

RELIGION, PEACE AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Religion is central to the spiritual upliftment of man; it unites man if its tenets are kept, teaches men to live at peace with one another and to shun greed and corruption. Nigeria has a lot of resources that can boost the economy and improve the living conditions of the people, yet many go about without shelter, while many are dying of hunger and poverty. Travelling in Nigeria is fraught with danger and uncertainties. Even at home, life is not safe because armed robbers, assassins, Boko Haram and murderers can strike at any time of the day. Peace is becoming elusive and is a mirage. The situation cannot change for the better unless the political leaders, men and women, saddled with the leadership of the country have regard and fear of God and thus embrace religion as a fundamental factor for good governance and national security. This paper looks at the security which religion provides the individual, society and to the nation at large. The researcher makes use of historical and analytical methods of research for effective achievement of his goal. Religion's involvement in politics will bring political security and blessings of God, since no nation could survive without God and His laws. Religion has a powerful influence on the activities of members of the society, whether they are Christians, Muslims or African Religion's worshippers. Religion regulates the conduct and behavior of people in the community and preaches vital virtues needed in the society. After his findings, he suggested some recommendations for a way forward.

Keywords: Religion, Peace, Security, Maintenance, Governance.

Introduction

It is a common knowledge today that Nigeria is regarded as one of the most corrupt nations in the world where heinous crimes, violence and corruption have become endemic. According to Oladunjoye¹ Nigeria has become synonymous with fraud and corruption. At international airports, Nigerians are considered potential fraudsters and are therefore specially scrutinized and subjected to all manners of indignity. According to Ojo,² the country has been drained and her resources laid waste through decades of misgovernance and economic sabotage, high tech fraud,

misappropriation and even arson. The prevalent security problems that the (modern) state faces justify an assessment of the role of religion in sustaining peace and security in Nigeria. Religion is, without doubt, a potent force to achieve political stability, peace and security in the land, considering the role it can play in bringing about development in the light of corruption that pervades our society. In Nigeria, where people have suffered much mishaps and setbacks from political and economic misrule as a result of maladministration, corruption, and poor leadership, the search for security, peace and good governance has assumed a multi-disciplinary approach;³ hence the need to examine how Religion can bring about security and promote good governance. Security implies the action of protecting something and the condition of being protected. Human Security is a positive concept denoting freedom from multiple sources of threat to human life such as repressive violence against political dissent and minorities, aids, drugs, environmental scarcity, human trafficking, economic deprivation and the likes.

Religion is an important feature of human existence that cannot ordinarily be under played. The history of humanity is replete with man's adherence to various supernatural injunctions. Such injunctions have aided socio-economic and socio-educational development, interpersonal and international cooperation. Also it has been an underlying force precipitating conflicts and civil and international oppression.⁴

Within Christian doctrine, religion can aid democracy and good governance that is characterised by accountability, transparency, patriotism, fear of God, due process, responsiveness and the rule of law, cannot be overemphasized.⁵ To Christians, God rules His people through chosen individuals. There is no government that can rule except God allows it.

Jesus Christ was a political activist and Messianic revolutionist who like the zealots of his time who wanted freedom for Israel, did not separate religion, peace and security. His mission statement in Luke 4:18-19 makes his ministry holistic. He declared that his ministry was for those suffering from various forms of bondages and oppression, including economic oppression or poverty; physical oppression diseases, disabilities, political oppression, injustice and oppressive rule, demonic oppressions, various forms of occultic practices and these same evils still plague Nigeria today.⁶ The Bible is replete with many examples of Godly people in political participation such as Joseph in Egypt who saved many from hunger and starvation (Gen. 41), Amos who warned leaders of his time,

against injustice (Amos 4:7), Daniel and his three friends who changed the political equation in Persia (Dan 3:5-6), and Nehemiah who personally sacrificed to save his people (Neh. 1-2 & 5).

In the New Testament, Paul refused to give up his political rights as a citizen when political authorities put him in prison and flogged him without giving him proper trial (Acts 16:37-38, 22-25). Throughout history, the Christians have always been the voice of the voiceless in speaking against injustice and oppression. The challenges of moral bankruptcy, corruption, poverty, disease and ignorance all call for Christian participation in politics. When godly people, who have the fear of God, are in power/position, peace will reign and the society will be at peace. The nation will be secured. The fear of God in them will help them to rule according to God's dictates and not appease their selfish gain.

According to Obijole, the Bible makes it clear that the three functions of the church in relation to State are: first, the church has a priestly function, which is to pray for those in authority and for the protection and healing of the nation (I Tim. 2:1-3). Second, the church has a pastoral duty, which is to provide teaching and direction to the leaders and those being governed (Matt 28:19-29) and to encourage Christians to be good citizens who obey the State and pay their taxes (Rom 13:1-17, I Peter 2:13) and to see that both the state and the citizens do nothing contrary to the word of God. The third is the prophetic function which is to declare the mind of God to the state and her citizens. The word of God opposes the state when it acts unjustly and turns against God (II Sam. 12:1-14, Dan 4:20-27, 5:17-28). When it comes to choosing between compromise and obedience, the church must choose to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29) without minding the cost.⁷

Olayinka⁸ says Christianity is that religion inaugurated by Jesus Christ. A Christian is that individual who has accepted the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He has accepted his position as a sinner, convicted of his sins, confessed them and invited Christ to take absolute control of his life. He now experiences a new life, which is spirit controlled. He is henceforth, guided by the law and words of God as written down in the Bible. Having given the above conceptual framework, the pertinent question is what role can religion play in sustaining national peace and security?⁹ For the above, I will like to examine these roles from two perspectives i.e. Physical and Spiritual.

Physical

Religion by nature detests violence, cheating and acquisition of wealth through illegal and ungodly means. As a matter of fact, Religion is the very foundation of societal morality. .¹⁰ The missionaries who brought Christian religion to Nigeria made religious Education and Moral Education compulsory to all students and this helped in no small measure to reduce social vices and the crime rate, most especially in the 50s and 60s. However, immediately after the Government took over mission schools in the Mid-Seventies, things started to go bad.

Government's non-challant attitude to the teaching and learning of religious moral instruction in schools led to the upsurge in violence and crime rate in the country. The large turn-out of University graduates without adequate opportunities worsened the situation. A University Graduate without any moral instruction and fear of God does not have any regard for lives and properties as such becomes a problem both to himself and the society at large. Morality, according to Ezeani¹⁰ deals with the rightness or wrongness (immorality) of actions. A behaviour is moral if it is in accord with the universal principles of equality, conscience, justice and care for fellow human beings. Implicit in the above view of morality is the notion that true morality does not distinguish between religious, ethnic or other social considerations. Consequently, Ezeani¹¹ maintains that true morality is based on internal rather than on external control or coercion. A morally debased and bankrupt individual is a social as well as security risk to any nation. Little wonder then why at the slightest provocation, hell is often let loose with grievous consequences of loss of lives and properties in almost all parts of the country. If religious Education had been taught and given its rightful place in our Educational settings, Nigeria would have been better, security wise, than it is now.

Bribery and corruption is another cancer that has eaten deep into every fabric of life. It has equally contributed to undermining National Security. For example, the immigration and custom officers are meant to police our borders. They are supposed to control the movement of both man and goods in and out of the country. It is however disappointing to note that a few arms and ammunition flow and enter freely into our nation. Coupled with these are people of questionable characters entering the country at will. All these are the result of moral decadence from inadequate moral/religious education in schools. If Nigeria's military and para-military men kept at our borders and security posts feared God and kept strictly to their religious tenets (Christianity or Islam), they should

know that the bribes taken only bring disaster and insecurity to the nation. It is only the fear of God and living rightly and justly according to the Holy Scriptures that will make a nation to live at peace.

The word, “greed” has caused so many problems not only to Nigeria but to many areas in the world. Greediness is a tool that destroyed many countries. This was what made the former president of Libya not hand over power.

In Nigeria, we have seen many situations where political parties fight one another. A political party may like to rule for many years without giving up power. Elections are thus rigged to see that power comes back to the ruling party. This is one of the major causes of insecurity in Nigeria. We have seen many politicians in Nigeria fight in government houses because of greed. Hence religion preaches contentment with what you have. The Bible (Proverb 9) enjoins the followers of Christ Jesus to shun acts of greed because it can lead to crises and insecurity. For any society to be at peace, the citizens must do away with the spirit of greed so that peace and security can reign.

Many insecurity issues in the Federal Republic of Nigeria are traceable to bad government. In other words, one of the major causes of insecurity or crisis in Nigeria is bad government. A government that is not properly handled or ruled is vulnerable to crisis.

Religion plays an important role when it comes to governance. It is hard for any aspiring president or governor in Nigeria to do without religion. The reason is because the majority of citizens of the country are practitioners of Islam or Christianity. So, any governor or president that wants to win in any election in the country must identify with any of them or both.

We have seen situations in Nigeria where people who have not been going to church all of a sudden turn into the “holiest pope” on the planet earth. They turned into “holiest pope” as used in the context because they needed the votes of the Christians. After the election and they win, they forget that Christianity has ever existed in the country. Who is deceiving who? The moment our politicians/leaders stop playing hypocritical lip-service to religion, the nation will begin to enjoy peace and security.

Spiritual

A Christian is that individual who has accepted the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He is henceforth guided by the law and words of God as

written down in the scriptures. Such an individual sees God as his shield, fortress and refuge, thus, God becomes his Chief security officer, a dependable support in times of distress or trouble. The book of Proverbs 18 verse 10 says, “The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous man runs into it and is safe”. Acts 2:21 also says “And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” and Psalm 102 verse 2 adds “Do not hide thy face from me in the day of my distress! Incline thy ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call!

From the above quotations, God is seen as a deliverer, a present help in times of trouble and listener and hearer of those that call upon his name. It is implicit therefore that as he delivers individuals so he will equally deliver and keep secure people who are His. A very interesting story is found in the book of 2nd King 19:19-34, on God’s saving power and as a defender of the weak and the oppressed. The Assyrian King Sennacherib sent a message to Hezekiah King of Judah to surrender unconditionally to him. Hezekiah took the letter to the temple, spread it out and prayed over it to God of heaven in verse 19 thus, “ So now, O Lord our God, save us I beseech thee, from his hand, and that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou, O Lord, art God alone” In answer to this prayer in verse 34, God said “ For I will defend this city to save it and will restore peace into the land, for my own name sake and for the sake of my servant David”.

Israel as a nation had God as her national security, two quotations from the holy scriptures will back up this view- Deuteronomy 33:29 and Numbers 10:9 respectively:

Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you person saved by the Lord. The shield of your help and the sword of your triumph! Your enemies shall come frowning to you. And you shall tread upon their high places. And when you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you. Then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets that you may be remembered Before the Lord your God and you shall be saved from your enemies.

Several passages in the Book of Psalms also attest to the fact that God is the source of our ultimate peace and security. The arm of flesh will surely fail. Psalm 91 verse 1-12 explains that God is the peace and security of the godly.

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his pinions and under his wings you will find refuge, his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

You will not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

Islam is another prevailing religion in Nigeria. The purpose of Islamic law – Maqasidush – Shariah is security.¹² Security of life, property, progeny, intellect, religion and honour is the primary function of Islamic law.¹³ Islam thus prohibits any act that threatens the security of any of the enumerated endowments. Security in Islam goes beyond protection of the physique and wealth. It is therefore clear that in Islam whatever is necessary to enhance peaceful and meaningful existence of the community is considered a security measure for which every Muslim must work.¹⁴

Islam as a religion is inseparable from politics because the polity under Islamic control must practice theocracy.¹⁵ Political authority, therefore, resides with the clerics; a political order of a secular nature cannot, therefore, exist.¹⁶ As Odunuga¹⁷ puts it, in Islam, politics and religion are parts of a single alloy. It was said that the greatest achievement of Prophet Muhammad was the religious and political unification of Arabia.¹⁸ In Islam, the most functional political system is “theocratic”, in the sense that Allah is the only recognised authority as asserted by Kenny.¹⁹ Islam is peace and also preaches peace, and enjoins its followers to maintain peace within their domain to shun any act of violence, injustice, corruption and laziness.

In Africa generally, traditional religion permeates all societal activities. It is difficult to divorce any sphere of life from religion. A ruler in African traditional society is both the political ruler of his community as well as the Chief Priest.²⁰ This phenomenon according to Awolalu²¹ is particularly noticeable among the Yoruba where the Oba (King) is referred to as “*Igba Keji Orisa (Eledumare)*” i.e. (Next in rank to the Supreme Being) and he is also regarded as “*Olori Awon Awo*” – leader among the priests.²²

The African Traditional Religion promotes security by not condoning stealing, injustice, immorality and dishonest attitude e.t.c. In traditional Yoruba society, there was the concept according to Dopamu called “*agogo eewo*” (the forbidden gong). When it was sounded, criminals, evil-doers, adulterers law breakers and robbers shivered with terror because they would die soon.²³ Nigeria needs “*agogo eewo*” today. It should be taken to the ministries, institutions, financial Houses, Military Headquarters, Police Headquarters, National Assembly, Government

Houses and other places of financial mismanagement, corruption, money laundering and 419. Such measures may return sanity to the society.

Religion, Peace and Security in Nigeria

Religious institutions and leaders should have some defined roles to play in the maintenance of peace and security in Nigeria. Religion, no doubt, is a force to reckon with in the lives of individuals and the nation at large, because it is a tool that provides inspiration to Nigerians to unite and fight social upheavals, moral decadence, political stability and promote economic development through hard work. Also, religion prepares both the individual and the society for a good life.

In an interview granted Archbishop, John Onaiyekan by Tell magazine on 7th February 2005, he states that, “the Clergy and the church cannot afford to stand aloof when issues affecting the stability of the country are at stake.” He condemned the ways the people at the helms of affairs were accumulating wealth, while their people suffer. We also thank God for fearless and blunt religious leaders like Bishop Gbonigi, Cardinal Olubunmi Okogie and Dr. Lateef Adegbite who had reason at one time or the other to advise the government.

The above men of God advised our leaders at all levels to lead by example, imitate the life lived by Abraham (Gen. 12:17) (Christian), Ibrahim (Islam), Moses (Exodus 3:5) (Christian), Musa (Islam) and Jesus Christ. These men were leaders who lived above reproach because of the fear of God in their lives. Our nation will be a peaceful place to live in if our leaders will demonstrate the fear of God in their leadership.

Religion regulates the conduct and behavior of people in the society, and preaches vital virtues needed in the nation. The religious sermons that are preached in churches and mosques with specific reference to citations from the Bible and Qur’an are all efforts geared towards modifying the behaviour of the people positively in the society. The counseling done by Christian Pastors and Muslim clerics is also a way in which the society can be made to maintain peace and security in the nation. According to Oke,²⁴ when a youth is not exposed to education and sound moral doctrine, such a person can only be liberated from ignorance and bad moral values through religious counseling.

Religion has a powerful influence on the activities of members of the society, whether they are Christians, Muslims or African Traditional worshipers because religious tenets work directly with the conscience of man, a guide to right living. In a situation where there is poverty and

unemployment in the society, there is nothing bad when those that are affluent in the church or mosque show love by either employing these people or by giving them financial assistance, as done recently by Bishop David Oyedepo of Living Faith Church, where he donated food items and cash to Osun State workers who had not been paid their salaries for months.

The radio and television electronic media will be useful tools in communicating religious messages to people. Through this, Oladunjoye says their attitude may change positively and they could have moral and spiritual rebirth.²⁵ When the adherents live strictly by the tenets of their religions, Africa will achieve the desired peace, good governance and security.

Recommendations

The church should not compromise its role as social a watchdog by playing “spiritual advisers” to deadly politicians who camouflage as ‘friends of the masses’. Rather, it should be aggressively involved in preaching against the maltreatment of the masses by the government. The pulpit should be effectively used to combat the ills in the society, just as many great preachers did in history. The church should let them know that all evil practices if not checked/corrected, will be punished by God here on earth and in the hereafter. If therefore, politicians and leaders can rule according to God’s words, the society will enjoy peace and security. The religious leaders in the country should shun the ‘gifts of money’ and position in government and show good examples to their followers.

The practice of conferring honours and awards on personalities in appreciation of their contribution to the church or the society should not be monetized. This would definitely reduce corruption and promote decent living among the people in government. Hence, pleasers of men rather than God, corruption and injustice will be reduced.

Conclusion

Religion is the anchor of any nation particularly Africa. Religion teaches happiness for its followers while on earth and ensures that man attains his ultimate as well as helps build good citizens, who will contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation and her security.

According to Okebukola, Religion maintains that all human beings are equal in the sight of the Lord and considers every human person as a special creation of God. It also condemns corruption, dishonesty, injustice,

nepotism, kidnapping and disrespect to constituted authorities. Therefore, for good governance in Nigeria, the religious groups must teach virtue in the places of worship.

Ultimate Security is of God but as citizens of this nation, a religious nation has prominent roles to play both individually and collectively. Emphasis has to be placed on the teaching of Religious and moral instructions in our schools. Dignity of labour reward for handwork has to be promoted while adequate punishment for laziness, bribery and corruption is enshrined. It is important that the entire populace must be security conscious and be ready to make necessary report to the police and equally be ready to stand in any court of law to stand as witness against culprits. Since security is a collective responsibility, it is important that all are determined to join various security watch outfits in the various communities, so that peace and security will reign.

On the part of the Government, there must be the political will to rid the society of social miscreants and to purge the nation of all forms of bribery and corruption as prescribed by religious tenets. If this is done by government, it will be seen as moving towards the right direction in fighting corruption in high places thus ensuring peace and security in our nation.

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