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Review Paper

Peace Education, Religion and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: A Review

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ABSTRACT

It can be observed that religion conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria have given the citizens a cause for deep concern. One may ask why religion which is supposed to be a unifying factor suddenly turned to an instrument of conflict in Nigeria. Can this be as a result of inadequate peace education? Presently, religious violence and conflicts did not end with loss of lives and properties but its attendance effects on peaceful co-existence, political and economic upheaval of different kinds. In all these, religious organizations have failed to maintain at least a minimum level of social cohesion. One wonders if peace education is preached in all these religious houses. This is because in the most recent times, conflict has become a predominant phenomenon and efforts to arrive at fruitful solutions remain a mirage even with the teaching of various beliefs and practices. As these religious crises linger on, suspicion becomes the order of the day especially among the adherents of Christianity and Islam in country. On this note, this paper through the method of philosophical analysis focuses on peace and peace education, it also examines the teaching of the two predominant religions in Nigeria on peace and as well dwells on the issues relating to religion and conflict in Nigeria. Based on the research aspects what are the findings. This paper therefore discovers that the spate of insecurity has breed suspicion among Nigerians and citizens appears predisposed to self-defence when violence and insecurity is encountered. Finally, the paper justifies how peace education can be used to reduce conflicts generated by religion.

Introduction

One would expect religion to be an instrument of peace education but in Nigeria reverse appears to be the case. This is based on the crises generated by religious practices and beliefs. Pope Francis in his world day of peace message said “no peace without a culture of care” (Francis, 2021). The implication of this for Nigeria is that conflicts persist because people lack the culture of care for one another. A culture of care advances path of harmony, justice and peace among all the citizens of the nation. Peace as a value is great and precious, the object of hope and aspiration of the entire human race. As a human attitude, our hope for peace is marked by an existential tension that makes it possible for the present, with all its difficulties, to be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can sure of this goal and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of journey of peace.

The terrible internal conflict in Nigeria often aggravate by ruthless religious acts of violence have a devastating effect on lives and properties of citizens. Every threatening of situations feeds mistrust and leads people to withdraw into their own safety zone. Mistrust and fear weaken relationships and increase the risk of violence, creating an atmosphere that never leads to a relationship of peace. In the name of religion, Nigeria for example has turned into a battle ground where people live in fear. It is pathetic that the clerics who are supposed to preach peace are now the messengers of violence in the name of self defence. Ines (2020) reported how bishops called for self defence against bandits in every guise in view of serious doubts on the willingness and capability of Nigeria’s security outfits to rise up to their constitutional responsibility. In reaction to the above message, the federal government vehemently frown at this that is it condemnable for religious leaders to speak out in this manner. Also, Ifeanyi (2020) opposed how Zamfara monarch who doubles as both religious and political leaders condemned peace accord, advocated weapons for everyone for self defence. This situation is worrisome and calls for individual, religion organisations and political leaders to preach and embrace peace since no development can be achieved in an atmosphere of rancour.

The concept of peace

The word peace is an all-embracing concept and it is as old as mankind. This is because the word has been in existence in all spheres of human life since the inception of the world. In recent past, Nigeria has been experiencing crises despite the colossal amount of human and material resources expended on global peace by the United Nations and as well by the government of Nigeria, rather than reduction in crises in spite of the several steps taken, it is becoming more violent and destructive. The term

“peace” originates from the French word “Pes” meaning reconciliation, silence, agreement among others. The Latin “pax” is equally translated to ‘pes’ meaning tranquillity, peace, agreement, treaty of peace, compact, absence of harmony, hostility. However, peace connotes freedom from or absence of noise, disturbance, or disorder, quietness or calm or state of enjoying rest of mind where law and order are of less importance as it was in the Nigerian traditional societies.

According to Encarta (2006) seven significant meanings of peace are enumerated as follows;

- a. The end state of war.
- b. A state of mental calm, serenity, devoid of anxiety.
- c. Tranquility: a quite calm state, free from disturbance
- d. A treaty agreeing to end hostility
- e. A state of harmony, free from conflict or disagreement.
- f. Law and order; stable, devoid of violence crime and other forms of disturbance
- g. Freedom from war.

The analysis of peace given by Encarta is all encompassing, that is, it moves from individual point of view to global or interpersonal international dimension. Wikipedia (2007) corroborates it by viewing peace as the absence of crisis and the enjoyment of justice by all and sundry in a particular environment.

Considering the definition of Advanced Learner Dictionary (2010), peace is portrayed as an individual issues and matter of mind, for examples, peace is a condition or a period of time in which there is absence of crisis, a state of harmony where people live together without rancour. In the same vein, peace is explained as an occurrence of calmness characterized by lack of war, commonly understood as absence of hatred and retribution like what Nigerian citizens are experiencing currently. This is because the level of violence, hostility and retribution is becoming high. The Northern perceive the Southern as enemies hence resulting in a serious crisis.

The Concept of Peace Education

Peace education is the process of acquiring the knowledge, the values, and developing the skills, attitudes, and behaviours to live in unity and love with oneself, with fellowmen, and with national environment. Ban ki-moon, former United Nations’ secretary dedicated international day of peace 2013 to peace education, this was in an effort to redirect minds and financing on the pre-eminence of peace education as an instrument to bring about a culture of peace and love globally. Also, Matsuura, former Director- General UNESCO has identified peace education as of fundamental importance to the vision of UNESCO and United Nation (Matsuura,2008).Peace education as a right is something which is now increasingly emphasized by peace researchers.

Ian and Synoh (2002) maintained that peace education is a service of teaching encounters that bring out from people;

- ❖ Non-violent means of managing crisis
- ❖ Their desire for peace and love
- ❖ Skills for logical analysis of fundamental arrangements that produce and legitimize inequality and injustice.

Rage (2008) opined that peace education should be considered as a commitment to peace as a settled disposition and encouraging the zeal in the individual as an individual agent of peace; as informing the student on the outcome of war and social injustices; as teaching the student on the worthwhile of peaceful and just social structures and working to develop and sustain such social structures; as encouraging the student to love the world and imagine a peaceful future; and as catering for the student and encouraging the student to care for others.

Peace education activities develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes that will assist individual either to prevent the occurrence of crisis, resolve crises peacefully, or create environment conducive to peace. Core values of nonviolence and social justice are central to peace education. Nonviolence is made know through worthwhile behaviours such as respect for the right of other people, love and honesty. We can realise social justice by principles of freedom, care, responsibility, and harmony. To achieve these laudable ideals, peace education programmes across the world has addressed a wide range of themes which include fairness, conflict resolution strategy, freedom and democracy, love, justice. gender equality, respect for human rights, environmental responsibility, inter personal and harmonious relationship, international cooperation and religious tolerance. Peace education can be rendered to people of all ages, both formal and informal settings. Programmes exist at local, national and international levels, and in terms of peace, conflict, and post-conflict to create public dialogue, different factions of society are often brought together in peace education programmes-these typically include civil society groups, schools, tribal and religious leaders. Yet due to the many areas covered by peace education, initiatives are primarily determined by culture and context, as well as by the projects’ scopes and objectives.

Often, the theory or philosophy of peace education has been assumed and not articulated. Galtung(1981) suggested that no theory of peace education existed and that there was clearly an urgent need for such theory. More recently, there have been attempts to establish such a theory, notable philosopher like Calleja(1991) has suggested that a philosophical basis for peace education might be located in the Kantian notion of duty. This is the central philosophical concept in the deontological moral; philosophy that morality of an action should be based on whether the action itself is right or wrong under a series of rules, rather than based on the consequences of the action. It is sometimes described as duty, obligation or rule based ethics because rules bind one to one’s duty. Deontology has been criticized for failing to resolve conflicts between two moral duties. One of these is decision either to lie or to keep one from harm. How can a person choose between those two moral duties? A popular response is to choose the lesser among

the two evils but means relying on which of the two has the least evil consequences. Therefore, the choice is being made on a consequentialist rather than a deontological basis. Some critics argued that deontological moral systems are, in fact, consequentialist moral systems in disguise. This is because, duties and obligations put forward by the deontologists are those demonstrated to have the best consequences. Also, one can ask, which duties qualify as those which we should follow, regardless of the consequences? This is in the sense that duties adjudged to have been valid in 18th century might not be valid today. How can we know which one to abandon or to follow? Deontological ethics is commonly contrasted to consequentialism, virtue ethics and pragmatic ethics. In this terminology, action is more important than the consequence.

Religion and Peace in Nigeria

The negative manifestation of religion as a source of conflict in Nigerian society is a Negation. The powers of religion as a resource for peace rest on theological foundations. It should be said that monotheistic religions promote exclusivism to the extent that violence is promoted in the name of God. One can say this is in variance with the theological injunction that sees God as God of peace. Religion has potential to solve social and political conflicts and to build peace. Different religions have different beliefs about God, and their influence on the achievement of peace. The three major religions in Nigeria are Islam, Christianity and Africa traditional religion with certain common beliefs, which can serve as basis for common action for peaceful approach to conflict situations. Identifying and stressing the importance of such ideas and by giving them new layers of meaning can do this. Each of these religions has a belief in a supreme being, creator of the universe and father of all mankind. God has established some moral order in the universe, which if allowed will enhance peace in human relationships. The re-interpretation of these religious ideas and education is the responsibility of religious leader.

All religions of the world embraced three basic elements namely, God, man and society. God is the subject of all religions while man is the object. That is to say, God is the one that we all worship and revere. This makes all human beings members of one human family. Christians for instance acknowledge the fatherhood of God and pray that God should cause the peaceful atmospheres that characterize heaven to prevail on earth. In Isaiah, one can see how Jesus is addressed as the prince of peace. Gospel of Luke attested to this, Zechariah celebrated his son, John, by saying you shall go before the lord in order to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the remission of their transgression, because of the tender mercy of our almighty God by which you will be visited from on high and to shine on those who sit in dark and shadow of death, to guide their feet into the path of peace (Luke 1:77). Similarly, Muslims believe and teach that Allah is the creator and guardians of all things. Also, the religion reveals a real picture of the impacts of Islamic education on the development of peaceful masses and harmonious environment. Islam is all about peace, as we have it in Traditional religion.

The belief in retribution in the hereafter is a strong religious teaching that has strong theological base for peace building in Nigeria. The beliefs that certain wrongs will be righted in the next life ought to reduce the risks of violent conflicts. According to Christian teachings, a person is not to take revenge for any wrong done to him/her but to leave things to God who is avenger (Romans 12:19). In Muslim circle, the word "Islam" means peace and submission to Allah. It implies that Muslim should be lovers of peace. If the adherents of both Christianity and Islam would practice what the two religions teach, these issues of incessant crises generated by religion may be completely resolved.

Religion and Conflicts in Nigeria

One of the negative features of religion is that it is always the source of conflict most especially when comparison is made between Christianity and Islamic religion in Nigeria. Experience in Nigeria has shown that religion could be a source of conflict, and conflict produces lawlessness, disorder, insecurity and instability in the society. Conflict here may be described as a conscious pursuit of exclusive values. A conflict arises from a situation where two or more persons try to possess one and the same object, occupy the same space or uphold incompatible goals. As a result of these unhealthy rivalries, the parties involved gradually become self-conscious rivals, opponents or enemies. This may disintegrate into religious intolerance and fanaticism (Odunde, 2012)

Moreover, it is felt that the insistence by a given religion that its members have undiluted possession of goodness, knowledge, truth and salvation is fanaticism. A fanatic thrives on the view of opponent. According to Hornby cited by Oduwole and Fadeyi (2013), a fanatic is someone who is too enthusiastic about some cause. Religion fanaticism is a violent and unreasonable religious enthusiasm. It is disheartening that religion which primary function is to bring people together in peace and unity has caused so much conflicts and wars leading to untold destruction of lives and properties in the society. The tendency is to an architect of religious intolerance and formation of violent groups which have caused a lot of conflicts in Nigerian society. Many factors are responsible for this religious fanaticism and insecurity in the society among which one religious organisation will claim to knowledge of eternal truth and salvation, are religion itself, differences in interpretation of the doctrine within religions, aggressive, the claim to monopoly of religious truth and practice which is the tendency of the members of one religious organisation to ignore whatever truth that are contained in other religious groups.

In the Northern states of Nigeria for instance, religion seems to have been associated more with conflicts than peaceful co-existence. There are lots of rivalries that have made Nigerians from the south to perceive northern region as a warring zone. In this part of the country, it appears religion has literally been privatized. Consequently, a new space for religious ideologies has manifested itself in fundamental antagonism especially between Christianity and Islam. This resulted in more tension in political and religious relationship in the country. The age long Arab/ Israel conflicts, Fulani/herdsmen conflict in mid-western region of Nigeria and the recent crisis in Ethiopia where 76 people were killed is traced to differences in religious beliefs. In Lebanon, one finds Muslims warring against Christians. In Ireland, the education is that of intra-religious ideologies which have helped to fuel racial and political tension. The obvious result has been the protracted civil war between the Muslim north and Christian south.

The truth about above examples is that, the people involved in the crisis have not enjoyed peace. Thousands of human and material resources have perished and development has been greatly crippled. Ozurba (2002) argued that aggression, hostility, brutality, among others, have mostly marked men's religious behaviour. It is a fact that the church tortured and even killed some of her own adherents who were condemned for heresy or apostasy in the 15th and 16th century. The holy war conducted by Christians against Muslims during the middle-ages are best known to us as Crusades. The propagation of Islamic Religion was occasionally been done through religious war called Jihads, replica of what we are encountering in Nigerian society presently. It is of paramount importance to say at this junction that contemporary society has witnessed and is still witnessing a lot of religious, ethnics, political wars and riots and one can say that the only antidote to all these crises is peace education.

Presently, Nigeria is faced with a lot of challenges such as ethnic, religious, youth violent acts which have punctuated the political process and rendered extremely fragile the security of lives and properties. Violence is becoming a characteristic hallmark of group relations in the country (John, 2010). Formation of militias and different violent groups become the order of the day, youths in Nigeria currently embark on range of violent activities in a bid to sustain their livelihood (Olokooba 2013). This situation has produced heroes in the content of political thug, assassination, militancy and ethnic massacre (Akeem, 2010) some of the unemployed and even uncritical youth have gravitated into religious extremism with networks spreading through Africa and Saudi Arabia for the adherents of Islam and to America and Europe Christian fundamentalist groups.

Nigeria's enormous endowments of natural and human resources are never being doubted but challenges confronting her economy today are diverse and enormous. While in fact, Asian countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia, with similar colonial heritage, attributes and natural resources have recorded significant success in the development of their economies. Nigeria is yet to stand their level of development. In the southern part of Nigeria, where there are little religious crises, one can say due to uneven distribution of oil revenue, the south-south part of Nigeria is constantly facing crises. Cases of oil pipe vandalism, kidnapping and arm robberies become ways of life (Odalonu, 2015). In the north too, the Islamic fundamentalists - Boko Haram sect kills at will. Up till now, according to Nina (2020) the actual location of the remaining 112 out of 276 kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls on the night of 14th -15th April, 2014 from their school in Chibok Local Government of Borno State remains a mirage. In the west, the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) is tormenting the populace under the pretence of securing the people. Cases were reported in 2018 in Lagos, Ikorodu area where residents were killed for months in the mid-night by some self-acclaimed members of Oodua People's Congress for ritual purposes (Adejoh & Ajayi, 2020). Although, there may be other reasons for all these conflicts, but the common reason usually given is the inability of Nigeria government to enhance religious tolerance. Religious crisis is taking a new dimension. Recently, Timi (2021) as reported in the Nation newspaper asked the federal government of Nigeria to order the release of a leader of an Islamic sect, El-Zahkyzaky to avoid more bloodshed. El-Zahkyzaky was arrested for inciting statement which led to the lost of live and properties during a protest organized.

Nigeria is a complex state with different religions like Christianity, Islamic and traditional. One can observe that there is little or no conflict generated by the adherents of traditional religion in Nigeria. A day hardly passes without a crisis generated either by the Christians or the Islam. Peace education can be viewed as the only panacea to resolve all these unwanted conflicts. Education is very essential for building peaceful societies and global citizens. To achieve this particularly in Nigeria, those in governance must have interest by investing in schools and teachers that will build a just society that embraces diversity. Education starting from primary schools must teach dignity of human right, peaceful co-existence and respect for fellowmen. Every child in Nigeria should know his right; learn his history and that of other cultures and origins. This assertion is collaborated by Bokowa (2013) in his speech at the international day of peace that peace education will help the pupils to understand the equal dignity of cultures and draw lessons from the crimes and violence of the past. Every citizen in Nigeria deserves to receive quality education and learn the values that will help him to see himself as part of a peaceful Nigerian society.

Peace education can be effective in strengthening religious practices that will be devoid of preaching hatred, violence and discord as one can observe these as common practice in Nigerian religious organisations. This assertion is corroborated by Ushe (2015) that religious education whether Christianity, Islamic or traditional should encourage fairness, honesty, peaceful co-existence, contentment love and unity which are actual virtues of peace and security. The religious education in schools can tailor the teaching of national peace and security into the curricular for the promotion of promotion of love and unity. Thus, the teaching of courses like peace studies and conflict resolution will have a religious background. Nevertheless, the efforts of preventing conflicts through peace education may not be effective if political office holders failed to imbibe the basic tenets of religion which are love, peace and unity. Leaders of religions in Nigeria are charged to embrace teaching of the peace education for nothing else but for the fact that God is a God of peace and that nothing can be achieved in the atmosphere of rancour.

Peace education should encourage dialogue and cooperation among the various ethnic groups tribes and religions. Nigeria can be classified as a society with the features of pluralism. A pluralistic society is one in which people of diverse ethnic cultural, historical origin or different philosophical, religious and political persuasions live together in one body politic. For a harmonious co-existence, a pluralistic society strive to ensure through peace education that every man, no matter his origin or belief is allowed to exercise his ultimate loyalty in action the way he deems fit limited by good order and health of society. Ibrahim (2018) submitted that to organised effective peace education in Nigeria, there must be cooperation and continuous dialogue among the different religious groups.

Conclusion

To attain a sustainable peace, Nigerian government should give credence to traditional education that will impact in all her citizens the knowledge and essence of peaceful co-existence at all level of educational system either formal or informal. This is because Nigeria is a culturally diverse nation that has experienced ethnic uprising from such diversity. There is a way one can

even state that each of the tribe belong to difference races, religions and institutions to the extent that there are different approaches to how social order and stability are maintained, most importantly in traditional periods. Of course, the task of doing this lies in the hands of the traditional rulers and the chiefs where the subject must respect with unquestionable obedience the orders from above. Peace education should embrace cross-cultural understanding among the ethnic groups to strengthen national unity and integration.

Apart from the peace education given, those in the positions of authority in Nigeria should make provision to empower all the jobless youths the adage says “an idle hand is a devil workshop” elementary education should be made compulsory to prevent the under age from being used as political tools to torment crises in the land. Religious leaders should be encouraged to preach peaceful co-existence among Nigerians wherever they find themselves in the country. Finally, peace education should be introduced along with moral and religious education into all our national education curriculum right from primary level for the students to know the effects of crimes.

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