



A Search for the Elusive Peace within the Religious Arrangements: An Argument for a Sustainable Nigerian Order

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Abstract

The work tries to broadly define what peace is and how the two major religions in Nigeria: Christianity and Islam, attempt to define it within the context of the Nigerian situations, and from the perspectives of their religious understandings/outlooks. Although peace is generally desirable and believed to be sought after by Christians and Muslims, the two groups however seem to have failed in their attempts to domesticate, translate, and actualize it, both internally and externally. The research is therefore of the concern that, in spite of the fact that, both religions hinge their tenets on peace, same has in practice consistently remained elusive and difficult to achieve. The research therefore raises posers as regards the absence of peace and what could have been visibly responsible for its absence within the Nigerian religious societies. The research states that, all attempts by many of the religious functionaries may have been partial and consequently not far-reaching. As a follow-up to the preceding point, the research attempts to unearth some verifiable reasons which could be attributed to the ostensible absence of peace within the religious circles of Nigeria, and by extension, the larger Nigerian society. The research concludes that, a search for peace is divine and desirable, because of its positive multiplier effects on the society. The research is of the view that, peace must be planted, if Nigeria must be a conducive and habitable place for all to live. Obviously, Nigerians are unreservedly connected to their religions. This explains why the affairs of the Nigerian society are usually influenced and ultimately dictated by occurrences prevailing within the religious circles. The research therefore identifies some basic hindrances militating against peace in Nigeria, which could be directly or indirectly linked to the diverse religious communities and their sentiments. The research adopts the descriptive methodology,

while it makes use of both primary and secondary sources of information.

Key words: Christianity and Islam, God, Nigeria, Peace, Religion,

I. Introduction

It is believed that, every major religion of the world talks about, and encourages peace, as well as harmonious living amongst their adherents. But, the reality in the Nigerian society dictates otherwise, as there are inter and intra conflicts, disagreements, misunderstanding, and even deep rooted animosities between and betwixt the various religions. Apart from the underlying African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam are the most notable dominant religions in Nigeria¹, and on several occasions, both appear to have been located on the spots of acrimonies. The paradox of this situation is what is of interest to this researcher.

Whereas, the basic tenets of the two religions are peace and love, yet finding peace and its precursor: love with them is almost becoming a rarity with the duo. The level of intolerance that exists within and without the two religions is a source of concern. Yet, it is clear that, peace is not achieved by rotundity, which the religions are proficient in. Therefore, one continues to wonder if the religions are living up to their confessions of circulating love and peaceful co-existence among citizens of Nigeria. Where then did the religions miss the topic? What is the relationship between love, and peaceful coexistence? Is there a relationship between love, and tolerance? What determines a societal religious tolerance level?

What role is evangelism and oratory playing in entrenching peace or otherwise in our contemporary experience? How does extremism come to focus in the discussion? How can we strike a sustainable balance of moderation in the outdoor activities of the religious functionaries? Why is



there a gap between the religious confessions and the reality on ground?

Adequate responses to these posers would elicit or reveal the reasons why the religions talk so much about peace, without achieving same. In fact, as it seems now, religion appears to be playing a dysfunctional role in the Nigerian society. The many squabbles and violation of national peace and unity had come from whipping of religious sentiments among the populace. The situation is almost becoming helpless as the society has been polarized along faith and religions.

Description of Peace

Peace could be described as a situation of the existence of harmony, tranquility and inevitable cordial relationship, which exists in a society, a community, or at its micro level of families and a group of people. Peace is generally desirable, as it bestows confidence, joy, love and understanding amongst and within the people where it is obtainable. Absence of peace automatically breeds chaos, fight, disagreements, and in some extreme cases, war. Therefore, every sane society which knows the cost of absence of peace does everything communally possible to institute and maintain peace. Presumably, peace is a precursor of many developmental and progressive ideas. It is usually very easy to identify peaceful societies from non-peaceful ones. No wonder; countries, families, organizations and even group of individuals would do whatever it requires to make peace reign in their societies. Where the leadership of these communities and groups become nonchalant about peace is an apparent pointer to their low level of spirituality. This is when the religions boldly come out to become assertive on the society.

Biblical Positions on Peace

The Bible is very much in support of peace. The basic teaching of the Christians' scripture is peace.² That is made more relevant in the personality of Jesus Christ, whom the bible describes as the Prince of Peace. If Jesus is so described, by implication, it means, his father (God) is the undisputable King of Peace. Jesus admonished severally that, peace should be embraced. The twin of peace in Jesus' teaching is love. What this connotes is that, wherever there is peace, there first exists love. Love is instrumental to harmonious individual and corporate living. Therefore, poor emphasis on this translates to undesirable situations and unpleasant occurrences.

Holy Quran and Peace

Islam is obviously predicated on peace. This is frequently verbally communicated as *As-Salaam Alakum* (peace upon you). If Muslims express peace as an anthem of greeting every now and then, it means that, Islam greatly desires peace. This form of greeting, although already taken for granted, as it is no longer seen beyond mere cultural expression by the Muslims, yet, it has gone a long way in indicating how central; peace is to the core of Islam. It would be an understatement to think or say that Islam does not lay much emphasis on the topic of peace.

National Experiences that Militate against National Peace

An uninformed observer might want to argue that, if truly peace is central to the two giant religions in Nigeria: Islam and Christianity, why then do they constantly have disagreements between their adherents. Evidently, and in buttress of this position, Nigeria had been dogged with a number of orchestrated and non-orchestrated breaches of peace, between their different adherents. The attendant consequences have been civil unrests, killings, house burnings and underlying deep bellicose hatred.³

Some have argued that, how could Islam; which confidently displays crossed swords as its insignia; be a religion of peace? Further discusses on this trajectory may generate theological and doctrinal positions and arguments, with relevant verses in the Holy Quran which could be cited to back them up, to the strength that Muslims are encouraged to go all out, fight and kill in defense of their faith. The Nigerian experiences are replete with religious clashes between Muslims and the Christians. Same could be said to also be going on between Islam and the very conservative traditional religion.

Religion and Politics

It is a thing of concern that, in Nigeria today, religion has come to be closely identified with politics and politicians. Hitherto, the political space had been dominated by Muslims, while the Christians felt they had no business in politics, which had been presumed as a dirty game! Over the time, and with hind experiences, Christians too began to dabble into politics. Sermons supported by relevant portions of the Bible are daily being churned out from the pulpit, suggesting that, politics is equally good for Christians. As a result, more Christians are finding their spaces in national politics. Unfortunately, things have not fared better,



as Christian politicians are merely joining the band wagon, without bringing much positive difference to the space. There is no concrete evidence dictating that, substantial changes are being experienced in the political landscape of Nigeria as regards, national conducts/values, eradication of poverty, and political accountability. Rather, the political space has become further polarized along sharp and deep religious and tribal fault lines respectively.

Cost of Peace

The cost of peace is priceless and could never be estimated in terms of monetary values. Its absence is financially huge, and would always take its tolls on the economy of the society where there is violence, war and fighting. At the end of the day, the humongous amount of money invested on research, inventions and production of war armaments go down in drains, as many of those lethal weapons are disposable.⁴

Interactive Conflicts in Focus

Strangely, there have been many instances of conflict between the adherents of Islam and Christianity, the two religions that claim their origins from the same source (Abraham). Interestingly, there had been very few of such conflicts between the duo on one part and the believers of Traditional Religion on the other hand. Meanwhile, these are religious functionaries; generally despised and perceived as ungodly. That gives the unfathomable impression that, followers of the “ungodly” African Traditional Religion are, as a matter of fact; godlier than the so regarded godly practitioners of Christianity and Islam! Although sociologists would rather readily argue that, conflicts are essential ingredients for development, however, this researcher opines that, that may be arguable in the reverse where religion is involved, as far as sustenance of peace in Nigeria is concerned.

Contemporary Religious Opinions Debarring Peace

As part of the contemporary religious opinions prohibiting peace, some basic teachings and beliefs which are not necessarily doctrinal, but personal opinions of religious handlers, and which have gradually mutated into fortified dogma, must be considered. Such are usually buoyed by ulterior economic and prestige reasons of the religious founders of Christianity and Islam.⁵

For instance, the teachings on religious superiority, where some religious leaders present themselves and their forms of belief as the only and acceptable way to access God and even go to

heaven, is a disservice to the unity of the country. As a result of this doctrinal belief, animosity has been generated and circulated amongst the religious groups and their followers, thereby raising tension, and consequently breaking down the tiny thread of unity binding the country.

Another of such is the opinion that, the more followers the religious handlers have, or how big their worship centres are, invariably determines how godly they are. As a result of this, unbridled vain competitions have been recorded among the religious. The competitions are not without bitter messages and orations which ultimately create a tense spiritual and physical environment.

Surprisingly, it is becoming very worrisome how religious functionaries (Christian and Muslim clerics), directly engage themselves in criminal activities and in many other activities that disturb public peace. It is daily reported in the news media, how they are actively involved in drug dealings, rape, child defilement, armed robbery, money rituals, among many other nefarious activities that breach the peace of the nation.

Nigeria and the Search for Peace

Nigeria has always in words; maintained her secularism. This means that, there is no State Religion in Nigeria, and everybody is free to practice their religion, within the confines of the constitution. Although this is the official position of the constitution, it is an obvious observation to make, and a sad commentary to say that, in practice, it is not as it is always claimed. That some religions occupy prime and pre-eminent positions among others may be an understatement. While Christianity and Islam are competing for leadership, the two are mindless of how they have almost obliterated the African Traditional Religion, which incidentally is their host.⁶

The implication of this is that, in the process, many enemies have been made, so much fractionalization has been created and disaffection has enveloped and taken over the entire space. Rather than tolerate others for their views and spiritual positions, Christianity and Islam have been on the sprawl, hitting and condemning all, except themselves for all the faults/sins of the world. Certainly, achieving peace under those rancorous and chaotic situations may be practically impossible. There is the need for Nigeria to focus her attention on recovering the life of the country from the religious, if peace must be achieved. Several peace initiatives have been put in place by the Federal Government of Nigeria to ensure national integration, love, peace and unity, but to no avail.



Several meetings and conferences had been scheduled to ensure same, but all to nullity. This is a serious weak point and a minus in the nation's building. So far, religion has caused Nigeria so much distraction and near embarrassing situations that has disturbed every rational mind. It does not matter what belief system the leaders hold at any point in time, there would always be excuses for the religionists to stir the troubles and sentiments.

Forensic Reasons for Dysfunctional Roles of Religion in Nigeria

If there is a forensic study and a DNA exhumation of the various crises that had happened in Nigeria, certainly majority of them would point towards religious undertones. Usually, civil crises in Nigeria have always started mildly and in disguise as either political, economic, or minor tribal disturbances, but which had usually snowballed into massive civil unrests, colourfully dawned in religious garbs.⁷ The most profound and available reason for this is that, it is easier to mobilize the public while inflaming religious sentiments and passions.

Therefore, it has become difficult over the time to justify any political, tribal and even economic positions, which are of either sectional and even larger public debate or interests, without supporting and reinforcing same with religious awareness and religious explanations.

Unfortunately, our politicians, traditional leaders and public servants have been exploiting this rather obvious weakness of the Nigerian society to their extreme advantage. Invariably, rather for religion to become a force for development and progress, it has been made to serve dysfunctional and destabilizing roles. No doubt, this has caused Nigeria a lot of underdevelopment and has earned religion a bad name of an undesirable force in the society.

Illogically, it usually takes the religious leaders a lot of appeals to their followers to stop ragging violence. The strong reasons for this may be that, first; such crises were instigated by the primary instigators with the connivance of the religious leaders, and therefore not really interested in ordering a stop to the violence.

Two, it could be that, the religious leaders usually lose control of the situations with their foot soldiers, and it takes much more efforts at reaching out to them for pacification. This is a surprising and disappointing role of religion, where ordinarily it ought to be at the forefront of preaching and practicing peace in the public.

Any inquisitive mind would ask why it is so easy for manipulators to turn religion into a destabilizing energy. Experience has proven that, it is possible, especially in Nigeria because of the age long mutual mistrust that has existed between Christianity and Islam. Over the years, the two have; on the field, continued to silently slide each other from the back for converts. They had carried on in this manner of followers' circulation and re-circulation for centuries without caution, thereby giving the impression that, they are recruiting soldiers for two different Gods.

Therefore, in their reasoning, each of the fundamentalists⁸ must out do the other; not only to gain more followers, but also to gain more territories for their God(s). This untoward effort is not only localized within States, and amongst tribes which usually dominate sections of the country in marked spaces, but has also become a national embarrassment.

To further worsen the situation, each group or side has sponsors in individuals, corporate bodies and even international partner countries in this retrogressive deal. The situation has become so complex that, an investigator would be lost in knowledge while attempting to get to the roots of the reasons for the instigations and confusions of one religion against the others.

Economic Ideologies in Relations to Religious Activities

Most times, the cause of religious strives are derived from economic ideologies⁹ as instituted and adopted by either the principal individuals or corporate religious bodies. What is economic ideology? Economic ideology is the basis on which any fiscal policies should run, whether as related to society, communities, countries and or religious organizations, as it were. Types of Economic Ideology include: Social, Marxist, Capitalist economic ideologies, amongst others. What then should be the consequential relationship between economic ideology and religion? The organization and structure of churches lend credence to the fact that, most modern churches are now run on capitalist economic ideology.

A close look at the various Departments of Churches such as Ushering, Music, Evangelical, Education, and even Pastoral confirm that, they are ultimately geared towards products' advertisement and patronage. From the arrangements, it appears all is aimed at boosting/enhancing the economic and funds generating abilities of the religious founders, through the corporate churches in disguise.



In this world of economized/commercialized religious society, a good number of the religious bureaucrats have adopted economic ideologies to run and maintain the affairs of their religious organizations, with a view to maximizing their financial gains and invariably sustaining a strong hold on their unsuspecting rich and poor admirers, who, by the way, are usually held spell bound by the stupendous financial capacities/wherewithal of the religious founders. It is becoming clearer by the day that, there is a lot of a financial gain derivable from religious investments and enterprises. Although this attitude is more common in Christianity, Islam too cannot be completely absolved of the practices.

To sustain this statuesque, passions are inflamed from the pulpits and lecterns to earn public sympathy and patronage. It does not matter, how the leaderships perpetually hold down their susceptible¹¹ followers, what matters is, how well and successfully they are able to do it. In this, Islamic clerics seem less orally combative and less adaptive, when compared to their Christian counterparts. The major reason for this is because, Islam is not individual/personality centered. Therefore, Marxist economic ideology seems preferred by Islam. Yet, even notable Islamic clerics also do make some personal advancement/gratifications from the conservative and more *Allah* centered worship arrangements.

Thus, these strategies have earned the religious leaders the statuses of demi-gods before their very gullible followers, who swallow all passion inflamed messages of their religious leaders hook, line and sinker. In this circumstance, the religious leaders are often not telling their followers the absolute truth from the scriptures or holy books, as may be preferably described.

For their conveniences and to their advantages, they only try to subjugate the minds of their followers through horizontal indoctrination. This often makes the worshippers; products of intellectual ignorance, religious slaves and unbridled war mongers in the name of their mixed up and essentially misunderstood God (s).

What Should Religions Do Differently?

Obviously, there are more influential and far beneficial roles religions should be seen playing in Nigeria at the moment. Rather than tearing the people apart¹² the first expected role is; building, integrating and bonding the block of people. This surprisingly; could be an easy role to execute and achieve by the foremost religions in Nigeria: Christianity and Islam. The process may be unarguably slow and time consuming, but certainly

it is achievable. When bonding takes place within the geographical space called Nigeria, it is almost certain that progress would follow as a consequence of a prevailing peace.

Religion should be galvanizing the available diverse energies in the various segments, to building a strong nation of Nigeria. Having got independence since 1960, and having consequently become a republic in 1963, by now, no visible diversions and divisions of nationhood should be directly or indirectly ascribed to Nigeria. It is a sad observation to make that, Nigeria, with all her abundant human and material resources, still wallops in the dream of attaining nationhood.

Rather than being used for diversionary roles, religion should be employed to further the interests of Nigeria, both internally and externally. For the mere fact that, Nigerians are religiously gullible¹³ should be an added value for galvanizing the populace to create an enviable society which imbibes, hard work, education and discipline. Unfortunately, the reverse is presently the case.

Religion, if properly harnessed could be a veritable source of building a highly moral and ethically conscious Nigerian society, which in turn would guarantee equity, social justice and fair play. It becomes a paradoxical experience to learn of Nigeria; a religious country, yet, it operates without morality and piety. The absence of these qualities undermines the developmental focus of the country. Meanwhile, other acclaimed religious nations of the world, such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirate, Israel, India, Malaysia etc., have often deployed same opportunities offered by religions to curb corruption, drug trafficking, poverty, discrimination, bad governance, amongst others.¹⁴ Inversely, it has become very difficult for religion to play these roles in Nigeria, and the absence of these basic things is one of the reasons why Nigeria lacks peace and progress.

Expectedly, religion should be used to expose the evils perpetrated, not only by the vulnerable masses who are poor and oppressed, and who apparently are not influential, but also expose same committed by the elites, aristocrats, and politically strong and powerful individuals of the Nigerian society. Offering the above leverage would offer brighter chances for development, peace and progress, as opposed to what it presently does by giving them cover and protection. So it appears when the religious find it difficult to speak the truth and stand by it to the powers that be, for the fear of losing their lives and losing patronage, then religion loses its potency for creating peace.



Since it is believed that humanity is one, and that God created mankind equally, then, humanity should be able to return a whole hearted service to God and to humanity. This presents an enviable and an adorable experience for the generality of the people. This creates love, and where there is love, there exists peace. Invariably, where peace is; that is where progress abides.

What should be the Modalities of Ensuring Functional Roles for Nigeria?

Ascribing expected roles to religion for a functional Nigeria may be an easy expression, but may not be an easy walk through, except it is viewed as a practical concept. This requires designing a work and thought process towards accomplishing same. To move Nigeria from the quagmire of chaos, underdevelopment and rancour it presently finds herself, Nigeria must consciously develop practical spiritual thought process that would deliver the good. A successful execution of this concept is readily in the hands of the clergies of the religions. They should begin by preaching what the scriptures say, and make such applicable to everyone, including themselves and the holders of political, cultural, and business powers. Our mind set must change from mundane and ephemeral attainments, to humility and deriving satisfaction in moderation in achievements. The new thought process should de-emphasize¹⁵ the power of money and pecuniary gains for spirituality and devotion to God and man. This new process would ensure that, individuals should stop paying attention on themselves, but more on the corporate existence of the nation called Nigeria. It should be clear that, the hurt done to others to make ourselves happy eventually negatively bounces back on the initiators, thereby causing hate, disaffection and non-spirituality.

II. Conclusion

From the foregoing, it would be understood that, religion is an active weapon which could be deployed as necessary for either progress or retrogression, as the case may be.

For any rational mind, it would be better applied for progress and development. But before this could be effectively carried out, basic guides and obligations must be observed, to ensure proper and adequate push of the society to an enviable level.

As it is, religion is not living up to its calling at generating and instituting peace in our various sections and sectors of the Nigerian societies. However, hopes are that, religion could be

passionately redirected and deployed for the scientific, economic, cultural and collective greatness of the Nigerian State.

How successful it is, depends on our ability to deescalate our false spirituality, refocus and genuinely guide the essentials of religion, without biases, its functionaries and subscribers to relevant positivity, required for national development.

III. Recommendations

*Unbiased and balanced religious education must be provided to the citizens and the religious alike, if the country must witness peace

* Only professionally certified and certificated individuals should be allowed to lead the religious congregations/assembly/gatherings

* There must be national regulations and practice manual for the Religious

* The religious should be incorporated to the government and administrative affairs of the Nigerian State

* Meddlesomeness of international countries and bodies for religious/spiritual expansion should be confronted by Nigeria's secular government

* In consonant with the secular religious disposition of Nigeria, all religions should be allowed to truly function, without suffering harassment from others, which appear to be more protected and considered privileged

* Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Peace should be created at both States and Federal levels

* The offices should be overseen by qualified academic professionals in religions

* Scholars of religions should be adequately involved in the religious/spiritual agenda planning for the country

* Department of Ethics and Disciplinary matters should be created to serve under the Ministry of Religious and Public Peace

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