Imperatives of Socio-Religious Measures in Solving the Crisis in Nigeria

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Abstract

Over the years, Nigeria has been tagged "a security risk nation" consequent upon which many international communities have warned their nationals not to live or even travel to the country. This is because Nigeria has been experiencing a number of crises, social vices, lack of cordial relationship among its various ethnic nationalities and constant hostilities among the

inhabitants of villages, towns, cities, uprising by one state against another or among inhabitants of the same town or state based on tribal, religious or ideological differences. This study therefore, seeks to explore the imperative for socio-religious measures in solving the violence, conflicts and war (ISRMSCW) in the country. It looks at the causative factors of crisis and conflict and the implications of the incessant conflicts in Nigeria. In terms of methodology, the data used includes both primary and secondary sources. The survey of literature relevant to the subject - matter reveals that the principal religions recognized in the country are Islam and Christianity. Each of these plays a vital role in unity and co-operation and has an influence upon the individuals than the society. It was the conclusion of the study that religion, like any other phenomenon with good and bad sides, ought to offer itself as the best tool for social engineering to quell the lingering crises in Nigeria. For this to be achieved, it is recommended that religious organizations should be partners in progress to achieve social development and peace in the country.

Introduction

Much like any other social institution, religion (used here as the formal gathering of believers in an effort to express their belief in, and relationship with, the unseen Deity) has been seen to perform some social functions within the human society (Umoh, 2009, PP, 133-140). Although predominantly either worldly in intent and orientation, religion has been known to function bifurcally in the society. To dismiss an institution as the Marxists have attempted to do on the basis of certain negative latent manifestations would amount to eliminating all social institutions for much the same reason (Merton, 1968, PP, 40-48). Study after study has shown that there is no human institution, from politics to the family that cannot be associated with one or two negative influences as by-products. It was under a similar consideration that suggests the application of the net balance of consequences of all social items in order to give an item its proper position in the social order.

Accordingly, religion must be given its right of place in the handling of societal problems. Nigeria is made up of different religions namely: Christianity, Islam and the African Traditional Religion. These religions are social institutions aimed at a common goal of sustaining peaceful co-existence of humanity in their social environment.

In an attempt to give credence to the prominent role of the religious institution (Hamilton, 1998, PP, 20-24, it was clearly stated that, ironically, it often seems to be the case that religious beliefs can have a much greater influence upon and hold over the individual than society does, since it is often out of religious convictions that individuals will fly in the face of society or attempt to withdraw from it, as in the case of many sectarian movements.

The use of religion in the solution to human predicament is not irrational because religion addresses the inner man's conscience and restricts vehement outpouring of emotions in the form of anger, and in the case of Nigeria as a nation, condemning religious riots in all ramifications by fundamentalists. Additionally, religion adds the divine and spiritual dimension to social norms and regulations, giving weight to the purely human condition since all religions preach brotherhood (Ogege, 2001, Pp, 39-50. This it does by teaching forgiveness of evil doers, encouraging peaceful search for one's right and discouraging war as an instrument for peace.

Causative Factors of Crisis and Conflicts in Nigeria

The pervasive nature of violent conflicts in Nigerian society has been attributed to a number of factors that are rooted in political, economic, social and religious issues. These factors have given rise to a variety of analytical approaches to violent conflicts in the Nigerian society. These approaches differ in their general assumptions about the causes, nature and management of conflict among rural and urban centres in Nigeria. There is the obvious need to study and understand the causes of violent conflicts so as to appreciate their inevitability in the life of a people.

1. Poverty

Poverty is a significant factor causing crisis in Nigeria. It follows the saying "A hungry man is an angry man". Poverty is on 'the high side in Nigeria with more than 60% of its population living below the poverty line (Umoh, 2009, PP, 103-110). Lack of employment opportunities creates a scene of hopelessness and is a stressor. Some who cannot earn an adequate living turn to illegal activities to make a living. They jump up to fight at the slightest provocation. Crisis is often the mechanism by which youth express their frustration and anger about the disparities that exist within their worlds.

2. Unemployment

The incidence of youth unemployment in Nigeria is alarming. There is also a problem of under-employed in which many young people eke out a living from indecent job. The rising hopelessness in the job situation facing the youths in Nigeria has forced an increasing number of them to risk their lives in crisis, especially, when they hear of the several billions of naira being stolen everyday by our so-called leaders' and politicians (Adebayo, 2001, Pp, 13-20). According to Hundreds of thousands of our youths graduate every year from our tertiary institutions into the labour market without any hope of securing gainful employment. The outcome naturally would be frustration (Ojie , 2004, p 178). It was noted that, nothing can be more miserable and frustrating for an educated young man, with the requisite physical and mental capacity than to wake up every morning without any assurance of a means of livelihood that will eventually at the end of the day guarantee his survival not to talk of enabling him meet the basic necessities of living a fulfilled human life".

3. Illiteracy

The educational background of most Nigerian youth is an inducement to embrace crisis. Majority of the youths involved in crisis situations are either uneducated or school dropouts. Many young people have no formal skills and are always excluded from productive economic and social life, existing without hope and without support. Many who claim to be educated have not gone beyond secondary school level, and lack requisite skills that meets current demands in the labour market. In a situation where educational and skill requirements are ever increasing, the result quite naturally would be thousands of unemployed and under-employed youths. The problem is further compounded by continuing decline in the quality of education, owing to poor and inadequate government expenditure on education and training, with the result that the educational system finds itself in shambles and cannot impact sound knowledge, let alone instill discipline and morality. Poor education and training makes the youths lose focus and vision; thereby making them ready and willing recruits for the perpetuation of conflicts in the country (Egwu, 2001, p, 46 &, Alanamu, 2004, Pp, 33-40).

4. Over population

It is an indisputable fact that many urban centres in Nigeria are densely populated. The rapid rate of urban agglomeration resulting from states and local governments' creation has resulted into the lust for employment, education, health care opportunities and other attractions within such environments Ademola, 2006, Pp, 31-38. This urbanization is not matched by adequate industrialization as against an ever increasing number of rural migrants, especially the youths. These problems produced stress and strains that are later expressed in the forms of riots, labour protests, students' demonstrations, and political insurrections, ethnic and religious disturbances in most Nigerian cities.

5. Family Conflict

 The chances are high that urban hypertrophy or subsistence urbanization, also leads to family or domestic conflicts. A frustrated urban settler resulting from unemployment is likely to inflict his aggression on members of his family in the form of wife and child battering. This tendency is referred to as the resource theory of violence (Ugnwegbe D.C. (1999) …Pp, 10-15). This action, however, is a displaced aggression an aggressive; action against an innocent person or object rather than against the actual cause of the frustration. This has a multiplier effects in that children living in violent homes are themselves more likely to become agents of violence and sources and causes of conflicts as they grow up. Such children see conflict situations or violence as an instrument of group relations. Also, (Ojie, 2004, p, 178 & Otite, et al, 1999, P, 20) ethnocentrism is a feeling or tendency of an ethnic group' members to view the norms and values of his/her own ethnic culture as total and absolute and employ them as benchmark against which other ethnic groups or cultures must be judged. All ethnic groups in Nigeria have ethnocentrisms tendencies resulting in conflicts.

6. Political Struggle

In the political arena, holding political office in Nigeria either through the military or democratic machinery is fraught with violent conflicts. Even the democratic system of governance that emphasizes peaceful change of government is now fraught with violence. All aspects of the electoral processes at one moment or the other are subject to disagreement. The worse of it all according to Abioye, 2001, p, 127 is that unpopular candidates are in

most times imposed on the people while their choice candidates are denied the opportunity through rigging and other electoral irregularities[15]. Aggrieved candidates and their supporters therefore usually resort to violent conflicts as a way of confronting those responsible for their defeat. These violent clashes are evident in the first republic to the current political trends in Nigeria. Also the lust for political power and authority generally is inherent in humans. Nigeria has witnessed many conflicts associated with the struggle for political or economic power with many of them resulting in the death of some people. The most recent of conflicts as a result of the desire for power is the agitation for power rotation an marginalization being claimed by the South South people. Also power motivations tend to intrude in range of national affairs in Nigeria ldowu, 1973, p, 42.

7. Disputed Jurisdiction of Certain Traditional Rulers and Chiefs

When a monarch or a ruler of one ethnic group or sub-ethnic group lay claims to rulership over people belonging to other ethnic groups, such actions often generate conflicts. It is more disturbing when such a ruler used his position to influence policies decisions in disfavour of the other group that is ordinarily not within his hegemony. An instance of this is creation of local government councils in to their headquarters cited in the wrong place. According to Haselbarth, 1976, P, 181 the crises between the Urhobo of Warri and the Itsekiri; and between the Itsekiri and the Ijaws have their origin in this factor.

8. Economic Factor

Economic factor encompasses the issue of land ownership and control. Land is a very vital economic resource in the hands of the owner depending on the resources in it and its situational values at any given time Williams, 1982, P, 40 say that, the discovery of crude oil and its exploration and exploitation in many communities in the Niger Delta led to ethnic groups asserting their influences on areas usually not under their jurisdiction and this has led to violent communal clashes in several places. This is not only peculiar to the Niger Delta region. Some of these are evident in other parts of Nigeria. Tiv - Jukun war in Taraba State, Mangu Bokkos in Jos Plateau to mention just a few are examples of land related violent conflicts in Nigeria.

A survey of conflict in the Niger Delta region, reveals a disturbing pattern of accelerated rise in the intensity or scale of violence arising from dwindling

capacity of the environment to sustain life as a result of monumental environmental degradation, social fragmentation and institutional decay, conspiracy by the representatives to cheat those they are representing in the host communities (Ige, 1995, Pp, 34-40), furthermore catastrophic disputes between ethnic groups, economic and political fissures and suppression and articulation of primordial and class interests are conditions that have constituted a veritable violent conflicts vortex in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

9. Marginalization of the minority ethnic groups

The series of violent conflicts witnessed in the Niger Delta today can be attributed to acute marginalization and the failure of the Nigerian State to give enough attention to the developmental problems of the region that produces the wealth of the nation. While the Niger Delta region that produces the wealth of the nation is collapsing under the weight of under development and poverty, the regions that contribute little or nothing to the commonwealth are developed (Haselbarth, 1976, p, 181). Likewise, the need for autonomy is an inmate characteristic of man. In fact Maslow regards it as one of the basic needs of man. People always have the desire to be on their own especially if they are not satisfied in any political arrangement. The desire for autonomy according to Batstone, 1979, Pp, 61-67 was the main cause of Nigeria's civil war (the Biafran war) and it is also partly responsible for the crisis going on in the Niger Delta area. Also Obioha, 1999, Pp, 32-34 all ethnic groups in Nigeria have ethnocentrisms tendencies resulting in conflicts. Ethnocentrism is a feeling or tendency of an ethnic group' members to view the norms and values of his/her own ethnic culture as total and absolute and employ them as benchmark against which other ethnic groups or cultures must be judged.

10. Religious Fanaticism

Nigeria is a pluralistic state with different beliefs and religions. The sects have always been intolerant of one another and their mutually antagonistic attitudes have resulted in several conflicts. Thousands of lives have been lost to religious crises in Nigeria, especially in the Northern and South Eastern parts of the country. Also, fanaticism and religious intolerance have transformed into religious violence. This is mostly common in the northern part of Nigeria. The sectarian violent conflicts are either due to different interpretation of doctrine, aggressive evangelism,

resistance to change etc (Ross, M. H. (1995, Pp, 13-20). The Maitatsine uprising in Kano and Bauchi in 1980, Jimeta and Rigasain in Kaduna, 1984 and 1994 respectively, Moslem-Christian clash in Jos, 2001(Osaghae, 1994, P, 20) and the current Boko Haram mayhem in Bauchi, Yobe Katsina, Kano (Adams, 2003, P, 13) to mention just a few, are some of the instances of religious violent conflicts in Nigeria. Moreover, as earlier mentioned Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state with different beliefs and religions. The sects have always been intolerant of one another and their mutually antagonistic attitudes have resulted in several conflicts. Thousands of lives have been lost to religious crises in Nigeria, especially in the Northern and South Eastern parts of the country.

11. Desire of Autonomy

The need for autonomy is an inmate characteristic of man. In fact Maslow regards it as one of the basic needs of man. People always have the desire to be on their own especially if they are not satisfied on any political arrangement. The desire for autonomy was the main cause of Nigeria's civil war (the Biafran war) and it is also partly responsible for the crisis going on in the Niger Delta area. Also, the need for power is inherent in humans. Nigeria has witnessed many conflicts associated with the struggle for political or economic power with many of them resulting in the death of some people. The most recent of conflicts resulting from the desire for power is the agitation for power rotation and the theory of marginalization being claimed by the South South people. Also, power motivation tends to intrude into a range of national affairs in Nigeria (Akinyele, 2001, pp. 640.

Implications of Conflict for Nigeria's Development

The implication of conflict in Nigeria's development is obviously negative. The resultant fallout of short or long-term conflicts is destruction. Public and private properties and utilities are destroyed during conflict. Rebuilding is not only time-wasting, capital intensive and laborious but also an unnecessary waste of unavailable resources, burning, arson and killing is the trend in conflict situations, the period of conflicts also means absence of organized society to put together the necessary ingredients to help the society achieve a positive focus[27]. The period of crisis is also a period of truncation of economic activities. A visit to any of the old sites of conflict such as Ife in

Osun State, Kano and Katsina in the North reminds us, without being told, of the destructiveness of conflicts.

Able-bodied youths are the major participants in conflicts and killings. Maiming is a characteristic of conflicts situations. This naturally means that the most productive population of the society is endangered. This creates a long run effect of conflict for the society.

The Roles of Religion in Solving the Crisis

1. Faith

In Hebrews 11: 1- 3, faith is defined as follows: Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." It embodies belief, trust and confidence. Also, it is an important factor in all human experiences, thoughts, behaviours and activities. Models of political organization and regimes failed in Nigeria because the citizens had lost faith in them. A political ideology is a system of ideas organized in or to provide and sustain the faith of the citizens in the goals, methods and instruments of an administration or a political system (Durkheim, 1961, P, 71). The legitimacy, authority and power of any administration or a political system rely on the citizens' belief trust and confidence. When politicians make moral claims against their opponents, they want the Nigerian citizens to believe that they would not engage in corruption, exploitation, misuse of political power and economic resources if voted into power.

All religions teach faithfulness and before there can be national unity, Nigerians must be seen as faithful citizens. Death is the ultimate end of man whether being a politician or not. A politician who engages in corruption, exploitation, misuse of power and economic resources does not give room for national unity among the ethnic groups in Nigeria. This was confirmed that "To West Africans, death is considered to be the inevitable end of man" (Haralambos, and Holborn, 2004, P, 90)

2. Honesty

Religion teaches honesty to all and sundry. Honesty is manifested in trustworthiness, truthfulness, sincerity and fairness. Also, it is the absence of deceitfulness and untruthfulness. In a country where honesty does not reign, it is crystal clear that there can never be unity among affected ethnic groups. This is because cheating, misappropriation and embezzlement are acts of

dishonesty. An honest person is found to be faithful in taking care of what belongs to other people or the nation. (Marshall, 2005, P, 56) in Nigerian politics the manifestations of dishonesty include falsehood during electioneering campaign, rigging in elections, inflating census figures, overestimating of contract prices, misuse of public funds, and other forms of corruption.

If Nigerian citizens are to serve their country faithfully and disloyally with all their strength, to defend the nation's territorial unity and uphold her honour, glory and prestige, they must be seen as honest Nigerians in their style of thinking and behaviour. Hence, we must learn to appreciate the value of honesty if and only we need national unity. It is noteworthy to state that national unity is firmly secured when the rulers and the ruled practice honesty. But those who oppress and exploit their fellowmen shall be severely punished by Allah because the Qu'ran states "Great is the guilt of those who oppress their fellowmen and conduct themselves with wickedness and injustice. These shall be sternly punished. (Qur'an 42: 43).

3. Impartiality

Another contribution of Religions to solve crises in Nigeria is its teaching of impartiality. An impartial Nigerian does not make distinction in his treatment of individuals and social groups. In a country where this is practicable, national unity is bound to reign. For God shows no partiality (Rpm. 2 : 11) "And that He makes his sun rise on the evil and on he good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt. 5:45). If our leaders at the helms of affairs do not make distinction in their treatment of ethnic groups and individuals, it is believed that, the unity of this country-would be sustained in Nigeria today, people value the rich people for being rich, the educated persons for being educated as well as the powerful for being powerful. This should not be the attitude whatsoever. Nigerians should value all people equally

Also, the ethnic groups in Nigeria must be treated equally if and only we want unity to prevail in our country. In a country where there is disunity, it means our rulers are partial, and can be regarded as the cause of disunity in the country. They will eventually give accounts of their deeds while on earth before God. This is confirmed by the saying that: The judgment of man's character is in his hand.

4. Love of One's Neighbour

It is crystal clear that love of God and man is the foundation upon which prophecies and laws rely. A person should love God in everything he does and show same to his neighbours as he has loved himself. (Mt 22 37-40). Without the love of the country and its people, the citizens will continue to be selfish, greedy, intolerant and continue in looting the country's human and material resources. In a country where there is lack of love among its ethnic groups and citizens, there can be no unity and peace talk less of economic development and political stability. If our leaders actually love they governed, they should treat the citizens equally and improved the conditions of the masses rather than accumulating wealth in their personal accounts in various foreign banks at the expense of the masses   In a country where love of one another reigns, the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria should love themselves affirmed. This is in the biblical sayings that, the Christian should love his neighbours as himself and this injunction applies also to members of other races (Umoh, 2005, P, 65).

5. Religious Tolerance

This is one of the important contributions of Religions be it African Religion, Christianity or Islam, to national unity. In a country where there are many ethnic groups, whose religious are not the same; religions tolerance is of great significance for peaceful coexistence. In Nigeria, lack of religious tolerance is common among Muslims and Christians. This is because the preachers of Islam and Christianity are found of abusive and destructive languages in their sermons thereby creating hatred, distrust among people of different faiths to the disunity of the countary (Orilade, et al, 2009, p, 27). The continuation of this attitude, can never guarantee unity. Rather, it leads to religious riots which at the end lead to national disunity. Lack of religious tolerance should not have arise at all because our country is a country that is known for preserving a surprising religious balance between the Muslims and the Christians. It is confirmed that: Nigeria is a country which preserves a remarkable religious balance between Christians and Muslims (Ugnwegbe, 1999, P, 113.

6. Teaching against Corruption

Religion teaches against corruption. It is believed that love of money and greed among millions of Nigerian citizens leads to corrupt practices. In a country where its rulers and political office holders are corrupt, such a country can

never be economically buoyant. This is because the billions of Naira siphoned from Nigeria to overseas countries could have been used to develop the neglected ethnic groups and areas in the country. The people of these neglected ethnic groups and areas would be bitter for neglecting/ underdevelopment of their areas by the government. This leads to national disunity instead of uniting the main ethnic groups together in the country. The affected people turn to oppose the government and make the country ungovernable for those in position of authority.

When General Murtala Mohammed became the military Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, (1975-1976) all the military Governors were removed. Ayanrinde, P, 305 submitted that, only two military governors were not guilty of corruption after probe. It is on record that of the twelve military Governors, only two-Brigadiers Oluwole Rotimi of Western State and Mobolaji Johnson of Lagos State were found not to be corrupt.

7.   Teaching against Cheating

The Bible states, he who oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth or gives to the rich will only come to want. (Prov. 22: 16) There is no religion in the world that does not teach against cheating: Cheating one's neighbour or people of other tribe does not please God. In a country where millions of people are being cheated one way or the other, such could lead to national disunity and make it difficult for the country to move forward. For national unity to reign in our country, both the rulers and the ruled should do away entirely with cheating. Nigerians who cheat their neighbours one way or the other are wicked and God's curse is on the house of the wicked no matter their status, but he blesses the house of the righteous (Prov. 3: 33).

8.   Teaching against Discrimination

Discrimination does not give room for national unity because the people discriminated against can never be glad with those in position of authority and at last leads to disunity. Religion does not support discrimination of human beings whether in Nigeria or in the world at large. The Christians must be on the side of the oppressed until discrimination is totally eradicated. Where there

is still discrimination, like in South Africa, the Christian, must be heard clearly in favour of the oppressed (Nelson, 1986, Pp, 28-34).

9. Teaching against Tribalism

Tribalism is another important effect of religion on national unity. In Nigeria today, there exists tribalism, and where it prevails, it is very difficult for citizens to be united. This is because right from the time Nigeria became independent on 1st October, 1960, many of the political leaders are tribalistic and that is why Nigeria lacks national unity. Even up till today, many of our leaders in position of authority are guilty of tribalism. No wonder one sees a project which is to be cited in a particular state been cited elsewhere for ethnic reasons to the disunity of the country. This type of wicked attitude should cease so as to give room for unity. These leaders have forgotten that when it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices and when the wicked perish, there are shouts of gladness (Prov. 11 10). Also, they have forgotten that the wrongdoers are people who are not doing things that please Nigerians. Such people will never go unpunished because the wrong doers shall suffer an everlasting punishment. They shall have no friends to help them besides Allah (Qur'an, 42: 46).

10. Teaching against Greed

The Bible states, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life (Mk. 8 36). Greed is that excessive, uncontrollable, burning passion to have more of anything than one really needs or deserves. Greed is a rapacious desire to own more and more of just about anything. It is an insatiable appetite for more. A greedy person therefore is he who is so self-centred that all that matters to him is to have more and more of anything. He is never satisfied. The more he has, the more he wants to have. He wants more food, more drinks, more money, more houses, more cars, more power - the only thing he lives for is the acquisition of more.

The problem can be traced to the mid 70's when the then military regime "fired" all workers it considered to be deadwood. The mass retrenchment of workers and the general purging of the establishment were hailed by many Nigerians. Workers who could not cope with their untimely dismissal from service for which they were most unprepared, died of heart attack. The families and friends of those who survived the purge soon began to put pressure on them to stop being foolish. They were encouraged to get as much as possible

out of Government while they had time and the opportunity because they too could be fired at any point in time.

Some areas could not be developed by the government due to lack of funds. The greedy political office holders had siphoned billions of naira to overseas countries. This money could have been spent to develop the neglected areas in the country. The neglected areas can never be co-operative and united in the country. But the moment Nigerians do away entirely with greed. It is believed that the unity of the country is certain.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to create measures in solving the crises in Nigeria:

(a) Nigerians must be seen as faithful individuals so that there might be unity in the country.

(b) If Nigerian citizens are to serve their country faithfully and diligently with all their strength and to defend the nation's territorial unity, uphold her honour, glory and prestige, they must be seen as honest Nigerians in their style of thinking and behaviour.

(c) Nigerians must be impartial treat and value all citizens equally without referred to tribal, ethnic or religious affiliations.

(d) Without the love of the country and its citizens, Nigerians shall continue to be very selfish, greedy and intolerant in looting the country's human and material resources.

(e) Christians and Muslims clerics as well as Traditionalists must learn how to tolerate themselves and stop abusive language in their sermons to their congregations and in their public utterances.

(f) Nigerians must stop henceforth the act of corrupt practices, discrimination tribalism and cheating.

Conclusion

In this paper it was found that, over the years, Nigeria had been tagged "a security risk nation" consequent upon which many international communities have warned their nationals not to live or even travel to the Region. This is because they have being experiencing a number of crises, social vices, lack of

cordial relationship among their various ethnic nationalities and constant hostilities among the inhabitants of one village, town, city and the other; one state and another or inhabitants of the same town or the same state based on tribal, religions or ideological differences. It also revealed the causative factors of crisis and conflicts in Nigeria such as, poverty, unemployment, for political power, Illiteracy, family conflicts, marginalization, economic factors among numerous others. The paper also showed the implications of conflicts as it affects Nigeria development and the roles of socio-religious measures in solving the violent, conflicts and war (ISRMSCW) in the region. This includes faith, honesty, impartiality, religious tolerance, among numerous others. It was the conclusion of the study that religions, which like any other phenomenon with good and bad sides, would offer itself the best tool for social engineering to quell the lingering crisis in the region. For this to be achieved, it is recommended that religious organizations should be partners in progress to achieve social development and peace.

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