

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN A PLURALISTIC STATE: A FUNDAMENTAL BASIS FOR TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA?

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Abstract

The issue of seeming religious intolerance in the Nigerian society has reached to the point that most thinking Nigerians and several other concerned people elsewhere in the world have begun to get worried. This is why it is considered pertinent in this work to take a look at the issue of religious tolerance in a pluralistic state in relation to technological development in the country. Like in any religious study, the method considered suitable for the study is qualitative descriptive and comparative phenomenology. While the introduction essentially addresses the issues in the study, some important concepts are defined in the following segment whereas certain related literatures are reviewed immediately after that. The relationship between the various religious groups in the country over the years is the task of the fourth segment, while suggestion as to the solution to the mess in the society is the task of the fifth segment. There is the belief that if suggestions are adhered to, things could be better in the land hence there will be improvement in technological advancement in the country, and such is the conclusion of the study.

Key Words: Religion, Tolerance, Pluralism, Fundamental, Technology.

Introduction

Religion is intrinsic to life. Its intrinsic nature to life is so real to the African man that Idowu (1973, 1991), in an effort to define religion declared, "religion is here". It is so certain among Africans that Mbiti, for the same reason, writes that it (religion) permeates every facet of the human person especially, among the Africans. It then becomes very germane to trade with caution as one involves himself in religious matters, either as a preacher or a scholar and even as a mere adherent; religious issues call for so much caution in a pluralistic state such as Nigeria.

This caution can only be real where there is tolerance among the various stakeholders in the two main religions. When mention is made of stakeholders, it is glaring that one will always mean the opinion leaders of any class. What such does or says matters to the followers - that is what such teaches or upholds at whatever level

sounds cogent to the followers, especially when such comes from the very most respected in the fold. This is why the suggestion that people in such class should adequately consult their literatures and other relevant materials elsewhere and earnestly communicate positive values to their adherents that peace might reign in the society (Nwanguma, 2014).

The bane of technological cum economic development in Nigeria is the presence of what Bacut (2006) quoting Galtung (1990 and 1996) calls 'negative' peace in the land where "the peace in existence includes *only* the absence of direct violence, war, fear, and conflict at individual, national, and regional levels" (p. 225). Although branded political, as it were, the demands of Boko Haram sect of the Islamic religion that until all Nigerians become Muslims, there will be no peace in the country and the claim of most people in the nation especially among those of the opposition party consisting mainly of Muslims that the cause of the unrest in the north east of the nation is "maladministration and irresponsiveness on the part of the President" and the repeated claim that "Goodluck Jonathan led administration deliberately decided to destroy the North" is sure proof that there is evidence of religious intolerance in the land", particularly given the unprecedented fears and panics that characterise the feelings of the adherents of any religion especially among the Muslims and Christians when any office is predominantly occupied by those of the other religion. And this has been the issue for quite a long time even before independence and the effect has been epileptic or poor development in all sectors. It has put on many garbs since Nigeria came into existence. At times, it feigns political, at the other time, it appears racial. It has even presented itself professional; however, only one thing has been the issue, it has been **religious intolerance**. The damage this has done is unquantifiable. The question has always been how shall this problem be solved? When will all this be over? When will Nigerians be happy in their own country? The list is inexhaustible. And such is the burden of the paper.

Definitions of Important Concepts

The terms considered for this task are religion, tolerance, pluralistic, and technological. They are considered because of the role they play in this work. **Religion** has as many definitions as scholars talk of it. It is generally perceived as people's beliefs and opinions concerning the existence, nature, and worship of a deity or deities, and divine involvement in the universe and human life. Omoregbe (1999, 4) refers religion as "the kind of activity which goes on between a man and a transcendent being (a deity) believed to exist." This definition was given after a long analogy of various definitions of religious realities merely tying religion to activities, which are not unconnected to faith. But in a similar context, Nwanguma (2012) sees it as man's effort to satisfy certain emotional needs by establishing and maintaining cordial relations with the supersensible world and his fellow man. Basically, religion *is about relationship*. In view of this truth, the structure of the cross of Christ is theologically construed as depicting vertical relationship (between man and God)

and horizontal relationship (between man and man) essentially summarized in Jesus' conversation with a lawyer, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all you soul your, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 10: 27).

Tolerance, as a term, derives from a Latin verb *tolere* meaning "to lift up" and the Greek *tlēnai*, which means "to bear" basically means "sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing or conflicting with one's own" (Merriam-Webster, 2002). Similarly, the term, especially in context of this study, refers to the acceptance of the differing views of other people, particularly in religious or political matters, and fairness towards those that hold these views that peace can reign in the society. Central in this definition is the truth that it is a fundamental as well as constitutional right to belong to any association of one's choice including a religious group; therefore, each member of the community is protected to belong to any religion of his or her choice (Alana & Abok, 2013). These definitions are in tandem with a saying and belief among the Ibos, *egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebele nku kwas kwa ya*, "let the kites perch, and let eagles perch; the one that refuses the other the right of perching should lose the wings". But according to Knight (2012), religious toleration is the magnanimous indulgence, which one shows towards a religion other than his own, accompanied by the moral determination leave it and its adherents unmolested in private and public, although internally one views it with complete disapproval as a false faith. All theses, including the Igbo's saying will be fully treated in course of this work.

The term **Pluralistic** is adjectival in nature modifying a noun. The noun here is always a state or society. Although state is chosen in the title either of the two terms will be used interchangeably in this work. As stated earlier, the term and its noun, pluralism, suggest divergent views. *Encarta Dictionary 2009* defines it as existence of groups with different ethnic, religious, or political backgrounds within a society. These definition simply that pluralism refers to the existence of many groups of people in a community. These groups could either be tribal, ethnic, political or even religious. A religious pluralistic society could then mean an environment where various religious beliefs, concepts and ideologies exist. This sets the stage for this work in reference to its preoccupation particularly as it relates to developmental matters. How these beliefs, concepts, and ideologies are handled is very important in any such state.

Technological as one can say, like in other terms, is an adjective of the term technology from the Greek *tekhnologia* meaning "system treatment" and *teknē* meaning "art or skill" primarily means an application of tools and methods which refers to the study, development and application of devices, machines and techniques for manufacturing and production processes (Encarta, 2009). Any form of technology is methodical as it is acquired and so requires progression. Either

acquisition of technology or its progression requires peaceful co-existence and such can only be attained when members of the society choose to tolerate the views of one another, whether religious or political or even ethnic or the likes, even where such views seem unacceptable to those of different groups within the wider society.

Review of Related Literature

Attention at this point of the work is drawn to the main term in the first segment of the title namely "religious tolerance." In his view Dzurgba (2010) opines that only absence of parochialism, chauvinism, bigotry and fanaticism can create atmosphere of religious tolerance. This he said with the natural characteristics of the individual traits in mind. But as bad as the extremes of those traits could be, it will still be nice to state that one has right to love his or her religion. What one has to caution against here is the attitudes of the various religious leaders especially among those whose maturity is yet questionable. There are things leaders or men of commanding influence among any religion must neither do nor say or the very immature and unknowledgeable one among them be misled unwittingly. For example, when an aggrieved politician of any of the religions boasts that he would make the society ungovernable for whoever that wins if he failed to win; whether plan or unplanned, he has inadvertently incited some hoodlums who will exploit that in the name of religion. Such was the issue in Nigeria in the recent times. Writing in reference to this Nyiam (2002: 21) calls those with such tongues (attitudes) "hegemonistic opportunists who embark, when allowed, on exploitation of religion for their own political – economic self-interests". In what he calls search for '**Nigerian National Question**', his discovery is that "the longest surviving imperial powers tend to be those who accompany their use of military might with psychological operations (psyop) skills of winning the minds and hearts of the conquered people". Earlier, he had argued in the 19th page that the occurrence of religious confrontations in Nigeria, particularly in the far North stem, amongst other factors, from the Nigerian feudal cabal resort whenever it suits them to the exploitation of religion for personal political-economic ends. "The danger these opportunists pose to our collective well being", he continues, "Is that the frequency and intensity of the confrontations seem to be rising proportionally to the rate of misuse of religious sacred texts for their political ambition".

The fundamental cause of religious intolerance could be seen in Nyiam's sharp contrast in the belief systems of the two main rival religious groups in Nigeria namely Islam and Christianity. Here, while Christians of Nigeria in their belief that one should give to Caesar what is Caesar's and accept the Western secular, and geo-political bounded idea of 'nation state', the Muslims on the other hand, believe instead in the pro-commonwealth of Muslims and consequently accept the 'nation of Islam'. That is, "to the Muslim, the world-wide unity of Muslims is much more important than the unity of Nigeria", the nation of his nativity. Such explains why the reprisal attacks on Nigerian Christians and other innocent Nigerians by Nigerian

Muslims whenever there are riots in the Middle East or any such thing in any part of the world supposedly involving a Christian and a Muslim or even the Jews and the Arabs in recent times, that is, Nigeria will bear the consequence leaving the nation with the only option of having or enduring what Bakut (2006) calls "negative peace" which this author calls **partial peace** in the sense that the nation can only boast of not being in obvious war situation like in Sudan; and as such, technological cum economical development has been and will ever remain difficult if unattended to especially in the northern part of the country. For example, Nigerians are scared of locating any serious economic cum developmental project in any region other than their own environs. This includes banking transactions.

Many Nigerians are skeptical when it comes to the banks they transact with now for the fear of the unknown because no one knows which crises that may not be successfully managed and the resultant effect will always be the loss of what one spent lifetime to acquire in a moment. So, ownership of a bank especially in respect of where such hails from greatly determines patronages in the Nigerian society for the fear of the unknown; that is, people from certain parts of the country are careful when it comes to the amount they lodge into the bank. Back at home (within one's own ethnicity), there is gross intra-ethnic squabble, there is gross unrest perhaps over protracted land dispute among village members and the likes; and makes settling within such places difficult for the indigenes. The list is inexhaustible. Under such conditions, innovations and creativity have been adversely affected.

Religious Intolerance in Nigeria in Retrospect and the Aftermath

The issue of religious intolerance in Nigeria is one of most challenging experiences one can ever imagine. In history, any serious issue that has involved people of different religions in Nigeria, the chances abound that the cause has been one religious matter or the other. For instance, the shocking revelation that the main reason for the 1960s civil war in Nigeria which has hitherto been believed to be political, ethnic, and perhaps the so-called lopsided coup d'état, which of late, is being unveiled to be religious with unequivocal proofs is one of most intriguing wonders to this writer. There was an ongoing gross acrimony against those from the then Eastern Region especially the Ibos because they were predominantly Christians and whatever involved them was misconstrued with bitterest passion among Northerner Muslims (Ojo, 2014); and even when the Maitasine or Boko Haram killings of Christians started in the North, the first victims were Igbo Christians before it got to what we have now. Some trace the mess from 1932 when there was a rift between those of Igbo extraction and the Hausas and the one between those of Yoruba extraction and the same Hausas in 1944 including the Kano conflict of 1953 which claimed several lives and also damage to property (Anuagwom & Oji, 2004: 150). This perhaps motivated Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe of South to tell his Northern counterpart Ahmadu Bello that all should be forgotten (Asaju, 2006) that they could continue with Nigerian projects, which the crises that led to the civil war could not

allow the leaders to foster.

In the 19th century when Nigerians could easily claim that they were from the northeast, west or south as people of one particular region or ethnicity as it were, the intolerance was hidden under political and ethnic clad. But now, especially, since 1980s the intolerance particularly from those of the Islamic group, which has always been the case, is without pretence. Beginning with Mohamed Marwa Maitasine led massacre in the cities of Kano, Gombe, Bauchi, Gongola – new Adamawa, Kaduna and Borno States in the early '80s (1982-1984) indicated above through the rough era of Ibrahim Babangida whose administration witnessed high ethnic and religious conflict ascendancy and down to Obasanjo's administration when Zamfara State governor came up with his agenda of *Sharia* code entrenchment in September 2000 and the subsequent moves of other Northern states to adopt the same measure even to date that Boko Haram scourge brought the menace to its peak, the issue of religious terrorism in the Northern part of the country is such that pages of papers nor volumes of books can exhaustibly describe.

Would one talk of the issue of the so-called political formula in the country where it is an anathema to have people of the same religion of the rival religions in power without squaring the so-called equation. It is so bad that Nigerians are blind to the fact that what is important is who has the people at heart or who can deliver and not necessarily the religion or region the person belongs to or hails from. The 1999 Constitution of the Federation as amended encourages citizens of Nigeria to live in any part of the nation they like and do whatever such can to contribute to the welfare of the nation, but this consistent religious intolerance in the north makes such difficult or even impossible. Under such conditions, technological development is particularly difficult if not impossible and that is why the "land that is flowing with milk and honey" is ranked among the poorest in the world.

Way Forward

Before anything will be suggested in this segment, it will be important to implore the various religious groups in the nation especially between the two dominant religions in the country to please pay close attention to the instructions of the people they say they follow. First to the Muslim faithful whose direction the accusing fingers of all are towards as long as terrorism is concerned in the land. It is a common notion that Islam is a religion of peace (Bidmos, 1993; Omoregbe, 1999). It is the instruction of the Holy Qur'an that religion can never be by compulsion (Sura 2:256). As a matter of fact, the Qur'an advises that Muslims should emulate the good examples of others who lived before Prophet Mohammed. In the words of Ather (2008: 3), Muslims are asked to follow the good examples of earlier prophets. "In the matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had ordained upon Noah and unto which we gave you O. Muhammad. insight through revelation as well as that which had enjoined upon

Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Steadfastly uphold the faith and do not break up your unity" (42:13)." Not to bore one with quotations from Qur'an, the Holy Book does not instruct that Muslims should just learn from prophets who lived before Mohamed but from good fellows (Sura 49:13). Therefore, the idea of rioting and killing of people, wasting and destroying lives contrary to the instructions of the Prophet is inimical to peaceful co-existence and as such, economic cum technological development will be naturally impossible.

The same holds for the Christian faithful. The best way to overcome strife or an attack is not by reprisal attacks as has been the case in some instances in recent times which Christ of course taught against in strong terms with the instruction that those slapped on side of their cheeks should turn to the other cheek to their strikers (Matt. 5:38-39). These verses of course, do not speak against the administration of proper justice towards those who do evil, though, going by the following verses (vv. 43-48); His statement here, however, indicates that the believer has the obligation to love his enemies (v. 44 Luke 6: 27). As suggest Stamps et al (2000: 1414), "When wronged, we are not to react in a spirit of hatred but in a way that shows that we have values that are centered on Christ and His Kingdom". Again, Jesus' imagery in the parable of the man who sowed good seeds and his enemy eventually sowed tares later, especially in regard to the attitude of the man when his servants wanted to uproot the tares in Matthew 13: 24-30 is a clear evidence that as much as Jesus would want to have everyone to be in His flock, though, He, as a matter of reality, would not encourage people to have issues with those who would not want to be in His fold.

These and so many passages in the New Testament are proofs that Jesus and His early disciples would want people to allow what they cannot stop to be; and consequently, such is a typical example as well as an illustration of religious tolerance. As the Ibos will always say: *nyugwara ahu n'apu si* (trying to mess up the air in order to take vengeance of someone who did mess up the air when such is not naturally ready to do so suddenly forces out immature stools). Any wonder the Bible warns and states that vengeance is of the Lord (Deut. 32: 35; Ps. 94: 1; Rom. 12: 19). Dialogue as Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe would always put it is still the solution to any social issue.

Furthermore, the so-called social cum political formula should be entirely jettisoned in the Nigerian system. The determinant of a person's appointment into any public office should not be religion or ethnicity but competency or "Nigerianness" of the candidate. By "Nigerianness" I mean a situation where Nigeria matters most in an individual than anything, that is, a Nigerian who places Nigeria and Nigerians above anything when it comes to issues of national importance. Not those who rather represent ethnicity, religion, or even themselves other than Nigeria. In the connection, it will be important to state that the spread of Islam and Islamic matter across the Constitution should, as a matter of urgency and necessity, be readdressed. Such is capable of raising dangerous dust in the polity and adversely affect the unity of the nation because the presence of Islam and the *Sharia*, for instance, and t

absence of other religions in the country and anything that has to do with them certainly make the Constitution Islamic and Nigeria an Islamic country which is inimical to the peace of the nation and can consequently mar or even inhibit technological development in the nation. Such has forced a scholar like Alana (2014) to think that Nigeria is yet to be considered a nation.

Conclusion

As one tries to conclude this paper, it is important to note that religious intolerance is about the most dangerous social malady in the world. Its evil is so much that most of those involved in it can go as far as harming even their very blood relatives, bosom friends, business associates, etc in order to make points. The example of Middle East for as long as one can remember is such that one cannot wish any nation elsewhere in the world. But the same has been the issue in Nigeria since the inception of the nation-state.

As Bidmos (2001) would say, the notion of thinking that any religion would bow for the other is the faultiest thought anyone would conceive. Such is the counsel of this paper, hence the citing of the Igbo adage that both the kite and the eagle should allow each other to perch that peace might reign in the forest. The two main religions in Nigeria, Islam and Christianity, especially Islam should adopt the culture of leave and let leave. The thinking that unless Nigeria is islamised, there will be no peace is not only a threat to peace and technological development in the nation but to the quasi unity that the nation now has.

Again, the device to hide under the guise of religion or race to advance one's selfish organised political agenda should also be discontinued. The question is how much has this helped the nation? It caused the civil war in the '60s and thus taking Nigeria several decades behind. The perpetrators of this evil do not seem to reason. The sooner this stops, the earlier the nation will maximise its potentials, which can hardly be seen elsewhere in the world.

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