Religion: A Veritable Tool for National Security and Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria

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Abstract
Religion is a great force that can be used for human development for the benefit of the entire society if properly channeled. It is in this light that this paper discussed the concepts of religion and national security in Nigeria and concluded that religion is a veritable tool which could be used to foster national security and peaceful co-existence in the Nigerian nation. Security is a major prerogative of any responsible government. This is why the successive Nigerian governments since independence have tried to be committed to security of lives and property. It is imperatively necessary to note however that among other national challenges in Nigeria, security is one of the most pressing, for without it, lives and property are endangered, the economy crumbles, the socio-political integration of the nation is punctured and development in all its ramification is halted. The state of security in Nigeria is not only alarming but injurious to our social coexistence. The authors made use of research approach which relies on argumentation that adheres to the rule of logical syllogism to argue that religion is a tool which enhances national security, given its main aim, objective and focus. Religion has the roe of fostering unity in any nation because it links all to a common origin and ancestry, since it deals with the relationship between the human person and God. If religion preaches that God is the father of all, the implication is that all are brothers and sisters. This paper concluded by making useful recommendations accordingly.

Keywords: *Religion, National Security, Peaceful Co-existence*

Introduction

Nigeria is said to be the giant of Africa, and the largest concentration of blacks in the whole world. As a big nation, it occupies an area of about 923, 768 (Egbeto 2016), and the Nigeria political Burea (1989). It has a population of over 180 million people (Ebeburu, 2014), and has over 350 ethnic nationalities in different parts of the country, with different religious beliefs and practices. Nigeria is blessed with divergent cultural heritages.

As a people and as Africans, Nigerians are very religious, almost in all things. In fact religion constitutes the second nature of the Nigerian people, it affects everything we do. Mbiti(1985), noted that Africans are religious in all things. He says:

> *Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or*

possible always to isolate it… religion is the strongest element in
traditional background, and exerts probably the greatest influence
upon the thinking and living of the people concerned.

In fact, another name foran African person is a religious person and since Nigeria is an integral part of Africa, it is equally true of Nigeria,but the role and value of religion inthe face of the incessant religious crises inNigeria has left many minds to ponder on its usefulness. Religion, as stated by Uche (20111: 388) has supported mutualintolerance, inquisition, Jihad, Christian crusade, fanaticism, priest-craft, and harmful cultural practices.Religious crisis in Nigeria is a cog in the wheel of democratic governance and development.

Religious crisis, cultural or ethnic conflicts, political agitations arising from the feeling of marginalization, tribal or ethnic politicking whose result is always negative and anti-unity, kidnap activities across, the nation, robbery and the Fulani herdsmen brutality have become the most recurrent security challenges in the Nigerian society. However, worthy of note is the fact that every human being treasures and values security, without which there cannot be unity, peaceful co-existence, development, Unity and Progress. Hence there is need for security to enhance peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

In the light of the above, this paper has as its main thrust, the role of religion as a tool to foster national security, which in turn snowballs into peaceful co-existence of all and sundry irrespective of ethnic backgrounds and religious affiliations. Religion is here categorized into three in Nigeria, the Islamic Religion, the Christian Religion and African Traditional Religion. These religions have very large followership because there is hardly any Nigerian who does not belong to one religious group or another. Atheism is alien to Nigeria, though there may be a handful of people who consider themselves atheists but the number is very insignificant. (Omordia, 2013).

Following the aforementioned order, it is the interest of this paper to analyse the concept ofreligion, with its roles and functions, the negative impact of insecurity to the nation, the challenges of the different factors of insecurity and the role of religion as a tool in addressing insecurity.

Clarification of Terms

(a) Religion: Religion is a prominent feature in human society that it cannot be simply ignored. It is as old as man on earth and will probably remain on earth as long as man remains in it. This phenomenon has no universally accepted definition thus, religion has been variously defined by different scholars. The sociologists see it as one of the social institutions of the society, while religious men and women see religion as a GIVEN. This means that religion is conceived as "extra-societa" (Onyeka, 2009). In his definition of religion, Taylor (1985), said that religion is the belief in spiritual beings. Every religion believes in a being, higher and greater than man, who is the object of man's veneration and worship. Francolin, (2000), conceived religion as the act of worship, propitiation and recognition of power beyond man and superior to him, which he (man) believers to have control over the whole universe, the human person and the course of nature. For Uche (2011), religion is a reference to a set of beliefs, practices, norms and values relating man to God and to his neighbour, irrespective of colour, nationality, creed and worldview. By this definition, it is discernable that religion fosters both vertical and horizontal relationships – vertical relationship defines man's relationship with God and the horizontal relationship suggests man's relationship with his fellow man. Egbeto (2016), observed that religion is always the last resort of man when he is in distress. This means that when human actions fail to bring an expected result, religion is appealed to for intervention. The act of doingthis is worship and prayer. This is why it is believed that religion brings people of same faith, belief and convictions together in a social and spiritual sense for some kind of physical

and spiritual security now and hereafter. Egbeto, (2016), noted that in Christian religion, faith is centred on the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ and the Bible; African Traditional Religion assuresits adherents of holistic divine security covering the three aspects of the human person, Spirit,Soul and body, while in Islam, faith is based on Muhammed and Quran, the holy book of theMuslims.

Religion is unique in sharing several features that characterize it, such as belief systems, norms and values, prayers, ceremonies, rituals and festivals. (Uche, 201 1: 351).

b. National Security: National Security suggests security for the entire nation, for nationalexistence in all areas of life. This is a concept that enjoins the government, along with its parliaments, to protect the state and its citizens against all kinds of "national" crises through a variety of power projections, such as political power, diplomacy, economic power, military might, religious,fanaticism, and ethnic avengers etc. The Nigerian national security policy has as its objectives, the duty to safeguard the Nigerian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states, and regional economic development and security cooperation. National security advocates the safety of the citizens of a nation or country at home and in diaspora. This means that security outfits must be put in place to ensure that lives and property are safe and secured. National security enhances national integration and nationaldevelopment. This implies that each country must work for the safety and unity of all in the country and further implies that political intimidations, exploitation, social unrest and religious crisis are checked and handled. National security denotes that no part of the country isleft unprotected or over protected and that citizens should be free to live in any part of thecountry without fear of intimidation, expulsion or insecurity. It further denotes that nogroup, association or organization should be empowered directly or indirectly, to intimidate, exploit, or even kill any person or group. For instance, if a particular group is reported to have caused the death of fellow citizens unlawfully, and their activities remain unchecked, the government would be said to have failed in her national security project and could be understood to be encouraging insecurity.

The issue of National Security is very important to all nations and leaders, hence nations and leadersshould do everything possible to ensure the defence of their nations or maintain maximumsecurity. Egbeto (2016), quoting Walter Lippmann in Audu, 2010, said that a nation is secured to the extentthat it is not in a question to lose core values, life, property and liberty. National security according to Gwarzo, (1998), is the freedom from hunger, threat to a nation's ability to protect and defend itself, promote its cherished values and interests, and enhance the wellbeing of its people. Any threat to the general well-being of citizens in any nation is a threat to national security.

c. Peaceful co-existence: Peaceful Co-existence refers to a state or condition of friendship,acceptance, conviviality, hospitality,integration and cooperation. This implies that when people are said to co-exist peacefully, they live together in unity, though they may have their differences but cooperate with one another, they see themselves as friends, collaborators and accept each other. In a state of peaceful co-existence, no one tramples on the rights of another. The dignity of everyone is upheld, without exploitation, marginalization and deprivation. Ojularin, (1995) defined peaceful co-existence as a state where there is:

> *Peaceful contact and interaction between groups, each of which has an identity to make some inputs into their existence. In short, each of them has some scope and area of autonomous action but always exhibit sacrifice for a continuous friendship…*

This definition has many implications. The first implication is that there must be contact and interaction between groups because it is a social phenomenon since human beings are involved. The second implication is that the different co-existing groups are unique in their identities. This suggests that the different groups have variations in their natural endowments, in their comparative and absolute advantages, their socio-economic and political needs and idiosyncrasies.

Religion and National Security: The Nexus

Religion at the service of national security is seen as a natural element in man. To this end, religion does explain the social living of people and prevails in all aspects of the human society. It is an indubitable fact that religion has a pervasive and powerful influence on thecultural, economic, socio-political and spiritual activities in the Nigeria society. Thus, religious beliefs and practices are fundamental for enhancing national security. This establishes the fact that the link or relationship between religion and national security is that of mutual transmissibility of impacts and their subsequent repercussions. Here, we shall adopt the functional theory of religion to state that religion acts as a sociological tool which fosters a sense of belonging in human society and plays the role of community binding of social integration thusreligion performs the role or function of re-inforcing the collective conscience of the society requisites for social order, stability, peaceful co-existence and in all human society (Keenan, 2007).

With the above in mind, one can say that whatever constitutes fear before people, constitutes security threat to them. Religion has a role to help man cope with fear of the supernatural which man acknowledges every day. On this, it can be submitted that freedom from fear is the nexus between religion and security. Functionally, religion provides meaning to life in the face offrustrations, pain, loss and sickness. Religion provides security against the mystery andvicissitudes of life. It equally provides and ensures freedom from pain and hard experiences andin this way, it serves as a security provider in all human society. It is against this background that one argues against the scientific and philosophical positivists that religion will die or cease to exist in the world and particularly in Nigeria. Religion will continue to perform its role in the society since it is always man's last resort when and after all other avenues for problem solving and man's emancipation has failed. As long as people still believe in and acknowledge the presence of the supernatural in their lives and affairs, irrespective of their philosophical and scientific orientations, religion will continue to play a very significant role in the affairs of man.

Pseudo-approach to national Security

The world before now had insisted that strong and powerful Militarialism was the only guarantee for peace. Countries have tried to attain and entrench national security by the use of military force and threats, neglecting other variables which could have contributed immensely to the attainment of peace. The classical postulation of security management has the assumption that the world is anarchical, hence the use of force remains the ultimate means of ensuring national security. This postulation places a great deal of emphasis on military threats and according to Nwolise (1996), concentrate on the different forms of military response to manage such threats.

Nwolise observed that the cold war era encouraged this threat of militarialism and after the cold war, people began to realize that national security must respond to new global challenges on humansecurity and the socio-economic and political well-being of dynamic societies. Accordingly, Nwolise averred that the world was deceived during the cold war to believe that security meanshighdefence allocation, amassment of awe-some weapons system and large military personnel. Security problem is dynamic, therefore limiting it to militariarism does not do justice to it. There is therefore need to view security, national or international, from a holistic perspective because, a country may have the best military outfits, equipment, best police,

custom and other Paramilitary agencies and yet be the most insecure nation in the world. This also corroborates the security fact of Nigeria as a nation. With the well trained military and Para-military formation in Nigeria, the Boko-Haram security challenge is still on, armed robbery and kidnap are still on the increase in Nigeria and the Funali Herdsmen security threat is still un-abated.

The realist paradigm of strong militarialism against security threat is still very evident in Nigeria and it is to a .very large extent, not yielding the desired result. This is because the use of strongforce and military threat to achieve national security is anachronistic and obsolete. Where do wego from here? What is the best approach to security challenges and national security? This papersubmits that religion is a very portent and veritable tool that could enhance national security of any country, but particularly the Nigerian nation.

Religion Fosters Security
Naturally, religion is a source of security in general and well-being and security of adherents. In Nigeria, with the high respect accorded religion and the exalted place it occupies in the scheme of things, it is the case that it should and must be a tool, an instrument and a yardstick for addressing threats to national security and all forms of insecurity in Nigeria. This also agrees with the view of Segun, (2013) that religion ought to and should address all forms of security challenges in Nigeria. Egbeto, (2016), enumerated the threats which constitute human wants in Nigeria to include, economic security threat, food security threat, health security threat etc. Religion can and should concentrate on how to help people out of these threats through seminars, symposia evangelization , prayer meetings, and other more practical actions like, training, skillacquisition, farming projects etc. But how can religion be relevant in ensuring national security? The following analysis explain this well.

National Security and Peaceful co-existence management through Religion in Nigeria.
The need for religion to help address the national security challenges in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. It is an imperative as well as a clarion call. Religion also has the potency to performsuch an all important role because of its people welfare and salvation oriented nature. Religion is basically for the well-being of man both spiritual and material. It is not only a spiritual,mystical reality but affects man here and now and addresses man's experiential problems. This corroborates the fact that religion is both pragmatic and existential. In its pragmatic-existential nature, it seeks practical solutions to people's existential human problems. In its supernatural or spiritual nature it links man with the divine. Since religion has spiritual and social functions, it has the disposition to address human national security challenges and proffer meaningful solutions. We shall be considering the three major religious affiliations in Nigeria, which are:

a. The Christian Religion (b) Islamic Religion (c) African Traditional Religion. It is our view here that religion can be re-packaged and tailored to address, manage and controlnational security threats. This also is in agreement with the view of Egbeto (2016), that religionin Nigeria should focus on promoting the security of individual citizens of the country as well asthe national security. We shall use the nine (9) points he highlighted in this session;

    a. economic security
    b. food and shelter security
    c. health security
    d. environmental security
    e. personal security
    f. inter-faith security
    g. political security
    h. educational/institutional security

i. peaceful co-existence

Economic security: The government has always been at the forefront in the provision of job, services and production because it is the duty of every responsible and people-oriented government to do so. However, the burden of the provision of job and production cannot and should not be left for the government alone because she cannot provide for the teeming population of graduates and job seekers. This accounts for the reason why the government should partner with stakeholders and the private sector in this regard. Belonging to the private sector, -religious organizations should be more involved in the provision of jobs and production. Fortunately, religion in Nigeria, especially the Christian and Islamic religions are significantly, involved in this as exemplified in the employment of religious acolytes and functionaries, teachers in religious schools, and other kinds of workers in religious institutions and establishments. Moreso, they can invest in agricultural production, transportation, estate acquisition and sales, computer/business centres, textile and banking industries and all these would generate jobs for our young graduates.

Uduma (2018) observed that presently, religious bodies are investing in educational sector with many schools from primary to university levels. He advised that apart from schools established by religious bodies which are expensive, religious bodies should venture into other businesses, not to maximize profit as its sole aim, but reduce the rate of joblessness among Nigerian youths.

Food and Shelter Security

It is a truism that many households in Nigeria can hardly afford three square meals a day. A few, among these could feed three times daily in terms of quantity not quality. Some others seem to live from hand to mouth. This is because people's access to food, shelter and clothing depends on their income. In the Nigerian society, says Ebeonyebiru (2014), many, because of their poverty level, are denied access to basic food because it is to them. With regards to shelter, many Nigerians live in places whichcouldbe rightly described as caves and dungeons. Religious bodies have tried and are still trying to make food available to many under-fed people in the country and even those who are actually hungry, in the spiritof religious charity. It is a mandate of religion to take care of the hungry, cloth the naked, give,shelter to thehomeless and do other religious charitable works. More can still be done in this regard.

Health Security

Religion emphasizes healing that is both divine and orthodox. Apart from praying for people fordivine healing, religion also fosters and helps provide health-care services because physicalwell-being of a people which include their health status is as important as their spiritual well-being. Religious bodies in Nigeria can be more involved in health care delivery to the people.This is no prejudice to the fact that they have made significant contributions and achievement in this regard.

Environmental Security

Religion is an instrument of security. To this end, religious bodies in Nigeria and functionaries should help to discourage people from engaging in acts of abuse of the environment because environmental threats are chronic and long- lasting. These threats include water pollution, airpollution, deforestation, poor sanitation, unnecessary digging up of the soil etc. By preaching against these acts from the pulpit, religion would help in sensitizing the people against environmental abuses.

Personal security is very important because it is the foundation of other forms of security. Religion in Nigeria has a duty to help promote and enhance people's security from physical violence. As the voice of the voiceless and hope of the helpless, religion should challenge and

confront threats from the state in terms of physical torture and external threats in the form of war. Religion should also in its bid to foster peace and harmony, confront threats from ethnic crisis, religious fundamentalists and extremists, threats from crime, street violence, violence against women and domestic violence, threat against children and the vulnerable, threat to life arising from suicide, drug abuse and alcoholism.

Cultural and Inter-Religious Faith Security

A religionthat is true and worth its name does not condemn the culture of any people but enhances it. Some cultural practices are barbaric. Such cultural aspects should be helped by religion in the light of contemporary realities. Aspects of our culture that are no more needed should be reviewed and religion has a role to play here. It should help preserve and secure good and valuable aspects of culture, approve community virtues and condemn vices. In Christian religion the principle of inculturation helps to plant the gospel message within the culture of the people. This means that religions should study and understand the people's culture and interpret the gospel message within the cultural framework of the people. Inter and intra ethic-religious strife should betotally condemned by religion. To this end both inter and intra-faith security should be encouraged and promoted by religious bodies.

Political Security

Religion preaches and upholds the rights of peoples. In Nigeria, in consonance with this, religion should offer security from basic human rights violation. It should oppose and challenge politicalrepression, systematic torture and all forms of human right violation. The fight against corruptionshould begin from the religious bodies, in their sermons, homilies and faith education.

Educational Security

In the area of education, the Christian religion in Nigeria has done very well. It has not onlyencouraged educational Security but has and continues to foster it. Religion moves with andherald's civilization. On this note, it is imperative on the various religious affiliations in Nigeriato help secure education especially now that the level of education is going down andmany Nigerian youths are traveling to Europe and Asia to make quick money in defiance toEducational gains.

Peaceful co-existence

Religion is the instrument of peace. The Islamic religion is said to be a religion of peace. TheChristian religion promotes and enhances peace and its founder, Jesus Christ is called the princeof peace. Unfortunately in Nigerian, religion has been used to cause tension, crisis and conflictand even threaten the peace of communities. The various religious crisis and conflicts in Nigerialeave a lot to be desired.

The Boko-Haram insurgency that has caused Nigeria thousands of lives, invaluable property,and displacement of people from their communities, economic stagnation and many other negative consequences is the result of religious intolerance. The radical and extreme Islamic sectBoko-Haram, who are opposed to western education are the promoters of this religious bigotry. In some states in northern Nigeria where Sharia judicial system is practiced, we also see a threat topeaceful co-existence of Nigerians. This is because a Christian cannot, peacefully live in suchcommunities for fear of being subjected to Sharia judicial system.It is argued that the Onslaught and mayhem of the Fulani herdsmen across the country has religious undertone. This is a threat to peaceful co-existence and harmony which religion is supposed to encourage and enhance. The sermons, homilies and actions of some religious fanatists! Only encourage religious bigotry, hatred, tension and war.

Inspite of the above dysfunctional aspects of religion promoted by the ignorance of the mis-informed religious fantasists and extremists, religion still remains a very portenttool or instrument for national security and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to critically analyze the concept of religion, national development and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. It equally tried to demonstrably show that there is a nexus between religion and national security and indicated that there is need to improve on national security. In arriving at this, the paper argued that military force cannot be a veritable tool for national or international security. In line withthe focus of the paper, the expected roles of religion in managing and enhancing national security were analytically discussed in the areas of the different aspects of security. In summary, this paper concluded that religion is a portent and veritable tool for enhancing national security and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Having critically analyzed the idea of religion and its potency as a veritable tool to foster national security for peaceful coexistence, the following recommendations are made

i. **Introduction of comparative religious studies:** One of the major causes of religious intolerance is ignorance. It is against this background that this paper strongly suggests the introduction of Comparative Religious Studies in primary and secondary schools. This subject, when introduced, will help to reduce the tension usually experienced between Christians and Moslems or other religious groups. The curriculum of the subject should deal with the objective views of both religions. This will ensure mutual relationship. If this course is introduced in our schools, it will take care of the problem of fanaticism and the like. Pupils will be taught from the early childhood the importance of religious tolerance. This will positively change the perception and attitude of our people which will ensure national development in Nigeria.

ii. **Inter-faith seminars / workshops:** Knowledge is so powerful in that it removes scales from the eyes of people. There is nothing more powerful than updating one's knowledge about a particular thing. So, having introduced Comparative Religious Studies in the primary and secondary school levels, the next thing is how to sustain the trend. There is need for public inter-religious conferences, workshops and seminars. This will be a forum for deepening our oneness and belief in one God. It will also be an opportunity to clear some misconceptions concerning one's faith. It has to be done with mutual respect with a view to understanding the other better.

iii. **Introduction of conflict management in tertiary institutions:** Conflict management should be made a general course in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

iv. The Nigerian democratic socialization should be redefined and repositioned for a more desirable democratic dividend to be enjoyed by all Nigerian people irrespective of ethnic or religious affiliation.

v. The government should encourage various religious bodies and traditions to see their functional roles in the society as a divine mandate.

vi. Religion should be made relevant to the existential situations of the citizenry, thus religious fanaticism and fundamentalism should be discouraged and those who promote such negative religious ills be punished. To this end, government should introduce religious dialogue and tolerance ministry whose duty should be to foster peaceful coexistence of adherents of different religious affiliations

vii.   Modalities on how to evaluate the role and impact of religious policies should be put in place for periodic evaluation.

viii. Government should help oversee the activities of the various religious groups in playing their functional roles in the society.

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