
Religious Pluralism and its Implications on National Unity

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Abstract

Religious Pluralism has been perceived variously by different people. It is the standpoint of some that it has a lot of positive effects on the world while it breeds negative results on the contrary for others. Nigeria is one of the nations of the world that has religions in plural. These faiths are Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam. Each of them has devout adherents that are very devoted to their beliefs and observances. Religion has wielded great influences on Nigeria as a nation, some positively and others negatively. This work tries to X-ray what pluralism is in general, its positive and negative influences on the nation. The work discovered that pluralism can be of immense help if utilized very well for the good of Nigeria and therefore, advises all citizens and inhabitants of the nation, starting from the leaders to the led to promote religious freedom which pluralism has to offer and eschew violence which has thrown the Nigerian nation into chaos, irreplaceable losses and retrogression. Socio-historical approach was employed in the research. This paper assesses its effects on national Unity and also look at ways at which Multicultural society can be managed. It recommends among others that tolerance and accepting individual religious differences is a key to peace and harmony. Religious leaders should emphasize the integrative aspects of religion. Religious education should be made compulsory at both primary and secondary school to expose youths to the ideas of other religious. Finally, politicians should not use religious as a

language of power but rather emphasize its role of fulfilling social needs that affect the well-being of the people.

Keywords: Religion, Religious Pluralism and National Integration.

Introduction

Pluralism describes the existence of diverse cultures within the same society. Like some other African States, Nigeria is religiously diversified with the people practicing three main religions: Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religion. Madu J. E. (2018) explains pluralism as a fair treatment and a relationship between people of different religious groups regardless of their beliefs. No human or individual can exist on its own without a relationship and interaction with the other amidst the diversity that exists. Religious pluralism refers to a situation where there exists a different religious persuasion within a given institutional frame. In effect, a religious pluralistic society is a multi-religious society, where different religious groups have different doctrines of salvation and world views which eventually condition the style of life, values and ultimate goal of each group. Religious pluralism has always posed a challenge to national identity or integration in Nigeria judging the level of religious crises and violence over the year.

Concept of Religion

The ultimate purpose of religion includes helping humans to know themselves, their origin, nature and purpose of life; to bring them into a relationship with the transcendent; to instil peace in a troubled heart and to unite people together in worship and service. Thus, people of different origins who might previously been at war with one another has through religion been fastened together. Anyacho (2005) admitted this fact when he gave the root meaning of religion as derived from the Latin word Religion, meaning to hold together; he therefore concluded that: It represents the coming together of a group which is

bound by a common feeling of dependence on a particular object or subjects believed to be more powerful than man.

Commenting on the importance of religion, Onyeidu (1999:6) averred that 'while man engages in religious activity, religion in turn helps to make man there is therefore, no gain saying the fact that religion contains a system of values'. According to (Onyeidu 1999:6), these values are appreciated in 'the ethical dos and don'ts' of religion. Indeed, the duty to provide these ethical laws for people is one of the noble tasks of religion everywhere in the world. In agreement with this fact, Ireoba (2008) averred that: [R]eligion meets human needs. It gives to man what he cannot obtain from any other source namely, a confidence in the outcome of life's struggles through a personal connection with the superior powers in the world. (p. 7) Hence, religion is indispensable for the human society.

Undoubtedly, religion has shaped human life and, on that note, religions are generally believed to be good and the same. However, considering the sameness, some people still feel that some religions are more developed than the others. For those who hold such an opinion, this could be adduced from doctrines and traditions, theology and liturgy of different religions. Be that as it may, we consider it an error of thought borne out of ignorance to assert that one religion is more developed than the other without providing any standard or objective parameter for carrying out the appraisal. To say that one religion is more developed than the others is the same as saying that one religion has better promise of eternity or seeing God than the others.

Certainly, Christianity and Islam are easily accessible through their holy books and other religious documents such as commentaries, magazines, liturgy, catechism handbooks, cannons and so on, but it does not seem to us that being better documented in their activities makes them being more developed than other religions. If we may ask, is it the case that

the countries with written constitution are more developed than the countries with unwritten constitution?

Concept of Religious Pluralism

Pluralism describes the existence of diverse cultures within the same society. It is the harmonious and enriching co-existence within one political community of people of divergent, at times incompatible views, establishing and promoting their common good. It arises from the fact that while people differ from each other in many aspects, they interact with each other and have a unity as members of the same political community. It is this sense of shared identity involved in the interaction of peoples who are ethnically, politically and religiously diversified that makes for the pluralistic society. In the world of religions Idowu (2009) says religious pluralism is a situation where people of different religions and faith live together and interact at all levels without fear or prejudice, it is an attitude or policy regarding the diversity of religious belief systems co-existing in society. It therefore, enables a country made up of people of different faiths to exist without sectarian warfare or the persecution of religious minorities like other African states, Nigeria is one of the most religiously diversified with the people practicing three main religions: Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religion. However, the two most dominant religions are Islam and Christianity and with their arrival asserted themselves by dislodging the traditional religions of the various communities and also imposing their ways on the indigenous people. A major challenge that has confronted the country over the years is that of religious violence between Christians and Muslims. The relationship between the two have been that of mistrust and suspicion. This has led to incessant religious crises. This is as a result of their different perceptions of the ideal society and the conflicting strategies of power and posturing which has made the ideological gap impossible to cover. Between the 1980s to the present, there have been more than 50 religious crises recorded in the Northern part of Nigeria only which have left political, Social, economic and

psychological losses and pains on the affected people and area. Umejesi (2011). A more challenging crisis is from Boko Haram religious sect, a group opposed to Western education and values in place of full implementation of the Sharia Law. The crises which started in Bauchi has spread to states like Kano, Adamawa, Yobe and Borno. Boko Haram unleashes havoc in the North-Eastern states, capturing large parts of them. They killed, maimed and kidnapped. The abduction of over 200 school girls at Chibok remains an issue till today. The Boko Haram, which is an anti-western

civilization sect, started killing Christians and burning down Churches but later graduated to killing Moslems and burning mosques. For Barnabas (2019), "in a spate of fresh attacks across Eastern Nigeria and Cameroon, Boko Haram is continuing its campaign of terror and seeking to expand the rule of its caliphate". Currently, it is the Muslim Fulani herdsmen that are inflicting havoc and violence all over the Christian middle belt and Southern parts of the country. They have slaughtered human beings like animals, raped women and destroyed crops in Agatu, Benue state; Ukpabi –Nimbo, Enugu state and many other states in the South-East a South-West. When they went on rampage in the Northern parts, it was targeted against the minority Christians over there. All these violence is in a bid to subdue Christians and Islamize them. Little wonder the Muslim fanatics (Gumi) who had used violence, is quoted in Barnabas (2019) thus, "if Christians do not accept Muslims as their leaders, we have to divide the country." Since the regime of the present President, the Muslim Fulani Muhammadu Buhari, the Fulani herdsmen have been carrying sophisticated weapons like AK47 and others and killing with glee, unchallenged, in a country where it is a crime for Civilians to carry such guns. A lot of factors are identified as sources of these religious conflicts. One of such is religious intolerance and fanaticism. Umejesi (2011) contended that in Nigeria, the most prevalent problem confronting relationship between the religious is the absolute claim to religious faith especially between Christians and Muslims. The attempts to

interpret and impose the various doctrines by the various religious groups end up in religious riots.

According to Imaekhai (2010), oral or million statements made by the adherents or leaders either to show the superiority or inferiority of other religions lead to conflicts. The Muslims in Nigeria have been demanding for the application of the Sharia Law. To follow this demand means the state support Islam which violates its secular status. Where it exists, its application affects both Muslims and Christians, like in the sale and consumption of alcohol, gambling, segregation of women in schools and in public transport. Christians staying in these affected states are fearful of misapplication of these laws. Minority groups or Christians are sometimes forced to change to Islam or they are tried in Sharia Courts, Imekhai (2010). Religious intolerance is also found within the various denominations, for example, Muslim against Muslim brothers whom they call infidels. Similar attitudes are shown by other protestant churches against the Catholic Church and vice versa. Religious intolerance has become a very big obstacle to nation building in recent times. Blinded to the ideals of other religions, the Muslim sect like Boko Haram has ignored the provisions of the constitution and taken up arms against the Federal Government with the aim of establishing a theocratic state. Isiramen (2010) believes that poverty or deprivation of various dimensions provides empowerment for religious violence. A situation where there are wide spread social, economic and religious insecurity, endemic corruption, inequality, injustice, youth unemployment and absence of good governance among states in the North could serve as catalyst for religious violence. Unemployed youths, especially the Almayiris are used as war machines to carry out violence in the Northern part of the country. They receive their impetus from the promise of a ticket to heaven, should they die in the process. In Nigeria today, positive gains of Pluralism are being frustrated because of fanatical tendencies among the various religious groups.

Concept of National Unity

National unity or integration is used here to describe a process of ensuring that the component parts (tribes and people) of a nation are brought together to achieve a higher sense of belonging, mutual understanding and nationalism. Okonkwo (2008) defines it as the process of opening up a group, community, place of organization, to all, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender or social class. Okonkwo (2008) expresses the view that 'at the heart of meaningful integration must lie a deep understanding of the relative importance of the value systems, customs, religion and behavior of the various groupings. According to him, it will imply the weakening of certain types of ethnocentric tendencies as well as positive moves to build new relationships or fortify existing ones. The essential task of national integration is that of building cohesion amongst the various ethnic and religious groups or it can be said to aim at fostering higher loyalties in the place of parochial loyalties to the ethnic or religious origin of the citizens. One of the greatest development challenges facing Nigeria is the threat of national unity. According to Abel (2014) agitations for recognition by various ethnic groups, resource control, ethno-religious politics and other primordial cleavages have crept into national consciousness of many Nigerians. This development motivated various past administrations or regimes to establish national unity programs like National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC), Unity Schools, National Orientation Agency, National Sports and Cultural Festivals amongst others. These efforts have not yielded the desired result. Part of the challenge in this direction is the manipulation of religion by the political elites. Adamu (2015) stated that; in Nigeria, the entire gamut of social, political and economic relations revolve around Islam and Christianity and this have been the basis of legitimacy for the political class. In their quest for power and to enhance their prospects of capturing and retaining it for their environment used Religion. Notable politicians have used or known to sponsor misguided extremists in causing disturbance which has led to conflicts between Christians and Muslims resulting

in death Adamu (2015). It is for this reason that many have come to believe that the Boko Haram insurgency is a political tool to score political points. During the 2015 general elections, Adamu (2015) asserted that; it does appear the Northern elites have agreed to put the Presidency under siege, believing that by doing so, they would put at a political advantage by instigating religious and ethnic sentiments in a multi-religious and ethnic country like Nigeria in order to capture power by all means.

Nigeria as a Pluralistic Society

National unity or integration in a pluralistic society like Nigeria has been a problematic issue since attainment of independent in 1960. It is the most populous nation in Africa with a population of over 160 million people. As a political entity, she came into formal existence in 1914 with the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates by the British government. However, one of the Chief characteristics of the Nigerian society is its pluralistic character. This has over the years made the task of building a united nation out of the heterogeneous ethnic and religious groups one of the greatest challenges facing political leaders. As a religious pluralistic society, the place of religion in analyzing and addressing national issue appears evident. It is part of the fabric of people's lives and strongly tied to their cultural identities. This has made religious issues play roles in crisis generation and resolution. However, Imaehai, (2010) has observed that; people's attitude about the role of religious is by no means uniform. To him, there are those who wish to put an official religious stamp on all political and social institutions, like the Muslims, Also, there are those who would want to see the role of religion as providing the conscience of the nation and the gadfly of its leadership. This is a view shared by many Christians. The challenges of religious pluralism are manifested in various ways and varying degrees and in all Parts of Nigeria. They are manifested in political instability, disunity, distribution and participation in the political process, as a result of these factors, Nigeria has never been an integrated nation. The country has demonstrated

a high rate of religious conflicts in the past three decades. The ubiquity of religious conflicts is attested to by the dramatic rise in the incidents as well as volume of destruction of lives and property that have accompanied and, the tension that has generated in the relationship between religious groups in the country. This has continued to engender mutual suspicion and distrust among Nigerians. The incidents of hostilities in different part of the country have shaken the very foundation of peaceful disposition, and a threat to national integration. According to Ntamu et al, (2014) stated that the North feels like power is their exclusive right and the south as conquered territories and paupers in the corridors of power, and any political formula leaving out the north in the equation is bound to fail. The current president, who is of the northern extraction, has openly displayed his religious and tribal bigotry, where political appointments have been positively stewed in favour of the North to the detriment of other segments of the country felt left out of key appointments, whereas some South-South people are of the view that he is a tribal president and a religious bigot, so he is busy patronizing his Hausa, Muslim and the Fulani brethren to the exclusion of the entire Southern geographical region.

Religious Pluralism and its Effects on National Unity

Religious pluralism and its attendant conflicts have continued to create social divide between people making their coming together difficult. Christians and Muslims have not been able to coexist and work harmoniously for decades. This is to say that it leads to the polarisation of Nigerian Christians and Muslims as most of the Christians live in the South and Muslims in the North. Religious crises which have claimed many lives in the North have left questions as to whether Nigeria is truly one nation. According to Oguiche (2009), many find it difficult to imagine why the Southern Muslim or Christian should be killed in the name of religion in his or her own country. This has led to reprisal killings in the Southern part of Nigeria in some cases. The result is that national integration

consciousness which is a major ingredient in the process of national integration has been negatively affected. Frequent religious conflicts or crises have effect on the country's survival. According to Oguche (2009) conflict or war is one of the most serious threats to national integration because it has a bearing on the country's socio-cultural, political, science and technological development. Crises resulting from religious pluralism have continued to compromise national development. This is because hundreds of human lives are lost while properties running to billions of Naira are damaged. For example, the activities of the Boko Haram insurgents have left millions of Nigerians homeless in the country with others living as destitute without good shelter and adequate health care. Again, the situation has continued to tarnish the country's international image as a bastion of religious pluralism. This affects foreign investments as most multinational corporations wanting to do business will not find the environment receptive. There was the abduction of French nationals by Boko Haram and the demand for 9(nine) million Dollars before they could be released Adadu,(2015). Where these threats attain alarming dimensions, they tend to undermine not only the legitimate functions of government to the generality of the people but also the existence of the government itself. The meddling of religion with politics as experienced in Nigeria has not really helped the cause of democracy or its sustainability. Religion which should have been a unifying factor has been manipulated to cause division and hatred. Evidences abound in pages of Newspapers and Magazines, of irresponsible and inflammatory remarks made at one time or the other by prominent Nigerian Muslim or Christian Politicians Akama, (2000). In most cases, democratic values such as dialogue, national unity, patriotism, self-reliance, territorial integrity and political consciousness are not practiced or promoted. Political leaders have continued to exploit the country's religious and regional diversity to create and consolidate political base of support. In doing so, integration among people became a119 problem. The consequence is that Nigeria today is a deeply divided society in

terms of religion. Countries like Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia that faced the challenges of diversity since their independence, have been able to integrate the diverse groups and have forged national identities.

MANAGING MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES

The Views of Marx and Rawls Building a system of consensus for rational human existentialism is one of the major tasks of philosophers, they tried to build a consensus around cultural purity to create the possibility of forms of community which are simultaneously more universalistic and more sensitive to cultural differences. Their goal is on the ethical ideal of a cultural purity that will determine the unity in diversity among the various cultures. Perhaps, under this trajectory, John Rawls and Karl Marx introduced a model of rational consensus that will determine a cultural purity of inclusiveness of cultures and harmony of the differences in the state. Both Marx and Rawls are emissaries of the state harmony under the trajectory of conflict. “Marx’s famous critique of Hegel’s political philosophy stressed the failure of the modern state to satisfy the basic material needs of the subordinate classes”.

Here, Marx is of the contention that, it is the economic factor that determines the social consciousness, man cannot think at all, unless his material needs are satisfied, and then what he does think will be dependent upon the material mode of production of the society in which he lives. Here, we borrowed a leaf from Marx which seems to have rejected the evils of industrialization with capitalism on the ground of relationship of the material conditions, in which people lives to the ideas and beliefs they hold. His assessment of the evils of the bourgeoisie reminds us of the dangers of class disparity and the separation of reward from performance. His overall cultural importance to the point of expression in pluralism is on the avalanche of bridging the gap or hiatus between the classes. It is a form of cultural purity in promoting unity of human collaboration,

inclusiveness and collectively of cultures within the multicultural state.

Considerably, Marx in the light of these expressions have jettisoned the class division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. He proposes that, an economic factor is the real essential product of determining the social consciousness of cultural purity in a state. He is more of a revolutionary than Rawls, who is a social reformer of the capitalist society. John Rawls as a social reformer is one of the contemporary philosophers on the issue of distributive justice. He argues that the task of social and political institution is the preservation and enhancement of individual liberty and well-being. In his work: "Justice and Fairness", he attempts to reconcile the demand for equality made by radical tradition with the demand for liberty and freedom from control made by individualism. He expounds a set of moral principles designed to regulate the basic institutions of any just society, arguing that social life is marked by both cooperation and by conflict, and that these principles determines how the fruits of co-operative endeavours are to be distributed. Thus, according to Rawls, the questions of justice arise when a society evaluates the institutions and practices under which it lives with an eye toward balancing the legitimate competing interests and conflictive claims which are pressed by the members of that society.

Here, Rawls wants to determine the language of rights, to avoid the legitimate competing claims which usually come into conflict. Rawls in this perspective does not view the citizens of a state as naïve moralists searching for a utopian ideal. Rather, he sees them as enough self-interested individuals who which in pursuing their own individual interests and achieving their own individual goals. Presumably, Rawls vision of fuller, better life adds him to the list of champions of "Social reformer" who advocates the harmony of individual liberty during multicultural society. Once we highlight the dynamics of state membership - the interaction between associational life and vicissitudes of personal existence is determine by the individual

and state through the essence of humanitarian paradigm, which is the policy prescription able to adequately address the imperatives needed to preserve the individual in the human society. It can be observed that most countries in multicultural society have cultural purity which transcends the bounds of ethnicity, religion, race, gender and language differences. And the issues of divisions, contradiction, and exclusiveness are incidentally in countries which attach graver moral; concept to personal identity of heteronomy activity. In most of these countries, a strong indication of personal identity is enough to jettison the socio-political process and brings disunity or disparity among the people.

In Nigeria, there is no real sense of cultural purity and this is symptomatic of the efforts of this country to ensure that they have a cultural purity that will determine the stability of heteronomy activity of culture. This is not feasible, even on the theoretical level of public policy, where the government have not agreed on the restructure of the institutions. Really, the crux of the argument is for the moral probity of our leaders, the very makers and executioners of the law, to adopt a unifying principle of culture that will determine unity among them. Considerably, it is in this perspective, that a cultural purity will solely transcends the bounds of religious differences, ethnic chauvinism, racial slurs and language differences. Here at this juncture, we adopt Marxian approach of conflict resolution, in seeking to bridge the hiatus or gab between cultures in Nigeria. Our common interests, therefore, will depend on shared economy inform of farming, industrialization, banking arrangements etc. It is this according to Marx, that it is an economic factor that will shape our lives in the society. It determines our social consciousness of everything. It will bring the model of cultural purity, and thereby dissolving the intensity of the general cultural differences in Nigeria. A genuine economic factor will promote a secularization of culture in a divided society. It will promote the idea of living together in mutual existentialism. Secularity as a cultural purity is a condition in which our experience of and search for fullness

occurs and this is something, we all share, believers and unbelievers alike. Thus, it is in the light of this trajectory, that the evolution of the cultural purity would be born in Nigeria, because, “it is the material conditions of existence that mould the idea of people who, mistakenly, assume that it is their ideas which shape their mode of living” [8]. Thus, in following this methodology in the classical intellectual epistemology of Marx, it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. It is the mode of production of material goods that determines the political, social, intellectual and religious life and institutions of a given people in a society. When men/women are exposed and influenced by the economic factors directly or indirectly for socio-political and cultural development, they designed that to form alliance irrespective of their diversity and heteronomy activity of cultures. Thus, in Nigeria, the case is different; there is no economic configuration as a model to mould people’s behaviour into a form of cultural purity. Asike and Anwuluorah in this regard, corroborated this, by saying that in Nigeria: There is no individual political will to sustain the federal structure. The political arrangements are shaped in such a way that religion, ethnicity serves as the ideological preference for national identity much more than any configuration along cultural or historical lines... The nation’s political elites were unwilling to maintain Nigeria’s tradition of pluralism and tolerance, for the sustainability of a genuine political and economic development. However, it is in consonance with the above explanation, that we believed that a political development has no terminal end; it is always in a state of flux, revolving around those internal and external circumstances confronting it in an epoch. It is within the foregoing context that the Nigerian national cultural purity can arrive on the concept of economic interest as stipulated by Marx and Rawls.

A nation state must be in a transformational goal in which they will be structured, organized, and shall be guarded by some

procedural rule of law controlling and regulating the people. Summarily, it is in this way that any nation can survive the distinctive ways of division, dispute, quarrel, squabble, disagreement, dissension etc. And a nation divided against itself shall not stand or survive. For equality made by radical tradition with the demand for liberty and freedom from control made by individualism He expounds a set of moral principles designed to regulate the basic institutions of any just society, arguing that social life is marked by both cooperation and by conflict, and that these principles determines how the fruits of co-operative endeavours are to be distributed. Thus, according to Rawls, the questions of justice arise when a society evaluates the institutions and practices under which it lives with an eye toward balancing the legitimate competing interests and conflictive claims which are pressed by the members of that society. Here, Rawls wants to determine the language of rights, to avoid the legitimate competing claims which usually come into conflict. Rawls in this perspective does not view the citizens of a state as naïve moralists searching for a utopian ideal. Rather, he sees them as enough self-interested individuals who which in pursuing their own individual interests and achieving their own individual goals. Presumably, Rawls vision of fuller, better life adds him to the list of champions of “Social reformer” who advocates the harmony of individual liberty during multicultural society.

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It is within the foregoing context that the Nigerian national cultural purity can arrive on the concept of economic interest as stipulated by Marx and Rawls. A nation state must be in a transformational goal in which they will be structured, organized, and shall be guarded by some procedural rule of law controlling and regulating the people. Summarily, it is in this way that any nation can survive the distinctive ways of division, dispute, quarrel, squabble, disagreement, dissension etc. And a nation divided against it shall not stand or survive.

Conclusion:

To enhance national Unity or integration in Nigeria today, peaceful practice of religion with respect for other peoples' religion is a pre-requisite. Muslim and Christian adherents

should henceforth emphasize their area of similarity and de-emphasize divergent aspects of their religion. This is to say, they must seek beyond each other, a basis of unity that brings them together without destroying their differences as far as religious affiliation is concerned. It is imperative that religion should always play its spiritual role as a source of ethical and moral inspiration in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In order that there may be greater religious freedom and national Unity or integration in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made: All religious leaders should preach tolerance in order to promote peaceful co-existence and unity in Nigeria. Religion has integrative functions. Where religious tenets are similar or related, it is easier for adherents to co-exist harmoniously. Muslim and Christian preachers, therefore, need to demonstrate better understanding and sympathy for each other. They must uphold the sacred nature of human conscience and accord individuals the freedom to search for truth of their choice. For good understanding of each other's religion by the citizenry, the Federal Government should make religious education compulsory at the primary and secondary level of our educational system. Religious tolerance should be inculcated in school curriculum and discourage religious indoctrination. This will expose youths to the ideas of other religions, reduce religious fanaticism and foster religious virtues that promote national unity or integration. A regulatory body should be constituted by the Federal Government with the responsibility to monitor and maintain peace. This body should discourage religious rivalry from exhibiting destructive tendencies. Politicians in Nigeria should learn to stop using religion as a 'language of power'. Its role should be on fulfilling social needs that directly affect the well-being of the community. Interfaith dialogue should be encouraged.

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Notes.