Volume 18 Issue 46
Originally issued as A7



Global Journal of human-social science: A
Arts & Humanities - Psychology
Volume 18 Issue 7 Version 1.0 Year 2018
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Towards Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria: Religious Education as a Tool

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Keywords: *peace, nigeria, religious, education.*

GJHSS-A Classification: *FOR Code: 220499*



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Towards Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria: Religious Education as a Tool

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Abstract- Religion is as old as man itself; it entrenches the totality of man to keep the tenets and teaches men to live at peace with one another and disassociate with corruption and greed. This research work argues that religion can be used for peace and also be used for selfish interest. The paper revealed that, the prominence of religious education will instill values and high morals on the citizenry to bring about expected sustainable development. The principal religions recognised in Nigeria are Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion. Each of these has deep roles to play in enhancing peace, and sustainable development. It concludes that, the role of religious education to peace, security and sustainable development in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. The Federal Government of Nigeria, down to the local government owes it a duty to re-introduce the teaching and learning of religious education in Nigerian schools and make it compulsory for all students. However, religious sentiments should be stamped out and proper tenets of religions should be taught and practiced. The paper therefore recommends that, religion as a subject should be made compulsory for students at all levels of the educational system right from the primary up to the tertiary level. Cleric, Imam, and traditionalist should uphold the tenet and teach moral values in their respective places of worship, the non-Governmental organizations should organised symposium, workshop and create awareness in upholding religious morals in the society among others.

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I. Introduction

Nigeria is one of the most populous nation in the whole world, is situated on the west coast of sub-Saharan Africa, with the largest population of any African nation with total population of about 188,462,640 million people. Composed of multiple ethnic groups, cultures and languages which result to intermixing of religious groups. The Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri ethnic groups dominate the predominantly Muslim northern states. Significantly numbers of Christians also reside in the north, and Christians and Muslim reside in about equal numbers in the Middle Belt, the Federal Capital Territory, and the southwestern states, were Yoruba ethnic group predominates. While most Yoruba's are either Christians or Muslim, some primarily adhere to traditional beliefs. The land is naturally blessed with good weather, comfortable land couple with mineral resources. This made Nigeria to be one of the major oil producing nations of the world-whose quality of oil is rate among the best.

(Esan, 2013), righty claim that the belief of system of a people influences the way they think, feel and perceive things in relation to people of other religions and culture. Violence in different form such as ethnic, religion, cultural and socio-political issues had repeatedly weighed-down the harmonious relationship and as negatively affect the country with unpalatable situation manifest in poverty, joblessness, low productivity, low income and poor infrastructural facilities. In 1979, the Federal Government in an attempt to resolve, promote unity among the various religious ethnic groups in Nigeria, established the National Youth Services Corps (N.Y.S.C.) and some Federal Institutions to ensure cohesion among its religious ethnic groups. Despite these various attempts by the government, not much has been achieved. In view of this, this paper examines the role of religious education as a tools in solving religious crisis.

II. Conceptual Clarification

For the purpose of clarification and better understanding, it is expedient to define and explain basic issues underlying this work. In the first place, the operative words namely- religions education and peaceful co-existence needs clarification. Also, it is apposite to state that the locus of our discussion would be based on the world-view of the Nigerian peoples as an exemplification of religions as a tool for harmonious relationship. Having made these prefatory remarks, it is essential to clarify these terms in order to understand their meanings.

a) Religions

It is generally accepted that Religion has no universal definition. However, the writer wouldconsider some definitions of religion. It is important to note that the word religion is derived, etymologically, from the Latin noun, *religio*. The common verbs are *religere* to turn to constant or to observe conscientiouslyⅡ, *religere* to bind oneself back) and *religere*It could be safely claimed that most common definitions of religion appear to be etymological derivatives of the above verbs. On the strength of this, Obilor (2002:63) defined religion as the whole complexes of attitudes, conviction and institutions through which we express our deep fundamental relationship with Reality and not excluding

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the created order‖. On his part, Gilbert (1980:5) stated that religion describes any system of values, norms and related symbols and rituals, arising from attempt by individuals and social groups to affect certain ends, whether in this world or any future world by means wholly or partly supernatural. The transcendental perspective of religion is aptly captured in the definition of Odumuyiwa (2006:2). He defined religion as *"man's effective desire to be in right relationship with a sacred transcendental order, controlling human destiny and events, either a prescribed system of rituals and of belief".* Omoregbe (1993:3) defined religion as essentially a relation he stated that religion is the recognition of all our duties as divine ship, a link established by the human person and the divine person believed to exist. It can be deduced from the definitions above that religion coveys the following information, first, features of a Supernatural Being, secondly the belief in that Being and lastly a feeling of awe and mystery in response to the command of that supernatural being. The writer, therefore, defined religion as our *"absolute acknowledgement of dependence on the supernatural Being who sets and controls the entire affairs of life and the universe, hence attracting our reverence and obedience"*. This dimension may have been responsible for the emotional power that religion sometimes have on the adherents.

b) Religious Violence

"Religious violence is a term that describes a phenomenon where religion is either the subject or object of violent behavior. Religious violence is, specifically, violence that is motivated by or in reaction to religious precepts, texts, or doctrines". It involves all forms of violence against religious institutions, persons, objects, or when the violence is motivated to some degree by some religious aspect of the target or precepts of the attacker. This phenomenon does not only refer to violent acts committed by religious groups, but it also includes acts committed by secular group against groups. Thus, it is pluralistic in its incidence.

c) Religion Education

Religion is the experience and expression of faith. Learning about religionand learning from religion are important for all pupils, as religious education helps pupils develop an understanding of themselves and others. (Iheoma, 2006).It's also promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of individuals and of groups and communities. In particular, religion education offers pupils with learning difficulties opportunities to develop their self-confidence and awareness understand the world they live in as individuals and as members of groups bring their own experiences and understanding of life into the classroom develop positive attitudes towards others, respecting their beliefs and experience reflect on and consider their own values and those of others deal with issues that form the basis for personal choices and behavior.

d) Peace

Peace is the concept of harmony and the absence of hostility. In a behavioral sense, peace is a lack of conflict and freedom from fear of violence between individuals and heterogeneous social groups.

III. Theoretical Framework

The center for world religions, diplomacy and conflict resolution offers a new approach to reducing global violence and terrorism by incorporating the best moral practices of religious communities into policy and democratization. Providing policymakers and activist with strategies to elicit moderate moral religious expression in conflict regions can strengthen civil society and democracy. Yeasin Arafat (2018: 34) The goal is to create political, religious and social openings that allow international political compromises and vital peace processes to flourish action. These comprises of three things as follows: (a) to promote and empowerment of a network religious peace makers around the world last minute back-channel interventions in religious conflict. (b) organizing dialogues between and among members of religious tradition. (c) conferences and retreats where policymakers can learn from an interact with religious leaders. The research work will be working towards this direction in other to proffer notable solution to this burning issue militating against the peace we ought to enjoy in our society.

IV. Overview of Religious Crisis in Nigeria

Table 1

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.

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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	Attacked of Christians by the 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.
9	February 18, 2006	Maiduguri, Borno State	Religious crisis between Christians and Muslims over Danish Cartoon on Prophet Mohammed in Jyllands-posten 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 392 woman widowed, and several properties destroyed.
13	March 7, 2010	Jos, Plateau State	Attacks by Fulani Moslems on Christians-dominated villages of Dogo-Nahawa, Shen and Fan. 13 person killed
14	Jos South, Plateau State	Jos South, Plateau State	Attack on a 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 injuring others.
17	May 2016	Padongari, Niger State	Religious crisis that left 4 persons dead.
18	June 8, 2016	Kakuri, Kaduna State	A Christian man 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.

Source: Adapted from Sampson, 2018; Sahara reporter, 2018.

a) Causes of Religious Crisis

Several causes of religion violence could be identifying from socio-economic, and political influences, it cut across every sectors of our society. Notable factors from these amoral behaviors could be visible in that bad governances have poison the mind of adherent of religion to one another because government oppress, neglect, dominate, marginalized, discriminate and exploit are some of the factors. For further understanding the work as critically and systematically mention some of these causes below.

b) Ignorance of Religious Education

Some of the soul aims of religious education is that it enables adherent to consider and respond to a range important questions related to their own spiritual, moral, psychological and societal values and development related to fundamental questions concerning the meaning and purpose of life. Religious education is an essential component of a broad and balanced education. It should also be noted here that those adherent behind the killings of innocent citizen are ignorance of what their religion entails in term of moral,

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and spiritual stories about sanctity of lives that each religion teachings, permit me to say this without any reservation that no religion preaches violence of human lives nor killing of innocent soul.

c) Extremism and Intolerance

Extremism from the two sides is another important reason behind religious crisis in Nigeria. In most cases this extremism is based on poor knowledge of the teaching of the religion being defended by the group in both sides. Religious intolerance means hostility towards other religions, as well as the inability of religious adherent to harmonized between the theories and the practical aspect of religion. Intolerance devotion to one's opinions and prejudices, especially the expression of intolerance and animosity toward persons of differing beliefs.

d) Depletion of cultural values

This is seen in the fact that man no longer attaches the expected value to the sanctity of life. The African virtue of being your brother's keeper has been eroded.

e) Insecurity

Insecurity possess threat to the mind of citizen, it is very rear that people cannot sleep with their two eyes closed, the government at the other hand are heartless in every regard in that they have much time to squander our money, and spent much money in securing their personal live at the detriment of the citizen.

f) Poverty

Poverty is a worst and unpalatable situation which can make man to think of getting rich without thinking of the consequences. Also some of our political leaders are using the opportunity to use some of our youth to unleashes terror, and threat to live.

g) Negative roles played by some religious leaders

Obioha (2008) submitted that, the occurrence of these conflicts cannot be divorced from the activities of religious leaders, both of Christian religion and Islam According to him, some of them present their religion as the best, while others are no religion, or worse still, false religions.

V. Effects of Religious crisis in Nigeria

Critically speaking one do not needsa prophet before one would understand the fact that religious crisis as negative effects on the socio-moral and economic growth of the society, Religious and ethnicity crisis will definitely affect the foreign direct investment (FDI) flow into Nigeria. FDI has positive relationship with economic growth as the more FDI flows into the country the more jobs are created, the per capital income and the higher the standard of living. This was buttressed by Onwumah (2014) when he posited that in economic terms, religious and ethnicity crisis damages resources and facilities which took time to be acquired. No foreign investor will like to invest funds in country that is divided by communal, religious and ethnic crises (Ayinla, 2003). The basic aim of foreign investment is to make profit which is not possible in an environment of crises. The resources invested already will definitely go down the drains. Meanwhile, the source of Muslims and Christians crises in Nigeria has been religious ethnicity, social and political. The dramas of intolerance by the two religions led to successive misunderstanding between them, sometimes degenerating into violent open war or skirmishes. This drama was marked by the 1980 religious crises that started in Zaria involving members of two religions, resulting to the Wanton destruction of live and properties.

Also, religious violence breed suspicion among the various adherent involved. It can be rightly said according to (Theophilus Alabi & Fola Lateju, 2014).That just as Christians are suspicious of Muslims, so also Muslims mistrust Christians. For clarification, M.O Adeniyi, for example, blames Christianity for the violent religious climate in Nigeria. He explained that Islam and African religion co-existed peacefully. Until Christianity came in ten centuries later, with its evangelistic determination to wipe out Islam and African religions. John Enyinnaya's reactions to Adeniyi's views, said he (Adeniyi) criticized colonial leaders as being both political leaders and religious evangelists. He further said Adeniyi wrote off the western education introduced by missionaries, as being primarily aimed at converting people. Adeniyi was of the opinion that the mode of preaching, used by Christian evangelists, as well as the offensive use of the mass media are responsible for discord among the adherent of religious in Nigeria. Furthermore, religious violence does result to loss of lives, properties worth million, and farmland, some people whose medium of livelihood has been destroyed might involve themselves on illicit businesses such as armed robbery, hooliganism, prostitution and unethical behavior.

VI. Religion Education a Tools Toward Peaceful Co-Existence

The value and virtues of religion is peace; every religion advocates understand that peaceful co-existence in non-negotiable. In Christianity Jesus Christ is known and referred to as the prince of peace. He taught, commanded and demonstrated the significance of peace and "his is name will be called wonderful, counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace." Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry, he demonstrated his to love and maintained peace with all men. Despite stiff opposition from the Pharisees and religious leaders, he never said any rude or insulting word to them.

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Islam also calls for the quest for peace, tolerance and kindness which is a state of physical, mental, spiritual and social harmony. Other virtues of Islam are that Muslims were urged to imbibe the spirit of kindness and forgiveness. (Q3:124) and further enjoined to live in harmony and peace with fellow human beings, repel evil with that which is better and show perseverance with patience (Q 3: 200). Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) can be seen vividly when there was famine in Mecca and he helped them despite the fact that they had driven him out of his home. Similarly, after the conquest of Mecca, the people of Mecca expected Prophet Muhammad (SAW) either executes to them in retaliation, take them as slaves or at least confiscate their properties and belongings. They were extremely worried and wondered what declaration he was going to make at his historic occasion. However, he began his address by saying to the pagans of Mecca, "Today there will be no blame on you for anything and no one will harm you in anyway" Such example of rear nobility and humanness is rear in human history. These are the type of behavior expected from Muslims, as exemplified by the Prophet of Islam. In fact, there are several examples of this nature in the life of the Holy prophet. If this is what the Bible and the Quran teaches then the adherent needs to be educated, every human should understand the dignity and sanctity of lives.

VII. Conclusion

The role Religious Education as a Tool Towards Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized, however much needs to be done in that the society is eager in looking for a peaceful society we all are clamoring for, religion is like a knife, it can be useful in the kitchen and also harmful so we need proper and structured religious education in other to enjoyed the peace and harmonious relationship which will champion our society for the better tomorrow.

VIII. Recommendation

1. Religion as a subject should be made compulsory for students at alllevels of the educational system right from the primary up to the tertiary level. Cleric, Imam, and traditionalist should uphold the tenet and teach moral values in their respective places of worship.
2. The non-Governmental organizations should organised symposium, workshop and create awareness in upholding religious morals in the society.
3. The teachers of religious education at all levels of Nigerian educational system should be consistent in promoting morality and ethical values while imparting religious knowledge on students.
4. The students should be encouraged to demonstrate such moral values in their day to day dealings or affairs with other fellow men.
5. Religious leaders, in and outside government circles, should serve as good ambassadors of Religions by demonstrating ethical values of kindness, tolerance, forgiveness, and consideration for others in all circumstances.
6. It is pertinent now for a conscious attempt to re-read re-examine and re-interprets the Holy Scriptures, and religions doctrines to make them more meaningful toward establishing an egalitarian society, where all people will be at peace with each other.
7. The Religious Teachers should preach and teach the word of God in its true meaning to the students.
8. Religious students themselves should not use their own cultural and historical background to condemn and seek to destroy other religions arising from a different cultural and historical setting.
9. And on a final note All obstacles that may hinder practical implementation of the moral values taught through religious Education should be removed.

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