

THE ROLES OF RELIGION, PEACE, EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT / SELF-RELIANCE

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Abstract

This article entitled "Religion, Peace Education and Self-Reliance" begins with a definition of religion and shows how it may be manipulated for negative and positive purposes. Then it shows how religion is threatening to tear Nigeria apart. The article emphasizes that religious communities and leaders, Christians as well as Muslims can influence the people to embrace peace, unity and security for the development of Nigeria to make it a self-reliant nation. The article identifies some developmental challenges facing Nigeria which both Muslims and Christians must unite to tackle them if Nigeria would become one of the developed and self-reliant countries of the world. These developmental challenges include poverty, unpatriotic attitude of some Nigerians, corruption and mismanagement of the nation's resources and a defective education system.

Introduction

The writer feels that the choice of the above title is very timely given the roles that religion plays in today's social order not in Nigeria but at the global level. It is hoped that those who may read this article will come up with useful suggestions to usher in religious tolerance, peaceful co-existence among the various religious communities so that Nigeria may strive to achieve self reliance and complete favorably with the developed nations.

When the Apostle Paul entered the Greek city of Athens and passing through its streets, he could not help but declare that he perceived that the Athenians were very religious in all things. As it may be observed, Nigerians deserve a similar commendation because many Christian and Muslim worship places are littered all over the streets of many of our cities. Looking at its population one is left with no option but to declare that Nigeria is very religious because over ninety percent of the inhabitants profess one religious faith or the other.

Religious, be it Christianity or Islam, to be fair has helped to shape, mold, transform and introduce positive change in the development in many nations not only in Africa, but the world at large. Nigeria has been a beneficiary of these positive contributions. Daudu (2000:7) pointed out that Christianity and Islam have made positive contribution to development of Nigeria.

Definitions

According to Daudu (2013:1) quoting Balogun (1978), students of world religions have sought in vain to give a universally accepted definition of religion. By the end of the 19th century, they started to despair of achieving any success in the attempt. However, it was in the twentieth century that a partial solution was found when the German theologian and philosopher, Rudolf Otto, introduced the category of the holy as a possible universal for religion which means that idea of the holy was common to all religions.

The complete Christian Dictionary for Home and School (1992:575) defines religion as “A system of belief and worship of one or more gods”. To most Nigerians, it appears that the term religion is often associated with the existence of a Deity who assumes different names among different communities. For the purpose of this article, the term religion shall be used as it applies to Christians and Muslims. To the Christians, the Deity is called God and to the Muslims, he is called Allah. Christians and Muslims both recognize Him as the object of worship, love and obedience and this recognition leads the adherents to practical piety and morality.

The Attitudes of Nigerians to Religion

To most Nigerians, religion seems to be a major factor to be reckoned within their political, economic and social life. Experience has also shown that religion is capable of being used as an effective tool for development as well as a tool for destruction of lives and property. Observation of the world scene has shown that nations that have rightly/positively employed the power of religion have harvested peace, harmony, security and self-reliance. Perhaps United States of America, Saudi Arabia and Great Britain are examples to mention just a few. There may have been instances of disturbance(s) once in a while in these countries, but as a rule, they are religious, peaceful, secured, developed and self-reliant. It is equally true that nations that have done otherwise, for example, Northern Ireland, Somalia, Mali and Soviet Russia have brought upon themselves untold miseries, hatred, destruction of lives and properties; insecurity and development have been very minimal. The exception perhaps may be Soviet Russia but its sudden disintegration in the 20th century was perhaps very embarrassing.

Today, Nigeria seems to be passing through a phase in her history as a sovereign nation when the application of the power of religion is threatening its corporate existence. The menace of Boko Haram threatens the peace of both Christians and Muslims. Nigerians do well to take warning from the disaster that befell some of the countries that had used religion negatively. A Hausa proverb will help make the point clearer. It says “Pitina makauniya ce, in ta taso ba a san kan wanda za ta fado ba”. It means, “Trouble is blind, when it moves one cannot predict on whose head it may bump into”. If the incorrect use of religion did not spare the nations concerned neither will it spare Nigeria. Their respective religions are religions of peace and that their holy books teach and preach peace and religions tolerance. Another Hausa saying says, “An ce ma kare ana biki a gidanku, sai ya ce in gani a kasa”. That is, “a dog was told that there was a feast in their home. He answered, I will believe it if I see it on the ground”.

Nigerians are yet to experience true religious peace and tolerance. The reality on ground does not really support the claims made by the two major religious groups. The post-election crises of 2011 and the harassment by Boko Haram are probably still fresh in our memories. The song then was and even today is, “So many churches and so many mosques were burnt or attacked and

worshippers killed or injured and property destroyed". One wonders and is tempted to find out "where are the peace and religious tolerance that our religious leaders teach and preach in churches and mosques?" They have become what Shakespeare says about life, that "It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing". Our much talk about peace and tolerance has become mere chants. It is time we translate it into practice, for peace, security and development for self-reliance to be experienced.

It has been said and repeated on several occasions by many Nigerians that Nigeria is a multi-religious society. Permit me to repeat same today, Nigeria is a multi-religious society. It is an undebatable fact that many Nigerians were born to find themselves in multi-religious communities. God in His infinite wisdom made it so. He destined that Christians and Muslims would coexist together in Nigeria. Shika (2001:20) a one time Provost of Federal College of Education, Zaria repeatedly made this statement whenever religious tension reared its ugly head in any part of the country that "If God wanted it, He could have created all Nigerians Muslims or Christians and nobody could have challenged him".

However, it would appear that the sources or reasons for suspicion and friction between Christians and Muslims are not truly religious. It appears that they often fight over the monopoly of the scarce resources available to them. Then they "decorate" it with religion to arouse sentiments. Let us accept the fact that God has made us the people of one country and seek its peace and development. Even if the country were torn into several countries, the writer believes there cannot be 100% Muslim or Christians in any of the countries.

Onaiyekan (1978:195) described the multi-religious nature of Nigeria as a jungle where it is difficult to find one's way through, unless one happens to have had a solid religious upbringing in one direction. He further submitted that like every jungle, Nigeria is full of wild beasts roaming around and seeking whom to devour in the name of religion. In a situation such as this, religious leaders ought to make their stand clear so that there can be an identifiable path through this jungle.

The need for Religious Tolerance

Chidili (2009:1) defined peace as a state of harmony and total absence of disturbance amongst the people. Then he goes on to say that this peace as defined by him is desired in Nigeria because inter-religious hostility is tearing the nation into shreds. The writer believes that when this type of peace is embraced by both Christians and Muslims, Nigerians will be happy and develop their full potentials in all sectors of their social life to usher in self-reliance

Daudu (2009:4) pointed out that Christians and Muslims constitute fifty percent of the world's population. He equally pointed out that the nature of relationship between adherents of the two religious bodies is of utmost importance for peace, welfare and development of the human race. The two faiths cherish and preach as a religious virtue. The Christian Bible unequivocally declares that the founder of the Christian faith is THE PRINCE OF PEACE (Isaiah9:6). Similarly, one of the 99 names of Allah in Islam is 'As-salam'; 'PEACE'. And Muslim's greeting is punctuated with the words: 'as-salamalaikum' which means 'peace be upon you'. In view of these, the writer believes both Muslim and Christian have much to do to help stop the threats by inter-religious crises to tear Nigeria apart.

The world has become a small village through international co-operation in science and technology. Through the internet one can get information from any part of the globe. It is for this reason that the writer feels that Muslims and Christians have a collective responsibility to bring together the various communities in the country to achieve peace and common political and social goals, their religious differences notwithstanding. The drums of violence and threats tear Nigeria apart along religious lines are very scaring!!

We do well to bear in mind that there are very few (if any) societies in the world today that are homogenous, be they traditional or technologically advanced. All social groups are of different backgrounds linguistically, culturally, economically, ethnically and religiously. God who is ALL KNOWING and ALL WISE put Christians and Muslim in one Country, States, Local Government and in some cases families. Permit me to suggest that, if Nigerian Christians or Muslims think they should live without the other, then it is high time they send a high powered delegation to God to challenge Him for putting us together and advise Him on what to do. All we want is peace, harmony, security and development in our search for self-reliance. Disturbances and insecurity are threat to our corporate existence and national development. That is perhaps why it may take us a long time to graduate from being a developing country. Are we not ashamed of ourselves to be known and called a developing child at 57? We build and at the same time tear down what we have built. King Solomon said,

A wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down (prov.14:1).

The Need for Christian and Muslim to Fight Social Problems Together

At least, theoretically, both Muslims and Christians have often expressed their concern over the spread of materialism, Nigerians' exclusion of God and religion from their private and public life, unreligious behavior in political and economic matters, the widening gap between the poor and the rich, sexual abuse, act of violence, greed, abortion and the scourge of disease like Aids which seem to defy solution. It is felt that Muslims and Christians can tackle these problems with relative ease if they pull their resources together. Perhaps an elaboration of the effect of ill health on our economic development will enable us see the need to come together.

A World Bank study by Burnett in Africa covering the period 1975-95 made the following revelation. The study revealed that:-

Ill-health and poor nutrition affect a student's performance in school. Poor health and nutrition also affect student's future productivity as adults in the work force. The study further reveals that the burden of disease is higher in Africa than elsewhere in the world. See the figures below. It is on record that malaria, river blindness, sleeping sickness and HIV/AIDS while occurring in the other parts of the world are concentrated in Africa. In specific terms 80% of the world cases of malaria occur in Africa and those two thirds of the world's HIV/AIDS pandemic is in Africa.

Are these health hazards not more aggressive enemies than Muslims or Christians? Is it not wiser to pull together our energy and resources to fight these common enemies than picking quarrels with our Muslim and Christian brothers thereby helping these ills to destroy both of us? Ill health does not discriminate between Muslims and Christians. It devours whoever it lays hold of. It has been pointed out that Africa's future lies in its people and that investment for Africa to make it is to claim the 21st century is certainly that in its own people. Burnett (2000) further pointed out that the importance of this investment is ever increasing because Africa's economic growth will depend less and less on its natural resources, which are both depleting and more and more on its labour skills. All hands must be on deck so that collectively the investment in human resources would be achieved. Nigeria have been engaged in actions that are counterproductive to human development. The loss of human resources has been enormous and alarming as a result of the religious and communal crises that rear their ugly heads in various parts of the country Muslims and Christian fight to learn lesson from the motto of the then Benue plateau State Government which was stated thus: United we stand, Divided we fall'.

Religious impact upon the society

Religion be it Christianity or Islam has shaped, molded, transformed and brought positive changes in the development of many nations not only in Africa but in the world at large. Nigeria has been a beneficiary of these positive contributions as noted by Daudu (2000:7) when he pointed out that both Christianity and Islam made positive contributions to the development of Nigeria. He further stated that the two religious bodies have instilled into psychi of the citizenry good ethical and moral principles. For Christian teaching on the equality of men and women before God, women have been allowed full participation in public life with their counter points.

The above positive developments notwithstanding, the moral plan is yet to attain perfection. Government's desire for a morally healthy national life has been expressed in various national institutions: the National pledge and the national anthem whose objective is to inculcate into Nigerians values like social justice, trust, patriotism equality before the law and opportunity, self reliance, peace and dignity of labour. Past administrations of the country introduced concrete measures to help enforce discipline in national life. Such measures included decrees, Special Tribunals Code of Conduct Bureau, Public Complains Commission, Mass Mobilization of Social Justice and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSAR), Ethnical Revolution, War against Indiscipline.

Mc Cain (1998) pointed out that the international community has declared that Nigeria is the most corrupt nation in the world. Many Nigerians, Christians and Muslims inclusive take advantage of their positions as stewards of Nigeria's treasury to accumulate wealth for themselves. The educational sector among others is equally guilty. Examination malpractice, falsification of documents and manipulation of admissions are common phenomena at the levels of learning. Similarly, Nigerians' work ethics leave much to be desired. Promotions are often delayed unnecessarily. Laziness, idleness and inefficiency are common in offices. Vandalization of public property is rampant. Neither Christians not Muslims can claim to be innocent of these social ills.

Since independence in 1960 Nigeria has been grappling with moral problems which seem to defy solution. Some of the teething moral problems include armed robbery, bribery, dishonesty, ritual

murder and unpatriotic acts all of which have assumed a disturbing proportion. Realizing that these social ills have been a cog in the hub of national development, successive regimes, civilian as well as military took various measures to curtail the spread of the canker worms in both public and private life. Government's desire for a morally healthy national life is expressed in the various constitutions, National Pledge and the National Anthem. Their objective is to inculcate into the Nigerian citizenry values such as social justice, trust, patriotism, equality before the law and opportunity, self reliance, peace and dignity of labour. Other more concrete measures have been taken to help enforce discipline in national life. They include among many, decrees, special tribunals, Code of Conduct Bureau, public complaints Commission, Mass for Social Justice and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER), Economic Revolution, War Against Indiscipline (WAI), and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

In spite of the afore mentioned measures and many sermons in churches and mosques which emphasize character building, much indiscipline and moral decadence seem to be in the increase in the society. In fact it was very disturbing to hear that towards the end of the 20th century according to Transparency international that Nigeria ranked second to Cameroon as the most corrupt countries of the world. What a contradiction! The writer strongly believes that both Muslims and Christians are involved in the embezzlement of public funds just like the so called unbelievers. Christians as well as Muslims are involved in examination malpractices. Corruption is encouraged by both Muslims and Christians. Then they deceive the outside world that they are fighting for defence of Christianity and Islam or God. If truly Christians and Muslims are fighting for God, they ought to fight against the ungodliness in themselves first.

In a situation like this where the spread of immorality is faster than the attempt to fight it, one is forced to ask whether religious and moral education in the home, worship places and schools is really making any positive impact in the lives of Nigerians? Is it achieving the desired objective?. Do parents, spiritual leaders and religious teachers employ the right methods? Why do some Christians and Muslims fail to practice the morals which they believe and teach?

The Concept of Self-Reliance

Way back in the 18th Century, Henry Venn, the Home secretary of the Church Missionaries Society in England sold his dictum of truly indigenous Churches to missionaries going to foreign lands. Accordingly he advised missionaries to establish Church communities that will be self-governing, self- supporting and self- propagating Padilla: 613. There were to be the cardinal gains or evidence of self-reliance.

When we speak of self-reliance as Africans and indeed as Nigerians, are we aware of the religious, educational and moral implication? Are we willing to make sacrifices to enable us pay the price? It is in the Dailies, on the radio, television and the social media that Nigeria's current president, Muhammadu Buhari has been waging war against some teething problems which militate against Nigeria's attainment of self-reliance. Corruption is one of such problems which has proved very difficult to overcome.

The reason is probably farfetched because though Nigerians complain about it and are aware of its negative impact on the society, they love and accommodate it. This is perhaps because they derive some selfish benefits from it. Quoting ancient Greek philosopher, the Director of the

Kenya School of Laws, Lumumba (2013:1) pointed out that it is in the nature of man to hang small thieves and elect the big ones into public offices. Then he pointed out that Africa has remained the poorest continent in the world because Africa countries are guilty of this.

Observation shows that some men and women who once occupied or occupy public offices are among the very rich people in Nigeria. Nigerians celebrate looters of government tracery and defame the good and honest. A close look at the country's health sectors reveals that Nigerian's big shots do not trust it. Instead, they trust the services of foreign health services where ironically some of the experts are Nigerians. Why the hospitals are not fully developed and equipped? The country cannot be said to be self-reliant if it cannot adequately meet the needs of its people. To answer the above question, I dare say corruption probably has not allowed a proper utilization of the financial resources of that sector.

Education and Self-Reliance

The literary level in Nigeria does not seem to be very bad; however, it is perhaps far from being very adequate. It seems that there are still many rivers to cross if our literary level will take us to the place of self-reliance. A survey carried out by the National Population Commission (NEEDS 2010) produced the following data on Nigeria's education. The data shows the percentages of children who have not attended school though they are of school age (15-16) in some selected Northern States of Nigeria. They include:

State	Not Attended (%)	Attended
Jigawa	49	51
Kaduna	24	76
Kano	36	64
Katsina	48	52
Kebbi	62	38
Sokoto	68	32
Zamfara	70	30

The above table reveals that educationally Nigeria is still Kilometers far from attaining the level of self-reliance - at least as the situation was seven years ago when the survey was carried out. How much better is the situation today?

Lumumba (2013:1) has pointed out that some Africa political leaders, Nigerians inclusive do not have faith in their education sector. He further pointed out that though they introduced Universal Free Primary Education, most of them send their own children to private primary and secondary schools. Thereafter these children are sent to tertiary institutions outside – to America, Europe or Asia.

There is a public outcry from well-meaning Nigerians that our education sector is sick right from primary to tertiary institutions. A personal experience by writer will help to make the point clearer. He asked an SS II graduate to write a letter telling her mother why she had come to Zaria. She could not. Then he dictated, "My father is a farmer," but she could not spell father and

farmer correctly. There are presently 400 level university students who write 'sentences' without verbs.

On 28th October 2017, a tomato seller said, "There are student in College of Education who cannot spell their names correctly. Are these the teachers who will teach our children? Education is in trouble in this country!" Without fear of contradiction, examination misconduct is no more frowned at in some quarters: special/miracle examination centres abound. The 'purchase' of examination grades and certificates is common. This is evident at the screening of newly admitted candidates for undergraduate courses at the university. Some candidates have credits in their O/Level results which they cannot defend.

CONCLUSION

Nigerian Christian as well as Muslim leaders need to teach their followers how to apply the tenets of their respective faiths. The said religions need to make an impact upon the society so that they do not remain theories. In this way, they will help develop the nation towards self-reliance

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