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Religious Crisis and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract:

This paper examined religious crisis and development in Nigeria. The paper posits that lack of religious toleration and respect for other people's religious views amongst others are causes of religious violence between Muslims and Christians. The paper argues that the consequences of these religious fracas hampers and frustrates developmental efforts in Nigeria. The study relied on secondary sources and observation method as source of data collection. The study also adopts "Social-Conflict" theory as theoretical framework. We noticed that our data on religious violence in Nigeria is in line with the theory. For instance, religious violence today has become a tool to ferment trouble, unleash fear and insecurity in our society. The paper recommends that leaders of these two religious groups should conscientize their followers on the great value of religious toleration in a pluralistic religious country.

Keywords: Religion, crisis, insecurity, development, dialogue and economy

1. Introduction

Nigeria as a country is characterized with multi-religious and multi-ethnic groups. Nigeria is a conglomeration of diverse-cultures and languages; with a population of over two hundred million people. The major religions practiced in the country are African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. Traditional religion is indigenous and has been in existence prior to the advent of Islam and Christianity. As a distinct religion, it is non-violent and accommodating. It does not impose its belief on another. A telling example here is that the religion has being able to embrace and co-exist side by side with the two religions on the same environment without friction (Amadi Emmanuel and Ezeonye Paulinus, 2019).

Upon the advent of Islam and Christianity, the population of the country was divided between the predominantly Christian south and the predominantly Muslim north with Islam trying to impose violently its belief on the Christians. Thus, the refusal of Christians to be enlisted into the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986 during the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida ignited off the struggle for religious supremacy between these two religions. The aftermath of the violent struggle between these two religions for supremacy has had adverse impact on development in Nigeria. In an atmosphere of constant religious fracas, developmental processes are bound to suffer setbacks of various dimensions.

In spite of the fact that Nigeria is a multi-religious nation, the constitution does not permit the dominance of any religion over others in State affairs. It guarantees equal rights and space to all religions to practice without each inhibiting the other. It is sad that this aspect of the constitutional provision has been ignored as religious violence remains a recurrent decimal in our society. In this study I utilized secondary sources and observation method. The study adopts "Social-Conflict" theory as theoretical framework. Three factors motivated the researcher's interest in carrying out this study. The first was to make a brief survey of religious crisis in Nigeria. The second was to reflect on the basic factors that generate religious crises in Nigeria. The third was to reflect briefly on the effect of religious crises on development in Nigeria.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is "Social-Conflict" theory. The social-conflict theory is rooted in Karl Marx's critique of capitalism. According to Marx, in a capitalist society, religion play a critical role in maintaining an unequal status quo, in which certain groups of people have radically more resources and power than the other groups of people. For Marx, the rich exploiters encourage and use religion as an "opium" with which the sedate the exploited masses and prevent them from revolting against their exploitation. By telling the people that their reward is in heaven, that after suffering in this life they are going to enjoy in heaven; here, religion act as a powerful sedative, the opium of the people; which keep them calm (Marx, n.d).

In sum, we noticed that our data on religious crisis with special reference to Muslims and Christians is in line with this theory. For instance, religion today has become an instrument of violence. Religious adherents have used religion to ferment trouble, unleash fear and insecurity, indiscriminate killings and wanton destruction of lives and properties.

2.1. What is Development?

Eum and Anugwom (2002) defined development as the general improvement in the life of the people. i.e. "the development of the people". These includes their income, health and their intellect or capacity to sustain the improved

living conditions. Therefore, development, as used in this essay refers to the growth and maturity of the people of Nigeria in terms of social, economic, political and religious well-being as well as their ability to sustain improved living conditions.

2.2. Religious Crisis in Nigeria: 1999-2018

S/N	Date	Place/Town/State	Nature of Crisis
1	July 1, 1999	Sagamu, Ogun State,	Crisis between Yoruba traditional worshipers and Hausa groups as a result of the killing of a Hausa woman by the Oro Masqueraders for violating traditional rites.
2	December 20, 1999	Ilorin, Kwara State	Muslim fundamentalists attacked and destroyed over 14 churches, properties worth several millions of naira destroyed.
3	February 28, 2000	Aba, Abia State	Religious crisis that led to the killing of over 450 persons.
4	February 21-22, 2000	Kaduna, Kaduna State	Crisis over the introduction of Sharia an estimated 3000 people died.
5	October 12, 2001	Kano, Kano State	Religious crises in protest to U.S. invasion of Afghanistan over Osama bin Laden. over 150 persons were killed.
6	September, 7-17, 2007	Jos, Plateau State	Religious crisis between Muslims and Christians. Mosques, churches and several properties were damaged.
7	November 16, 2002	Kaduna, Kaduna State	Attacks on Christians by Muslims over article written by Isioma Daniel on Miss World over 250 people were killed and several churches destroyed
8	February 14, 2004	Numan, Adamawa State	Religious crisis between Christians and Muslims over location of the Central Mosque close to Bachama Paramount ruler's palace. over 17 persons killed. Religious crisis between Christians and Muslims over location of the Central Mosque close to Bachama Paramount ruler's palace. over 17 persons killed.
9	February 18, 2006	Maiduguri, Borno State	Religious crisis between Christians and Muslims over Danish Cartoon on Prophet Mohammed in Jyllandsposten newspaper. Over 50 persons killed and 30 churches destroyed over 200 shops, 50 houses and 100 vehicles vandalized
10	March 22, 2007	Gombe, Gombe State,	Religious crisis over the killing of Christians teacher for allegedly desecrating the Qur'an while attempting to stop a student from cheating in an examination hall.
11	November 28, 2008	Jos, Plateau State,	Religious crisis between Muslims and Christians over the controversial results of local election. Over 700 people killed.
12	July 26-30, 2009	Bauch, Borno, Kano and Yobe State	Religious crisis unleashed by Boko Haram sect on Christians. Over 700 people killed 3,500 persons internally displaced, 1,264 children orphaned, and over
13	March 7, 2010 Jos	March 7, 2010 Jos, Plateau State Attacks by Fulani Moslems on	Christians-dominated villages of Dogo-Nahawa, Shen and Fan. 13 person killed.
14	April 11, 2010 Jos	South, Plateau Attack State	Christians villages Fulani herdsman. 3 houses and 6 vehicles were torched.
15	January 5-6, 2012	Gombe, Gombe State,	Gunmen stormed a Deeper Life Church, shooting indiscriminately at worshippers. The Boko Haram Islamist sect claimed responsibility for the shooting
16	January 5-6, 2012	Mubi, Adamawa State	Suspected Boko Haram militants stormed a gathering of Igbo Christians and shot sporadically killing over 12 and the several others injured.
17	May 2016	Padongari, Niger State	Religious crisis that left 4 persons dead.
18	June 8, 2016	Kakuri, Kaduna State	A male Christian was stabbed for not joining Ramadan Fast.
19	March 14, 2018	Abuja	Protest by Muslim Groups Rocks National Assembly on the Public Hearing over Amasa Firdus, Law School Hijab Controversy.

Table 1: Religious Crisis in Nigeria: 1999-2018

Source: Adapted from Sampson, 2012; Sahara Reporter, 2017

3. Causes of Religious Crisis in Nigeria

The causes of religious fracas in Nigeria are not related to religious reasons alone. Several factors such as economic, social and political, etc. also come into play while religion is used as a cover to foment trouble. In line with this, Omotosho (2003) has pointed out four major factors responsible for religious crises in Nigeria. These for him are:

- Lack of genuine desire to understand each other's belief and culture: It is true that institutions of higher learning here and there offer some courses under various names. Studies in this regard have shown that such programs were not intended to foster understanding and respect. Through such programs an avenue is created for blackmailing and incitement under the cover of academic freedom.
- Campaign of hatred and blackmail: Both Christians and Muslim are actively involved in campaigns of hatred against each other. It has manifested in various forms such as distortion of facts about each other, incitement, as demonstrated in the issues of Shariah and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).
- Lack of respect for other people's religious views: Here, the adherents of both religions have refused to tolerate and respect the religious views of one another. Each faith sees the other as two strange bed fellows that should exist separately without the other. Thus, there is this mutual-suspicious that each faith has trampled upon the right of the other faith and so on.
- Extremism: Extremism has made the adherents of both religions think that his or her own religion is true religion. Extremism is based not only on poor knowledge of the teachings of the two religions, but also superiority complex which prevents the adherents of the two religions from seeing that there is no essentially difference between what he or she is doing and what the other person is doing; no essentially difference between his or her own religion and that of the other person. In addition to this are accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, exploitation, victimization, domination, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism, and bigotry (Salawu, 2010).

4. Effect of Religious Crisis on Development in Nigeria

Religious violence has become a potent instrument of underdevelopment in Nigeria. Each crisis often leaves behind memories of tears, sadness, frustration and anger. It leads to mutual suspicious and acrimony. No meaningful development can be established and sustained under such unhealthy atmosphere violence is capable of scaring investors (foreign or local) because it will amount to economic risk for anyone to invest in an environment that is not conducive for business. For instance, the religious crisis of 1999 made many people especially foreigners to unceremoniously abandoned the National Sports Festival that took place in Bauchi. The crisis that accompanied the Miss World Pageant exposed Nigeria to the international world as an unsafe county for business transactions.

Worst still, the nation's hard-earned currency which could have been channeled to such positive development programs like education, health and other social services is often spent quelling religious riots which usually result in the defacing and destruction of houses, business centers, churches and mosques. Religious crisis portrays religion as subversive. Here, it put a veil on the positive values of religion portraying it to be an institution that has nothing positive to offer. Religion ought to be an instrument of peace, moral re-armament and negation of evil in all ramifications. Unfortunately, religion has gradually been drawn into such topics of discussion that tend to be disastrous to man's existence on earth. Therefore, as far as development in Nigeria is concerned religious crises displaces people, destroys human beings and property, unleash fear and insecurity, hampers educational political, social and psychological well-being of the nation (Celestina, 2010).

5. Conclusion

Muslims and Christians in Nigeria must realize that God has no favorite religion. It should be clear to them that every person is also a child of God no matter his or her religious background. To move the nation forward, religious differences should not interfere with the brotherhood of all. The adherents of both religions should learn to be more accommodating and tolerant. Violence and destructions are impediments to development. Peaceful practice of religion with respect for other people's religious views is a recipe for development in the Nigerian society.

6. Recommendations

The government should:

- Create employment opportunities: As unemployment raises so also is the increase in violence and crime making the country insecure. Therefore, government should tackle and arrest youth restiveness by investing on job creation.
- Openly condemn religious intolerance and discrimination.
- Leaders of these two religious groups should educate their followers on the great value of religious toleration in a pluralistic religious country.
- Arrest and charge for assault all those who attack their fellow citizens in the name of religion.

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