

Preaching Peace and Living Peacefully in Northern Nigeria: Bridging the gap between Theory and Practice

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Abstract

Since the 1980's Northern Nigeria has been engulfed in a cycle of ethno-religious violence. This therefore has trapped the region in different vices and development seems to have been stalled or moving at a very slow pace. Northern Nigeria is said to be predominantly Muslims, but with a large significant population of Christians. Islam and Christianity is known to preach peace worldwide, so also in the region, but this now seems to be doubtful because of the series of ethno-religious and inter-religious violence that has engulfed the region. It is therefore against this background that this paper interrogates the perspectives of Islam and Christianity respectively, in preaching and living peacefully with non adherents of their faith. The paper finally establishes that there is a disconnection between preaching peace (which is theory) and living peacefully (which is practice) in the region and that there is need to balance theory and practice to establish a just and positive peace.

Keywords: Peace, Northern Nigeria, Islam, Christianity, Ethno-religious and Inter-religious Violence

Introduction

"Without forgiveness today, there wouldn't be peace tomorrow" Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Peace is a universal phenomenon that everyone desires and wishes to enjoy endlessly. Traditions, cultures, religions and societies do have different prescriptions to attaining and enjoying peace. Whenever and wherever there is peace there tends to be development and longevity is enjoyed. To this end, Islam and Christianity which are the predominant religions in the world today teaches peace and encourages all adherents to the respective faiths to pursue peace and live peacefully with one another. The above statement now seems to be questionable with the rise of intra, inter and ethno-religious conflicts in the world. While most Arab and some European countries are faced with intra-religious conflicts, an African country like Nigeria is faced with both intra and inter-religious conflicts. Nigeria, which is popularly known as Africa's most populous black nation with a population of now about 170 million people, with more than 250 ethnic groups has Christianity and Islam as its predominant religions, though there is still in existence the African Traditional Religion (ATR). Before the advent of colonialism, majority of Nigerians followed African Traditional Religion even though Islam had started coming into the country from the northern axis and Christianity coming from the southern axis. The movements of the religions in the country had made it so that the northerners are seen as predominantly Muslims and the southerners predominantly Christians, while the middle belt of the country seems to be the dividing line for the two religions, having most of the middle belt states (Niger, Plateau, Nassarawa, Benue, Kogi and Kwara) to be an almost 50 percent Christians and 50 percent Muslims. Most internal conflicts in Nigeria, especially in northern Nigeria have always been religious or have religious undertones, and as such has placed the region in a sort of trap of recycling conflicts with reprisal attacks on almost a monthly basis, as there is virtually no month that passes without the newspapers reporting one form of attack or the other.

In Northern Nigeria today, because of its past experiences of ethno-religious and inter-religious violence, many people are now skeptical and view each party's religion in a negative light.

While many Muslims view Christianity as an insensitive, worldly and intolerant religion, many Christians view Islam in a negative light as well, many Christians view Islam as a blood thirsty and violent religion that tries to impose its religious doctrines on other groups. These different views have set both religious groups against each other in the region. Therefore, whatever anyone does is judged in the light of religious tenets. The negative effects of these are that development and politics are religiousized. The last presidential elections in the country in 2011 confirms this argument as the region was the only part of the country that was engulfed in violence and the victims were largely Christians and other non Islamic groups, though a portion of the Muslim population in the north were affected but research and scholars have argued that the Muslims that were affected were either those who voted for the Christian candidate's party (PDP) or those who were viewed as corrupt (Halilu, 2012). Ever since then the region witnessed the rise of an Islamic militant group (Boko Haram) that has caused more havoc than any other militant group in the country at large. The group had called for the departure of Christians from the north and that the serving president of the country converts to Islam (Onuoha 2012). This in turn deepens the negative views, if Islam truly preaches peace or not and if the religion actually accommodates other religions or not. This paper therefore interrogates the perspective of Islam and Christianity in preaching and living peacefully with non adherents of their faith. It also seeks to interrogate reasons why the northern region is yet to overcome and shun violence completely. The paper finally establishes a disconnection between preaching peace (which is theory) and living peacefully (which is practice) in the region. There is need to then balance theory and practice to establish a just and to a large extent positive peace in the region, noting that except the truth is faced squarely, the region will continue to wallow in the conundrum of conflicts which Paul Collier (2007) considers a trap.

Perspectives of Peace from Christianity and Islam

Islam

Contrary to stereotypes on Islam, Abu-Nimer (cited in USIP Special Report, 2002) stated that Islam advocates numerous non violent and peacebuilding values and expects Muslims to live by them. These values are supported by the Quran and the Hadith (the Prophet's sayings). One of these values is the duty to pursue justice (Quran 5:8). Another is the necessity of doing good by struggling against oppression and helping those who are in need. The third of such value is that all humans are God's creation, have sacred lives, and thus are all equal (Quran 7:11). Islam grants no special privileges based on race, ethnicity, or tribal affiliation. Moreover, all Muslims are to respect and preserve human life (Quran 5:32). Islam also calls for the quest for peace, which is a state of physical, mental, spiritual, and social harmony (Quran 5:64). Other verses stress the importance of tolerance and kindness to other people (Quran 16:90). In fact, the Arabic meaning of the word Islam itself connotes peace. Another virtue in Islam is forgiveness (Quran 23:96). Muslims are urged to live in harmony and peace with all fellow humans (USIP Special Report 2002).

In giving his own views on Islam, Fetthulah (2004), notes that Islam is a religion of security, safety, and peace. He added that when Muslims stand to pray, they cut their connection with this world, turning to their Lord in faith and obedience, and standing at attention in His presence, completing the prayer, as if they were returning back to life, they greet those on their right and left by wishing peace: "Remain safe and in peace." With a wish for safety and security, peace and contentment, they return to the ordinary world once again. Also greeting and wishing safety and security for others is considered one of the most beneficial acts in Islam. He also noted that when the Prophet was asked which act in Islam is the most beneficial, the Prophet replied, "Feeding others and greeting those you know and those you do not know." This depicts that Muslims are enjoined to live peacefully with one another. It is however unfortunate that Islam, which is based on this understanding and spirit (of peace and tolerance), is shown by some circles to be synonymous with violence and terrorism. If one were to seek the true face of Islam in its own sources, history, and true representatives, then one would discover that it contains no harshness, cruelty, or fanaticism or even terrorism. It is a religion of forgiveness, pardon, and tolerance (Fetthulah 2004).

Despite these ideals set out for Muslims, various societal forces pose obstacles to their implementation, Abu-Nimer noted (cited in USIP Special Report 2002). Among these are the cooption of religious leaders by governments, which leads to a lack of trust and credibility in religious leadership. Other challenges include corruption, patriarchal social structures, rigid social hierarchies, economic dependence on the West and the sense of helplessness it engenders, and the humiliation generated by such confrontations as the Arab - Israeli conflict. Islam does not fully advocate pacifism, Professor Muqtedar Khan (cited in USIP Special Report 2002) stated. Islam does permit the use of force.

But the theory of jihad, which means “struggle in the path of God,” forbids violence except:

- 1) When Muslims are not allowed to practice their faith, that is, when freedom of religion is threatened;
- 2) When people are oppressed and subjugated; and
- 3) When people’s land is forcibly taken from them. In these situations Islam allows a range of responses.
- 4) One can forgive the oppressor or one can respond with force.

Khan noted that there are Qur’anic sources encouraging both positions. The Quran states, “And slay them wherever you find them, and drive them out of the places from where they drove you out, for persecution is worse than killing” (2:191). But the Qur’an also states, “Tell those who disbelieve that if they cease persecution of believers that which is past will be forgiven them” (8:38). Khan went on to say that there is no hierarchy of verses in the Quran. Those who privilege the first verse over the second will wage war to fight injustice. And most militant Muslims invoke this verse in the defense of their actions. But then there are Muslims who privilege the second verse and seek a diplomatic end to persecution and urge forgiveness. These two verses are exemplary of the tension between realism and idealism in Islam. But in the final analysis Islam is what Muslims make of it (cited in USIP special report 2002).

Christianity

Christianity as a word means followers of Christ or Christ like. Christians therefore are those who follow and act the teaching of Christ in all ways of life. One of the climaxes of Christianity or Christian virtue is peace. Christians are enjoined in the Bible to embrace and live peacefully with their neighbors’. The following scriptures confirm this:

Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it (Psalm 34 vs 14).

Blessed are the Peace makers for they shall be called the children of God (Matthew 5 vs 9).

Let him eschew evil and do good; let him seek peace and ensue it (1 Peter 3 vs 11).

Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12 vs 14)

If it be possible, as much as it lieth in you, live peaceably with all men (Rom 12 vs 18)

The word Peace in Christianity is translated from the Hebrew word ‘Shalom’, which is a key word in the Bible and its at the center of how God wants us to live on earth. One of the key things Jesus came to give humanity is Peace and expects us to live in peace as cited in the scriptural verses above. Peace was not only what Jesus taught but He also lived it, this in most cases is what scholars call pacifism, as Jesus never taught violence, even at his arrest by the Pharisees and one of his disciples struck the ears of the priest, Jesus rebuked the disciple and said that “those who live by the sword shall die by the sword” (Mathew 26:52, NKJV). In another place Jesus taught the people not to retaliate any evil done to them as it used to be, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, if one should strike you on the right cheek, turn the left cheek (Mathew 5:38-39, NKJV) but now to always forgive those that offend them and he charged them to forgive their neighbors even seventy times seven (Matthew 18:22, KJV). According to Markham (undated) the act of non retaliation as taught by Jesus helps to absorb violence instead of escalating it, hence every cycle of violence provoking revenge, which in turn provokes more violence is broken by the simple act of tolerating the violence and avoiding retaliation. These are some of the basis that form the post new statement church or Christians, as this was also potrayed in the lives of the first apostles in the Bible (the book of Acts of the Apostles).

Islam and Christianity become misrepresented when practitioners of these religions live outside the true teachings of their faith and also when they misinterpret certain verses of the holy books to suite their own selfish interest, especially in terms of justifying exploitation and violence as evidenced in northern Nigeria.

Relationship with non Adherents of Their Faith

Both Islam and Christianity calls for and teaches tolerance and accommodation. Suppression of cultural diversity in the name of a religion is described as a wrong practice that leads Muslims away from the right teaching of Islam that considers tolerance towards other religions, since Islam states there is no compulsion in religion, but as noted by Jok (2012) there is something wrong with those that practice the religion (people) and not the religion (Islam). This indicates that there is a misrepresentation somewhere from those who practice the religion.

Since God is a God of varieties, El-Seoudi (2012) notes that Allah the Almighty decreed according to His will and wisdom, to create man as a unique creature distinguished with ability of choice.

So Allah decreed that people are to be divided into Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus, difference of people concerning religion is a decree of Allah. He further went on to add that Islam guarantees the following to non Muslims:

- Guaranteeing the freedom of belief
- Guaranteeing the safety of the places of worship
- Guaranteeing the freedom of practicing worship
- Guaranteeing good relationship and kind treatment
- Guaranteeing justice in dealing with them and protecting them from oppression
- Guaranteeing the social solidarity

In his research on the '*rights of non-Muslims in the Muslim Society*,' El-Seoudi (2012) notes that non-Muslims living in Islamic countries enjoy the above rights, guarantees and are at peace with Muslims as enshrined in the Holy Qur'an and the Hadiths of the Prophet. This is however not the case in northern Nigeria which is the focus of this paper. The above study therefore shows that there is a disconnection between theory and practice in northern Nigeria.

Factors Militating against the Peace in Northern Nigeria

We have only chosen to divide ourselves by sentiments and beliefs that are not in line with God's intents and plans for man. We are all created by the same Almighty God to be nice to one another. Whichever way we choose to serve God, the underlining factor that binds us all as Nigerians and human beings is love. Aregbesola, 2013

Since both Islam and Christianity preach peace and have peace as one fundamental attribute, why then do we have so much chaos in northern Nigeria; why does it seem an almost impossible situation to resolve. A multi-dimensional approach will be taken in answering the above questions raised. Starting from the colonial formation of Nigeria, the post colonial formations and other vices that naturally creped in because of the social structure and formation of the country and region.

The colonial formation of Nigeria: Prior to the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914 by the then Governor General (Lord Federick Lugard) of what is now called Nigeria. The north and the south were different entities (politically, economically and even religiously). The northern protectorate prior to the amalgamation was to a large extent ruled by the Sokoto caliphate which was established in 1804 but was conquered by the British colonial masters in 1903 but for cheap and easy administration of colonialism the colonial masters re-enforced the authority of the caliphate and other emirate structures in the region.

The Sokoto caliphate as stated above was established in 1804 after the Uthman Danfodio Islamic jihad, the jihad was a form of purifying Islam in the parts of the region that were considered to be practicing both Islam and paganism (the traditional customs of the native people), hence the conquering of kings and kingdoms to establish emirates (headed by emirs) in the places (especially conquered) and then the caliphate in Sokoto (headed by the Sultan) which served as the headquarters of the region and the purified Islam. This marked a turning point in the northern region. As result therefore, when the colonial masters came to the region, it was easy to re-enforce their administration through the emirs with the adoption of the divide and rule tactics as employed by the colonial masters. This divide and rule tactics therefore brought other ethnic identities who were not under the emirate system under them, hence the beginning of another form of colonialism and the beginning of subjugation of other ethnic groups who are now tagged '*minorities*' and the Fulani/Hausa emirate system as '*majorities*'. The crisis group report (2010) also concurred that colonial rule facilitated the domination of Hausa Fulani elites, especially in areas that minority groups had historically considered their exclusive domains and sowed the seeds for conflict claims to political space, economic rights and societal values. This has had long lasting effects on the socio-political formation, activities and the struggle for identity in the region.

It should therefore be appreciated that not all of the northern region were conquered by the Usman Danfodio led jihad, Bornu (north east Nigeria) had long before the jihad a flourishing empire and also had Islam as its religion. Other ethnic groups that exist in the region though during the pre-colonial and colonial era were what anthropologist call stateless societies (such as the Zar (popularly called Sayawa), Jarawa, Ngas, Tarok, Zuru, and others). This also made it easy for the colonial masters to subsume them under the established emirate system.

The point here is not to discuss much of history but to bring out the salient points that have reshaped the region into what it has become today. The north which was once peaceful and the economic strong hold of the country have now become a shadow of itself due to these salient points.

The first salient point is misrepresentation of the region by many (both within and outside the country) calling the north, the Hausa-Fulani north or the categorization of all northerners as Hausas/Muslims. This misrepresentation has brought a lot of problems to the region. Because of this generalization many forget that there are other ethnic groups in the region with distinct identities from the Hausas or Hausa-Fulanis and this of course continues to portray the Hausa-Fulani hegemony as the dominant group in the region knowing fully well that part of the reason why the group looks very large is because one can become a Hausa person by adoption or conversion to Islam, although in doing so, one enters at the bottom rung of a highly stratified society (Crisis Group Report 2010:6). This point is clearly evident in the misrepresenting of people who bear certain names and are concluded that they are Hausas, names such as: Abdulkareem Mohammed. A Yoruba Muslim could bear such a name but its easier to conclude that the person is Hausa and not just a Muslim, or a person bearing Thomas Richard is easily considered a Christian from the southern part of the country than considered a northern Christian. At this point one can see that the misrepresentation of the region has also led to ethnicity of religion and could also explain why the 2011 Presidential post election violence took a religious form than just a political form.

The second salient point is enforcement of the emirate system on other ethnic groups, making them to become minority groups in the region. Unlike what it used to be before the Usman Dan Fodio Jihad, many Hausa kingdoms operated largely on its cultural system having a King or Chief (Sarki in Hausa) as its political head but in its new emirate system the Emir is both a political and Spiritual leader and commander. This has also gone a long way to reshape and redefine inter-ethnic relationship amongst the different ethnic groups. While the emirate system may well accommodate other ethnic groups that have Muslim majorities (since the Islam religion is almost synonymous with the Hausa-Fulani hegemony), it may not be for other ethnic groups that have other wise, which is evident amongst the Zuru people in Kebbi state and Jarawa people of Bauchi state who are largely Muslims but a distinct ethnic group from the Hausa-Fulani, hence for such a people the emirate system may work almost perfectly well for them, except for restriction of practicing certain cultural rights. Other ethnic groups that were also subsumed under the emirate system like the Zar people of Bauchi state have been in conflict with the Hausa-Fulani emirate system since colonialism, not because of the religion but because of its distinctiveness in culture and tradition from the Hausas. In many cases of ethno-religious violence in the northern region its very easy to examine it from a religious point of view because of the people participating in the act but when examined from another view, it can be seen that access to political and economic power are factors that fuel the conflicts. Traditional rulers in Nigeria enjoy certain rights and privileges from the government and this in turn makes every ruler want to dominate and be in controls

The third point is the religiousization of politics in the region. Apart from instrumentalizing ethnicity in northern politics, religion has also been politicized and politics has been religiousized. The interplay of religion and politics, politics and religion is immeasurable. This is even evident in the executing of developmental projects in a state. Once a political office holder decides to execute a project in an area, it is seen or assessed in the light of religious or ethno-religious affiliation of the people in that area of execution. Many times favoritism of a religious group over the other divides those religious group the more and this in turn makes all religious group to desire to be in control of power. This partly explains why the 2011 post Presidential election violence took more of a religious dimension than a political dimension. Also Islam teaches accommodating those from different faiths and religion as it is Allah that created all mankind and has given man the free will of choice but unfortunately because of fear of losing power and control of the economy, the religion has been instrumentalized and misrepresented in a negative light, hence making the religion look as though it doesn't accommodate other religions. Even Christianity has been misrepresented as well, especially in terms of politics, the church which was separated from the state has in recent times been seen to associate with the state, thus depicting the religiousization of politics. An example of this was witnessed during the political party campaigns in the 2011 general elections in the country. Some Christian candidates and even Christian Clerics that supported candidates were seen to have even used certain verses in the Bible to justify why Christians should vote for a fellow Christian and not a Muslim candidate. Some of these Clerics cited Bible verses like:

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn (Proverbs 29:2, KJV).

This verse of the Bible was used during political campaigns within the Christian cycle just as certain verses in the Holy Qur'an was used within the Islam faithful as well. This also explains why politics in Nigeria, especially northern Nigeria takes religious dimensions and even violence executed along religious lines. Religious clerics that ought to teach and be examples of a righteous God have now become political gladiators. The State which ought to be an impartial umpire has been religiousized and in some developed countries this also explains why liberalism is encouraged in order to manage ethno-religious differences.

In buttressing the above point Koriath and Augsberg (no date) stated that the state is principally neither allowed to favor nor to discriminate against certain confessions (religious groups). As a concept of equidistance, the principle of neutrality towards all religious communities commits the state to generally withdraw from religious issues. In the same vein Liberals argue that the state in liberal democracies should observe tolerance, impartiality, and neutrality in religious matters because it must ensure the respect of individuals' fundamental liberties, especially freedom of religion and of conscience. Some who argue this position view religion as a source of division and conflict and think that religious divergences are rarely reconcilable, which in part warrants the principle of the separation of religion and the state. The American philosopher Robert Audi holds that the liberal argument is based on three principles that justify a separation of religion and politics. The first principle is tolerance, which Audi calls the 'libertarian principle'. According to this precept, citizens in a free and democratic society should be allowed to practice the religion of their choice, though within certain limits for the sake of preserving public order and individual liberties (Bere, 2012).

Audi's second principle, the 'equalitarian principle', assumes that a democratic society should uphold the equality of the basic rights of its members and, therefore, refrain from exhibiting preference for or discrimination against any specific religious community. The third principle, the 'neutrality principle', requires that liberal democratic states be religiously neutral. This means that they should make no difference between religious and non-religious peoples. In other words, anything that is public, such as access to municipal services and civil positions, should never be subjected to religious criteria. Such an approach is warranted to protect citizens from religiously based governmental coercion and discrimination. When coercion is required, it should be based on rational, secular grounds (that is, persuasive argument), not on religious grounds (Bere 2012). This is however not the case in northern Nigeria, as even access to certain services and politics in the region has been religiousized. This is particularly evident in states like Kaduna, Plateau, Bauchi, Adamawa and Taraba states. To show the extent to which politics has been religiousized in the north, the death of Kaduna state governor, who died in an helicopter crash in December 2012 was celebrated by some Muslim Youths in the state capital. When one of the Muslim youths was asked why they were celebrating, he simply replied that 'now one of our very own will rule over us again, we were never happy when he first became the governor of the state'. One can then see how politics has been religiousized in the region, so in contesting for any elective post one of the things people look out for is what religious faith does he belong to and not really the political party. Even the agenda of the contestant is interrogated in religious light in knowing whose agenda he is going to preserve or protect. Not because a religion teaches a political leader to serve the interest of religion but because of the politicalization of religion and the religiousization of politics. So if a Muslim politician does a thing it will be said that its because he is a Muslim and vice versa.

The fourth salient point is the implication of the West and the Arab world conflicts, especially the Arab/Palestine and Israeli Conflict on the region. The on-going Arab and western world conflicts has had negative impacts on some third world countries like Nigeria, especially in northern Nigeria. This is clearly seen when some Islamic groups go on protest in northern Nigeria streets on either over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the invasion of Afghanistan by U.S.A and also the immortalizing of Osama Bin Laden by certain Moslem clerics and individuals. Unfortunately, many fail to consider the political side of these foreign conflicts before demonstrating in a religious way or manner. For now, it can be seen that the termination and peace between the Israelis and Palestinians will have positive impacts on the peace in northern Nigeria.

The fifth salient point is blending ethnicity with religion or religiosity to now form ethno-religiosity. There are some cultural practices or personality traits that are not religiously accepted or approved but when such are practiced by people it is quickly considered as part of religion. For example one of the key teachings in Islam is '*forgiveness*'.

Islam teaches that a true Muslim should forgive anyone who does him wrong, hence any Muslim who doesn't forgive his neighbor who wrong him isn't living to the expectations of Allah. Many ethno-religious violence has persisted in the north because of lack of forgiveness by conflicting parties and as stated previously, lack of forgiveness produces an unending circle of violence in a place and as Desmond Tutu puts it '***without forgiveness today there wouldn't be peace tomorrow***'. The ethno-religious conflicts between Hausa-Fulani and Berom people in Jos, Plateau state can be seen in this light of unforgiveness. Since the Hausa-Fulanis in Jos are predominantly Muslims and the Beroms are predominantly Christians, religion can easily be instrumentalized that neither Muslims nor Christians forgive their neighbours when hurt. Of interest here is a peculiar cultural feature of the Fulani ethnic group. Best (2007) notes that the Fulani's hardly forgives any trespass on the platform of mercy but revenges the hurt or harm done to them. This does not represent the Islamic religion well, hence a misrepresentation of Islam and since majority of Fulani's are Muslims, one may think that Islam doesn't teach forgiveness while forgetting that the culture of an individual could affect a person's disposition to some issues of life, such as forgiveness. The above may partly explain why some of the conflicts in the north especially between the Fulani's and other ethnic groups in the north has been and is still recurring. Putting in mind that majority of the Fulani's are Muslims and other conflicting ethnic groups are Christians or non Muslims makes the conflicts very volatile.

Finally, what northern Nigeria is expressing today is the ventilation of accumulated evils in the region, unfortunately the present form of social structure and formation in the country and in the region naturally breeds these evils, though sometimes the region may be at peace because of absence of war, this doesn't necessary mean that other forms of violence doesn't exist such as structural violence, a condition that is typically built into many social and cultural institutions. As noted by Barash (2000), structural violence has the effect of denying people important rights such as economic opportunities, social and political equality, a sense of fulfillment and self worth and access to a healthy natural environment. When people starve to death or even go hungry, a kind of violence is taking place. Similarly when human beings suffer from preventable diseases and denied a decent education, housing opportunity, an opportunity to grow, work, raise a decent family, express themselves freely, to organize peacefully or to participate in their own governance, a kind of violence is occurring even if guns are not used. This depicts the case of northern Nigeria, especially the northeastern part of the region that has the highest maternal mortality rate, most educationally backward and underdeveloped. This also shows how and why it's easy for Islamist militants to arise from the region and also why ethno-religious violence reoccurs. A just and positive peace therefore entails that structural violence in drastically reduced as well. Interestingly, many religious conflicts in northern Nigeria has never been because of whose God reigns, as God does reign in the realms of man but many religious conflicts has always been for the desire to control, dominate and enforce subjection of one group above the other.

Conclusion

As noted earlier the social structure of any society determines the kind of issues that spring out or manifest from it. To this end the character of the Nigerian State is responsible for the country's deepening ethno-religious contradictions. The social structure of the country fuels a constant feeling of distrust between the component units, and the fear of one ethnic or religious group dominating the other. Despite efforts by the Federal Government of Nigeria to reduce the menace of religious conflict in the country, and the establishment of Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC) to promote inter-religious dialogue and harmony amongst the religious groups in the country, these efforts have yielded little or no success, even with the introduction of sections 38(1) and 10 into the Nigerian Constitution, which have guaranteed freedom of religion and prohibited the declaration of state religion respectively, has done little to attenuate the frequency of religious conflicts, as state patronage and veneration of the two dominant religious groups has helped in heightening the underlying tensions and rivalry.

Since the recurrence of religious violence in the northern region and throughout the world has cast doubt on the claim that religion, by nature, promotes peace and tolerance, liberal theorists have argued that religious convictions should be kept away from the public sphere or referred to only in secular terms as this would help have peace in a society. Barash (2000) notes that building a positive peace therefore can be very delicate and dangerous, since disagreements over what constitutes a desirable peace can lead to war. So in as much as people hate war and want to live in peace, factors that breach the peace must be avoided and overcome. Interestingly, even when a small group is fighting, they fight for peace. Peace with hunger is no peace but violence in silence.

Hence as some will put it, peace is something you fight for and not just wish for especially when there is so much injustice in the society and as Barash (2000) also added, economic and social development advocates claim that the problem of violence can be solved simply by spreading knowledge or even by keeping everyone's belly full. In summary a search for peace must therefore include a search for economic and social betterment which also entails a restructuring of the social structure or formation of the country.

For peace to really reign in a multi-plural and democratic society like Nigeria liberal policies must be put in place to help the society flourish in peace. According to Bere (2012), Liberal policy aims at accommodating people from a diversity of backgrounds. It's also meant to foster pluralism and to prevent a particular religion from having influence on the public sphere to the detriment of others. This justifies why citizens should resort, according to liberals, to 'secular reasons' (non-religious arguments) to support their claims in political matters (such as legislation, policy making, and so on). He further stated that for the sake of justice, peace, and public order in a democratic society, the state and individuals of different faith communities should be guided by the principles of tolerance, impartiality, and neutrality.

Recommendations

A just society entails not only the teaching and preaching of peace, it entails that factors that breach the peace must be buried and not allowed to resurrect. It also requires an effective conflict prevention mechanism and resolution of conflicts, and as Agbede (note date) observed, conflict resolution is more about solving problems right from the earliest stages of any disagreement. It is concerned with the maintenance of a peaceful atmosphere in a peaceful society. The most important ingredient for a peaceful society is the existence of government that believes in conflict resolution. This is what is expected from every democratic government.

Aware of the dangers involved in the utilization of religion as an instrument of politics and ideology, liberal theorists have argued that religion should be considered a private matter and kept away from political debates and the public square in general but unfortunately this is not the case as religion has been and is been politicized. Despite the risks involved in the mingling of religion and political realms, an issue is whether believers of different confessions can interact in a way that is fair to all and that contributes to peace, and, if at odds, the reconciliation of their divergent views on public issues. Politics must therefore be separated from religion and religion in turn must be depoliticized.

Now because religion is transnational and globalized than ethnic identity and nationalism, there is need for world religions to be mindful of activities that will provoke spill over reactions and destructive actions from other parts of the world that share the same believe system. There is also need for countries not to engage in reprisal attacks or allow spill over conflicts into their territory as innocent lives and valuable properties will be destroyed as it has always be and will continue to be. This therefore calls for a constructive awareness campaigns from religions in various countries to avoid been used as instruments of reprisal attacks.

Since one of the factors militating against the peace in northern Nigeria is ethno-religious domination of a group over the other, there is need to grant minority groups their autonomy in the region or traditional institutions should be removed completely from not only the region but the nation at large. Also it is either traditional institutions are democratized or dissolved in the region and the nation at large or all traditional rulers should have equal powers than asymmetry of power as it is witnessed.

The need to establish more schools in the northern region cannot be over emphasized, as the region is educationally backward and there is high rate of illiteracy, hence it becomes easier to recruit illiterates to perpetuate evil acts. More secondary and higher institutions should be established. Just as there is Integrated Science (in Junior Secondary) that comprises both Physics, Chemistry and Biology, there is also need to establish an Integrated Religious Studies subject that will introduce students to Christianity, Islam and African Tradition Religion, this is to help enlighten the younger generation about other religions other than theirs, this will go a long way in changing their mindsets about other religions.

There is also need to have a robust Civic Education and Social Studies course in the primary and secondary schools to introduce students to love and tolerance. There is no better time than now to institutionalize Peace Education in Senior Secondary Schools and Peace and Conflict Studies Programmes in Nigerian Universities as it is disheartening to note that only a few universities offer these programmes.

Also northern states and all educational institutions are encouraged to organize intercultural activities annually, this will also help to create awareness on our cultural heritage and diversities, it will help reduce ethnocentrism amongst host communities. The Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) which is more concentrated and functional at the national level should be created at the local and community levels. Their activities (especially inter-religious dialogues) should be encouraged more at the community and local levels than at the national levels. Also, at the community level (where most of the conflict actors are), there is need to encourage NGOS to have mutual dialogue and enlightenment programmes especially with those whose instinct is to reject contact with public authorities. This is needed to reduce recruiting pool of conflict actors.

Finally, until our social formation is reformed or restructured, the problems eating the region will continue to persist and violence will continue to reoccur. In my submission here poverty is not a cause of conflict but an instrument for conflict. Our leaders are encouraged to not only preach peace, but act peacefully and put in place structures that strengthen the peace than threaten the peace.

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