

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE ROLE OF RELIGION AS A TOOL FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE IN NIGERIA.

OSAJIE, JUSTINA .N.

Introduction

The world today is full of many problems part of which are, schicism, oppression, fear and crises. It therefore, becomes obviously presumed in some nations like Nigeria that crises at the rate it is occurring is not escapable. Crisis/conflict is a recurring natural phenomenon which is unavoidable in every socio-cultural, political and economic behavioural setting. However, crisis depending on how it is being handled, could affect the society positively or negatively. In the case of Nigeria, one of the types of violent crises that incessantly affect the socio-political history of the nation is religious differences. Such religious crises are common and particularly takes place between the Muslims and Christians population in the Northern part of the country.

These crises so affected the nation that it has resulted to a strained relationship between Muslims and Christians; many lives lost, properties destroyed and many being displaced and became refugees in their own country. In line with this, Onabanjo (2011) states that *"conflicts and crises have hindered genuine national integration more than fifty years after Nigeria's independence thus raising serious concerns on the unity of the nation"*.

According to Obasi (2009), the issue of conflict can influence, alter and shape the lives of citizens or individuals. If it is not controlled properly, resolvment/peace will not be achieved. Peace itself is not easily come by; it is a process and it takes time and efforts to realize it. Obasi (2009) went further to ask how conflicts can be handled, resolved and achieved peacefully. The difficulty we encounter each day is that conflict can be resolved but peace may not be achieved. This is where religion has to play a significant role in the process of peace resolving and since Nigeria is a multi-religious nation; our concern is not on any particular religion but on the role of combining efforts and ideas of the three main religions Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion (A.T.R). This work among other things seek to contribute her quota towards resolving the Religious crises facing Nigeria as much has been said and written on this direction.

Conceptual Framework

Religion:

The word Religion has been defined by many authors in diverse ways. Johnston and Sampson (1994) defined religion as "an institutional framework within which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued, usually among a community of a like minded believers". Heynes (1993) stated that religion is "a system of language and practices that organizes the world in terms of what is deemed holy".

Dubois (2008) observed that religion is "a powerful constituent of cultural norms and values because it addresses the most profound existential issues of human life (for example, freedom and inevitably, fear and faith, security and insecurity, right or wrong, sacred and profane), therefore, deeply implicated in individual and social conceptions of peace.

In line with the above, Okwueze (2003) saw religion as "a regulated pattern of life of a people in which experiences, beliefs, and knowledge are reflected in man's world, the physical as well as the metaphysical world".

According to Dapamu (2009), religion has to do with "the belief in the existence of the supernatural Being, and how such belief can help in influencing the attitudes of religious adherents to growth and development in Nigeria". No matter what one thinks about the definition of religion and its impact, it is obviously known that religion cannot be put aside, unavoidable and synonymous with life.

Peace: Peace as David (2009) stated is generally defined "*as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence and about peaceful co-existence. It is primarily concerned with creating and maintaining a just order in society and the resolution of conflict by non-violent means*". This definition, is line with that of Rummel (1981) "*who regards peace 'as the absence of dissension, violence or war; a state of concord, harmony and tranquility. In agreement with this, Galtung (1996) opines that peace is a state of absence of hostility disturbance or agitation*"

From the afore definitions, it implies that peace making is associated with conflict resolution without the use of violence. Therefore, peace prevents loss of life and build human capacity.

Conflict/Crisis:

Scholars have arrived that conflict is an unavoidable process of social life and basically of social existence. According to Aja Akpuru (2007), stated that "conflict involves two or more parties that have or perceive in compatibility in either interests and values, or in strategy of achieving the ends desired. For him, conflict is a strain in a relationship that goes with emotion. The higher the emotion, the high tendency of an evolving conflict intensity.

Shehu (2007) maintained that conflict occurs even in the 'best' of human societies. That conflict index includes mutual image of misunderstanding, hostile utterances, actions and responses that seek to put the interest(s) of the other party in a disadvantaged position.

The word "Conflict" has been defined by many scholars, (Pondy, 1967; Katz and Kahn, 1987; Flippo, 1980; Mc Enery, 1985; and Anuguom, 1997) have defined conflict in different ways, meaning and interpretations. One common factor in these definitions is that conflict is the expression of disagreement over something paramount to two individuals, groups, states or nations when they have different views or opinions, goals, needs, values and they fight over limited resources. This view seems to be in line with Coser as cited by Adejo (2002) that crisis/conflict is *"a struggle between and among individuals or groups over values and claims to scarce resources, status symbols and power bases"*. The objective of the individuals or groups engaged in conflict is to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals so that they can enjoy the scarce resources, the status, symbols and power.

From the above therefore, conflict is obtainable in situations where goals, aspirations, interest, the needs of the social groups cannot be achieved. Thus, Adejo (2001) sees conflict *"as disjunctive process which results in the disruption and destruction of all so certain of the bounds of unity that may previously have existed between disputants."*

Religious Conflict

Religious conflict on the other hand by Ugwu cited in Gofwen (2004) is conceptualized *"as a specific form of conflict between groups which differed ideologically along religious lines within a pluralistic setting with each striving for political relevance"*. In other words, religious interest is like political interest that must be operated or go hand in hand with the principle of divide and rule.

This separation is quite important on the bases of doctrine and faith. Therefore, religious crisis refers to those who do not belong to the same

faith and who are well guided and protected by some classified or unclassified doctrines. No wonder, Takaya (1992) pointed on this issue and avers that; *"Religions are parochial and emotional socialisers.*

They specialize in building one faith exclusive brotherhood communities. Religion at some point is politics and is the most potent and long lasting political association. Moreover, religious creeds excite and extract the deepest possible emotional and physical loyalties from their faith".

This view also seems to agree with Nwaomah (2010) who observed that conversion campaigns as in Nigeria, by opposing religion(s) and fanaticism arising from indoctrination of adherents, mostly due to parochial education, can also reinforce religious hostilities and thus create a conflict. In other words, things that make religious crises special are the kind of results on religious doctrines being seen by the people, the formation of values, feelings and emotions of the identification of the groups.

Various Religious Crises in Nigeria (Colonial and Post Colonial Period)

Between 1966 and 2015, many religious conflicts, resulting in the death of thousands and millions of people, destruction of churches and mosques and properties were encountered in Nigeria. The most recent of these religious crisis is the conflict and terrorist attack that have been traced to the Boko Haram, an Islamic group with other terrorist groups outside Nigeria. The group originated in 2002, in the capital of Nigeria's northeastern Borno State, Maiduguri. Though, these crises are religious in nature, other factors according to Nwaomah (2010) *have also been identified as contributory or even fundamental to the crisis; and that the myriad of causes remote and immediate could be summed into religious, socio political and economic factors.*

The first and most recorded event of what appeared to be a political crisis but which later assumed a religious status was in 1966. The result of the Kaduna Nzeogwu aborted Coup' et at led to the Pogrom where the easterners residing in Kano were massacred in Sabon Gari in retaliation of their leaders who died in the process of the Coup' etat (Ibenwa and Ugwu, 2006). To buttress this view, Ekwunife (1992) states that the failure of the Coup' etat later flowered into blood civil war.

In 1980, there was a religious riot in Yan Awaki Ward which Mohammed Marwa Maitatsine, a Cameroonian born, who raised unreasonably Muslim group that held Nigeria at ransome through his

much killings in which thousands of people and properties were destroyed. Again, one of the very first serious religious crises that brought quite an unimaginable problem on both lives and economy of Nigeria was in 1980 in Zaria City when properties belonging to Christians were destroyed without remorse. This exercise not only stopped the well-being of life but also spread to most other parts of Northern Nigeria in 1982. The state also witnessed another religious crisis when a group of fierce Muslim demonstrators burnt down some churches.

Ugwu (2009) states that in 1991, there was a "Peaceful" procession initiated by Izala Sect (Islamic Sect) to halt Rev. Reinhard Bonnke from having a crusade in Kano which later degenerated into a bloody religious violence as Muslim youths inspite of all appeals by the Emir and members of his council, still went on rampage and eventually led to loss of lives in thousands and destruction of property.

Furthermore, in 2004, this 'hot bed' of religious crisis registered another negative landmark in killings. This was caused by a group of people protesting against the killings in Jos, Plateau State where some streets in Kano they unleashed their anger on usual targets and suddenly a death toll of high magnitude was recorded (Adamu et al, 2004).

Another similar incident that happened in 1987, was when Christian students from College of Education, Kafanchan had a squabble with Muslim students who were openly against Christian students that organized a crusade in the campus. This riot led to the killing of people and the burning of some mosques by Christians and some native Kajes.

Again, notably recorded were religious crisis in Katsina, Funtua, Zaria, Gusau and Kaduna which resulted in the burning of churches, destroying of lives and damaging property belonging to Christians. Kaduna in 1988, saw another religious disturbance in Kaduna Polytechnic where some Muslim students destroyed the foundation walls of Christian chapel.

Gofwen (2004) observed that the other very notorious religious crisis, which wrecked the city of Kaduna precisely in 1992, was the Zangon Kataf riot. This later spread to Zaria, Kaduna and Ikara all in Kaduna State. This simply arose as a communal feud between the Kataf Christians and Zangon Muslims (Hausa). It later assumed a new dimension spreading to other parts of the state. In addition, in the year 2000, religious conflict invaded the city as the crisis between Christians and Muslims changed into an inter-religious war leaving the State in a state of helplessness as several lives and property were destroyed.

Recognizing the importance of religion in Nigerian crises, Nwaomah, citing Boer (2004) observed that one cannot discuss about Nigerian political problem without relating it with religion. Every political situation always have a religious influence hence the political leaders prefer to deny the religious feeling of these crises since the value of religion cannot be questioned in the Nigerian politics. Reacting to the riots of 1987, for example, Kukah (1993) stated that "President Ibrahim B. Babangida denied the religious basis of the riots, arguing that the trails of destructions of lives and property in Kaduna, Zaria, Katsina and Funtua and other places in Kaduna State were politically motivated".

Moreso, Babangida as cited in Kukah (1993) note was quoted to have said "the riots were Carefully planned and masterminded by evil men who saw the incident in Kafanchan as an opportunity to subvert the Federal Military Government and the Nigerian nation". In line with this, Binta cited in (Boer, 2004) a Muslim women leader argued "I want the common man to know that their leaders want to use them for their selfish interests in the cover of religion. A lot of these leaders are only using religion to make money and to enrich themselves...."

Buttressing this fact, (Awowede, 2000 citing Boer 2004) asserts that in the 2000 Kaduna riots that followed the introduction of the Sharia law in the Northern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara authorities insisted that the Kaduna crisis was beyond religion. It is not religion. It is politics.

The varying political issue of the major religious crisis in Nigeria could be seen in misinterpretation of national events. For example, when President Shehu Shagari openly received Pope John II in 1982. Kukah (1993) asserts such 'fraternization' as a reason to question the "Muslimness" of President Shagari, claiming that Islam was losing out to Christianity and the president was losing grip of asserting himself as a Muslim leader. Based on this statement the adherents of each religious groups reacted violently, thereby wasting more lives and properties due to lack of misquotation and interpretation of the Bible and Quran.

Finally, is the issue of the application of the registration of Nigeria as a member of the organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). Ugwu (2009) opines that "arising from such factor as failure to implement the recommendations of the previous Judicial Commission of Inquiry, ethnic and religious differences, allegations of marginalization and victimization in the civil service, historical animosity between the Christian and Muslim groups and political reasons, religious crisis shad always emerged trying to tear the country apart".

Effects of Religious Crises on the Economy:

The effects of religious crises in Nigeria are numerous. It spreads to every part of the economy. Obviously speaking, crisis, not properly handled leads to discrimination, insecurity, low turn of economy, poor educational development, unemployment and mutual mistrust. This is the situation confronting Nigeria now, where thousands of people are being killed every day especially with the Boko Haram sect; properties damaged and destroyed. Consequently, these damages and wastes have made the society to lose the necessary manpower and service needed for the growth and development of the nation. It deprives and discourages the foreign investors in coming to the country to invest since their lives and properties may not be secured. Those who are investing due to this problem relocate to a more secured country thereby reducing the high rate turn up of the economy. The negative aspect of this will also mean that those employed in these sectors will lose their jobs and the income that would have been coming to the purse of the government will be lost.

Foreign aids will equally be lost since money cannot be invested for the development of the country because even if it is being invested, there is the tendency of being destroyed as a result of crisis. Tourists who could have been visiting Nigeria which can equally boost our income would also be suspended as tourists would be frightened due to uncertainty and insecurity in time of crisis.

The Role of religion in Promotion of Peace and Conflict Resolution.

Religion is regarded as of the oldest institutions that makes a significant contribution to the well-being of the society. It is a unifying factor in the society hence Okwueze (2003) cited Marx's definition of religion as "*the opium of the masses*". During religious crises, there are so many wars and violence to the extent that without religion (opium) which relieves us from the pains and agony arising from so much sorrow and agony (society), we cannot survive the difficulties that will face us in the present life. Therefore, religion gives us hope where it appears there is no hope. Religion makes it possible for us to live hopefully of a better tomorrow simply because its teachings have relieved the pains we are encountering today.

Religion governs the social as well as personal behaviour of Man by providing guidelines, laws and principles relating to his/her interaction with his/her fellow Man. This of course implies that religion is one of the strongest forces that is used to maintain peace in the society. Another purpose of religion in the society is to promote 'justice' since

justice is one of the main pillars of peace, the elements of peace and religion are the same. Thus, peace can be achieved only when there is law and order, and a state of harmony and mental calmness.

True religion must redefine its identity and mission to address the many challenges of the society to uplift the spirit of the down trodden and bring peace to them. To be precise, the church, Catholic Church in particular, in trying to create peace in the society from these religious crises have sheltered and continue to shelter Internally Displaced Citizens (IDC). These people have to be given a sense of meaning through elimination of many of their distresses. Such painful hurts that show themselves in these religious crises or communal violence that make people to be internally displaced does not portray the good image of the society.

In every religion, there must be covenant. This type of covenant is an alliance of friendship under the Old Testament of Biblical concept where Jonathan and David made a covenant of friendship. For example, whenever Jonathan's father wanted to kill David he always let him know and David always run for his dear life. If Nigerians have love for themselves and have this covenant of alliance of friendship, the tendency for the adherents of Christians and Muslims engaging in religious crises will be reduced. Therefore, Nigeria needs a binding force that will minimize, eliminate religious, communal and ethnic conflicts. This binding force is agreement or bond. Agreement binds people together through a solemn promise. It respects individual identities, guarantees human rights and builds trust. Trust too, guarantees security and where there is security, there is freedom, respect, peacefulness and creativity. Creativity nurtures development and development helps in the healing of wounds of division and establishes reconciliation (Obasi, 2009).

[Http://mepeace.org/m/blogpost](http://mepeace.org/m/blogpost) states that in the present age, three things are missing from people's lives; love, faith and fear. If a person loses these three things, he/she becomes fearless or violent too. Love for humanity and God, keeps a person humble and happy. Faith in God that everything will be alright keeps a person going. And fear of God, keeps one down to earth and kind. Religion is one of the strongest institutions that help a person believe in these three things simultaneously as they are important to control human behaviour. With this, one can say that religion is not only a promoter of peace but also has worked in the field of conflict prevention and resolution for ages.

Conclusion

In this write-up, Nigerian nation is often characterized on religious upheavals, worries, shock and crises that are generated in the northern parts of the country. It has been observed that both remote and immediate causes of these crises could be responsible. The paper also considered the role of religion as a tool for conflict resolution and peace in Nigeria. The Muslim and Christian groups of the three major religions in the country are, however, advised to show love, faith, fear and understanding in their reaction by imitating the teachings of their masters - Jesus Christ and Mohammed since both masters profess peace in their teachings. For example, in the Bible, Romans 12:18 and the Holy Quran in Surah Al-Maidah Chapter 5:5. If this can be done, I believe that there will be peace, sanity and tranquility in the nation, if and only if the followers of these faiths live up to expectation set for them by their respective religions, then the nation will move from crises of civilization to dialogues of civilization.

Recommendation

It is obviously true that, there is no academic research work without the problem being solved. On this note that this write-up offers a number of solutions to these religious crises in the country.

One of the solutions, is that, government should not be partial towards the formulation of religious policies. The two religions should not be favoured over or against one another as Boer (2004) explained *"we have already heard in volume one that, while the government had refused visas to some world famous, popular Muslims, Louis Farrakhan and Ahmed Deedat, of the USA and South Africa respectively, the Christian evangelist, Bonnke, was allowed to come and hold his revival. This perceived government partiality led to Muslim anger. In that tense context, Christians had the bad tasks of aggressively promoting Bonnke with loud speakers in Muslim neighbourhoods"*. This type of behaviour should be abhorred especially where people involved are hostile and aggressive.

Secondly, inadequate action/measure by government also aided the regular occurrence of religious crisis. It was shown by Boer (2004) when he asserts that some of the factors that *"aid the confused religious crises are, lack of appropriate action on the part of government in addressing the underlying problems that caused the riots, in stopping them in punishing the perpetrators. The police appear almost without exception in the work lights for either showing up too late or for being part of the problem not in frequenting complicating situations"*.

Dialogue, an age long solution to human problems should be used if the people involved have the notion of honest and trustworthy intention. Dialogue needs open mindedness, truth and sincerity. It should be done first rather than calling it up when the harm has been made. This was why Chukwulozie (1986) opines that "*dialogues infact are now the order of the day among religions and wherever people (Nigerians, for instance) want to get along meaningfully together*". Dialogue instead of violence, however, becomes a better means of achieving peace all over the world.

It is also being recommended that the feeling of brotherhood, fraternity and nationhood should be propagated, especially in the Northern parts of the country where this degree of intolerance is known to be on the high side (Ibenwa and Ugwu, 2006).

Christian and Muslim leaders should strive to inculcate the teaching of solidarity of human kind into their followers since both persons are being created by one Almighty God, irrespective of their religious and political ambitions. In view of the creation of all men from a Supreme Being, Nwaomah (2004) asserts that this Supreme Being "*is founded on the essential image of God in every person*". Acknowledging the sense of solidarity among themselves, will foster unity, tolerance and forgiveness. Based on this, that Kunhiyop (2004) states that "*we must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love...*" It is also necessary to realize that the forgiving act must always be initiated by the person who has been wronged, the victim of some great hurt, the recipient of some tortuous injustice, the absorber of some terrible act of oppression".

Thus, the Muslim and Christian groups should see themselves as one. Is of no use inciting inferences at one another. When this behaviour is exhibited and adopted by adherents of religions, there will be peace, unity and harmony which will enhance national growth and development.

Christian religious education/Islamic studies should be included in the school curriculum at all levels of educational endeavour in order to impart moral instructions to the populace; because with it, there will be self discipline and the tendency to cause riot or deviant behaviour will be minimized.

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