

Religious Harmony in Nigeria: Evaluating the Role of Islamic and Christian Beliefs and Practices

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate whether Islamic and Christian beliefs and practices promote harmony, particularly in the context of Nigeria. Employing a qualitative method, the research was anchored on the sociological theory of religion. Despite acknowledging the existence of social inequity and political unrest stemming from the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, the study argued that both faiths still advocate for harmony through religious tolerance and enlightenment. Key findings suggest that while religious conflicts persist, there is a shared belief in the potential for harmony through religious tolerance and enlightenment. The study concludes with recommendations for religious leaders to promote peaceful coexistence and unity among adherents.

Keywords: Christianity, Islam, Harmony and Conflict Resolution

INTRODUCTION

The advent of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria was greeted by the people as a remedy to every unwanted and barbaric life style. The introduction of the two foreign religions; Islam and Christianity changed the pattern of relationship in the society [1]. Both religion have some things in common in terms of background, geography and basic principles. For instance, both of them originated from the Middle East. Their guiding principles are based on divine revelation and they have prophets as mediums through whom God's words are received and articulated. The issue of religion is a very important one in the development of any society. Religion shapes the moral, social, political and educational ideology of the adherents positively or negatively. It does not matter what the belief system is; even traditional societies, were held together by scary religious beliefs. Today, religion has become such a complex matter especially when the issues involve the basic religions ruling the world; Christianity and Islam. In principle, religion is one, having the same objective, global peace and moral excellences, but in context, it is defined as one of the most significant causes of violence, war and turmoil in human history [2]. This is evidenced as much atrocities has been committed recently in the name of religion. In the first place, religious hierarchies

have sided on occasions with the oppressors rather than the oppressed. Worst still, people around the world violate the most basic tenets of their own creeds in promoting state and group terror. Sadly, this impacts mostly on the helpless, children and women. Religious leaders, who are made to be the faithful reminders of the core principles of their creed to members, became instruments in the hands of greedy politicians [3]. While some are taking the advantage of economic instability of the nation state to enslave the poor among them. The proliferation of religious business for self-aggrandizement has become the order of the day. Others are dwelling on the imposition of religion on their children. Then imagine what will be the fate of the adherent who has grown up in an environment which religion has impinged on, hence the striking difference. Another devastating problem is the baffling nature of the religious crisis in Nigeria. The introduction of sharia law, Boko-haram, partiality of the media in reporting events to the favour of one religion, illiteracy that deprive many Christian and Muslims knowledge of peace and harmony which is core to their faith. Islamic sharia was introduced to suppress Christians from gaining political control, people lying under oath in the name of religion; resistance of oppression by some groups that feel alienated in the nation, lack

of job opportunities that pushed some people to seek employment in religious conflicts [4]. The general feeling of rejection by another religious group dominates the scene, leading to violent posture, aggression, killing and destruction from either side of the divided. This situation undoubtedly, led to compromise, peace for violence. The question is: of what benefit will it be to work together as brothers and sisters than to dialogue with guns, knives and

bombs? These evil beliefs and practices have become a source of great worry thereby making people to ask: does Islamic and Christians belief and practices promote harmony? To this end, the study shall be treated in four stages. The first stage treats definition of terms. The second stage which is theoretical framework is anchored on the sociological theory of religion. The third stage is centered on the significant of the study.

Definition of Terms

Islam: Is a monotheistic faith centered around belief in the one God (Allah). In this regard, it shares some beliefs with Judaism and Christianity by tracing its history back to the patriarch Abraham, and ultimately to the first prophet, Adam. All the prophets preached the same universal message of belief in one God and kindness to humanity. Their major teaching is on how to make humanity to live in harmony since it is a peaceful religion.

Christians : Is the most widely practiced religion in the world, with more than 2 billion followers. The

Christian faith centers on beliefs regarding the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Living harmony Imagine how good it will be for brothers and sisters to live in harmony.

Harmony: To live in harmony means to have a culture of transparency and accountability where your faults and differences don't disqualify you as someone to love like Jesus would. We can live in harmony when we ask Jesus to help us see and love others the way that He does.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on sociological theory of religion.

Sociological Theory of Religion

The sociological theory of religion posits that religion is simply a creation of the society. One of the pioneers of this school of thought, Emile Durkheim, viewed religion in the context of society and concludes that religion has a powerful influence in the behavior and thinking of the members of society [5]. In his study of a group of people in the Central Australia, he stated, that people tend to separate rituals, objects and religious symbols from profane objects. He also noted the enthusiasm the natives experienced during their totem ceremonies and asserted that this marked the origin of religion. Furthermore, in his enquiry on religious beliefs and symbols of "Savage Minds", he concluded that culture and religion influences each other to a high extent. Consequently, a theologian Paul Tillich, submitted, that religion only attempts to answer questions profound by culture. While, Weber in his

Protestantism, ethic and the spirit of capitalism, studied larger area than Durkheim, looked into the impact of religion on social change which Durkheim did not do in general and asserted that religion is a precipitator of social change [6]. Karl Marx opines that religion was merely created by the capitalist for their selfish gain. People were coded religiously to work hard for the authorities and undermined their unrewarded efforts on earth but wait for their rewards in heaven. Applying this theory to this study will help to identify the paradigms of religion in the economic and socio-political development of any society. To note how sociological behaviour and thinking of a society is influenced by religion in economic political and social relations. How religions became an instrument in the hands of Capitalists.

Application and Relevance of the Theories to the Study

Hence, applying the sociological theory of religion in the context of this study, it pinpoints the trends responsible for religious influence on the economical and political class struggle and how the capitalist have managed to use religion for their selfish gain at the expense of people's principle belief of religion. The prime purpose is perhaps positive/negative. The tune of this study is positive which is based on

harmony that will bring about healing, economic development, political stability, love and peace if well managed. The following scriptures confirm this: You yourselves know very well that you should do just what we did. We were not lazy when we were with you. While we were with you, we used to tell you, "Whoever refuses to work is not allowed to eat,"(2 Thessalonians 3:7 & 10).

Significance of the Study

The study has conceptual, theoretical and empirical significance. The conceptual will add to the existing phenomenal definitions of the variables under study. At the theoretical level, it will contribute to the

existing literature by providing adequate and concrete information on the tenets and nature of different faith and philosophy of Islam and Christianity, which now have their votaries in

Nigeria particularly, and the global village at large in ensuring peace. At the practical level, the findings of the study are likely to be of benefit to researchers, religious leaders, government and the society. It will be beneficial to them in the following ways:

It will provide the researchers with a stimulating foundation for debate and further investigation. The findings of the study will serve as reference to future researchers who may wish to carry out researches on whether Islamic and Christians belief and practices promote harmony. It will contribute to the ecumenical call for religious dialogue that is done academically and practically, as contact and dialogue are crucial to breaking down religious conflict. Practical dialogue, which is faith to faith dialogue, is very important if done in a straightforward manner with factual information and without a monopoly from the identity of religions. This research is significant because most of the research done in relation to religious leaders is not at this level, and does not explore faith-to-faith encounterology in the model of and for religious leaders as peace brokers for interreligious dialogue in the Nigerian context. As a result of this research there is a need for a musicological approach in order to foster interreligious dialogue in religious diversity. The findings will help in providing the religious leaders the background and information necessary for effective teaching of religious studies and uplifting of moral and spiritual values that will go a long way to bring about peace. The Bible and the Holy Qur'an which are the basis of religious studies emphasized all these communal expectations. By implication, it

Does Islamic and Christians beliefs and practices promote harmony

Religious toleration is the key ingredient and may even serve as a tool for managing extreme religious beliefs. Religious toleration breeds harmony in any multi-religious society. Understanding the difference in religions of the world help in destroying the seed of hatred. It paves way for constructive inter-religious dialogue. Religious tolerations has been for ages but had global constitutional birth in 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18; and it states that, "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this rights includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. This rule is provided to bring an end to all forms of religious war, create peace and political stability world over. Intolerance among religious creeds is the formation of violence and all forms of inhuman treatment. Analyzing Augsburg modus Vivendi, [7], argues that terrible torture and other deprivations will not force (some) people to abandon their religious beliefs and practices, so it is useless

will equip the religious leaders to transfer such values that unite them to others, so they can complement instead of conflicting each other. What this means is that religion provides its members with an ethos, a worldview and values as well as a source of identity and legitimacy, and is also associated with formal institution. The findings of the study will motivate the government to promote diversity so as not to allow religion constitute a barrier; rather it should be a source of enrichment that will make us understand the culture and faith of people and can only be so if we equip ourselves with the knowledge of religion to dispel what is called cross/supine ignorance with the conviction that builds friendship and understanding among us as a nation. The findings of the study will reawaken the host community and society at large, to be diligent and steadfast in striving for peace. This is achievable if there is an understanding of faith objectives. This research work to-faith encounterology in the identity of religions for interreligious dialogue, especially between Christians and Islamic religious leaders. This study is significant because it will help the adherents of Islam and Christianity in the society see themselves as peace brokers in harnessing their model of and for religions in interreligious dialogue. This can be done by providing insight into and understanding of how the model of and how society as peace brokers can foster peace through interreligious dialogue. The question is does Islamic and Christians beliefs and practices promote harmony?

and politically destabilizing to oppress them. The Muslims and the Christians have religious obligations to tolerate and peaceful cohabit with people of other religion as prescribed in their holy Quran and holy bible respectively. The holy Quran says, "you will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers [to be] the Jews and those who associate others with Allah; and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers who say, "We are Christians." That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant." (Quran 5:82). Again, Muslims were admonished to coexist with Christians and to note that no religion was revealed to repudiate the other, as it is written, "And we sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming that which came before him in Torah; and we gave him the Gospel, in which was guidance and light and confirming that which preceded it of the Torah as guidance and instruction for the righteous," [Quran 5; 46]. Tolerance exists because all men are not alike, consequent upon, the Quran states, "Yet all are not alike: among the people of the

Book there are upright people who recite the messages of Allah in the watches of the night and prostrate themselves in worship." (Quran 3; 113). In like manner, it is a moral obligation of Christians to love and tolerate everyone no matter their creed for harmony. Their faith advocates love as the conqueror of all things. It is the greatest gift given to man of which without it there will be no earth for men to dwell in. God demonstrated love by giving His only begotten Son that who so ever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. [John 3;16]. Subsequently, Christian got the Divine command to love others as Christ loved them, even if it means laying their lives down [1John 3;16]. "So then, in everything treat others the same way you want them to treat you, for this is [the essence of] the Law and the [writings of the] Prophets". [Matthew 7; 12]. Again it is said, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have no love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal." [1 Corinthians 13; 1]. These are pure definitions of tolerance which breeds harmony. Conforming to these religious standards will promote harmony among all especially among the

Implications for the Study

The study's implications are concentrated on how it exploits mankind. Abuse of the teachings of Islam and Christianity is complicated and dangerous. Religion, geography, politics, and ethnicity all interact in the abuse. First, there is the country's north-south divide, which is often regarded as the boundary between Muslim-north, particularly the far north, and Christian-south, particularly the southeast and some parts of the south-south, while Muslim-north and the rest have mixed populations of Christians, Muslims, and ATR adherents [1]. The Hausa-Fulani are categorized as the Muslim-north, at the expense of northern minority ethnic groups, and the Christian-south is made up primarily of the Igbo in the southeast and affiliated ethnic minorities, such as the Ijaw and the Urhobo in the south-south. The third ethnic majority, the Yoruba and allied ethnic minorities, such as the Edo, Itsekiri, and other south-south ethnic groups, Both Christianity and Islam fight with one another for followers, power, and political and economic dominance and try to outdo one another in all areas

In conclusion, this study highlights the complex interplay between Islamic and Christian beliefs and practices in Nigeria and their potential impact on societal harmony. While acknowledging the challenges of social inequity and political unrest, the study emphasizes the shared belief in religious tolerance and enlightenment as pathways to

adherents of Islam and Christians in any host community [2], in his book; "The long march of Islam....." Noted that "in Africa, traders rather than warriors have been Islam's principal agents." Christianity in the other way round preaches love of neighbours as first principle for promoting harmony. It becomes worrisome why some misguided Islamic and Christians extremists indulge in activities that are against the teachings of Islam and Christianity as enshrined in the Quran and Bible thereby tarnishing the image of each other. In all, Islam promotes values such as compassion, forgiveness, and respect for human dignity, which are essential for creating a peaceful society. Additionally, Islamic teachings encourage individuals to strive for inner peace through prayer, meditation, and charitable deeds. Christianity in their ways also promote harmony as enshrined in Romans 12:16-21 which says, "live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty (snobbish, high-minded, exclusive), but readily adjust yourself to [people, things] and give yourselves to humble tasks. Never overestimate yourself or be wise in your own conceits.

of human accomplishment [8]. From the much debated 1978 Sharia inclusion in the Constitution controversy, to the Organisation of Islamic Conference/Countries (OIC) membership crisis, and subsequent ones, including government attacks on Boko Haram and counter-attacks, to the post-election violence of April 2011 that rekindled the Boko Haram crisis, coupled with the Fulani herdsmen onslaught on farmers that ensued as from 2015 till date (2023), Nigerians have been experiencing terrible socio-political and economic upheavals resulting in increased bitter politics, increased religious political intolerance, unprecedented mass abject poverty and insecurities [9]. The situation is leading to internal and forced displacements, economic losses, increased social inequity, political unrest, and a bigger threat to Nigeria's corporate and peaceful existence. Of course, none of the aforementioned is the result of religious practices being misused for partisan or personal gain.

CONCLUSION

harmony. Despite instances of religious conflicts and misinterpretations of religious teachings, there exists a fundamental aspiration among adherents of both faiths for peaceful coexistence. Moving forward, it is imperative for religious leaders to promote unity, tolerance, and understanding among their followers to foster a harmonious society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of the study, the study recommended that religious leaders should mind and weigh their utterances and actions, stop radicalizing and brainwashing their members to become extremists, fanatics and suicide bombers. Hence, Christians and

Muslims in Nigeria should put regional, religious, ethnic and political differences aside, to unite and identify what they need, that is, peaceful co-existence and industrial development, to join forces to get it, for the good of the nation.

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