

Effect of Religious Extremism on National Development

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ABSTRACT

Religious extremism affects Nigerians in many diverse ways. The effect on national development can be viewed at the level of the individual, the family, the community and the nation. The frequency and destruction of human and natural resources has become so rampant in Nigeria, such that, people often run for their lives, while the economic life of the society suffers. Religious extremism has great consequences on Nigerian society. Due to harmful effects of this malady in Nigeria, certain norms of cultural discrimination and civil disabilities have been imposed on some citizens, because of their religious affiliations. Some zealous Muslims for instance have corrupted the original koranic meaning of the Jihad and introduced the principle of holy war in order to spread Islam by the sword and forced conversion. Furthermore religious extremism with its divisive and destructive nature is the greatest danger to political stability. This is particularly so in Nigeria, a secular polity with a religiously pluralistic setting which can only be sustained in a healthy atmosphere of religious freedom and respect for human rights and the principle of the political secularity of the Nigerian nation and polity. A remarkable consequence of all religious extremism including religious conflict, is the hostile environment unfavorable for investment. Apart from the fact that the society is declared a security risk nation, the socio-economic infrastructure that create enabling environment for investments and developments are destroyed during the violent conflicts. Thus, growth and development would be retarded as growth and development can only take place under a peaceful atmosphere.

Keywords: Christian, Development, Extremism, National, Religion.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of religious fundamentalism has become a prominent phenomenon in international politics, playing an essential role in shaping the main events of the 21st century. The word fundamentalism dates to an early 20th century American religious movement. The movement took its name from a companion of twelve volumes published between 1960 and 1915 by a group of Protestant laymen entitled. The fundamentals: A testimony of the truth. It owes its existence, according to [1], particularly to the same evangelical revivalist tradition that inspired the Great Awakening of the early 19th century and a variety of millenarian movements. It came to embody both principles of absolute religious orthodoxy and evangelical practices which called for believers to extend action beyond religion into political and social life.

Accordingly, despite the fact that every religion claims to be peaceful and prays for peace, there are wars, conflicts, violence, and insurgency all over the globe. The spate of Maitatsine riots of 1980 in Nigeria in Northern Nigeria marked the beginning of the trail of this religious orgy in Nigeria. It is estimated that the Maitatsine uprising in Kano 1980 alone claimed over 4,177 lives, while that of Jimeta in 1984 and Rigasa in Kaduna in 1992 led to 763 and 175 casualties respectively [2]. It seems that religions in the world have not realized that some of their doctrines are incompatible with the realization of peace in the country. Unfortunately, some of the adherents of these religions have capitalized on the weakness of the religions doctrines, particularly the ones that support violence to perpetuate grievous havoc in the society which has resulted to the

incessant violence in the nation today. Therefore, there is a necessity to investigate on extremism and the various ways it has contributed to the incessant conflicts that have tormented the nation. Religious fundamentalism connotes religious beliefs that are carried to the extreme in one's practical life due to the conviction that they are inspired by the deity [3]. Religious fundamentalists believe that religious doctrines or propositions are absolute and immutable. They abhor change of whatever kind in religious matters. They find change oppressive and troubling and thus their emergence is seen in the form of an orthodox restatement of traditional and conservative religious patterns. Religious extremism holds influence among the various kinds of fanaticism owing to its key position in people's lives and priority. Mbiti [4] averred that "it is natural for people to die for their religious beliefs and many have died as a result of their religion. The saints who are celebrated today among Christians are those who lost their lives for the sake of their faith. It is the mark of extremism for people to die for their religion. The consequences of religious extremism are common in the society. Nmah [5] avers, that religious fanaticism has caused a lot of tragedies in the socio-political and economic sectors. "It has promoted social tensions and religious upheavals which have resulted to the destruction of human lives and property, burning of churches and mosques, destruction of sacred shrines, religious artifacts and symbols". Unfortunately, radicalism is enshrined in obscurity which is demonstrated in various ways in which it applies to people of different socio-political and religious inclination. Gwamna [6] observed that extremism is made manifest among adherents of religion which is informed by their misplaced enthusiasm that is demonstrated in over zealousness which is devoid of self-control. It is characterized by excessive and uncritical zeal to pursue an extreme religious course. For the sake of peaceful co-existence, all adherents of religions should apply moderation in the exercise

of their religious beliefs. Nigeria is a heterogeneous country, rich in diverse culture, language and ethnic background. There are many religions in the country thus making Nigeria a pluralistic and multi-religious state with most Nigerians being Muslims, Christians or adherents of traditional religion. It is not an overstatement that the various religious groups find it difficult to tolerate one another. There is always religious intolerance in a pluralistic society that has varied beliefs and practices [7]. Religious fanaticism with its attendant religious intolerance has caused religious conflicts, crises and riots.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation with diverse cultural groups that are about three hundred and seventy-four groups in number [8]. Rather than harnessing our diversities towards sustainable national development, there is acrimony, rancor, hatred, violence, division, war among others at the detriment of nation building. This has resulted in ethnic prejudice and mistrust, religious and political diversities and socio-cultural conflicts. These crises have pervaded all spheres of life in Nigeria, be it employment, education, health, economic and other situations.

Development

Development is a process of economic and social transformation that is based on complex cultural and environmental interactions. According to [9], development is the process that includes: Physical development which includes man-made goods produced by use of technology, cultural development which comprises of the values, norms and traditions of a society and personal development which includes the psychological directions of individuals. While National development is the ability of a country or countries to improve the economic and social welfare of the people, example by providing security and social welfare of the people, for example; by providing security and social amenities such as quality education, clean water, transportation infrastructure, medical care, employment among others. Due to religious extremism in Nigeria, the

government's attention is diverted from providing these amenities for the citizenry and huge amount of money is spent on security and fighting insurgency.

The Concept of Religion

Conceptualising 'religion' is elusive, as efforts to define religion suffer parochialism among various writers. Religion is simply a belief system of a suzerainty relationship between perceived SUPREME BEING, God, and man, involving reverence, worship, faith, trust and hope from the latter to the former. To this, [10] notes, "It is obvious that the concept 'religion' can be interpreted as a concrete relationship existing between two different persons, e.g. a man and a Superior BEING, like spirit, gods/God. Moreover, there are promises (oath) both parties are to abide to in order to concretise the relation." This reflects the etymology of the word 'religion', which is traced to the Latin word 'religere', meaning 'to bind together as by oath' [11]. Akah [12] defines religion "as man's relationship with God". In search for that relationship with God, man uses various means such as prayer, church, singing praises to God, etc. Madu [13] affirms that religion "consist of moral relationship that exist between God and man in which man expresses a sense of guilt whenever he fails to keep the moral rules". Therefore, man does everything possible to abide by the rules that regulate his relationship with the Supreme Being in order to avert the wrath of the Supreme Being. There is no gain saying that the adherents of religion in a bid to maintain the relationship between them and the Supreme Being may violate the principle of moderation that leads to recklessness, extremism, rascality and violence. Thus, it becomes important to assess extremism and the various ways it has contributed to the incessant conflicts that have tormented the Nigeria nation.

Religious Extremism in Nigeria

Nigeria is a religious nation, with three most pronounced religious: traditional African Religion, Christianity and Islam, whereby Christianity and Islam incessantly struggle with bloodshed for superiority, popularity, population

increase, secularism and more rights, since inception. Religious fanaticism in the nation since 1980 has become endemic. The actual religious crises caused by religious fanaticism began to set in from 1980 with the Maitatsine Muslim religious uprising in Kano- North Western Nigeria [14]. The first religious crises was described as "intra-religious conflicts (Muslim-Muslim conflict), due to the fact that it arose among the Muslims themselves [between the fundamentalist and orthodox Muslims] [15]. This riot was instigated by the teachings of some fundamentalists Islamic scholars from neighboring countries like Cameroun and Chad Republic. Over five hundred people lost their lives and goods worth several millions of naira were destroyed. Similar riots were organized by the group in other parts of Nigeria like Bulunkutu, Jimeta, Yola, Gombe and Funtua between 1982 and 1987. There were also Shitte attacks 1996 and 1997 which occurred in Kano though the base of the sect in Nigeria was Zaria [15].

The most erratic of the religious crises in Nigeria has been the inter-religious conflicts, that is, those between Muslims and Christians. The first of these occurred in Kano in October 1982 and it was described as "the fagge violent" [15]. It was the first major violent reaction of the Muslims against the ascending of Christianity in the city. The Muslims wanted to stop Christians from reconstructing their dilapidated church building which the Muslims felt was located too close to a mosque and therefore ought to be relocated elsewhere. The Christians also launched a counter attack on the Muslim Hausa Fulani population and several hundreds of people were killed and properties destroyed. These religious conflicts and crises in the country were triggered by religious extremism. However, some researchers have tried to list the spate of the conflict, crisis, killings and bloodshed and the present insurgency unleashed by the Muslim religious extremist on the nation but described it as endless, as the incidences are increasing every day.

Fundamentalism on the part of Christians is also evident through the type of fundamentalist religious activities they engage in. This include carrying their religious crusades deep into Islamic enclaves as evident in the case of the Bonnke crusade in Kano, as well as mounting loud speakers and public address systems indiscriminately and thus causing noise pollution to other religions and the general public even in very odd hours. These also have the possibility of arousing and instigating violent reaction from those who are being offended by such religious activities. The federal government have since been spending huge amount of money and resources both human and material to fight the sect and reduce its obnoxious activities. This no doubt has been taking a huge toll on the nation's resources. The funds which could have been expended in fighting terror group would have been used in improving the living standards of the citizenry.

Religion and National Development

There is no doubt that religion is indeed an indispensable tool to be adopted to realize peace in Nigeria which enhances national development. Although, some scholars are of the view that religion cannot play role towards national development in Nigeria because "religion is arguably one of the single most significant cause of war and turmoil in human history". This is because so much malevolence has been done in the name of religion. Religion has put in the past and at the present impacted so much on African culture in general both positively and negatively and it is still doing so now. On the negative contributions of religion towards national development, [16] affirms that "there is no logical reason to link religion to economic development or insufficient empirical evidence of any actual linkage. Any connection between religion and economics is likely the one in which the latter is caused and the former affected". Religion is a source "not only of intolerance, human rights violation and extremist violence, but also of non-violent conflict transformation, the defense of human rights, integrity in government,

reconciliation and stability in divided societies" [17]. Analysis of the implications of diversity in Nigeria and other countries suggest diversity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for conflict. In order words, the very fact that a country has different ethnic, communal, religious and radical groups does not make division and conflicts inevitable.

Nevertheless, so much good has been done on the name of religion. Tasie [18] reiterates that religious pursuit does "not create problems particularly the three main religions in Nigeria- African traditional religion, Christianity and Islam, to this thinking, each of these religions teaches love in its own way and may not discourage peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and tolerance". This is evident in the activities of churches in Nigeria where they assist some of their devoted members not only influencing their view of success and the need to acquire wealth but also to improve their standard of living and the country at large. The routine giving of alms to the needy during Christmas celebration or Ramadan is a way religion help to reduce poverty by encouraging "the haves to give to the have not in order to be given by God". The introduction of Islamic banking by central bank of Nigeria no doubt, will improve the economic power of the borrowers. A bank that shares profit and loss with the borrower invariably reduces the risk of doing business than the conventional bank that 'wins' in any business they enter with their clients" [19]. This will make fund available for those that have idea of a profitable business to create wealth, employments and also add value to the economy by paying taxes to the government. However, according to [14] religion has "mobilized community, nation and international support for peace through dialogue, training religious leaders in peace making.

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family, the community and the nation. The frequency and destruction of human and natural resources has become so rampant in Nigeria, such that, people often run for their lives, while the economic life of the society suffers. In the opinion of [20], "violent religious conflicts have the potential of resulting in large scale physical displacement and forced relocation of individuals, families and groups with all its torments". Religious extremism has great consequences on Nigerian society. Due to harmful effects of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria, certain norms of cultural discrimination and civil disabilities had been imposed on some citizens, because of their religious affiliations. Some zealous Muslims "have corrupted the original koranic meaning of the Jihad and introduced the principle of holy war in order to spread Islam by the sword and forced conversion" [21,22,23,24].

Furthermore religious extremism with its divisive and destructive nature is the greatest danger to political stability. This is particularly so in Nigeria, "a secular polity with a religiously pluralistic setting which can only be sustained in a healthy atmosphere of religious freedom and respect for human rights and the principle of the political secularity of the Nigerian nation and polity". A remarkable consequence of all religious fanaticism including religious conflict, is the hostile environment unfavorable for investment. Apart from the fact that the society is declared a "security risk nation" [22,26,27,28], the socio-economic infrastructure that create enabling environment for investments and developments are destroyed during the violent conflicts. Thus, growth and development would be retarded as growth and development can only take place under a peaceful atmosphere.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Religion and development are seemingly inseparable. However, religion provides much needed incentives for indulging in productive activities. Thus the following recommendations suffice:

- i. People should desist from imposing their religion on other people, especially people who do not share their belief.
- ii. Government should live up to their responsibility of maintaining peace and order in the society by ensuring that the educational

system at all levels in Nigeria include in its curriculum values and practices of the various ethnicities with emphasis on their common features.

- iii. Religious leaders should endeavour to contain extremist within their midst and ensure that they monitor their adherents so that they will not practice their religion to the detriment of other people's religion.

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