

Socio-religious Interdependency for a Stable Cohabitation: A Biblical Assessment for Unison in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria is an heterogeneous country with multiple identities This implies that, the country comprises of multiple ethnicities, multiple religions among other multifaceted identities which have brought about factionalism, nepotism, religious differences and bigotry to dominate interpersonal relationships leading to various threat to mutual cohabitation for national progress., this has hence made the effort of amalgamation as a failed venture due to lack of sustainable socio-economy and political stability currently threatening the country. Using content analysis methodology and advancement of intentionality of all citizens to ensure stability in Nigeria, this paper assesses the situation at hand and discovered that, obvious factionalism is the order of the day in the country. As such, the paper, mirroring the biblical teaching on unity, proposes that unison is a key to national sustainability and progress with an emphasis on social and religious dependency to one another in such a way that each religion appreciates respects the other religions and each ethnic group have mutual respect.

Key Words: Socio-religious, ethnicity, Unity, Cohabitation, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is largely respected as a country with largest economy in Africa, and this identity had been designated to the country for a long time. This could largely be because of being the seventh most populous country in the whole world with a population of over 219 million people according to the United Nations data elaborated by Worldometer (WPR, nd). With this population feat and laced with great resources to aid the development of the country, however, the contrary has been experienced by the country.

Various factors like arable land, mineral resources, intellectually sound individuals among others which ought to aid the progress of the country as a unique body and to make it one of the developed nations, have turned ironically as setback as it is currently happening in the country. It is essential to establish that Nigeria is not the only heterogeneous country in the world, as such, to say it is due to the multifaceted aspects of the country that have contributed to the setback is not a balanced statement as progress is possible even with the current forces that comprises of the country. Lee (200) explained that Singapore is a country which is multilingual, multicultural and multi-religious society, however, Singapore enjoys progress rather than seeing those variants as a reason for stagnation and retrogression in their country. They are able to manage the situation well because they are one of the most respected countries in the world.

It is against this backdrop of civic unrest, poverty and self centeredness and personal interest above national interest that this paper seeks to align and rectify. In a quest to emphasis the need for progressive cohabitation as a country and as a people, this paper therefore seeks to socially and religiously assess the situation and to propose that socio-religious interdependency is essential to aid progress and unity in the country.

Heterogeneous Nigeria Community

A heterogeneous society is a collection of various individuals who live together and adhere to the same laws and practices. They are individuals with diverse cultural affinities, values, and beliefs who coexist in a diversified community. It is possible to decide to live together by mutual understanding or consent. It could also be due to other factors, such as colonialism, which affects most nation-states in Africa (Terngu and Terngu, n.d.). This points and attests to the fact that, a heterogeneous society is one that is filled with people of different heritage especially as it concerns values and belief systems which points to cultural and religious differences in this context.

Without argument, Nigeria fits into this description owing to the fact that, there are multi-cultural and with various religious adherents in the country. Nigeria is a diverse political entity that is multilingual, multiethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural. There are reportedly more than 250 ethnic groupings in Nigeria, with emphasis on Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo ethnic groups as the dominant cultural groups and multiple religions, with emphasis on Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religions which are mostly attached to various traditional background and practices as documented by Ogoanah(2012)

The British colonialists united the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914, creating the modern-day nation of Nigeria. Those different ethnic groups lived apart and independently before colonization. It is evident that the colonial masters intentionally created ethnicity in order to utilise such sentimental expression as a means of maintaining their dominance and control over the African colonies (Ayatse & Akuva, 2013:181). The political and economic activities that led to colonisation and imperialism are the roots of ethnic feelings as well as the ruthless competition and conflict among the ethnic groups in Nigeria today. As such, it is impossible to completely divorce ethnicity from colonisation. Colonialism was the power behind the forced union of the several ethnic groups

who had previously existed separately in order to manage them in diversity (Ayatse & Akuva, 2013:184).

Ethnic conflict is a highly significant social phenomenon because of its complexity and the social and political challenges it poses to society, according to the expression by Osaghae (2002). This had led to various rifts, land context, and ownership mentality among others with a push for ethnic interest among citizens of the country. Ali and Yahaya (2019) cited some scenario of ethnic rivalry and conflict one of which is the Sagamu/Kano ethnic violent conflict between Yoruba and Hausa, there was also a recent oppression where, those in Lagos declared the Igbo residents that they are on a strange land during the 2023 general elections, among others which point to lack of united identity among Nigerians. This idea is not only limited to the aspect of ethnicity only but the exact same is keenly observed in the religious aspect among Nigerians.

Prior to the colonial era, several ethnic nations, empires, and kingdoms with various administrative systems occupied the regions which are now known as Nigeria (Okoro, 2002). Disparities in language, religion, morals, conventions, and belief systems served as the foundation for these various systems. However, the colonial overlords brought these ethnic nations together to further their own interests. Nigeria as it exists now is a composite of several communities and groups with unique beliefs and interests. Therefore, conflict between the constituent groups is unavoidable in such circumstances (Terngu and Terngu, n.d.).

Ethnic diversity has hampered Nigeria's overall political and economic progress, according to Odeyemi (2014:1). He emphasised once more that social crises, injustice, inequality, and religio-political instability, as well as tension and anxiety along the political spectrum, are all directly related to ethnicity and religiosity. Nevertheless, the question remains: what can a

nation-state such as Nigeria do if cultural and religious variety is undermining the sense of national identity?

Biblical Injunction on Interdependency

This section of the paper rationalizes the biblical position about valuing others. This is in the sense that, it is biblically discovered that, interdependency is a virtue that should be inculcated by individuals in their day to day activities and in this, everyone have mutual progress. As such, the section explores the biblical encouragement and directive about social interdependence rather than living independently.

Before exploring the biblical injunction for interdependency, clarifying the terms independence, dependence and interdependence is essential. Independence according to Webster's dictionary is the ability of not being influenced or controlled by others in matters of opinion, conduct, thinking, acting for oneself, not subjecting to another person's authority; Woolf (2002) puts it that, it is refusing to be under the obligation of others. It implies that an individual is not under any authority to directly influence his conduct. Dependence on the other hand is the opposite of independence in which it implies a state of being dependent or relying upon others. The third premise which is the emphasis in this paper is interdependence which is referred to by dictionary definition as being mutually dependent or simply being dependent on each other. Turnbough (2011) opined that this is a better, noble and valuable way to go in regard to relationships, he argues that it fits more closely to the ideal reality of the existence of human and much more importantly the church, as this is the desires of God for the church to be mutually affiliated to each other that everyone become important in the body of Christ. Turnbough (2011) posited that, two people in a healthy relationship could be seen as in an interdependent alliance because when one side is the only one making the moves, sacrifices, then such relationship cannot be termed as healthy relationship. This

aligns with Collins (2008) definition that interdependence is the condition of people or things that depend on each other.

Interdependence is closely opposed to independence but not like dependence, it is rather a middle point between dependence and independence. In this case every individual has something to offer in such a way that each and every participant have a quota to contribute to the growth and development of a given society. In expressing his concern over giving to God's work, Whiteman (2021) explains that, extending love to others is practically participating in the work of God and sharing one's resources with others is an act which is deduced and centered on God. The most vital position emphasized here is that the ability to be interdependent is a mark of maturity and a sigh of unity among the parties that are involved which is a mark encouraged by God to believers.

The Bible is not silent about living at peace with all men (Romans 12:18), it rather encourages that believers should ensure to live at peace with all men. In multiple scriptural texts, the Bible explains the need for mutual responsibility and dependency. It implies that no individual that makes up a society is inconsequential, but rather everyone is important in the society they find themselves. Each man must seek to ensure that, he or she plays the role of living peaceably with others rather than being a cause for chaos in the society one belongs.

The Bible further teaches the beauty of living together in unity as brethren. Implying that, if Nigerians view one another as brothers with the Nigerian birth, they have to live and cohabit in a unified way that they seek to have same goal and pursuits together as a nation. The leadership will therefore have to spearhead some of the tasks that are necessary for them to live in such unison starting with leadership by example and forming a workable structure that encourages citizens to see the need to trust one another and to value one another. In assessing the content of 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 especially the concluding part which expressed that, "for we are co-workers in God's service;

you are God's field, God's building", Whiteman (2021) further detailed in light of God's work that, it cannot be done alone rather there is a room for mutual contributions. It implies that all parties should have a sense of participation mutually in each other's affairs rather than isolating duties without an iota of cooperating to achieve tasks together. This calls for co-responsibilities in order to aid maximum productivity for the body. Paul's description of the Body is replete with imagery that emphasises its interconnectedness and the diversity within unity that is essential to both identity and function (for example, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 and Ephesians 4:1-16). We are dependent on one another!

Viewing the mark example of the Trinity, Turnbough (2011) opinion that God, despite, He existed in three forms and though they worked dominantly at various dispensations, they were interdependent, and this made it easy to lead the human creation and make other things possible in the biblical times and injunctions. Citing Genesis 1:26 "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" this statement is seen by Turnbough as a call for interdependency and cooperation among the trinity as such, he detailed that it is not difficult to make a case for the Trinity being the eternal and best example of interdependence, the trinity demonstrated a perfect mutual dependence- instead of self-reliance, the Trinity practiced inter-reliance.

The above discourse among many is an indication that, the Bible teaches largely on the need for people to be mutually responsible for what they want to be established or obtained in their society or organisation. As such, cohabitation among Nigerians, if to be aimed towards progress, there is the need to emphasis that unison is essential to have same goal and same focus even as every individual is awakened to their mutual responsibilities towards one another and to the country as a whole.

Essence and Importance of Unity in Nigerian Nationhood

From the discourse in this paper, unity tend to be the baseline to achieve interdependency as clamored in the course of this study as such, it is essential to emphasise the essence of unity in the national affairs since it becomes so instrumental in contributing to stability and progress in the affairs of the country.

In considering the importance of unity in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria Mohammed, (2018) remarked that, even with all forms of multiformity inside a nation, including multilingualism, multi-religion, and multi-culture, national unity fosters ideas of unity within the nation. It encourages a nation's citizens to have a feeling of solidarity, nationhood, patriotism, and shared purpose. Consequently, it is imperative to foster national unity since a house divided against itself cannot stand. Furthermore, Viera (2019) noted that "Without unity, there is no growth, integrity, freedom, and most importantly, no patriotism." This is because the phrase "One People, One Nation, One Destiny" cannot be achieved without promoting national unity. Any nation's stability and progress depend on its capacity to maintain its national unity, and Nigeria is no exception.

Aragbaye, John and Akande (2023) commented that since fostering national unity is a shared duty that benefits all, none is exempt from its importance. Furthermore, because Nigerian society is made up of many ethnic groups, religious belief system and cultural beliefs, fostering national unity has been a recurrent subject. Therefore, adopting this form of social relationship is essential, with the emphasis on the role that religion plays specifically in the formation of the Nigerian mind.

In painting a closer and clearer picture, Turnbough (2011) uses the growing process of a small child from infant-hood which signifies total dependence to adulthood which indicates interdependence of the parent to the child and vice versa. He

expressed that, seeing an infant learn about the world around him is one of life's greatest pleasures. His parents nurture him and wait patiently for him to transition from complete reliance on them to adulthood with responsibility. His parents assist him with everything he needs to survive, including eating, walking, talking, and making sensible decisions. At this point of the life of the young boy turn man, there is a sense of fulfillment for the parents because, their totally dependent son is now dependable also and as such, the boy can depend on the parents and the parents can also depend on the boy in return.

The necessity of unity in Nigeria could be seen as a call for national unity and in addressing the term. Zamare and Karofi (2015), defined national unity as a process that results in a comprehensive set of measures implemented by a state, its delegates, or an institution with the intention of reconciling all interests through dialogue and representation and resolving potentially polarizing and contentious differences. This could be achieved through the application of fairness, justice, and equity in the distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities in order to ensure the stability, longevity, and prosperity of the polity for as long as its residents choose to stay in it. The notion behind national unity is simply uniformity, oneness not caring about distinctions as a people, or unity in diversity (Alabi, Zabairu, and Onuoha, 2019). Any significant society must accept national unity in order to progress and flourish.

According to Ambali (2019), national unity is the cornerstone of any significant progress a country can make because, it centers on a society that is united in purpose and a sense of oneness, regardless of differences in political beliefs, religious practices, tribal affiliations, cultural norms, or any other characteristic that makes people different from one another. Putting an emphasis on shared values and goals can strengthen national cohesion by giving people a feeling of purpose. According to Ezeobi et al. (2019), fostering national integration is crucial for

fostering unity, particularly in multicultural societies where linguistic, religious, and ethnic disparities abound.

In addition, highlighting shared objectives and ideals in the light of unity fosters a feeling of national identity among citizens. People can more easily relate to one another regardless of their backgrounds when a unifying story is developed that portrays all citizens as essential contributors to their nation. In summary, highlighting similarities rather than differences enables individuals from various backgrounds to perceive themselves as one under a shared banner. In conclusion, a nation-state's ability to maintain its unity through shared objectives is essential. A united people are capable of eliminating conflict and bringing about unheard-of peace even in these dangerous times if diversity is embraced and they celebrate the fundamental principles that bind them together as citizens (Ezeobi et al., 2019). Respect for individual rights is upheld while democratic values such as equality before the law are reinforced. Promoting courteous and honest communication throughout the diverse groups that comprise a nation is crucial in today's culture. By doing this, empathy can be fostered and understanding among people, which will advance national unity.

Socio-religious Interdependency in the Nigerian Context

Ojo (2016) opined that, indeed, the politics Nigeria has one of the world's most ethnically split societies, with many different ethnic groups and dialects. Consequently, the diversity of her makeup has made national integration difficult. This suggests that ethnic variety has started to impede the development of the most populated nation in Africa. Thus, implying that Nigeria as a community of various religions and cultural affiliations has found the negative side of amalgamation rather than the positive side of the union. And for stability to be enjoyed, which will result in mutual benefit for all angles there is the need to focus on national unity aimed through social and religious interdependence.

In order for the country to experience stability and overall progress, there is the need for social and religious integration nationally. Socio-religious interdependence here is seen in the light of national integration in which the citizens view one another as having one thing or the other to contribute and to gain from people of other ethnic affiliations and religious affiliations. National integration is the process through which individuals within a social system form connection, allowing the system's boundaries to endure over time and the subsystems' boundaries to have less impact on behavior (Ojo, 2016). National integration is defined as "a state in which a nation's citizens perceive themselves more and more as single people, united by shared historical experiences and ideals, and inspired by a sense of patriotism and unity that surpasses customary, innately diverse tendencies" (Jega, 2002).

A Yoruba man or woman is to see an Igbo woman or man as important and productive, an Igbo origin should also see an Hausa man or woman as a productive being. On the other hand, a Christian is to see a Muslim as someone with productivity in the society while a Muslim should also see a Christian as someone that can be of great benefit to the society. Same goes for interacting with people from the various traditional religions across the country, with this understanding of mutual benefits from one another rather than uttering words of hatred and mentioning issues that can foster hatred among each other. Each man must see the other as someone who can contribute positively to the growth and development of the country.

As posited by Aragbaye, John and Akande (2023), it is essential to note that fostering national unity is a duty that is shared by all citizens, not just a select group of knowledgeable individuals. It follows that everyone can contribute to the cause of national unity. The ability of each Nigerian to see the need and necessity for people of other religion and cultural affinity implies the beginning of progress for the country. The push for unity from the various angles both religiously, ethnically and socially is the beam of hope necessary for national sustainability for the

country and this is essential to place Nigeria as one of the leading countries in the world. The various resources naturally owned by Nigeria are sufficient to sustain the national strength of Nigeria as a country, as such, the human cooperation is the only vacuum that is left for the progress and stability to be achieved, and this could be possible when all quarters put hands together to ensure unity among one another.

Conclusion

Each member that constitutes a society or organisation has one role or the other to play for the stability and progress of such an organization. This is the exact situation in Nigeria It is not disputable as shown from the course of this study that Nigeria is heterogeneous, but her heterogeneous nature has contributed to failure on the part of progress as an amalgamated entity owing to the obvious nepotism, tribalism, religious bigotry which has turned out to be the trait of the Nigerian people.

It is impossible to overestimate the significance of advancing national unity since it not only guarantees peaceful cohabitation among Nigerians but also promotes social cohesiveness, economic expansion, and political stability in the nation. This paper as therefore successfully establishes that, despite the multiple ethnic groups, multi-religious and multilingual nature of the country, it could be well used to the advantage of the people in which everyone comes together as one in unity and pursue a national interest thereby redefining identity in light of one country rather than multiple ethnic groups or religion. The leaders and followers are to see to a united purpose of making the country stand out by each party, making their quota without felling that such little effort will amount to a futile endeavour.

With the scriptura teachings and precepts as a basis, this paper empahsises the beauty in unison. It implies that, when all parties render their little efforts at unity, the achievement of the

country becomes enviable and will place the country in a significant and reputable spot in the community of nations in Africa and even on the world map.

Recommendation

From the focus of this paper which has been on emphasizing the importance of unity done through interdependency in Nigeria, the following are recommended.

- i. The biblical injunction about unity can be used as a yardstick or template for national unity
- ii. Each ethnic group are to prioritise national interest above regional interest
- iii. Every religion is to be mutually respected and focus should be on appreciating each other's contribution to national growth

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