Religion and Challenges of National Unity

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Abstract: **History is full of crises and war, and in the recent times, most nations on the world are experiencing unprecedented catastrophe sparked mostly political, ethnic and religious conflicts. This poses great threat to national security and socio-economic development. Nigeria, for decades is sharing from this ugly incidence. This study therefore examines the religion and the challenge of the national security. The study was descriptive in nature; therefore, participatory approach was employed through interview of the sampled subjects. The subject was drawn from mostly the adherents of the Christianity, Islam and African religions; they include: religions scholars, priests and the adherents of these religions in Oyo Township. The study reveal among other that; religions crises is a serious threat to unity of Nigeria, that the core values of these religions are; love of neighbor, peaceful co-existence and sacredness of human life. It also shows that, religions people are not practicing the essence of religion rather; they are engrossed with external ceremonial frivolity. Recommendations were made that; government at all levels should withdraw their involvement from religion and that the religion leaders should emphasize the care values of religion in their preaching. Also, religious education should be made compulsory at all levels of education in Nigeria.**

Keywords: **History is full of crises and war, Religion and Challenges of National Unity.**

1.   INTRODUCTION

Religion is said to be a universal phenomenon which transcends race and geographical locations. It is a concomitant of man's everyday life. As pointed out by Idowu (1973), religion is very much and always with us. It is with us at every moment of life, in our inner most beings and with regard to the great or minor events of life. Mbiti (1970) stressed that "Africans are notoriously religious". Nigeria's reputation as a deeply religious country is firmly established. McCain (2008) asserted that, "there is a church on every corner in Nigeria…." And that there is no more sleeping in any Nigeria city again after 5.00AM". This is as a result of many new mosques being built. Presently, as pointed out by Okediji (2008), there is a serious revival and transformation on-going in African traditional Religion as against what it used to be. No wonder in 2004, Nigeria is rated as the most pious nation of the world.

Admittedly from the foregoing, Nigeria is a constitutionally a secularist state as state in chapter 1, sub section 10 of 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria titled, "Prohibition of state religion". It state that, "The government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion". Yet, it is not an overstatement to say that Nigeria is a religious state".

It is noted that the pivot of most of the religious' ethical teachings are; love, peace and unity (harmony). All the three predominant religions in Nigeria; (Islam, Christianity and African traditional religion) distaste hatred, anarchy, acrimony, conflicts, killing of human life and wanton destruction off properties. These three religions respect the sanctity of human's life. Omolade (2009) rightly observed that religion guarantees and preaches morality, tolerance, accountability, sympathy for one another and good neighborliness which are essential ingredients of peaceful co-existence.

In the Bible, (Mathew 22: 38-40), Jesus insisted that God's law could be summarized in two commandments; one of which was "love your neighbor as yourself". We are not to seek revenge (Romans 12: 14- 21) but are to pray for enemies who maltreat or oppress us (Luke 6: 28) (kunhiyop, Samuel waje, 2008).

The indigenous religion of the Africans (African Traditional Religions) is said to be a cohesive force in the African Societies. Almost everything is jointly done. For example, Sofola (1982) emphasized on wholesome human relations among the Africans in forms of respect for elders, community fellow-feeling, and sense of sacredness of life. It also reflected in sociological concepts of brotherhood, extended family, kinship, clan cooperation, unity and solidarity. And as such, Africans place high premium on the sacredness of human life. The aforementioned socio-religious values in the communal living void of unnecessary killing and violence.

Islam on the other hand is known to be a religion of peace. This is reflected in the mode of greetings among the muslim faithful; "As – salaamu alaykun…" which means "Peace be unto you". Islam encourage peace, tolerance and harmonious coexistence. For example, in Qur'an 7:46 and 10:10, the prophets and the four orthodox caliphs discourage anarchy and holding of grudge against any one. Ayatayo (2002) highlighted eight position of Qur'an on how Muslim should behave towards Christians or and the adherents of other faiths. These include tolerance (Q 2:256, 109:1-6), Avoidance of bad language Q6:108, invitation to discussion Q3:64, Topic and style of discussion Q3:64, Encouragement of friendship Q5:5, Avoiding ill treatment of Jews, Christians and other believers Q2 :190 among others.

However, our experiences in Nigeria, starting from early 1980's to the present time and in other countries of the world are direct opposite of what religions to propagate. Instead of peace, it is hostility and crisis, the unity of the country is under threat. Something is wrong somewhere. This is what this paper sets to find out, and then suggest pragmatic way- out.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One of the major challenges facing most of the nations of the world**,** posing threat to National security and socio economic development emanates from or religion related. Nigeria, for decades has shared from this bad experience which is instrumental to almost tearing apart the country as an entity. The country like many others in the world has witnessed so many devastating religious conflicts and crises which has resulted in mass destruction of life and properties. Nigerians had and are still suffering greatly from religious related problems.

It is in the light of this that the paper sets to examine religion and the challenges of national security in Nigeria.

Sample of Religious Conflicts/Crises witnessed in Nigeria:

S/N	TOWN	STATE	DATE/YEAR	NATURE
1	Kano	Kano	1980	Maitasine Riot (intra-religious crisis)
2	Maiduguri	Borno	1982	Muslim/Christian Crises
3	Kadun Tundun	Kaduna	1983	Muslim/Christian Crises
4	Yola	Gongola	1984	Muslim/Christian Crises
5	Kafachan	Kaduna	March 6-10, 1987	Muslim/Christian Crises
6	Kaduna	Kaduna	March 1988	Muslim/Christian (At Kaduna polytechnic)
7	Bauchi	Bauchi	June 1990	Muslim/Christian (secondary school pupils fight over worship)
8	Bauchi	Bauchi	April 2, 1991	Demonstration by Muslim
9	Tafawa balewa	Bauchi	April 19-26, 1991	Sayawa -Fulani riot
10	Toro Ninji	Bauchi	April 22-26, 1991	Muslim/Christian riot
11	Zango Kataf	Kaduna	May 6, 1991	Kartaf- Hausa
12	Kano	Kano	Oct. 1991	Muslim Riot against Reinhard Bonke's revival in Kano
13	Jalingo	Taraba	March 1992	Jukun/Hausa riot
14	Ife/Modakeke	Osun	June, 1999	Ethnic Clash
15	Imosan	Osun	Nov. 27, 1999	Hausa/Fulani Muslim Vs. Oro Cult members.
16	Ishaga Onipanu	Lagos	Nov. 27, 1999	Hausa/Fulani Muslim Vs. Yoruba tribe and Christians
17	Ilorin/Offa	Kwara	Dec. 9, 1999	Hausa/Fulani Muslim Vs. Christians
18	Kaduna	Kaduna	Feb. 21, 2000	Hausa/Fulani Muslim Vs. Others

19	Port-Harcourt	Rivers	March 18, 2000	Hausa/Fulani Muslim Vs. Others after the introduction of Sharia legal system
20	Damboa	Borno	March 28, 2000	Eleme vs. Okirika
21	Saki	Oyo	April 24, 2000	Hausa/Fulani Muslim Vs. Other
22	Saki	Oyo	May 6, 2000	Hausa/Fulani Muslim vs. Other tribes who were Christians
23	Kaduna	Kaduna	May 20, 2000	Hausa/Fulani Muslim Vs. other tribes who were Christians
24	Kano	Kano	July 12, 2000	Hausa/Fulani Muslim Vs. Yoruba Christians
25	Mile 2	Lagos	Oct. 15, 2000	Hausa/Fulani Muslims vs. other tribes who were Christians.
26	Alaba	Lagos	Oct. 16, 2000	Hausa/Fulani vs. Yoruba Christians
27	Katsina	Katsina	April 7, 2001	Hausa/Fulani Muslim Vs. Katafa
28	Birinni Kebbi	Kebbi	June 25, 2001	Hausa/Fulani Muslim Vs. Christians
29	Jos	Plateau	Sept. 7, 2001	Hausa/Fulani Muslim Vs. Birom and other religious groups
30	Osogbo	Osun	Nov. 29, 2001	Religious fundamentalists vs. Christians before Rein hard Bonnke's Crusade
31	Jos	Plateau	Dec. 29, 2001	Hausa/Fulani Muslim Vs. Biron
32	Warri	Delta	Jan 10, 2002	Isekiri vs. Urhobo ethnic clash
33	Abuja	F.C.T	Nov.23, 2002	Muslim vs. Christians
34	Jos	Jos	Dec. 2008	Hausa/Fulani Muslims vs. Christians
35	Bauchi	Bauchi	July 2009	Boko Haram Fundamentalist sect
36	Jos	Plateau	March 7, 2010	Hausa/Fulani Muslims vs. Birom ended in Muslim/Christians Crisis

Sources: Adesupo, P.A. (2011) m "The impact of religious Conflicts on Socio- Economic Development in Contemporary Nigerian Society" Journal of Arts and Social Sciences Update. (4)1.

Factors engender Religious Conflict/ Crises in Nigeria:

There have been some factors identified as fostering and fueling religious conflict/crisis related in Nigeria. Okediji (2008) classified the factors responsible for religious conflict and crises in Nigeria into two, which are; religious and non-religious factors. These include the followings:

1. Provocative preaching through the religious leaders-akinyemi (2001) observed that naturally Islam and Christianity have missionary tendencies. It is mandatory from the two Holy books for the adherents to propagate their faith. So on many occasion, unguided zeal on the parts of the missionaries of the two religions usually manifests through the use of harsh language, erroneous interpretation of Bible or Quran in public places, provocative interference (Okediji, 2008). In some instances, this has degenerated into pandemonium and can lead to unhealthy interaction especially when there is counter reaction.

2. Mediocrity of the religious adherents- it is unfortunate that many adherent s of religious are half-baked in the knowledge of the contents and tenets of their faith. To worsen the situation many of the religious leaders are shallow in the knowledge of the religious they profess. In this view, Ayantayo (2005) opines that some interpret the scripture with little or no regard for the principle of logicality and reasonability. This has tendency to provoke crisis.

3. Government unholy alliance with particular religion- as stated earlier, the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria prohibit government's involvement and adoptions of any religion as state religion. This constitutionally confirms the country as a secularists state. However, the attitude of the government at all levels to religion reflects a blatant disregard and violation to this section of the constitution. Kenny (1982) opines that the behaviour of the federal government to religion is suspicion and it often causes conflict especially each time members of particular faith

suspects that the government day favour one faith at the expense of the other. It must also be stressed that religion is used as tools to achieve selfish interest especially political gains. Okediji (2007) posits that religion is decisive ingredient of political behavior in Nigeria. Ayandokun (2013) asserted that at the federal and state government levels, public officials manifestly patronize particular religion at the expense of others.

4. The poverty and unemployment level I the country – this is another major factor fostering religion crises in Nigeria. The poverty and unemployment level in the country is alarming. And as such, there are readily available idle hands that can be employed as instrument or religion upheaval. Ajayi (2006) lamented that:

Nigeria is steadily grinding to a halt in all the facets of life- the youths, the leaders of tomorrow, pushed by unemployment; the girls among them have become sex commercial workers in the hotel (p.34)

Other key factors fueling religious crises in Nigeria include; the breakdown of channels of social control and institutions in the traditional African societies as a result of modernization and urbanization, the weakness on the part of security agencies, unguided media report on religious activities and conflicts.

3. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

It is gathered from the finding of this study that there is nothing wrong with religion but many things are wrong with religious people. Many of the respondents interviewed attested to this view.

1. Religious Truths are intact: Most of the interviewers are of the view that the fundamentals of the religions are constant. To them, if the core values of religion such as; love for one another, perseverance, humility, forgiveness and patriotism are practiced by religious adherents, religious crises will rarely occurred. One of my respondents, Mr. Moses Alagbe said that the Bible and the Q'uran has not change; it is those that are carrying the holy books that refused to adhere to its contents.

2. The Religious Leaders: Most of the respondents asserted that the problem of religious crises in Nigeria emanates majorly from the religious leaders. For Example, Alhaja R.O. Aleem was of the view that many of the Clergies and the Immans are pursuing materialism, amassing wealth to themselves through exploitation of the impoverished members. Mrs. Olufunmilola Oguniyi corroborates this, she said that many of these Religious priest are pursuing Shadow, placing emphasis on gospel of prosperity at the expense of presenting the whole *truth of the Bible. According to her, this made their congregation to be half baked in the knowledge of the world of God. Deacon O*yeyemi in his own view opined that, the wave of prosperity messages which started in the nineties ended the preaching of basic teachings of love, holiness, righteousness, peace, endurance tolerance among others from the pulpit. And that, if sanity will be restored, it must start from the leaders.

3. Government involvement in religion: it was gathered from the respondents that, the involvement of government in religious crisis in the nation. Reacting to this, Adesupo Paul, Olutoye Olukunle, Akano Kehinde and Ogunsakin Eyinade observed that there is no clear cut separation between religion and the State in Nigeria. The favoured religion enjoys certain benefits at the expense of the others. This in turn creates the atmosphere of suspicions that can degenerate into chaos.

4. Religious Education: it was also observed that lack of thorough religious and moral education in Nigerian institutions of learning especially in a multi- religious society as Nigeria calls for urgent attention. The implication of this according to my respondents; Ayoola Adediran, Ojebode p. and Jaiyeoola Ayobami is that it will hamper mutual understanding. If applied, there will be understanding of the fundamentals of the religions.

4. CONCLUSION

The study attempts to critically examine the state and condition of religion in Nigeria vis-à-vis many unwholesome manifestations ensured from the religious people. It is revealed from the study that Nigeria is deeply a religious country and Nigeria are notoriously religious. As such, religion in its entirety ought to be catalyst of natural development through creation of peaceful, loving and harmonious enabling environment. However, the reverse is the case in Nigeria situation. In Nigeria, 'religion' has become ember of conflict and turbulent.

It is gathered from the findings of this work therefore, that; there is nothing wrong absolutely with religion but many things are with religious people. Many who claimed to be religion are still intact, but 'religious people' are either adhering to it half-way or not at all. Therefore, to salvage this deplorable state, solution is urgently needed from all the stakeholders in the religion parlance.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS (WAY OUT)

The following recommendations are therefore drawn from the findings of this work:

- The government at all levels should stop involving in religion either directly or indirectly, consciously or otherwise. The sponsoring of people to the holy pilgrimage and building religious worship centers should stop. There must be distinct separation from the state and religion.

- The government should enact a law to ban the using of public address system (loudspeakers) for religious worship and programmer. This does not only constitutes environmental hazard and rabble rousing, but equally serves as catalyst to religious crisis.

- Religious leaders have to be proactive in the discharge of their responsibilities especially reaching their followers with the whole truth embedded in the religion. Also emphasis should be placed on the ethical values of religion rather than only on materialism. In the same vein, the religious leaders should pragmatically demonstrate the religious virtues and also to be the epitome of unity, harmony and peaceful coexistence.

- Adequate provision should be made for thorough academic teaching of religion and moral education of all levels in Nigeria. Qualified teachers should be employed to handle the teaching. This will enhance better understanding of what religion is all about.

- The media should always censor religious news, reports and preaching before it is allowed on the air. Provocative preaching can lead to religious crisis.

ORAL INTERVIEW CONDUCTED

S/N	NAME	OCCUPATION	AGE	DATE INTERVIEWED
1	Alagbe Moses	Transporter	72	Nov. 2014
2	Ogunsakin Eyinade	Accounting officer	43	Nov. 2014
3	Deacon Oyeyemi	Teaching	47	Nov. 2014
4	Alh. Risikat Aleem	Teaching	52	Nov. 2014
5	Rev, Dr.Kehinde Akano	Clergy/Teaching	57	Nov. 2014
6	Olutoye Olukunle	Teaching	45	Nov. 2014
7	Ayoola Adediran	Teaching	44	Nov. 2014
8	Ogunniyi Olufunmilola	Teaching	44	Nov. 2014
9	Ojebode, Ayobami	Teaching	57	Nov. 2014
10	Ven. Jaiyeola Ayobami	Clergy/Teaching	52	Nov. 2014

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