

Religious Manipulation: A Threat to Societal Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper sought to posit that religious manipulation is a threat to societal development in Nigeria. The researcher adopts descriptive method. Nigeria today has been known with a lot of diversity of belief which in one way or the other has a negative impact to the societal development. It is noticed that the diversity of religious practices in Nigeria is the outcome of manipulation. For a society to develop, tolerance is at times its fulcrum. The author concludes that intolerance and insurgency is as a result of religious manipulation. Which was as a result of poor checkmating of religious belief in Nigeria and to curtail it before it reaches to the worst stage. However, this paper recommends that in order to control this perilous act, there is a need for Nigeria to emulate on how to treat people irrespective of religion. And enhance peace education in Africa.

Keywords: Religious; Manipulation; Religious Values.

INTRODUCTION

The impact of religious manipulation is not something to write home about in Nigeria. It has retarded the Nigeria Koinonia of societal development. However, intolerance is a great condition in any human society, and most times, it is predictable. History shows that intolerance, insurgency and segregation are common and often useful element in human relations and may occur within and among individuals and groups, they are rarely productive. One of the several types of intolerance, insurgency and segregation that constantly plague the societal development of the nation is the sort of vices that is based on religious manipulation which differs. Religious manipulation has resulted intolerance, insurgency and segregation which occurs mostly between the Christian and Muslim population in the northern part of the country. These conflicts have resulted in the loss of lives and property and have tremendously fractured the Christian-Muslim relationship in the country.

Going further, conflicts and crises have been observed as the cause of religious manipulation in Nigeria. Subscribing to this, Onabanjo (2011) comments that it has hindered genuine national integration more than fifty years after Nigeria's independence thus raising serious concerns on the unity of the nation. In this vein, several debates and attempts have been made towards resolving the many crises facing Nigeria.

RELIGION

Religion, although it appears difficult to have a conflated definition of religion, nevertheless, we shall attempt a survey of various definitions of religion by various philosophers and theologians. Religion is such a powerful phenomenon that exerts great influence on humanity,

such that it is difficult to have society that is devoid of religion and religious activities (Edet 2009; Asuquo 2018; Asuquo 2019). Even in an atheistic society, it is presumed that such society requires the place of religion, believing that there is no God is a kind of belief. To people who hold this view, religion is whatever anybody believe in very strongly. Thus, to them there is nobody without a religion (Udoh 2017 & Eyo 2020).

Omoregbe (1993) defines religion as essentially a relationship, a link established between two persons, namely, the human person and the divine person to exist. Carpenter (1913) holds that religion denotes the whole group of rites performed in the honors of the divine being. These make up a particular cult or worship ordained and sanctioned by authority or tradition. It means a body of religious duties, the entire series of sacred acts in which the primitive act is expressed. For A.C Bonquet (1941), Religion is a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity, the sacred, the supernatural, the self-existent, the absolute or simply God. A religion is an absolute dependence on God (Edet 2007; Edet 2011; Asira & Francis 2012; Eyo 2019).

What we can discovered as characterizing any definition of religion are belief in a supernatural being, rituals, the concept of the sacred, prayer, religious feelings- such a sense of mystery and awe. Thus religion can be seen as involving a feeling of dependence on a higher power as providing the ultimate foundation for morality or as encapsulating the truth about the universe and man's place in it. It is the belief in and worship of a supernatural controlling power, especially a personal god or gods (Edet 2015; Duke & Okafor 2020).

MANIPULATION

Manipulation is the usage of psychological influence over a person or situation to gain a positive outcome. According to Yusuf Bala Usman, in His Book "The Manipulation of Religion in Nigeria 1977- 1987" defines manipulation as "essentially controlling the action of a person or group without that person or group knowing the goals, purpose and method of that control and without even being aware that a form of control is being exercised on them at all" (Usman, 1987). By this scholarly definition Usman is of the view that people can be indoctrinated and manipulated in order to achieve a particular target or objective. Boko Haram projects to the people that western education is evil and has brought about hardship in the society therefore there is a need to restructure the society in line with Islamic ideology using the anarchist style of revolution. By carefully analyzing the videos and documents posted by this criminal group, we were able to identify that they only read out their agenda but they never recite the Kalmatu Shahada (Muslim testimony of faith) or make reference to what Allah has said regarding the killing of innocent people to support their agenda of Islamizing the Nigerian state.

The manipulation of religion in Nigeria, is deep rooted in the poor living socio-economic conditions of Nigerians that is rapidly deteriorating and only a microscopic few of the upper class enjoy the high standards of living while the lower class continue to drown in abject poverty and psychological depression (Usman, 1987). This is done under the disguise of religion to bring divide among the people of Nigeria. An example of such manipulation is explained by Alamatu (2012) in Ladan-Barki where he explained how the organizations recruits its members who are mostly the poor then brain washes them and offers them huge amounts of money ranging from 200,000-100,000,000 Naira to either become foot soldiers or suicide bombers.

A BEFALL FOR RELIGIOUS VALUES.

The question on the value of religion becomes unavoidable, and the answers provided will go a long way establishing the inescapability of religion as a positive contributor in human life and existence. The question is, does religion have any value? If religion is seen as the source of so much evil in the world? – intolerance, fanaticism, bigotry, discrimination, hostility, mutual

condemnation, holy war, persecution and many more, it is not contradictory then to talk about the values of religion. Religion seems to have no good name – it is the opium of masses, it is the ‘canopy’ for the unintelligent, the unsound mind, the foolish, it is prejudistic, it is objective, it causes division. In fact, every act of terrorism is traceable to religion. In the face of these negatives, is it still reasonable to front religion as a positive contributor to human existence.

Although religion has been thus indicated, yet it is still safe to say without any fear of contradiction that religion has done a lot of good to mankind or humanity apart from being the only legitimate phenomenon that can answer those fundamental questions that lie outside the competence of other discipline like science – questions on the ultimate origin of things and the ultimate purpose of our existence or of the universe- religion has enabled millions of people around the world to find meaning to their lives. Life without meaning is not worth living. In the words of Einstein (2001): “The happy man who regards his life as meaningless is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life”. Our world is a world of suffering and pains, a world of brutal wars and mindless injustices. Such a world has forced many to ask the kind of questions the biblical Job asked: why do we suffer? Why is the world so unjust? What is the purpose of pain and tragedy? Finding satisfying answers would make a difference. Religion is not a private business even if it involves the spiritual dimension of the person. This is precisely why the person is viewed as “member of a community”. Individuals do not develop their spiritual dimension from nothing. It is always received like a language; we receive it before we transform it according to our unique ability or talent. With all the individual or personal variation, religion belongs to a community in its broad public expression.

RELIGIOUS MANIPULATION: A THREAT TO SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT

The resultant effects of religious conflicts in Nigeria are enormous. It pervades all the sectors of the economy. Generally, conflicts breed insecurity, discrimination, mutual distrust and slow economic and educational development. This is the case in Nigeria where in addition to the gratuitous killings and maiming of thousands of persons, properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed. Certainly, these huge losses have deprived the nation of needed manpower and services for the growth of its wobbling economy. Religious conflicts in Africa have also left its effect on investment options in the crises ridden areas. The political instability, arising from the insecurity and uncertainty that pervades the region, does not inspire the confidence of foreign investors and thereby deprives the nation of the economic gains. In some instances, the enterprising Southerners who had established thriving businesses in the troubled areas in the North have relocated to other and safer places. Moreover, religious manipulation in Africa have left in its trail a broken society: communities that hitherto co-existed peacefully now treat each other with mistrust and latent or open aggression. Consequently, settlement patterns begin to follow the boundaries of religion in these areas so that adherents can be swiftly mobilized in the event of future riots. The disrupted social harmony is sometimes felt in places far from the crisis scene and thus account for the reprisal riots in other parts of Nigeria.

Considering the nature of the Boko Haram conflict it is important to discuss conflict from an Islamic perspective. Islam could be translated to mean submission, a total submission to God. A Muslim therefore is said to be liberated from submitting to any other form of authority be it in form of false deities, authoritarian regimes, money, passion of self or any other thing. To a Muslim therefore religion has two dimensions, that is, vertical and horizontal (Aruoa, 2012). The vertical relationship is between the individual and his or her Creator while the horizontal relationship is between the individual and other creatures. Religion to a Muslim affect all spheres of life including in conflict situations. Islam sees conflict as a positive thing and it is stated in Qur’an 49:13 that “O you Mankind! We have created you of a male and female and made you nations and tribes so that you may know each other.” This verse states clearly that Allah created diversity

in order for human beings to learn how to live with each other. This diversity which could be a source of many conflict are due to the fact that people have not learnt to live together and as a result diversity is seen as a negative thing. It could be argued that the reasoning behind the above verse is that Islam encourages conflict and conflict in turn drives development. We can imagine a hypothetical society where conflicts have ceased to exist, what will follow is stagnation.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF TERRORISM IN THE ISLAMIC RELIGION

The holy Quran in so many verses has described the religion to be a religion of peace. The holy prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him) was known to be a peaceful man throughout his life time and even at a point in time it was recorded that he actually lived among people who didn't believe in his faith but lived peacefully with them. However, there are two categories of people who practice Islam. There are those who practice radical Islam and those who practice the religion of Islam. The former are the ones who input their own innovations into Islam in order to suit their needs while the later are the ones who practice Islam according to the Quran and Hadith of the Holy Prophet Muhammed (Peace be upon him). As Gawrych (2005) notes, the suicide attacks on the United States of America on the 11th of September 2001 further made the American government to appetite the fact that there are some forms of people who were more extreme than the others. Terrorism above all is murder that is why Islam forbids the killing of even an unbeliever, let alone another Muslim. In so many verses of the Quran such as in (Qur'an 6:151) which says "and do not kill a soul that God has made sacrosanct, save lawfully." (i.e. murder is forbidden but the death penalty imposed by the state for a crime is permitted)" to further buttress the above point Quran 5:53 says, "... whoso kills a soul, unless it be for murder or for wreaking corruption in the land, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind; and he who saves a life, it shall be as if he had given life to all mankind."

Terrorism in Islam, has no hiding place thus the religion has categorically made it clear as to its stand in the unlawful killing of people and deploying the excessive use of violence to achieve religious goals (Edet 2015). One unique thing about terrorists who hide under the guise of Islam is that they repeatedly say that they are doing what they are doing for the cause of Allah and when one examines the Quran further to see if there is any match one is left in the dark as to where they get their divine inspirations from. Islam does not insist on the imposition of the religion on others through the use of force or even violence which is the opposite of what the Boko Haram terrorists are doing. If the motive for terrorism is religious, it is impermissible in Islamic law. It is forbidden to attempt to impose Islam on other people. The Qur'an says, "There is no compulsion in religion. The right way has become distinct from error." (-The Cow, 2:256). Note that this verse was revealed in Medina in 622 AD or after and was never abrogated by any other verse of the Quran. Islam's holy book forbids coercing people into adopting any religion. They have to willingly choose it. In so many documents that were posted by Boko Haram, they insisted that all Africa must convert to Islam or face death. In examining further, if they claim they are using the Quran as a source of guidance, the above verse proves otherwise to their claims. In Africa today, predominantly the Christians accuse Muslims of attempting to wipe out the Christians of Northern Nigeria mainly in the North Eastern parts of the country alleging the casualties of Boko Haram Attacks are Christians. From both dominant faiths in Nigeria, all have suffered massive casualties such as the recent attack on worshipers in Kano during Friday prayers when members of the Boko Haram group attacked Muslims as they prayed. It was reported that, up to three bombs went off at different places killing dozens of people (Vanguard News, 2014). On the other hand, the Christians have also suffered casualties with scores of worshipers killed such as the attack on a village in Bornu state north east Nigeria (BBC News, 2014). From the above, it is clear and evident that this criminal organization does not discriminate in the unlawful killing of people regardless of one's religious background.

The Justification of discrimination on Christianity's Religion

It is clearly observed that most often than not, Christians opined that their religion advocates that if one is not a member that person should not have ways for heaven. This is exposed in their holy write Gospel of John 3:16- for God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him shall have eternal life.

The reproach of religion in the world, violence in God's Name.

With affirmed research concerning religion in Nigeria there is no religion that 'per se' is against 'peace'. If religion is truly a public institutional expression and promotion of the spiritual dimension of a person as member of a community as we said, then it is fundamentally rooted in peace. Yet we have so many violence as a result of religion in the entire world, which Nigeria in particular is not exceptional. We have seen scenes of violence with a religious reference. Mark Juergensmayer's (2001) in his book "*global of religious violence*" has this evocative title: **Terror in the mind of God**. The quote from Exodus 23:27 (I will send my terror before you, and will throw into confusion all the people) as a front page epigraph seems to indicate that God himself is the author of the violence or, at least, can be referred to by his zealots to justify religious violence.

CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS MANIPULATION IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY

1. **Poverty:** this occurs as a result of abject poverty. When an individual is poor he/she can easily be manipulated. For example, one can be psyched to kill somebody who is not his religious member and he will have the reward here on earth and on the last day; looking at his critical condition he can easily succumb so as to get a daily bread.
2. **Ignorance of adherents about other faiths:** it refers to un ability to know other people's belief then you go about believing and acting towards a feeble statement towards their faith and doctrine.
3. **The media's sensational reports of religious conflicts:** this occurs under the guides of some reporters by the state holders. In regard of this, the reporters will be manipulated to make any report in favour of the person at seat so as not to lose his/her job.
4. **Religious fanaticism:** this involves excessive intolerance of opposing other church/religion. In this, the spirit of religiosity controls the life of victims. It binds their eyes to any other truths or causes, natural, logical and other views. This as a cause of religious manipulation usually insist that if others do not follow their ways, they will be damned

CONCLUSION

In this study, the researcher posits that religious manipulation is a threat to societal development. Which is basically under the causes and consequences of Christian-Muslim religious conflicts in Nigeria, it highlighted the tension between the reactions of the Christian community towards these conflicts and the content of Christian faith. However, the contemporary causes of these conflicts could be traced to political manipulations, quest for economic power and mutual ignorance of the deep religious virtues of Christianity and Islam by those who claim to advance the cause of their various religions. Christians and Muslims in Nigeria are, however, called to show understanding in their reaction a virtue taught by Christ. The numerous religious conflicts in Nigeria have left adverse effects on the social, political and economic life of the nation. It is this regard that we seek to make recommendations in the quest to diminish religious conflicts/crises and enhance a peaceful co-existence between Christian and Muslims in Nigeria.

The recommendations are made with the comprehension of the psychological demands they might impose. However, it is necessary to note that it takes two parties to resolve conflicts;

thus we hold that harmony amongst the adherents of the two religions is very essential for the development of Nigeria. The government must have the political will to make public the reports of the various panels that were established to investigate past religion-related crises. Some of these include the Babalakin Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Bauchi Civil Disturbances, Karibi Whyte Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Kafanchan Disturbances, Niki Tobi Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Plateau State Disturbances, Sankey Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Wasw and Langtang Disturbances and Justice Disu Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Plateau State Disturbances and lately the Ahmed Lemu Investigation Panel on the 2011 Election Violence (Onuorah, 2011)

Furthermore, where people are indicted, such persons need to be prosecuted if such steps are taken by the Nigerian authority, it might deter some perpetrators of these unpleasant situations that have caused huge loss of human lives and property, thereby making the Nation unsafe. The Christian and Muslim leaders in Nigeria must continue to reach out and sustain the dialogue processes, spearhead inter-religious education and seek every opportunity to educate its followers and others on the ills of violence and the Christian alternatives to the culture of retaliation. It also suits the Christian and Muslim communities to reject the manipulative acts of some political leaders, who constantly seek ways to flame the nation with violence under the guise of religious patriotism, for their selfish political interests. It is only sustained efforts in these directions that will build the Nigerian nation despite the different religious ideologies accepted by its people.

Christian and Muslim leaders should strive to impress on their followers the teaching on the unity of humankind. This unity is expressed in the common teachings of the two religions that all humanity, our religious and political ideologies notwithstanding, have one source of existence-the creative act of God.

We should advocate the importance of forgiveness. Speaking on the importance of forgiveness, Martin Luther King Jr., as cited by Kunhiyop (2004) in Ladan Bark, opines: 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.

The Nigerian government should also begin a process of the inclusion of subjects and/or courses on civic responsibilities and patriotism in the educational curriculum at all levels. These courses should be made compulsory for all students irrespective of religious and cultural affiliations. The contents of these subjects/courses should include but not limited to the common heritage we share as Nigerians, principles of nation building and the impact of violence on national development. The orientations given to fresh Nigerian graduates who serve the nation for a year should also include an aspect of this.

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