

RELIGION, SECESSIONISM AND THE QUEST FOR DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The activities of religious organizations in Nigeria is assuming an alarming proportion, especially in the 21st century with three major Nigerian cardinal religious groups competing for pre-eminence and supremacy. This has resulted to increasing rate of struggle for religion secession among religious groups in Nigeria. However, the struggle for secession by religious organizations in the last few decades has resulted to increasing rate of religious conflicts in most part of the nation. This increasing rate of religious conflicts in Nigerian has negatively affected the peaceful coexistence and sustainable development of the country. Therefore, this article focuses on religion secession and its impact on the quest for development in Nigeria. The paper adopted theoretical approach. Its sources of data were secondary and personal observation. The study unravels the fact that there is at the moment a very bright prospect for the survival of African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity in Nigeria in spite of the rising struggle for religious secession among recognizable religious organizations. This is anchored on the fact that there are still some compromises among religious extremists and the increasing desire for religious intolerance among the major religious groups in Nigeria. Thus, the paper submits that it is needful that all the spirited stake holders of the various religious groups in Nigeria create an avenue for meaningful dialogue in order to checkmate the monster of religious intolerance and secessionism to pave way for sustainable development of Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, Secessionism & Development.

Introduction

Nigeria is a country blessed with abundant resources. Overtime, the utilization of this abundant resources for rapid development of the nation has been jeopardized by frequent reported cases of conflicts instigated by various religious groups. Religion which is supposed to creates great impact in human behavior and in most cases transforms primitive and hostile behavior to a refine and more acceptable attitudes compatible with human cohabitation have been abused by certain individuals who do not understand the premise of religion and religion tolerance. This has resulted to increasing wave of religious successionist, who strongly believe that the teaching promulgated by their religion should be hold in high esteem, and such anything or set of people in opposition to their strongly entrenched beliefs and teachings should be put into extinction. However, to have a detailed understanding of the implications of religion secessionism on the development of the nation, it is pertinent to have a holistic review of related and relevant concepts, forming the basis of the study.

Religion

Religion which is meant to unite the people have been abused by some set of persons who hold in high Religion is a system of social unity commonly understood as a group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen or imaginary being, or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth, and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions, and rituals associated with such belief or system of thought. It is a structure within which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued; usually among a community of like-minded believers (Johnson and Samson, 2014). Religion can be found in all known human societies. Looking at the record of earliest societies on record, they show strong suggestions of religious signs and observances. During the course of history, religion has continued to be a significant part of societies and human experience, shaping how individuals react to the environments in which they live (Fagbamila, David and Issa, 2014).

Deton (2006) conceives religion as a fixed relationship between the human and non-human entities, the sacred, the supernatural, the self-existent, the absolute or simply, God. However, religion is such a wonderful universal phenomenon that is found in every society, developed or underdeveloped, black or white race. Pratt (2006) agrees that religion is a social behaviour associated with individuals or communities directed towards the power or forces which they conceived as having lasting and ultimate control over their religion, men exchange obedience and loyalty with security and peace in form of a covenant with the supernatural powers, hence they turn to worship them culminating in a religious exercise.

According to Eliade (2010), religion is the most substantial bond of humanity, the fear of the unexplainable phenomena of the universe and some superstitious beliefs compel men to enter into a bond or pact with such unknown forces. Balm (2004) sees religion as the experiences of the holy. This is where the objective side of religion comes to play. The objective of worship is conceived by man to be holy; having convinced himself thus, man the “experience” of such encounter expresses and passes onto others that which he has internalized. It is easy, therefore to experience the “holy” than to know or localize it.

Secessionism

Secession is the withdrawal of a group from a larger entity, especially a [political entity](#), but also from any organization, union or military alliance (Coppeters and Richard 2013.). Threats of secession can be a strategy for achieving more limited goals. It is, therefore, a process, which commences once a group proclaims the act of secession (e.g. declaration of independence). A secession attempt might be violent or peaceful, but the goal is the creation of a new entity independent from the group or territory it seceded from (Kohen, 2016). Analyzing from religion perspective, religion secession is the withdrawal or disintegration of a set of religious organizations or groups from the from the larger religious body or group as a result of new found believes or faith. Overtime, this form of disintegration has resulted in

all forms of chaos and struggle for supremacy among various religious organizations in Nigeria.

National Development

According to Munasinghe (2014), national development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems.

Dambisa (2010) opines that most African countries are confronted with major developmental challenges orbiting on leadership, corruption, insecurity of varied degrees like kidnapping, terrorism, child industry, ritual killing, armed robbery and the most endemic problem which is poverty is also wreaking. Furthermore, the scholar adds “there is no denying the fact that all these indices of backwardness are similar to what is operating in Nigeria today”. Nigeria economic prospects are now in grim and the economy is in recession (Eboh, 2016), while corruption is on the high side demoralizing every aspect of the government (Nwabughio, 2016). The state of the nation has greatly affected her quest for improved quality of life of her citizens as poverty; unemployment and starvation still pervade the nook and cranny of the country. Nigeria in the last fifty years has been battling with the problems of development in spite of her abundant material and natural resources.

Theoretical Perspective: The Philosophical Theory of Religion as a Theory of Terrorism

Many criminologists have pointed out that the disciplines of theology, religion, and philosophy have had important things to say about terrorism (Stitt, 2003; Kraemer, 2004). It is also a fact that about a quarter of all terrorist groups and about half of the most dangerous ones on earth are primarily motivated by religious concerns. They believe that God not only approves of their action, but that God demands their action. Their course is sacred, and consists of a combined sense of hope for the future and vengeance for the past. Of these two components, the backward-looking desire for vengeance may be the more important trigger for terrorism because the forward-looking component (called apocalyptic thinking or eschatology) produces wild-eyed fanatics who are more a danger to themselves and their own people (Egbosa and Rotimi, 2005).

The trick to successful use of terrorism in the name of religion rests upon convincing believers or convertees that a "neglected duty" exists in the fundamental, mainstream part of the religion. Religious terrorism is therefore, not about extremism, fanaticism, sects, or cults, but is instead all about a fundamentalist or militant interpretation of the basic tenets (Bryan, 2005). Most religious traditions are filled with plenty of violent images at their core, and destruction or self-destruction is a central part of the logic behind religion-based terrorism (Johnson and Sampson, 2004). Evil is often defined as malignant narcissism from a theological point of view, and religion easily serves as moral cover for self-cantered terrorists and psychopaths.

Religion has always absorbed or absolved evil and guilt in what is called theodicy, or the study of how the existence of evil can be reconciled with a good and benevolent God. Most religions theodicyize evil as: (1) A test of faith; (2) A product of free will; (3) part of God's plan; or (4) functional to let people learn right from wrong; and terrorists easily make use of these established theodicies or critiques of them (Derrida, 2008).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of religion as a theory of terrorism is how a devout believer could come to mix politics and religion. This typifies the rise and activities of religious terrorism (Boko Haram) in Northern Nigeria. First, Yusuf their dead leader came into the scene using philanthropy to attract followers by identifying gaps (poverty, corruption) in Nigerian polity. He gave the poor arms and also inculcated into them his rebellious position against Westernization and Nigerian Government; and his intention to Islamize (Sharia) the North as the only way they can escape injustice and attain the level which Allah (God) wants them to be. This is strengthened by the view that they are just tools Allah uses to do his will.

Religious terrorism can be quite extreme in its tactics. Not only does it strive to avenge a long history of persecution and injustice, but it frequently carries out pre-emptive attacks (Stitt, 2003). Leading to massive destruction of lives and bombing of government, religious and individual properties. This is because a high level of paranoia is usually maintained about the actual degree of threat that the enemy trend poses.

In summary, the above theories are just to help understand better the role of religion to national development. The common thing in both theories is the pursuit of a better tomorrow which is positive national development. However, the means and how to go about such pursuit is different even though all is geared towards national development. While one is pursuing it through peaceful co-existence, the other through conflict and violence. Generally, they are pushing for a society where honesty, justice, improved living standard etc are guaranteed.

This brings us to Robert K. Merton's Theory of Deviance where some individuals in the society are 'Conformist' (pursuing societal goals through societal accepted means) while others are 'Innovators' (pursuing societal goals but through their own created means). While the first theory is about how religion can motivate people to work hard in order to better their living standard and the general economy of the country, the other theory explained how religion could be used to psych people to take arms to fight for so called 'better society' where everything are done as stipulated by religion. All these are just for us to understand the influence of religion on national development from both sides of the coin.

Factors hindering National Development in Nigeria

In spite of series of developmental strategies put in place by successive governments, and sometimes with good intentions, all attempts to generate meaningful development proved futile:

1. Poor Formulation and Implementation of Policies. There are in most cases, no executive capacity responsible for the formulation and implementation of the plan. What is usually seen are officials entrusted to such a position but without any meaningful executive authority. Some of the previous development plans failed because; there was little or no consultation of the general public. Planning is supposed to involve even the peasant in the villages. Even the Local Government officials who are close to the people were not consulted (Mimiko, 2007).

2. Lack of Good Governance. This militates against national development. Where there is no good governance, development becomes a mirage. This is as a result of bad leadership in the country. Most of our leaders have no sense of commitment to development. Mimiko (2008) captures the situation by asserting that; Decolonization allowed the crop of leaders that aligned with colonial power to take over Nigeria. This ensured the sustenance of a neo-colonial economy even after political independence. These leaders on assumption of power quickly turned up the repressive machinery of the colonial state rather than dismantling it. Significantly, they have no vision of development to accompany the efficient instrument of repression they inherited. All they were interested in was access to power and privileges and not development.

3. High Level of Corruption. High level of corruption and indiscipline is another barrier to development. Nigeria is corrupt, managed by corrupt leaders who have made the state an instrument of capital accumulation, rather than using it to project the interest of the citizenry. A very good plan supervised by a thoroughly corrupt state can hardly do a thorough job. Corruption and development are antithetical to each other, the two cannot cohabit, and so, where one is present, the other suffers. (Chuta, 2014).

4. Religious Intolerance. Since the independence of Nigeria, she has witnessed a variety of religious disturbances some of which have threatened the peaceful coexistence and uniform development of the nation. There are always palpable fears at the slightest provocation of inter-religious skirmishes especially in the northern parts of Nigeria. The persistence of this monster has become source of worry for most Nigerians.

5. An Import Dependent Mono-Economy. Another important factor is the mono-economic base of the country. The country largely depends on crude oil for her survival to the detriment of other resources. All other sectors of the economy are neglected. For instance, agriculture, which constitutes the mainstay of the Nigerian economy in the 1950s and 1960s, has been thrown into limbo over the years. How would government encourage export promotion when there is virtually nothing to export? The economy is not diversified and this is not suitable for a sustainable development (Afamuefuna 2006).

Role of Religion in Enhancing National Development

Religion is a system of social coherence commonly understood as a group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen or imaginary being, or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth, and the moral codes, practices,

values, institutions, and rituals associated with such belief or system of thought. It is a framework within which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued; usually among a community of like-minded believers (Johnson and Sampson, 2014).

On the other hand, Development could be defined as a process of economic and social transformation that is based on complex cultural and environmental interactions. According to Walter Rodney, development is the process that includes: Physical development which includes man-made goods produced by use of technology, Cultural development which comprises of the values, norms and traditions of a society, and Personal development which includes the psychological directions of individuals (Akwalla, 2009).

According to Akwalla (2009), the purpose of development in the society is to reduce poverty, inequality, and unemployment. For Alesina and Rodick (2004), development involves reducing deprivation or broadening choice. Deprivation represents a multidimensional view of poverty that includes hunger, illiteracy, illness and poor health, powerlessness, voicelessness, insecurity, humiliation, and a lack of access to basic infrastructure.

National Development is the ability of a country or countries to improve the economic and social welfare of the people e.g. by providing security and social amenities which includes quality education, portable water, transportation infrastructure, medical care, employment etc.

From the foregoing therefore, it could be deduced that the role of religion in enhancing national development, focuses on the how religious organizations contribute their quota to national development. Therefore, the contributory role of religion to national development is discussed under the following five major subheading:

1. Social Roles: The recognition of social justice implies the recognition of God in the scheme of things and this tantamount to progress and development. The three religious' groups in Nigeria agree that man is dependent and contingent and need to be guided by the ultimate - God, Supreme or Allah and gods (Aremu 2013). One of the ways religion can help in national development is by securing the peace of the nation. This is done by appealing to the conscience of the people through ethical teachings. According to Agha (2013) "No society can live without morals". He argues that morality comprises of those standards of conduct which the reasonable man approves. Conceptually religion provides believers a guideline about life and the life-after and thus provides much-needed incentives for indulging in productive activities during lifetime. Religions can be seen as a promoter of growth as they direct people towards honesty, discipline, hard work, education, thriftiness (leading to savings essential for investment and thereby growth) and absenteeism from harmful activities; though it can also encourage violence in the name of doing the will of God. In view of the above, one can say that religion plays the role of moving the nation forward by bringing the citizens together to plan for the good of the nation.

2. Educational Roles: Another role religion has played in national development is on the educational sector. Religious groups have been involved in the educational sector of this

country through the provision of Nursery, Primary, Secondary, Adult education, Sabbath and Sunday School Classes, Almajiri school, clubs for Boys and Girls, Mass illiteracy, program planning and training courses. Religious groups took it as a challenge to invest on educational sector by providing schools even up to University level. Consequently today, the state government and the religious bodies pay regular salaries to their teachers.

3. Political Role: One of the banes of the nation is lack of political education among the leaders shown by rabid display of power. If the leaders should be educated politically on what leadership entails -service; and the-led (people) made to understand their position too, obedience -the magic of decorum and political awareness would have been effective. However, religion can bring about sustainable political development through the inculcation of high sense of duty, morality, selfless service, respect for human lives, public accountability, love of one's neighbor, sense of humanity and abhorrence of violence. Religion can contribute to national integration, political mobilization, reformation of ethnic identity, nationalism, peaceful co-existence, economic social and political development (Afolabi, 2015). In agreement to the above, Marshall (2010) submits the virtues inherent from the political education of these religions has effected some changes and hence helped in the development of our nation.

4. Health Care System: Religious groups in this country have been doing its best to see that our country is a better place to live. It has been providing and helping people to have good health care services. For example, there are the Seventh Day Adventist Hospitals in Aba, Ife, Jengre, and Ilisan. Faith Clinic Foundation in Nsukka, Queen Elizabeth hospital Umuahia, K and P hospital in Nassarawa State, Shendam hospital Gombe, Leprosy home Uzuakolie, and many others built by religious groups (Jerome, 2010).

5. Agricultural Sector: Religious groups encourage people, especially its members to embark on farming by providing fertilizer and soft loan to them. The members also encourage the farmers by buying their harvested goods. Religious groups also encourage their members to be hard working as no religion encourages laziness.

Religion and Economic Growth in Nigeria

The level of development of a country is affected by many factors. Economists tend to emphasize the impact of economic variables (Alesina and Rodrick, 2004) however; political and social factors can also be important determinants of growth. Religion is a source not only of intolerance, human rights violations, and extremist violence, but also of non-violent conflict transformation, the defence of human rights, integrity in government, and reconciliation and stability in divided societies (Akwalla, 2009).

Analyses of the implications of diversity in Nigeria and other countries suggest diversity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for conflict. In other words, the very fact that a country has different ethnic, communal, religious, and racial groups does not make division and conflicts inevitable (Egbose and Rotimi, 2005). In cross-country studies, economists have revisited Weber's hypothesis. Barro and McCleary (2003) assess the effect of religious

participation and beliefs on a country's rate of economic progress. Using international survey data for 59 countries drawn from the World Values Survey and the International Social Sciences Program conducted between 1981 and 1999, these authors found that greater diversity of religion is associated with higher church attendance and stronger religious beliefs. For a given level of church attendance, increases in some religious beliefs – notably belief in heaven, hell and an afterlife – tends to increase economic growth (Sushmit, 2006). This is evident in the activities of churches in Nigeria where they assist some of their devoted members not only influencing their view of success and the need to acquire wealth but also help to secure job for them; thereby helping to improve their living standard and the country at large. Other studies have focused more on particular religions in varied historical time periods. For example, very useful insights have been gained by focusing on Islam and on Judaism. For Islam, there have been detailed investigations into financial systems in the Middle East including zakat (alms for charity) and the manner in which Islamic banks have been using a financing method equivalent to the rate of interest to overcome adverse selection and information problems. This is also practical in Nigeria. The routine giving of arms to the needy during Christmas celebration or Ramadan is a way religion help to reduce poverty by encouraging 'the haves to give to have not' in order to be given by God.

Religion could also foster development through encouragement of members to acquire formal education. If formal education is significant to high standard of living, then religion may explain why there are many poor people in northern Nigeria than other regions especially South-West and South-Eastern Nigeria. This is because the practice of women in Purdah in Northern Nigeria could account for the low enrolment of women in former education institution.

The apparent linkage between religion and development attracts criticism. According to Samuelson (2007) there is either no logical reason to link religion to economic development or insufficient empirical evidence of any actual linkage. Similarly, Wallerstein (2004) expressed high skepticism of seeing capitalist development as guided by religion. He argued that any complex system of ideas can be manipulated to serve any particular social or political objective. Any connection between religion and economics is likely the one in which the latter is cause and the former effect.

Religion & Secessionism: Implications on Development of Nigeria

Nigeria can be rightly described as one of the most deeply divided states in West Africa. From its inception as a colonial state, Nigeria has faced a perennial crisis of territorial or state legitimacy, which has often challenged its efforts at national cohesion, democratization, stability and economic transformation (Soyinka, 2007). There are basically three broad religious groups in Nigeria; Christian, Muslim and Traditional. Of the three, traditional religion is the least politically active; numbering several hundreds of ethnic groups and subgroups, villages, clans and kin groups; and, involving the worship of different gods and goddesses. In parts of the Kogi, Kwara, and Nassarawa States, masquerade activities associated with traditional religion have been a major source of conflicts (Eghosa and Rotimi, 2015). However, Christian and Muslim identities have been the mainstay of religious

differentiation, secession and conflict, with Nigerian Muslims much more likely to evince or articulate a religious identity than Christians.

Religion secession has led to the disintegration of religious organizations in Nigeria. This has led to the formation of different religious sects, who have different objectives and ideology. The activities of these sects are major precipitant of the religious conflicts that proliferated Northern Nigerian political landscape since 1980s till date. Most of these involve conflicts between Muslims and Christians, with clear ethnic undertones, but some especially those involving the Izala and Boko Haram, also entailed anti-state mobilization.

The recent emergence of the new terror group (Boko Haram) in Northern Nigeria has affected negatively the political, economic, social and environmental situation of the region and in extension Nigerian economy. The continuous killing and destruction of lives and properties in Northern Nigeria in the name of Islam has a negative effect on the economy of Nigeria. Economic activities have almost been grounded by series of terrorist attacks in Borno and Yobe State, living people stranded, jobless and some refugees in their homeland. Many businessmen, companies both local and foreign have left some of these 'worst hit' States depriving government millions of tax revenue that would have been collected if economic activities are booming. The government is only left with diversion of money meant for development of the country and improvement of living standard of people to heavy spending on security. This is a clear negative influence of religion secession on development of Nigerian economy.

Conclusion

Religion is characterized by functional and dysfunctional element, most especially in Nigeria; it is also admitted that it deals with abstract things, that is, conception of God is intuitively mediated quite unlike science which has a conceptual knowledge which centers on sense perception. Religion, just as its dysfunctional aspect has functional aspect as evidenced in morality, justice, truth, economic development, educational and social services which it can render through its various institutions. These functional aspects can be incorporated to the benefit of the nation's development, when religious dialogue, tolerance is given its due place. Multiplicity in religion is the fate of Nigeria and therefore tolerance and dialogue must be an antidote to reap the benefits of these religions. Religion secession and development are seemingly inseparable. Conceptually, religion provides believers a guideline about life and the life-after and thus provides much-needed incentives for indulging in productive activities during lifetime. Religions can be seen as a promoter of growth as they direct people towards honesty, discipline, hard work, education, thriftiness (leading to savings essential for investment and thereby growth) and absenteeism from harmful activities; though it can also encourage violence in the name of doing the will of God.

Nevertheless, we can probably conclude that the relationship between religion secession and development is likely to be complementary as long as religious beliefs and practices promote 'moderation' rather than 'extremes'. Also, there should be no prejudice against any religion as the studies conducted so far have failed to prove the superiority of any single religion over

others in terms of their economic performance and behavioral changes on the society at large. However, it is germane to mention that any policy (or a system) based exclusively on certain religious principles that has potential to serve the entire global community should be adopted. A peaceful coexistence of various religious groups (or sects) in a country and various nations with different religious affiliations within the global community is a prerequisite for growth and prosperity in today's highly interconnected world.

Recommendations

In view of the issues raised and discussed in this paper, the article puts forward the following probable recommendations:

- i. Religions should be carried along in government policies to always inculcate moral principles, justice, truth, equity and honesty which is a reagent to personality change thereby reduce corruption. This is because laws and plans on eternal aspects of man exploiting scientific models are falling in Nigeria.
- ii. Also, government should make use of the various organs like Council of Religious Groups (CRG) provided by different religions in the country to carry its message to the people. Moreover, proven and virtuous religious people should be used in the sensitive areas in political social and economic goals of national development to prevent constant failures of government well-conceived programs.
- iii. The study of moral education should be made compulsory in all categories of learning and national orientation agency should also include it in their plans.
- iv. Promotion of the culture of Religious tolerance, through education and enlightenment of the people through the mass media, civil society organizations and educational institutions to respect and tolerate other religions as well as extol the culture of others is helpful. It will effectively mitigate the persistent occurrence of religious violence in Nigeria,
- v. The government needs to be pro-active in promoting the culture of tolerance by adherents of religions. The best way to do that is the enlightenment of various religious adherents through the use of credible religious scholars, to imbibe the habit of reporting through the right channel.
- vi. The government should give more power to the Christian Association of Nigeria and Islamic Society of Nigeria in promoting inter-religious dialogue and religious tolerance through organizing seminars and workshops for religious adherents which will help in building sustainable political development.

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