



The Impact of Religious Fundamentalism on Social Development in Nigeria: A Reflection

CLIFFORD MEESUA SIBANI, HARUNA EZEKIEL EXCELLENCE

University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

Abstract. Religious fundamentalism is seen as the strict observance of basic important rules and belief with unrestricted commitment by religious extremists. Social development refers the development of social skills and emotional maturity, Social development is about putting people at the centre of development. The defective religious foundation characterized by intolerance, fanaticism and lack of love has led to a number of problems in our society. Bloodshed motivated and masterminded by religious confusion has marred our beloved country for several decades. This is the logical result of the flawed concept and use of religion; the elite use religion for the exclusive purpose of perpetuating domination of the majority. They take advantage of the confusion arising from the issue of the secular nature of the Nigerian state. This paper addressed the brief history of religious fundamentalism in relation to social development in Nigeria, positive and negative fundamentalism in Nigeria, causes of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria, consequences of religious fundamentalism and religious remedies to religious fundamentalism in relation to social development in Nigeria. Historical method was used and books and journals were consulted. This research recommends that all the basic necessities of life be provided by the government as well as employment to enhance ceasefire by extremist- religious fundamentalist.

1. Introduction

Everything which happens in society is as a result of religion because religion teaches society in different ways ranging from culture, behavior and governance. Religion is against murder, theft, and many unlawful acts that take place in the society. It affects our society historically; it has sometimes been used as a means to control the populace. Even now, in some

area, religion affects law. The biggest effect, however, is on the way people behave and their traditions. Society's ways of thinking is being affected and the way people look at issues in the nation emanates from their religious standpoint. This propels conversion and commitment that emphasize choice and rationality over irrationality and indoctrination. Rational explanations for the success of "extreme," "fundamentalist," and "conservative" groups and weakness of more "liberal," "mainstream" groups which affect Christian and Islamic economics is concerned with religiously-oriented critiques of capitalism, socialism, materialism, specific economic practices. It is necessary that religious commitment and religious groups influence the well-being of individuals, families, youth, communities, and nations through right and good moral behaviours that can enhance national development in Nigeria. According to Ugwu (2002:54), religion is defined as "faith and practices involving the relationship between mankind and what are regarded as sacred. Religion generally involves the belief in the Supernatural and a code of ethical behavior more comprehensively". For religion gives humans "A sense that man's relation to the supernatural world is in some way intimately connected with his moral values, with the nature of the goals he is called upon to live for and the rules of conduct he is expected to comply with" (Lessa and Vogt 1979:63). Social development refers to the growth in the social order of a society. khuri, F. (2016) posits: "Social development include development in nature, social institutions, social behaviors, or social matters. Social development attempts to explain qualitative changes in the structure and framework of society, which help the society to better realize its aims and objectives". Development can be broadly defined in a manner applicable to all societies' at all historical periods as

an upward ascending movement featuring greater levels of energy, efficiency, quality, productivity, complexity, comprehension, creativity, mastery, enjoyment and accomplishment. Development is a process of social change, not merely a set of policies and programs instituted for some specific purposes. Therefore, social development is a process that results in the transformation of social structures to improve the capacity of a society in order to fulfill its objectives. Religious fundamentalism as viewed by Iwe (2002:11) is “those with irrational attitude towards religion which leads the religionist to the practice of religion beyond reason and therefore, without moderation”.

2. Brief History of Religious Fundamentalism in Relation to Social Development in Nigeria

Religious fundamentalism is the maintenance of deep literal interpretation and dogged insistence on the traditional beliefs of any religious group, which remains in opposition to other religious beliefs or modern teachings. Fundamentalism may be expressed intra and or extra religiously. Otite and Albert (2004:284) posit:

In course of... historical development, Kano played host to different kinds of Islamic scholars, from North Africa and other parts of neighbouring countries...which introduced to Kano Fundamentalist religious activities that led to development of several Islamic sects in the City.

In 1980 this incubated egg matured and hatched into dreaded monsters which terrorized both individuals and the government of the day. During this time of trouble many lives were lost as property worth of millions vanished with it. There was a violent inter-religious conflict in Kano in October 1982. It was the first major violent reaction of the Muslim against the ascendancy of Christianity in the city. The problem started at Fagge (near the Sabon gari) where some Christians attempted to reconstruct as dilapidated “Christ Church”. The Muslims living around the area felt that the old church was located too close to a mosque. Rather than reconstructing it, they felt the Christians should relocate the church elsewhere. They did everything within their power towards ensuring that the building plans for the new church were not approved by the government. But under police protection, the Christians soon started to reconstruct the church. “The Muslims consequently reacted violently and in the disorder that followed, three churches were burnt by the Muslims and several other churches were vandalized. The federal government resolved this issue by paying N75, 000

as compensation to the Christian Association of Nigeria in Kano” (Otite and Albert, 2004:290). This amount paid for unsolicited destruction by Government did not favour sustainable development.

Otite and Albert (2004:291) hold that in 1991, the charismatic movement in Kano tried to organize a religious crusade to be addressed by a German preacher, Evangelist Reinhard Boonke, and some American preachers. This religious event was widely advertised by the Christian on the electronic media and newspapers. Several thousands of posters and handbills were distributed in Kano and the neighbouring communities. The publicity given to the event later attracted the attention of the Muslims who felt that the crusade must not be allowed to hold in Kano. First, the Muslims accused the government of double standards for failing to grant permission to one Sheikh Deedat from South Africa who had wanted to organize a religious revival for the Muslims in Kano they asked why the same government should grant a license to Reinhard Boonke to preach in Kano, an Islamic city. In this crisis Boonke himself narrowly escaped death as many Nigerian heads rolled without exception of property and the disruption of economic activities. In the midst of such insecurity no meaningful development would go on not to talk of sustainability.

3. Positive and Negative Fundamentalism in Nigeria

By this sub- heading one would readily posit that there are two different faces of religious fundamentalism which include positive and negative fundamentalism. Positive side of religious fundamentalism focuses on the practice of such generally accepted religious moral tenets which lead to the protection of the common good of the society. Take for instance Jesus teaching- The Beatitude (Matthew 5) and Pauline letter to the Romans on civic responsibility (Romans 13) which are the sources of good citizenship are not injurious to the society but enhance the same. The respect for the mother earth for the traditionalist produces piety which in turn promotes reverence for natural laws or the Muslim acknowledging that the people of the book are the same people of Allah they should not destroy, is the source of peace building and sustainable development.

On the other hand negative fundamentalism manifests itself in violence, wanton destruction of lives and property and disruption of economic

activities. This is inimical to sustainable development as prevalent in Nigeria. Gambari (1973:20) observes: The rise of religious fundamentalism, largely of the Islamic faith but also including some of the Christian sects, constitutes real threats to the delicate balance of forces on the issue of the secular nature of the Nigerian state. Islamic fundamentalists, perhaps emboldened by the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Iran by the cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, intensified their rejection of the idea that religion and politics are separable. Some of their leaders also believe that under the pretext of maintaining the secularism of the Nigerian state, Judeo-Christian values were gaining the upper-hand in Nigeria. It was perhaps in this context that the demands for the extension of Shari'a laws and legal system to cover all areas of Nigeria where Muslims live gained prominence. In any case, the issue of "Shari'a" seriously undermined the proceedings of two Constituent Assemblies (1978 and 1988/89) established to produce the Constitutions for the Second and Third Republics of Nigeria respectively. Both times the Federal Military Government had to step in to arrange compromises which essentially allowed the status quo to continue.

4. Causes of Religious Fundamentalism in Nigeria

Several factors are responsible for religious fundamental minded crisis as we may want to discuss some of them namely;

Intolerance: Intolerance has always showed itself as the major factor responsible for inter and intra religious fundamental crises in the world. For instance the Catholic Church would not tolerate Luther's reform articles, which resulted to a major crisis in the early Church. Diana and Lawrence (2006) said that the Shiitte Muslims were not accepted by the Adakwa Gwammaja people for their style of preaching which was said to blaspheme the men of Allah. Other examples abound, like in Kano (1980) where the use of words was the bane of trouble.

Politics: Our desperate politicians now creep in among these religious fanatics in pursuit of their ulterior motives as a leeway to achieve their motive under cover. Indeed the situation is so mixed up than we can separate religiously motivated war from politically engineered aggression. Religious fundamentalism remains the channel of wanton destruction of lives and property, which culminates into retrogression and insecurity that scares away investors, takes its negative toll on our national development. Offi and Adeyi (2001:27), commenting

on the tension in the north blamed religious crisis on our politicians as thus "Relationship between the Christians and Muslims in the Northern Nigeria was tensed up by the introduction of Sharia Islamic Law in the North...and inflammatory statements made by eminent Nigerians of northern extraction" Our politicians most at times appeal to religious fundamentalism and fanaticism as weapons as they weep up sentiments in their favour as they play their game of number.

Youthful exuberance: The general tendency among our youths to exploit every available adventure is also contributory to the problem of religious fundamentalism. The

Young people in their unguided life and utterances enter into arguments that naturally snowball into crisis. None issues are over stretched into hot exchange of words and blows. These overzealous youths create disaffection inter and intra religiously.

Religious Supremacy: Even though Nigeria is said to be a secular state by our constitution the various entities that make up the religious sector of Nigeria are in silent competition of supremacy. Paden (2014) observed that this under cover tendency heightens the rate of intolerance among our religious bodies and like time bomb they erupt at the slightest provocation as evident in Nigeria.

Influence of Non-Nigerians: The influence of Non-Nigerians from neighbouring countries was largely responsible for the Kano religious crisis of the 1980. "Kano played host to...different kinds of foreigners (that) exploited this open door policy of the Kanawa to return Kano into a breeding ground for many kinds of fundamentalists Islamic ideas," as stated by (Oтите and Albert:297), with their attendant negative consequences. The panel that probed the Kano crisis came to conclusion that Nigerian border was very porous hence these non-Nigerians infiltrated and raked havoc on us.

5. Consequences of Religious Fundamentalism

The consequences of religious fundamentalism cannot be over emphasized. Its impact is clear for everyone to see. However, this paper considers some of the side effects as:

Exploitation: The fact that all forms of developments thrive only in the atmosphere of peace and concord is indisputably accepted by all as the sunrise expels darkness. And on the other hand it is obvious that no meaningful material or super structural development can be archived as it is certain that no one gets richer by getting and throwing away in any society. Therefore,

as people get uncertain about their lives and property in the lands that are not theirs by tradition and tribe they are nonchalant about the development of their non-traditional host areas. Quite all right it might not be the original intension of such people not to invest outside their traditional areas, but for fear of what could befall them they will prefer to invest in their home States and communities. In this type of attitude development eludes the host communities which are merely reduced to a place of exploitation.

Insecurity: Insecurity which is the opposite of security does not only affect life but development, as no one would like to trust his eggs in a broken basket no matter the number of baskets. There is nothing that scares investors like insecurity. Wogaman (2016:22) states, “No investor would spend money where he or she is not sure of harvesting from. No investor can afford to stand his hand akimbo watching his or her sweat go into flames. Insecurity stops both external and internal investors.” In a state where there are no investors development is usually sluggish. In case the fundamentalists make an area ungovernable there will be no development there, how much more to improve upon what is not even there. No one can improve upon a burnt house or add further utility upon a dead person.

6. Religious Remedies to Religious Fundamentalism in Relation to Social Development in Nigeria

6.1 Provision/Preaching Sustainable Development

Religion has been on the vanguard of challenging the government to care for lives and provide all the necessities of life for the needy and poor masses. Religion has and is still providing basic amenities of life in Nigerian nation. It might be necessary to mention that sustainable development is an umbrella phrase which encapsulates all forms of durable and lasting development whether human (capacity building) or material (structural, economic, social and industrial enhancements). To be particular; development could be referred to as the provision and improvement upon the existent social amenities. The erecting of public buildings, provision and establishment of Schools, Scholarship, Hospitals, judicial system and other necessities that provide protection for our common goods and enhance the well being of the constituents of each society are implied. Development is a process which enables human beings to realize their potentials, build self-confidence, and lead a life of dignity and fulfilment. Okereke, (1999:1) saw development, As the qualitative improvement in the living standard of members of the society...measured by such

indicators as literacy rate, rate of development, the distribution of income, availability of good drinking water, good roads regular supply of electricity, decent housing, medical facilities, and access to them....”

Nweke (2003:7) relates “development and modernization as the x-raying of man’s interest in changing the society to enhance the quality of life issues, which bother on the welfare of man, the society ...” and several social issues. Development, therefore, does not stop at the provision of and accessibility of physical infrastructures, but goes beyond to the provision of mental advancement, capacity building for the organization of the society as modernize existing infrastructures in suit each moment. The progressive rate of developmental acceleration (the safe keeping and enhancement of already provided social amenities) is referred to as the sustainability thereto.

6.2 Preaching of Peace

Developmental sustainability from religious perspective is dependent on one of the cardinal postulations of religion which is peace. Vatican Council (cited in Richardson (1999:76) states that: Peace is not mere absence of war. Nor can it be reduced solely to be maintenance of a balance of power between enemies. Nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called, an enterprise of justice (Isa. 32: 7). Peace results from that harmony built into human Society by its divine founder and actualized by men as they thirst after ever greater justice.

Peace which is harmony built into the society is an indispensable factor for sustainable development. Therefore, any religion that does not propagate peace remains inimical to sustainable development in Nigeria. Granted the fact that the preservation of developmental efforts and survival of humanity is predicated upon cordiality and peaceful atmosphere, which religious fundamentalism does not provide, religious fundamentalism remains a retrogressive cankerworm of ramifying negative effect on national developmental efforts. Obviously, religious fundamentalism is an ill wind which blows no one any good.

6.3 Care for the Bereaved and Protection of lives

Novak (2015:45) avers that “Nigerians lost their dear ones to death and the economic backlash is upon the entire world. Series of meeting have been convened and money spent on the activities of these fundamentals that now league or network themselves

into terror gangs". Fortune which ought to have been invested into the advancement of human society is being channelled into the battle against terrorism. The bereaved should not be made to suffer hardship at all because of a dear relative which is very painful. Okoye (cited in Sibani, 2013:33) describes the mood of the bereaved person as grievous. The bereaved person suffers miserably because of the loss and the addition of the responsibilities of the dead one to those being shouldered by the living persons. Otite and Albert (2004:300) categorically states:

The Jos religious crisis past and present show the huddle the nation is jumping through, (while) the introduction of the Shariah legal System in some Northern States brought the country into a standstill. In Kaduna, the clash between the Muslims and the Christians led to the loss of about 1,000 lives.

All these are in the name of religious fundamentalism. The various religious groups in Nigeria indeed leave in fears of each other in a nation of peace and unity. There is no mutual trust among the religious bodies because of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism.

6.4 Preaching Love and Justice

Most Nigerian Christians are firmly holding the form of their religion yet their public practices, actions and behaviors are complete denial of the transforming power of religion which can bring about holistic human flourishing in society. For example, personal happiness and self-centered pursuits become the goal of life rather than righteousness that results in love, justice, and peace with our neighbors. The Nigerian situation is best described by Warren (1995:10) "happiness, not holiness, is the chief pursuit of most people today, including many professed Christians. They want Jesus to solve their problems and carry their burdens, but they don't want Him to control their lives and change their character." However, religious extremism has not allowed Nigerian Christians to connect their religious activities with certain crucial aspects of their social life, particularly the economic life. The Nigerian elites take advantage of our religious extremism for their political, economic and social achievements. It is an alarming reality that in Nigeria the elite have for quite sometimes repositioned religion for their political advantage and to the detriment of the socio-economic benefits of the masses. They have continued to amass wealth which they use to hold the masses in check. Consequently, poverty and unemployment are the lot of our youth. Hence they become easy prey to the political class who uses them as political muggers or weapons of mass destruction.

7. Conclusion

Over the past decade, considerable research has emerged that demonstrates the benefits of religious practice within society. Religious practice promotes the well-being of individuals, families, and the community. Fagan (1996:112) state that studies indicate the benefits of religion to the poor:

Regular attendance at religious services is linked to healthy, stable family life, strong marriages, and well-behaved children. The practice of religion also leads to a reduction in the incidence of domestic abuse, crime, substance abuse, and addiction. In addition, religious practice leads to an increase in physical and mental health, longevity, and education attainment. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

Given the extent to which religious practice promotes civil society, understanding religion's contribution to the nation's constitutional order is fundamental to the nation's continued prosperity. The practice of religion is a powerful antidote to many of our nation's pressing social problems, many of which have reached historically high proportions. Yet, despite the societal benefits of religion, the expression of faith in the public square has faced many challenges. Therefore, legislators should seek constitutionally appropriate ways to explore the impact of religious practice on society and, where appropriate, recognize its role and importance for a sustainable development of the nation. The practice of religion improves health, academic achievement, and economic well-being and fosters self-control, self-esteem, empathy, and compassion. Religious belief and practice can address many of the nation's most pressing social problems, some of which have reached serious levels (e.g., out-of-wedlock births and family dissolution). Research has linked the practice of religion to reductions in the incidence of divorce, crime, delinquency, drug and alcohol addiction, out-of-wedlock births, health problems, anxiety, and prejudice. Faith-based outreach has been uniquely effective in drug addiction rehabilitation and societal re-entry programs for prisoners. Furthermore, the effects of religious belief and practice are intergenerational and cumulative. In a sense, they "compound the interest" of our social capital.

Freedom from an established religion is compatible with the freedom to fully practice one's religious beliefs. This freedom is very different from purported

protection from religious influence. To work to reduce the influence of religious belief or practice is to further the disintegration of society. Some may be uncomfortable with the religious beliefs and practices of others, but that discomfort is small compared to the effects of having a society with little or no religious practice.

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