
RELIGION A POTENT FORCE FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION

Okobia Faith Nkem (Phd)

08037569117

E-Mail: Nkembia80@Yahoo.Com

&

Osajie Justina N.

08063782313

Department of Christian Religious Studies, College of Education, Aghor, Delta State

Abstract

This paper examined religion as a potent force for national integration because religion is the human and spiritual experiences, which serves as the machinery that propels successful development and a unifying factor which enhances national integration. The practice of religious beliefs helps to achieve the unity and faith that are ingrained in the Nigerian coat of arms. Religion inculcates moral discipline in people, transforms behaviour, establishes rules, defines relationships and serves as an agent of social control. A number of recommendations were made such as government should treat all religions equally and promote conscious agenda that will produce patriotic citizens, which will enhance National integration.

Keywords: religion, potent, force and national integration.

Introduction

Nigeria is a country characterized by many religions such as African traditional religion, Islam and Christianity. Before the advent of Islam and Christianity, the indigenous religion has control over the Nigerians. Therefore, the economic, social, political and religious values of the society were internalized. According to Ubrurhe (2000) sanctions and prohibitions were imposed on actions which the society disagreed upon. Deviants were punished by the society or the gods. Christianity and Islam are not void of the values hallowed by indigenous religion. Moreover, religion is a powerful element that is as old as man. It has influenced and permeated every aspect of human life, such as the social, economic, political and cultural. Ihuagwu and Amolo (2013) state that religion integrates all aspects of life since

every experience of man comes under its scrutiny. They further state that every human interest can be seen as a religious interest. It acts as a binding link between different sections of society and explains the relationships. Religion introduces harmony, discipline and order into social activities and provides leadership and purpose. Religion influences human character such as man's ethical standards, moral behaviour and standard of judgment.

The integration of the various ethnic groups and religious groups in the country is designed to emphasize the necessity of the existence of national unity as a spring board for sustainable peace. In most plural societies the promotion of national integration is often a conscious agenda of the nation. Policies are pursued to encourage individual and group allegiance to the nation and its institutions in order to produce patriotic citizens out of the antagonistic groups (Adejoh, 2005). In Nigeria according to Jega (2004) national integration is a process of forging unity in diversity and striving to be a unified people in the nation. This means the coming together of Nigerian citizens, to speak with one voice, appreciate the circumstances of their country and jointly protect the sovereignty of their country. This kind of action means a collective responsibility to do things together in a genuine spirit of brotherhood Salihu (2017).

Conceptual Framework

Integration

Integration is the act or process of combining two or more things so that they work together. Adebayo (1995) defined integration as a progressive removal of antagonism and reduction of cultural and regional decisions and differences in the process of creating a homogenous political unity. According to Usue (2011), integration is the bringing of people of different ethnic groups into unrestricted and equal association in the society.

National Integration

National integration according to Usue (2011) is the bringing of the different ethnic, religious, economic, social and political groups into equal association on national issues. Adebayo (1995) states that national integration is the process of building a just social unit which confers on every inhabitants with a sense of belonging, a satisfactory level of participation in decision -making and development and a change to share from the resources of the society commensurate with decent and acceptable living. Bello (1987) defines national integration as the harmonious co-existence of diverse social groups. National integration is the unity of various ethnic groups in the country or nation in such a way that they see one

another as brothers and sisters devoid of tribal sentiments, nepotism and all other vices that bring about polarization of the people Usara (2001).

Religion:

Roy (1996) defines religion as man's search for supernatural assistance in achieving a sense of security. Ibenwa (2014) on his part, defines religion as man's awareness of the existence of a supernatural being whom he believes to be his creator and controller of the universe and his willingness to worship him. Attansay (2006) defines religion as a belief and worship of Supernatural Being that observes all human affairs and is interested in them. According to Agang (2009) religion is part of the social system which gives a society its social and cultural identity, self affirmation and self definition. Religion presents itself as the cornerstone of the foundation of people, since it dictates their social lives through norms and values. It also provides incentives for people to live moral lives.

The Importance of Religion

Religion teaches morality and shapes character. It is a process of guiding the character and development of an individual in the society in order for him/her to be able to do what is right or just. Religion inculcates moral discipline into individuals and provides inspirations required by Nigerians to be united and fight against tribalism and promote national integration.

Religion permeates every aspect of human life. It lays emphasis on moral consciousness which is the life wire of any society, because a morally conscious individual thinks better and acts better by living a worthy life and refraining from tribalism and selfishness which enhances national integration.

Religion is an indispensable institution that has the potency to bring about desired changes in human beings. Religion criticizes the existing social order and creates strong revolutionary force that calls man and unjust society to order as they tread towards social injustice, lack of common good, embezzlement, bad human relations, tribalism and selfishness, which hinder national integration (Iwe, 1999).

Religion shares consciousness of the world as a single place, armed with transcendental reference point and stands as a custodian of truth and judge of human ideas and values. Religion fosters survival of freedom, raises standards of the society through constant criticism that stabilizes every society. It aids human liberation, social justice, good human relations, respect for human life, discipline and social changes, which help individuals

to become useful members of the society, and promotes national integration.

The Role of Religion in Promoting National Integration

Religion plays important role in enhancing national integration because it advocates for brotherly love, peace, unity, reconciliation, tolerance, progress, harmonization of people, reinforcement of values, good human relation, common good and justice. Below are some of the ways religion promote national integration

i. Religion serves as a unifying factor

Religion serves as a means of unifying different ethnic and political groups in the nation. Nigerian government has promoted national integration, which encourages multiplicity of religions. A number of constitutional provisions, fight against religious discrimination and marginalization. (Ayinla, 2003) noted that Nigerian Constitution has attempted to enforce unity through the diversity of religion. In most cases, state machineries have been used and public funds have been spent to strengthen religions, which promote integration. Instances include the observance of religious holidays as Eid Fitr, Eid Kabir, Easter and Christmas among others are unifying factor for different ethnic groups. Public oath based on the Qur'an and Bible as well as official request by the Government that Muslims and Christians should offer prayers on certain occasions. (Oloso, 2004) also supports that religion is a unifying factor by stating that during festive periods, Muslims, Christians and political leaders exchange greetings.

ii. Harmonization of People's Interest

A society consists of individuals with different interests and values and they are bind together by a network of social relations. This social relation is sustained by the harmonization of the individual's interests as regards to what they are to approve and disapprove, irrespective of their individual interest and values, they must conform to the values the society uphold. Ubrurhe (2000) states that the formation and maintenance of any society depends on the existence of consensus. Religion helps to provide this needed consensus by imposing sanctions on some acts which might hinder the continuity of the society. Moreover, the individuals within the society accept these sanctions and prohibitions because they believe they were provided by God and other supernatural beings. The individuals have to accept them and shaping their behaviour to accord with the societal norms and values. The upholding of the sanctions or prohibitions is met with appropriate

consequence from the supernatural being and members of the society. Therefore, religion helps control behaviour and is thus an agent of social control.

iii. **Conformity with the societal Norms and Values**

For human societies to remain stable and man's social conduct to be orderly and predictable, social conduct should conform with certain principles. These principles are the main goals of man's social behaviour. If these values are well integrated, made meaningful and understood by the members of the society, there will be agreement as to the direction of their behaviour. According to Ubrurhe (2000), religion defines the ultimate values with their implications for conduct, depending on the accepted social relationship that should exist between its members and their duties. This creates in the individual the awareness that if he behaves contrary to the custom and tradition, the Supreme Being will intervene to his own detriment. Religion helps man to conform to the societal norms and values. Important among the values are those placed by members of a society upon one another. By defining the highest values, religion has assisted in the proper functioning of society, which enhances societal stability and national integration.

iv. **Reinforcement of Values**

Human beings fulfill societal obligations and behave in accordance with the accepted values because of fear of being punished. Social norms and values are the ideal standard of behaviour expected from every member of the society. The societal norms are, in all cases, accompanied with both rewards and punishments. Often man feels rewarded when he conforms to what is expected of him and feels guilty if he fails to comply. In most societies, sanctions have constraining force. The punishment arising from there has consequences, which include scolding lampoon, ostracism, excommunication and the final judgment of hell fire.

v. **Justice**

According to Bird (1997), justice is a habit whereby a man renders to one another his due by constant and perpetual will. It is also rendering to each what is his own by right. Justice occupies a place of emergence in every human setting and religion emphasizes on justice and speaks against any form of injustice. It also places premium on justice, encourages peaceful co-existence and good human relations. Therefore justice is a value which every human relation solely depends on. It is needed for national integration. Obiefuna and Izuegbu (2016) state

that justice is the hallmark for harmonious existence as well as national integration, and a basic requirement for social relations and action. Religion condemns lying and injustice and uphold truth and justice as John 8:32 states that "you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free". Truth is life and, it is only when it is told that justice is done. It then implies that truth is connected with social order. While justice includes, fairness, harmony, honesty and goodness which are essential for national integration. A just person is straightforward, upright, honest, predictable and impartial, while a just action is action performed as it should be. Justice is thus conceived as a straight course to which every human being and every human action should conform, which will enhance national integration. Religion encourages human beings to shun cheating, oppression of the poor and the weak. Therefore, if Nigerian leaders can imbibe the principles of justice, good governance would be achieved. Many states of Nigeria today are stagnant and people are suffering because the leaders and some of the led find it difficult to give what is due to whom it is due. The act of injustice and selfishness can be stopped only when the right morals such as honesty and transparency are inculcated in the lives of individuals. Nigerians have in most cases witnessed a set of representatives that represent their pockets and not the people, which leads to the negligence of the people. Therefore, Nigeria's leaders need to carry the people along and make adequate consultations before making and implementing any decision to enhance national development because peace and unity promote progress and development. Therefore, the enthronement of justice will help to stop injustice and various practices of inequality in the nation and promote national integration.

vi. **Good Human Relations**

Religion has the goal of improving on the citizen's intra and inter-personal relationship in our community. The intra-personal problems include individual's reactions to circumstances which create disorder. Most often, the individual inconveniences himself and others in the community. Some symptoms of intra-personal relationship problems include emotional depression, sociopath and psychopath problems, hatred and inferiority complex (Odebunmi 1990; Okorodudu 1995). In addition, these internal personal problems generate attitudes which govern interpersonal relations. Instances include the manifestation of hostility or uncontrolled emotional temperaments. The behaviour of a citizen may affect relationship with others. This is why religion seeks to improve on the intra and inter-personal relationship of members through the socialization agencies of the home, school, church and mosque etc in the following ways:

- a. By helping individuals to acquire traits such as patience and tolerance as they discuss on issues and interact with one another in the society.
- b. By making individuals appreciate and develop practical traits of good neighbourliness, sacrificial love, and respect for the worth and dignity of others and fair play.
- c. By appreciating the value of humanness and courtesy in intra and inter-personal relationships, in dealing with self and others.
- d. By encouraging citizens to understand the necessity of appreciating the reality of life and adopt positive measures in resolving personal and interpersonal problems.

vii. **Promotion of National Consciousness**

It is also the goal of religion to encourage citizens to acquire personality and community traits which are necessary for national integration and consciousness, for fostering unity and progress. For instance, the development of cultural tolerance, understanding, respect and acquisition of sentiments that maybe positively disposed to the welfare of others in communities other than our own, would go a long way in harmonizing national integration, consciousness, unity and stability in the nation (Okorodudu, 1995).

Therefore, the following ways are necessary for the reorientation of citizens towards developing national consciousness.

- (a) Appreciating patriotism and honesty
- (b) Having a sense of belonging to one's nation.
- (c) Willingness to render faithful service to the nation
- (d) Expressing loyalty to the leadership of the nation as provided for in the nation's constitution.
- (e) Supporting unity of the nation without fractionalization into ethnic interests and ethnic patriotism.
- (f) Shunning selfishness and promoting communalism in the nation (Okorodudu, 1995).
- (g) Avoiding covetousness and living by the principle of contentment which will enables the citizens to live within their income.

viii. **Common Good**

Religion remains the conscience of the nation and a moral tool that is capable of directing the affairs of individuals, groups and nations. Izuegbu (2013) posits that common good is a call for equity and justice in Nigeria. Patriotism which is needed for national integration depends largely on how the affairs of the nation are conducted to carry everybody along. Where the affairs are conducted in utmost fairness which the common good demands,

there will be high level of patriotism. Therefore, common good remains a strong call for those in authority at all levels to embrace the good of all so that each person may have every cause to contribute to the national integration. Government at all levels must work towards the common good if the nation wants to reach the height she works towards. Ehusani (2012) states that government exists in society to promote the common good and therefore it must strive to ensure the best possible good for everyone. Our leaders must put in place such laws that will guarantee the rights of individuals to private property, but also checkmate the acquisitive instinct of individuals. In this way, our government will ensure just and equitable distribution of national resources and protect the vulnerable poor from the excesses of the powerful who are often tempted to sell the poor and the weak for a pair of shoes.

ix. **Nigerian Motto and National Anthem**

According to Ubrurhe (2000), The ethical values gotten from religion are emphasized in the Nigerian Motto and National Anthem. The Nigerian Motto is unity and faith. The unity within the Nigerian context implies:

- i. Unity in spite of cultural differences
- ii. Unity in spite of geographical location
- iii. unity in spite of one's religious affinity
- iv. unity in spite of political differences.

In fact, it is unity in diversity. Faith on the other hand is founded on God, Allah, Supreme Being and other supernatural agents. Therefore the practice of our religious beliefs will help us to achieve the unity and faith that ingrained in the Nigerian coat of arms which will enhance national integration.

The National Anthem also emphasizes the nation's objectives and goals which runs thus:

Arise oh compatriots
Nigeria's call obey
To serve our father land,
With love and strength and faith
The labour of our heroes past
Shall never be in vain
To serve with heart and might
One nation bound in freedom,
Peace and unity.

O God of creation
Direct our noble cause
Guide our leaders right
Help our youth the truth to know
In love and honesty to grow
And living just and true
Great lofty height attain
To build a nation where
Peace and justice shall reign

The national anthem has reemphasized the values that would enable Nigerians to live together in love and peace, and enhance national Integration. The wise men who drew up the constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria in 1979. Saw religion as one of the tools for the realization of the National objectives and goals which will promote national integration and state that no religious group shall be prevented from providing religious instructions for pupils and students in any place of education provided the religions are the recognized ones accepted and practiced by the people of that community

Conclusion

It has been stated in this paper that religion is a potent force for promoting national integration through the production of patriotic individuals who will shun injustice hostility, selfishness, tribalism and poor human relations. Therefore if the moral virtues inculcated by religion are imbibed by all Nigerians, it will boost their morale and make Nigeria to be a free plural society where national resources are shared equally and respect for the worth and dignity of every individual are accorded, irrespective of his or her tribe and religious beliefs.

Recommendations

1. Government should promote conscious agenda that will produce patriotic citizens
2. Government should treat all religions equally and emphasize their importance in the transformation of people's lives.
3. Nigerians should develop a culture of religious tolerance to enhance national integration.
4. Right morals such as honesty and transparency should be inculcated into the lives of individuals through religious instructions.
5. Nigerian leaders should develop the culture of justice and selflessness.
6. Government should put in place such laws that will checkmate the acquisitive instinct of individuals and ensure a just and equitable distribution of national resources.
7. Religious values must be learnt and internalized by forming the child's socialization process during his formative years
8. Religion should be integrated into national policies meant for national development.
9. The Nigerian leaders should live to make difference on people by influencing people's lives positively through their attitudes.
10. Religious leaders should live to impact lives by bringing the best out of people.
11. Government should determine to add value to people's lives by being interested in their welfare and meeting their needs.

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