go in every direction, trying many options, in search of how to respond effectively to this challenge. The more she tries to create a developed state where people co-exist securely in peace and harmony, the more the challenges tend to exacerbate. Agitations from different segments or ethnic groups for more self-determination, the restructuring of the nation, the replacement of the existing constitution with a new one or outright secession keep rising. Various fields of learning and experts from different disciplines such as science and technology, education, philosophy, and religion propose options that should be put into practice for rapid growth towards nation-building. This work falls into these efforts of seeking solutions and searching for answers to the problem of nation-building.

Belief in the Holy Spirit is one of the fundamental marks of the Christian religion. However, it is often treated on the realm of spiritual activities in the Church for sanctification and the salvation of souls. The belief is scarcely considered in terms of its importance to matters of nation-building or the development of society. Proponents of projects for nation-building scarcely see this belief as a factor to consider in their search for elements of significance for their mission. Compared with other Christian beliefs, the Holy Spirit is one of the least studied because it is seen as highly abstract and difficult to handle. Moreover, ignorance and neglect characterize the attitude and approach of Christians to the Holy Spirit [1]. In the attempts to highlight the role of religion in nation-building particularly in Nigeria, little or nothing is noted from the perspective of the Christian religious belief in the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, a cursory glance at some of the principles, values, and motifs embedded in the belief shows that they are capable of making vital contributions to nation-building in Nigeria.

This paper highlights the principles and values of leadership, unity, and diversity, solidarity, courage, freedom, and the basis for dialogue embedded in the Christian religious belief in the Holy Spirit as elements of great importance for nation-building in Nigeria. It upholds that these values and principles should underlie and complement the contributions from other fields of knowledge such as science, technology, education, and philosophy. Christians constitute almost half of the population of Nigeria and by promoting this belief among them and having all men and women of goodwill in the country abide by the values and principles embedded in it, enormous contributions will be made towards nation-building.

Considering the complexity of religious beliefs and symbols and societal dynamics, the study applies a multi-dimensional method by combining the descriptive, phenomenological, and functional approaches. The major tenets of Christian belief in the Holy Spirit and the situation of the nation concerning nation-building are descriptively presented while the impact of the belief on nation-building is articulated from a functional perspective. These are guided by the phenomenological framework insofar as the researcher would not allow pre-existing presuppositions, preconceived positions, and biases originating from being an active practitioner of the Christian religion, and a citizen of Nigeria to overly counter objectivity in the study.

About significance, this work responds positively to one of the principal demands of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religion (NASR) which is, the exploration of ways that would make it more practicable for religions to play the role of a catalyst for national integration in a highly religiously plural society [2]. The claim that religion, particularly Christianity, plays transformative roles in society is strengthened by this study. Moreover, Christians would appreciate more deeply their belief in the Holy Spirit as they see its wider relevance towards nation-building.

In what follows, a presentation is made of the situation of Nigeria concerning the challenges of nation-building, the Holy Spirit in the Christian religion, and the principles and values central to the belief. The discussion of the principles and values sheds light on the implications of the belief for nation-building.

II. NIGERIA AND THE CHALLENGES OF NATION-BUILDING

A nation refers to a country or a sovereign state of people living within a defined territory and carrying out its functions with relative peace and harmony. It is "a cultural-political community that has become conscious of its autonomy, unity and particular interests"[3]. Sometimes, the elements of a common origin, language, defined territory, tradition, and religion are included in the definition of a nation. Once a nation is established, it is open to growth, adjustment, and even possible dissolution. The building of a nation is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, and usually a gradual process that requires certain calculated and concrete steps to actualize. These steps include actions and processes geared towards political, socio-cultural, economic, and integral human development, reconstruction, poverty alleviation, and peace-building. Thus, "Many people believe that nation-building is evolutionary rather than revolutionary, that it takes a long time and is a social process that cannot be jump-started from outside"[4].

With the emergence of the new nations particularly in Africa through political independence, they immediately faced the arduous task of nation-building. In the case of Nigeria, the task started with "the creation of national paraphernalia such as flags, coats of arms, anthems, national days, national stadiums, national airlines, national languages and national myths"[5]. These actions were taken to create national harmony and consciousness by way of bringing together people who had existed as fragmented units with different origins, customs, languages, and styles of governance. This agrees with the idea that "Nation-building aims at the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run"[6]. Nigeria's efforts towards nation-building have met with serious challenges that greatly hinder the project.

Leadership or governance is a major challenge in the making of Nigeria as a nation. Leadership has to do with having the ability to set goals about things that should be done, making policies to achieve the set goals, and influencing others to want to get the things actualized [7]. The single greatest problem in any organization is poor leadership or a lack of managerial skills [8] and according to Achebe, "Nigeria has been less than fortunate in its leadership" [9]. In his view, this is one of the troubles with the nation. It is the responsibility of the leaders of the state to protect the lives of citizen and their properties, enforce laws within the nation's territory, and punish offenders following the constitution of the land. That this is not the case in Nigeria and that there is a high level of insecurity in the country smacks of ineffective leadership. Thus, Kukah avows that "At the heart of all the crises in our country is the failure of governance" [10].

The failure of governance leads to political instability, which is another challenge for Nigeria in the process of nation-building. There is a high level of corruption, violence, rigging, and selfishness beginning from the electoral processes, through the actual elections to the appointment of people to offices at various levels of the polity. Consequently, there is a lack of trust in the political system and the existence of the nation is constantly called to the question of "to be or not to be". People's sense of nationhood and patriotism is very low especially because their loyalties go more to their ethnic or cultural groups than the nation. In absence of a strong sense of nationalism, the desire for separation and division by the different ethnic groups in the nation is easily provoked.

Dependency also militates seriously against nation-building in Nigeria. The theory of dependency holds that underdevelopment is caused by the unequal relationship between the developed and the less developed nations which leaves the former rich and the latter poor. The less-developed nations provide cheap labour and raw materials which the developed countries use to produce the products that they sell to the less developed nations at high prices. On account of this, the less developed nations can hardly accumulate sufficient capital for building up the infrastructures and institutions required for rapid national growth. A vicious circle is

created whereby the developing countries keep getting poorer and dependent on advanced nations and the latter remains dominant. This logic of dependency prevents the developing nations from fully transitioning into industrialization [11].

Nigeria is politically, economically, culturally, scientifically, technologically, and religiously dependent on the West and most recently on the Asian world. The Nigerian systems of government are borrowed, first from the British and later from the United States of America. The West and the others continue to play decisive roles in matters of influencing policies in the governance of the country. Economically, Nigeria is overly dependent because, for almost every manufactured product that she needs to survive as a nation, she turns to Europe, the USA, or China. Despite the overwhelming human and natural resources in the country, Nigeria's productivity quotient is extremely minimal. She rather serves as one of the biggest markets and dumping grounds of the Western nations including their arms. Dependency in the area of science and technology is substantial. The role of science and technology in the history of modern development is not a thing to doubt, and yet the performance of Nigeria in this area is very low. The requisite knowledge of science and technology to produce what is needed is lacking in the sphere of information and communication, medicine, food and nutrition, and engineering. On the part of religion, the majority of Nigerians are either turned towards the West or the Arabian worlds for direction and control on account of Islam and Christianity. Altogether, these different forms of dependency are challenges to the building of the nation in Nigeria.

Neocolonialism is another terrible obstacle against nation-building in Nigeria. This phenomenon refers to "the control of less developed countries by developed countries through indirect means" [12]. This control takes place through exploitative policies and schemes by the developed nations calculated to dominate the less developed countries in the Third World. Former colonial powers and other developed nations establish trade arrangements, treaties, grant schemes, modes of transfer of knowledge or technology, and debt management cleverly designed "to block growth in developing countries and retain them as sources of cheap raw materials and cheap labour" [13]. Nigeria finds herself in this situation. The weight of the money which Nigeria owes to other countries (bilateral debts) and international financial institutions (multilateral debts) is too heavy to allow for a meaningful stride towards nation-building. The balance sheet of Quartz Africa shows this to be the case [14]. This indebtedness has far-reaching negative consequences on the audacity and capacity of Nigeria to build up the nation.

The inferiority complex stands out among the major challenges to nation-building in Nigeria. This complex refers to one's deep-seated belief that one is inferior to others who are in the same field of play or existence. In fact, "It is appalling to realize the number of pathetic people who are hampered and made miserable by the malady popularly called the inferiority complex" [15]. The experiences of slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, and dependency over a relatively long time and in almost every aspect of life contributed immensely in leaving Nigerians with the feeling of inferiority to people of the developed nations. Products are considered of superior quality simply because they are made in any of the Western nations. The way of life of people in Europe and America is ideal for Nigerians and they are imitated indiscriminately. Many young people in Nigeria desire to visit or live permanently in those "superior" nations. The yoke of inferiority complex stands in the way of Nigerians to compete favourably with their counterparts in the world.

Faced with these challenges, the crucial issue becomes what Nigeria should do to overcome them and be able to move faster on the path of nation-building. Formal education for all is highly recommended for this purpose. The power of education to drive the process of the growth of a nation is widely recognized. Chimaka observes that the destiny of the nation is inseparably tied to the availability of formal basic education for all its citizens because "Education is an important means of growth and development of any nation. Education especially formal education provides the needed human capital for a country's growth and progress, it equips the citizens with the necessary skills to function effectively and contribute to the nation's development" [16]. Science and technology are also considered as factors of prime importance for nation building because "Development at any phase is always linked with technology, and technology happens when there is advancement in science. Hence, science and technology and development are all proportional to each other" [17]. Placing more emphasis on science and technology education, the establishment of special science schools, creating scholarships, and making more funds available for studies and researches in the field of science and technology are roads to nation-building.

The multidimensional nature of nation-building makes it obvious that its goals cannot simply be attained by focusing on formal education in general or on science and technology alone. Hence, Ogoma and colleagues argue that "Philosophy has crucial roles to play in the development of a nation"[18]. For them, the highly-priced impact of science and technology towards the making of the Nigerian nation should be complemented with the values inherent in philosophy. On his part, Egbule avows that "One of the facets of a progressive process of nation-building is religion... Over the years, religion has contributed immensely to nation-building and development in Nigeria" [19]. He contends that religion has the power of transforming individuals through values, ethics, and doctrines, who in turn build the nation. In support of this view of religion, Uchendu asserts that "by religious leaders adopting a new approach, teaching and emphasizing those

aspects of their beliefs that make for peaceful co-existence in a plural society; and by states desisting from interfering in religious matters" [20] an atmosphere of tolerance will be created which will help to sustain efforts at nation-building.

This study agrees with the claim that religion has a lot of positive values and principles that can contribute significantly to nation-building in Nigeria. The Christian religious belief in the Holy Spirit is put forward as a case to establish this claim.

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Of all the monotheistic religions in the world, Christianity is unique in its belief that God is a Trinity of three divine persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The unity of Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as three persons in one Godhead "is considered to be one of the central Christian affirmations about God" [21]. Thus, belief in the Holy Spirit as the Third divine person is an integral part of the Christian understanding of God. The history of the development of this Christian belief in the Holy Spirit goes back to Judaism. Even though Judaism was strictly monotheistic, it contains within its body of beliefs certain symbols, imageries, and traditions that imply a plurality of persons in God. The symbol of the "Breath of God" (*Ruach Elohim*) expresses the most fundamental Old Testament or Jewish understanding of the person, presence, and operations of the Holy Spirit in the universe.

The Hebrew word, *Ruach*, which is translated in Greek as *Pneuma*, in Latin as *Spiritus*, and in English as *Spirit*, literally means breath or wind or air. Primarily, the breath is the principle of life given by God to human beings and taken back by him to bring about their existence or their death respectively [22]. The Jews understood the "Breath of God" as the creative, life-giving, life-sustaining, protective, and guiding dimensions of the One and undivided God in creation. This Breath of God "indicates the life of God himself, the force by which he acts and causes action, both at the physical and at the spiritual level" [23]. The recognition of this divine principle in action runs through the whole of the Old Testament.

The Jewish mysticism of the Kabbalah, a term that simply means tradition, also recognizes a plurality in God that paved the way for the affirmation of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The Kabbalah understands God as a unity but also teaches that God reveals himself through several divine emanations. The *Shekinah* is one of the principal emanations which on account of its position subsumes the fundamental categories of other divine emanations in the world. The *Shekinah* is recognized in the Kabbalah as an independent female counterpart within God²⁴. Christians later saw in the doctrine of the *Shekinah* a mirror of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. However, it was only in the New Testament, through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, that the Holy Spirit was affirmed as a distinct divine person.

The origin and the power that defined and sustained the life and mission of Jesus on earth are closely associated with the Holy Spirit. His conception is traced to the Holy Spirit (Luke 1: 26-36)²⁵ and Jesus himself named the Holy Spirit as the one behind the work he did (Luke 4: 18-19). Towards the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus announced to his disciples the coming of "Another Advocate" whom the Father will send in his name to continue the mission he started for the salvation of the world (John 16: 7-8, 13-15). This promise was fulfilled in the life of the followers of Christ, privately on the evening of Jesus' resurrection (John 20: 19-20) and publicly on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 1-11). From this point onwards, Christians started to profess belief in the Holy Spirit and to understand their existence and mission in the light of the Spirit.

Christian faith affirms that the presence and actions of the Holy Spirit are not limited to the Church and its members but that it extends to the whole universe. The history of the Holy Spirit in the cosmos is older because the Spirit of God was first in the universe before Christianity was born. The Spirit of God made his first appearance in the Bible about the world (Gen 1: 1-2) and only much later, he was manifested through Christ and in his followers. About the cosmic character of the Holy Spirit and his activities, Edwards rightly notes that "God's Spirit has been breathing life into the processes of the evolving universe from the very first. The laws of nature and the initial conditions of the early universe exist only because of the empowering presence and action of the Creator Spirit" [26]. It for this reason that Christians talk about God's dwelling in the universe within the context of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit [27].

The Second Vatican Council affirmed in strong terms the presence and actions of the Holy Spirit in the world. According to the Council, the Spirit of the Lord fills the earth, directs the unfolding of time, renews the face of the earth, and is present in the development of the world [28]. This understanding of the all-pervading presence and actions of the Spirit in the universe implies that "The same Spirit is at work divinizing the world through parents, politicians, merchants, researchers, scholars, mystics, priests, religious men and women, and charity workers as they carry out their specific roles" [29]. Therefore, speaking of the Holy Spirit concerning nation-building is both socially logical and in keeping with Christian religious belief.

In what follows, six motifs of values and principles embedded in the Christian religious belief in the Holy Spirit will be highlighted and discussed concerning their implications for nation-building in Nigeria.

IV. BELIEF IN THE HOLY SPIRIT PROPOSES A MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

The Christian Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments establish a close connection between leadership and the Spirit of God. Israel was molded into a nation under the leadership of Moses and the striking qualities of Moses as a leader and of the seventy elders he selected to assist him in administration are traced to the fact that the Spirit of God was with them. When Moses brought the seventy elders to stand around the tent; "The Lord then came down in the cloud and spoke to him. Taking some of the spirits that were on Moses, he bestowed it on the seventy elders; and as the spirit came to rest on them, they prophesied" (Numbers 11: 25). The elders were given a share of the principle of Moses' leadership. The Spirit of God continued to be associated with the leadership of Joshua (Num 27: 18, Deut 34:9), and others who led Israel during the period it lived as a loose collection of tribes without an institutionalized monarchy. At each point, the Spirit moved the leaders to accomplish specific missions for the good of the people of Israel.

The first two kings of Israel, Saul, and David were intimately associated with the Spirit of God. Both of them were anointed by Samuel to mark the beginning of their reign and in each case, the Spirit of God came upon them (1 Sam 9: 26-10: 13. 16: 13). The Spirit constituted the beginning of their kingship as well as the source of their authority as leaders over Israel. The link between the Spirit of God and leadership is further evidenced by the fact that when Saul was rejected from being the leader, the Spirit of God departed from him (1 Sam 16: 14-23). As the monarchy became fully institutionalized, the connection between the Spirit of God and the leaders in Israel dwindled greatly and the quality of leadership waned as well. The people continued to express hope for the restoration of the Davidic type of kingship which was exercised under the direction of God's Spirit. They looked expectantly for the messiah because it was promised that he would be a person of the Spirit [³⁰].

Considering Jesus as a leader, it is obvious that his history from conception, through death to the resurrection is presented as the work of the Holy Spirit. He did not hide this fact (Luke 4: 18-19) and ultimately, he passed on the same principle of leadership to his successors (John 20: 19; Acts 2: 1-11). St Paul, who knew only the risen Christ, did not show any less awareness about this connection between leadership and the Holy Spirit. He counted leadership as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Eph 4: 11).

Besides his role as the inner principle of effective leadership, the Holy Spirit provides a leadership model by himself. Moses and Joshua were the physical human leaders that led the people of Israel from the land of Egypt to the Promised Land. However, it is known that the people's journey was carefully directed through the alternating guidance of the pillars of fire and cloud. Moses and the people relied on the leading of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The "cloud" and "fire" are principal symbols of the Holy Spirit in Judeo-Christian tradition; so, Israel's journey from Egypt through the wilderness to Canaan was primarily accomplished under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Deserts are known for extreme weather conditions; very hot during the day and too cold by night. Acting under the form of fire by night, the Holy Spirit kept the Israelites safe from cold and helped to scare away possible attacks from wild animals. Similarly, under the form of a cloud by day, the Holy Spirit was like a canopy that shielded the people from the scorching desert sun.

The leadership model characteristic of the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit does not support in any way the miracle mentality and approach to both human and national growth. The road through which the Holy Spirit led Israel to the Promised Land was not without difficulties. There was a shorter way between Egypt and the land of Canaan but the Spirit chose to lead Israel through the way of the Red Sea and of the wilderness (Exod 13: 17-18). Similarly, the Spirit moved Jesus from the River Jordan to the wilderness where he was without any food or drink for forty days and nights and tempted by the devil. The Spirit did not spare Jesus of the struggles and confrontations that are typical of human existence, rather he chose to give him victory within through them [³¹].

Thus, Christian belief in the Holy Spirit proposes a model of leadership that inspires and empowers others, having a good knowledge of the challenges facing the people, being determined to face difficulties with courage without resigning to the miracle approach to problem-solving.

V. BELIEF IN THE HOLY SPIRIT STIMULATES UNITY AND DIVERSITY

In Christian understanding, the Holy Spirit is essentially personal, social, and relational. By the logic of this essence, he is capable of creating and entering into relationships and using them as his context of operations. In the same way, he is capable of cutting across the walls and barriers of differences, diversities, and distinctions and holding them together in healthy unity. For this reason, within the three persons of God, fellowship is usually attributed to the Holy Spirit and the Scripture bears witness to it (2 Cor 13: 13). Fellowship is from the Greek word *koinonia* which in the New Testament refers to a state of unity characterized by sharing, joint participation, joint ownership of a gift, and mutual contribution of the same gift [³²]. According to Moltmann, "Fellowship means opening ourselves for one another, giving another a share in ourselves. It creates respect for one another. Fellowship lives in reciprocal participation and from mutual recognition. Fellowship

comes into being when people who are different have something in common, and when what is in common is shared by different people" [33].

Fellowship speaks of the nature of the Holy Spirit as well as what he does and the way he operates. The Holy Spirit works as the unitive principle that causes the multitude of things and persons that make up the universe to be together and this reflects his function in relation with the other two divine persons, the Father and the Son. Rightly, "The Eastern and Western churches have since viewed the Holy Spirit as the bond, the fellowship, or the mutual charity between Father and Son; they are absolutely united in the Spirit" [34].

The bond of unity which defines the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is not created by force and does not possess anything by coercion. It is unity based on sharing and respect for the other in total recognition of their distinctiveness [35]. It makes room for differences, distinctiveness, and diversities and discourages individualism and political totalitarianism or the type of centralization of power of governance that is marked by rigidity and total control. In fact, the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the services rendered through and to the Spirit are marked by variety and channeled to the common good of the community (1 Cor 12: 4-6). Thus, in the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit, unity and diversity are held harmoniously together as an asset for meaningful growth in the community.

Nigeria is a country characterized by striking varieties, diversities, and differences in terms of ethnic origins, culture, language, religion, natural and human endowments, and histories. Records show that "Nigeria has one of the highest ethnic nationalities to be found in one single nation in the world" [36]. The logic of unity in diversity allows room for the recognition and acceptance of differences and turning them into useful elements for nation-building. The different parts of the nation are to develop at their own pace and yet be at the service of the one nation.

VI. BELIEF IN THE HOLY SPIRIT ENUNCIATES SOLIDARITY

The Holy Spirit does not relate to the universe as a disinterested and detached onlooker. His cosmic indwelling and fellowship presuppose total involvement in the history of the cosmos to the point of suffering with it. In the first instance, for the Holy Spirit to inhabit a universe chiefly marked by suffering "presupposes a self-limitation, a self-humiliation and a self-surrender of the Spirit" [37]. The suffering of the Spirit in and with the universe is one of the profound mysteries of the Christian religion but it is not absurd. It is explainable by the logic of love wherefore whoever loves partakes in some ways in the experiences of the beloved.

After a long struggle, Christianity, through reflection on the history of Christ, affirmed that God and suffering are not contradictions and that in some ways, suffering belongs to the divine [38]. Nevertheless, every creature suffers for its nature; animals suffer as animals, human beings suffer as humans, and God suffers as God. The unity of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son makes him a full participant in the event of Calvary. The person of the Holy Spirit consists in love that is eternally free and open, and in keeping with this nature, the Holy Spirit is suffering love as well as redeeming love. He suffers not as a result of a lack but out of the fullness of his being as love. Just as the God of Israel partook of the suffering and humiliation of his people in exile, so does the Triune God partake of the difficulties of the world through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit suffers from the people in their struggles to build the nation. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit which implies sharing and solidarity expresses itself most abundantly in his ability and willingness to co-suffer with the builders of the nation in the pains they undergo. This solidarity guarantees the hope of success in the project at hand and provides consolation to them as well. For, "The God who through his indwelling Spirit suffers with those he has created is the firm hope of created being. This hope is our assurance that the beings he has created have not been forsaken by their Creator" [39].

One major problem with nation-building in Nigeria is that the leaders are usually far from the realities of what the common people in the country undergo. The leaders and the few others who control the wealth of the nation have almost everything they need in abundance; they go for medical check-ups overseas and secure admissions for their children in the best schools outside the country. Maximum security is provided for them and their families, and roads are cleared of traffic and obstacles when they must out of necessity travel by road. Meanwhile, there is so much misery and suffering in the land for the masses. The principle of the solidarity between the leader and the led embedded in the Christian belief in the Holy Spirit is an alternative to this existing situation in the country and adopting it would impact positively nation-building in Nigeria.

VII. BELIEF IN THE HOLY SPIRIT CREATES BASIS FOR DIALOGUE

Christian religious belief in the Holy Spirit provides a strong basis for dialogue between Christians and the adherents of the African Traditional Religions and Islam for the ultimate purpose of nation-building. The relationship among these three different religions in Nigeria has often been marked by conflicts and rivalries that give rise to crises and violence that lead to the destruction of lives and properties on large scales. This negative impact of religion has adverse effects on nation-building but can be curtailed through proactive dialogue among the members of the different religions in the country. Inter-religious dialogue is a *sine qua non*

for meaningful nation-building in Nigeria. In his speech at the opening of the Exhibit on the World's Religions at Santa Clara University in 2005, Kung said that "There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions and no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions..." [40].

Dialogue may be understood as "conversation, a discussion or exchange of ideas and opinions, especially between two groups, with a view to resolving conflict or achieving agreement" [41]. Interreligious dialogue is the meeting of people from different religions to know and appreciate one another and the truth and be able to coexist and co-work for common projects. This dialogue can take place on the level of collaboration in matters of social concerns, daily life, or doctrine [42]. Usually, the dialogue of life, a dialogue of sincere love and fraternizing expressed in terms of attending social functions organized by people of other religions, mutual greeting, giving and receiving gifts from one another, is highly encouraged because it is about the easiest to accomplish. Nonetheless, easy as the dialogue of life appears to be, experience shows that when real religious crises occur, their gains vanish quickly. Better fruit from interreligious dialogue calls for discussions and a greater understanding of the beliefs of the other religions. By encountering themselves on the level of the real areas that breed conflicts, the religions will be better exposed to the truth and disposed to tolerate and accept one another.

Belief in the Holy Spirit provides Christians in Nigeria a favourable ground for meaningful interreligious dialogue with Muslims and African Traditional Religionists. The Islamic Religion and the African Traditional Religion do not understand or believe in the Holy Spirit in the same way as Christianity does, but belief in spirits is common to all the three religions. The Quran affirms the existence of spirits particularly in the form of angels. These spirits or angels are creatures of light who live and work at the service of Allah. In addition to the angels, there are ubiquitous spiritual beings whose identities are hidden from the physical world. Put simply, "the belief in spirits is a reality among Muslims ..." [43]. The African Traditional Religion and the African worldview, in general, are deeply spirit-centered and spirit-oriented. Africans see reality as fundamentally made up of two highly connected spheres: the visible/physical world and the invisible/spiritual world. There is hardly any dimension of the life of the African where the presence and activities of spirits are not richly felt. The farms, markets, streams, rivers, mountains, and homesteads are all abodes and areas of operation of spirits. Hence, West Africa is described as "a constituency that lays high premium on spirit" [44]. The absolute control of the universe is in the hands of the spiritual realities, with the Supreme Being as the principal actor and cause of all things. In fact, "the invisible sphere dictates the pace, regulates and influences what happens at the visible sphere. It is, therefore, a spirit-filled world at the visible reality; a world where all activities are interpreted in terms of the intricate interactions of these realities" [45].

Therefore, besides having the belief in spirits as part of their religions, the adherents of the three principal religions in Nigeria have the African worldview in common. So, the basis from which these adherents of the different religions understand, interpret, and experience realities are highly related to spirits. The combined effect of sharing the belief in spirits by the fact of their religions and of being Africans makes the belief in the Holy Spirit a veritable point of entry and ground for interreligious dialogue in Nigeria.

VIII. BELIEF IN THE HOLY SPIRIT BESPEAKS FREEDOM

The Christian belief system recognizes a very strong connection between the Holy Spirit and freedom. St Paul sums up the significance of Christ and his ministry on earth under the term freedom when he says, "Christ freed us to make us free. So, remain firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery" (Gal 5: 1). This freedom that Christ brought to the world is executed through the Holy Spirit; "The Lord is Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3: 17). It was the inward and outward experience of freedom that the early Christian believers had from their association with the Holy Spirit that prompted them to call him "Lord". The association of the Holy Spirit and freedom explains why for Christians, "The essence of the expression of the Holy Spirit is free spontaneity" [46]. The imaging of the Holy Spirit as wind or air derives from his association with freedom. This association is accentuated by the words of Jesus to Nicodemus that "The wind blows where it pleases and you hear its sound but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3: 8). The freedom which the Spirit mediates is primarily spiritual but it guarantees the liberty of the integral human person and his whole environment. The history of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the world has liberation as its ultimate goal.

Freedom refers to "the condition or right of being able or allowed to do, say, think, etc. whatever you want to, without being controlled or limited" [47]. Freedom is foundational to the realization of Nigeria's project of nation-building. It forms the basis of good leadership, unity, solidarity, dialogue, and their contributions to the construction and sustenance of a just, upright and caring society. The effort of Nigeria and its citizens to build the nation is hampered by different forms of constraints that impinge on the freedom of the state or its people. These constraints are either from within or outside the country.

Obstacles to freedom from outside the country include neocolonialism, and international debts and they constitute major weights against nation-building. Within Nigeria, the freedom of people is scarcely upheld,

promoted, or protected. Fundamental human rights are violated and denied with little or no opportunities for seeking redress. Elections are conducted in ways that the citizens do not choose their leaders; they are rather hand-picked and imposed on them. The freedom of speech, of religion, of association, and different regions to develop themselves are often compromised. The military rule that lasted over three decades in Nigeria created an environment that supports dictatorship with little or no room for dialogue. Bonafide citizens of Nigeria are disliked, discriminated against, or denied their rights on grounds of their belonging to certain ethnic groups or religions. Such is how ethnic and religious prejudices weigh heavily on freedom within the country. These constraints to freedom working from outside and within Nigeria do not allow nation-building the required condition to flourish.

Nigeria could find in the emphasis which the Christian belief in the Holy Spirit lays on freedom insight and a reawakening to its importance and apply them in nation-building.

IX. BELIEF IN THE HOLY SPIRIT STIMULATES COURAGE

Courage is required to guarantee the exercise of freedom, to face challenges, take initiatives and risks, carry out plans and similar actions to bring about transformational changes as are demanded in the making of a nation. It took courage to fight against colonial rule and win political independence for Nigeria, and in the same way, the continued existence of the nation particularly about nation-building cannot be achieved by any others means except through the same principle. The New Nation Movement defines courage as "perseverance, determination and moral strength" and counts it among the seven cardinal values that are foundational to building up strong and prosperous nations" [⁴⁸]. The Christian belief in the Holy Spirit offers good help in highlighting the importance of courage for nation-building. The courage that sets men and women free from fear and inferiority complex to achieve desired goals is located in the corpus of belief in the Holy Spirit.

The role that courage played on the disciples of Jesus Christ for the realization of the Christian agenda can be seen by contrasting their attitudes, values, and conditions before and after Pentecost. Before Pentecost, the Scriptures present a picture of the disciples as people who lacked the courage to a fault. At the point when Jesus was arrested, all his disciples deserted him and fled (Mark 14: 20) because they were afraid. Crippled by fear, Peter, the leader of the group of disciples, denied Jesus three times (Mark 14: 66-72). On the evening of the Resurrection when Jesus came to the disciples, they were together with all the doors locked because they were afraid of the Jews (John 20: 19).

Following the experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the condition of the disciples as regards courage changed radically. The same people who were under the locked door for fear of the Jews (John 20: 19), came out boldly to the open and began to speak and act courageously not minding the Jewish people and their leaders. It is unusual for persons like Peter and his colleagues who had little or no formal education or training in the Jewish religion to not feel inferior before the learned members of the Jewish Supreme Council, the Sanhedrin. The disciples who could not stand the sight of the least pain began to rejoice and count themselves privileged for suffering disgrace for the sake of Christ (Acts 5: 41). The transformation was amazing and it astonished the people who wondered at the boldness which the disciples exhibited before them (Acts 4: 13). They got the courage to break through the racial barriers and walls separating the Jews and the Gentiles and started to form new associations devoid of discrimination (Acts 10).

The experience of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost also made the disciples start believing in themselves. The incidence of the cure of a lame man by Peter and John at the Temple place called the Beautiful Gate sheds light on this effect of the Holy Spirit on the disciples concerning self-realization. Peter and John were going to the Temple to pray and there at the gate, there was a man crippled from birth who was being carried in. He asked the two apostles for alms. Peter spoke to the man in these words; "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk" (Acts 3: 6). Peter knew that he had neither silver nor gold (no money) but he had something to offer. The fact of having no money did not cause Peter and John any feeling of inferiority. They were convinced that they had something vital to offer and what they offered was better than money because it transformed the life of the lame man. This awareness dawned on the disciples through their experience of the Holy Spirit and that is how they were able to carry out the mission entrusted to them successfully.

Belief in the Holy Spirit serves to create awareness in people about what courage or the absence of it means for the realization of projects such as nation-building. Seeing what the disciples were before the Pentecost and what they became after it gives assurance that courage could become part of the experience of a people who did not have it before. Courage paves the way to believing in one's self and when this happens to a people, there is no limit to what they can do or the extent they can move in the direction of nation-building.

X. CONCLUSION

This work affirms that outstanding values and principles that are required for nation-building in Nigeria are embedded in the Christian religious belief in the Holy Spirit. In the style of leadership and the values of

unity in diversity, solidarity, freedom, courage, and dialogue espoused in the belief, Nigeria finds some of the valuable elements that she needs for its sustainable growth as a nation. Nation-building will receive a significant boost if the principles and values of this belief are appropriated and effectively applied. Through the appropriation and application of these values and principles from the Christian religious belief, the challenges of poor leadership, high propensity for divisiveness, inferiority complex, and unhealthy dependency, lack of courage, and insufficient basis for dialogue that have bedeviled nation-building in Nigeria for years will be positively addressed. This study has also shed light on a dimension of the belief which previously has not been obvious to the adherents of Christianity. Therefore, Christians can now appreciate the belief more than before for its implications for the well-being of all in the wider society. On account of these affirmations, the Christian religious belief in the Holy Spirit should be promoted particularly among Christians in the country while the principles and values of the belief are endorsed for every man and woman therein. The promotion of the belief and its values point to a high degree of contribution to nation-building. Further studies of this belief are required in order to possibly find out more or other values and principles which are embodied therein that have positive impacts on nation-building in Nigeria.

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