

Sustainable Development In Nigeria: The Problem Of Negative Religious Fundamentalism

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Abstract

Nigeria as a developing nation is confronted with such vices like: corruption, militancy, abductions, students' cultism and such related negative threats on the society, which deter her speedy and sustainable development. As if the mentioned factors of setback were not enough Negative Religious fundamentalism is another threat to sustainable development in Nigeria. Adherents of various religions such as Maitatsine and Shiite sects hold tenaciously to their religious dogma to the extent of sacrificing any thing including their lives in pursuit of such religious tenets do so to the detriment of the entire society. Negative Religious fundamentalism makes useless sustainable development for its propensity for wonton destruction of life and property. The inference we have made here are the product of the study of records of several dastardly religious bigotries precipitating from negative religious fundamentalism and its effect on sustainable development since 1980. In course of this study we discovered that this is common to all religions but of higher rate among the Muslims in Nigeria. Furthermore, we found that politicians of this nation exploit this ugly trend to advance their political ambitions. This remains worrisome as our study of the heinous injuries this has unlatched on national

development across the length and breath of the Nigerian society.

Introduction

Religious fundamentalism is the maintenance of deep literal interpretation of the traditional beliefs of any religious group in opposition to other religious beliefs, or modern teachings. This trend is common to all religions, but of higher rate among Muslims in Nigeria. Adherents of various religions such as Maitatsine, Shiite sects, Christian Youths and ardent traditionalists (both young and Old), who hold tenaciously to their religious dogma to the extent of sacrificing any thing including their lives in pursuit of such religious tenets do so to the detriment of the entire society. Nigeria; struggling to meet up with the emphasis on millennial global development; staggers under situations quite unequal to her strength. Currently the threat of corruption, militancy, abductions, students' cultism and such related negative ethical threats on the society seems to engage us more than we can make such laudable giant strides as we ought and or are capable of. The much developmental giant steps so far taken by this dear nation of ours have been severally daunted by negative religious fundamentalism since 1980. Religious fundamentalism in the case of Nigeria remains worrisome as our study of the heinous injuries this has unatched on our national development across the length and breath of the Nigerian society are obvious. Between 1980s till date are records of several dastardly religious bigotries precipitating from religious fundamentalism.

While the Christians mostly battle with the Muslims in the North particularly, it is the Christians and the traditional religionists in some of the Southern States. While the cause of acrimony in the Northern part of Nigeria could be out rightly associated with hatred and struggle of supremacy between the two major religious groups in Nigeria, it is the attempt by the Christians to obliterate all the traces of African traditional religion that is the bane of discord in some other places. Among the Muslims in the North are Islamic fundamentalists who are bent on the sanitization of Islam. These people strike at flimsy excuses. In several cases this unguided quest for the cleansing of the land of idolatry religious reforms rob off on the positive cultures of the people that are not inimical to national development and the spreading of the religious values. There are no religious frictions between the African traditionalists and the

Muslims in the South because Muslims' approach is more of symbiotic co-existence with traditional religion so far.

Our inferences are drawn from the study of Nigerian religious mishaps since 1980 to date, which indeed proves that this does not only pave way to religious bigotry, but the source of ember in our national polity. At this age of millennial development consciousness, war against poverty and educational advancement, it is pertinent that we consider this topic apt and timely with seriousness as we may need to postulate sincere remedial propositions in favour of national development.

Religious Fundamentalism

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

In course of... historical development, Kano played host to different kinds of Islamic scholars, from North Africa and other parts of neighbouring countries...which introduced to Kano Fundamentalist religious activities that led to development of several Islamic sects in the City. (Otite & Albert, 2004:..284)

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

several other churches were vandalized...The federal government resolved this issue by paying N75, 000 as compensation to the Christian Association of Nigeria in Kano (Otite and Albert, 2004:290). This amount paid for unsolicited destruction by Government did not favour sustainable development. In 1991, the charismatic movement in Kano tried to organize a religious crusade to be addressed by a German preacher, Evangelist Reinhard Boonke, and some American preachers. This religious event was widely advertised by the Christian on the electronic media and newspapers. Several thousands of posters and handbills were distributed in Kano and the neighbouring communities. The publicity given to the event later attracted the attention of the Muslims who felt that the crusade must not be allowed to hold in Kano. First, the Muslims accused the government of double standards for failing to grant permission to one Sheikh Deedat from South Africa who had wanted to organize a religious revival for the Muslims in Kano they asked why the same government should grant a license to Reinhard Boonke to preach in Kano, an Islamic city. (Otite and Albert, 2004:291)

In this crisis Boonke himself narrowly escaped death as many Nigerian heads rolled without exception of property and the disruption of economic activities. In the midst of such insecurity no meaningful development would go on not to talk of sustainability.

In 1996 and 1997 the Shiite sect occasioned intra religious disturbance in Zaria which did set developmental pace backward. Reacting to Kano 1996 religious riot, Jimoh Yekini (Osa & Nmodu 1996:15) said, "This is not a question of different religions. But ...Shiite fundamentalists," against fellow experience which left a fatal economic scare on America and the rest of the World is a sad memory of the negative contributions of religious fundamentalism on sustainable development. Currently in India there is an on going religious bigotry between the Hiduists and the Christians. Here in Nigeria there are some religiously masterminded mayhem occasioned by religious fundamentals with all its ugly negative effects.

Distinction between Positive and Negative Fundamentalism

By this sub- heading one would readily posit that there are two different faces of religious fundamentalism which include positive and negative fundamentalism. On one hand, positive side of religious fundamentalism focuses on the practice of such generally accepted religious moral tenets

which lead to the protection of the common good of the society. Take for instance Jesus teaching- The Beatitude (Matthew 5) and Pauline letter to the Romans on civic responsibility (Romans 13) which are the sources of good citizenship are not injurious to the society but enhance the same. The respect for the mother earth for the traditionalist produces piety which in turn promotes reverence for natural laws or the Muslim acknowledging that the people of the book are the same people of Allah they should not destroy, is the source of peace building and sustainable development.

On the other hand negative fundamentalism manifests itself in violence, wanton destruction of lives and property and disruption of economic activities. This is inimical to sustainable development as prevalent in Nigeria.

Sustainable Development

It might be necessary to mention that sustainable development is an umbrella phrase which encapsulates all forms of durable and lasting development whether human (capacity building) or material (structural, economic, social and industrial enhancements). To be particular; development could be referred to as the provision and improvement upon the existent social amenities. The erecting of public buildings, provision of Schools, Hospitals, judicial system and other necessities that provide protection for our common goods and enhance the well being of the constituents of each society are implied. The Report of South Commission, (The South Commission, 1993:10-11) defines development as, “a process which enables human beings to realize their potentials, build self-confidence, and lead a life of dignity and fulfillment...Development, therefore, implies the growing of self reliance, both in individual and collective.” Okereke, (1999:1) saw development, “as the qualitative improvement in the living standard of members of the society...measured by such indicators as literacy rate, rate of development, the distribution of income, availability of good drinking water, good roads regular supply of electricity, decent housing, medical facilities, and access to them...” while Nweke (2003:7) relates “development and modernization as the x-raying of man’s interest in changing the society to enhance the quality of life issues, which bother on the welfare of man, the society ...” and several social issues. Development, therefore, does not stop at the provision of and accessibility of physical infrastructures, but goes beyond to the provision of mental advancement, capacity building for the organization of the society as modernize existing infrastructures in suit each moment.

These developmental efforts sap both government and the individual members of the society their hard earned currencies to provide. Because of the enormity of human and material resources that go into developmental processes, the provided amenities are jealously guarded or protected. The progressive rate of developmental acceleration (the safe keeping and enhancement of already provided social amenities) is referred to as the *sustainability* thereto. Developmental sustainability from religious perspective is dependent on one of the cardinal postulations of religion which is peace. Okwueze (2003:97 - 98), quoting Vatican council states that,

peace is not mere absence of war. Nor can it be reduced solely to be maintenance of a balance of power between enemies. Nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called, an enterprise of justice (Is. 32: 7). Peace results from that harmony built into human Society by its divine founder and actualized by men as they thirst after ever greater justice.

By this conclusion we agree with Okwueze that peace which is harmony built into the society is an indispensable factor for sustainable development. Therefore, any religion that does not propagate peace remains inimical to sustainable development in Nigeria. Granted the fact that the preservation of developmental efforts and survival of humanity is predicated upon cordiality and peaceful atmosphere, which religious fundamentalism does not provide, religious Fundamentalism remains a retrogressive cankerworm of ramifying negative effect on National developmental efforts. From our study across the globe it is obvious that religious fundamentalism is an ill wind which blows no one any good. The recent September 11 attack on America, precisely “the bombing of the World Trade Centre and Pentagon by terrorists” (Okwueze, 2003::02) associated with religious struggle in that far away country had affected us right here in Nigeria and other part of the globe. We lost our dear ones to death and the economic back lash is upon the entire world. Series of meeting have been convened and money spent on the activities of these fundamentals that now league or network themselves into terror gangs. Fortune which ought to have been invested into the advancement of human society is being channelled into the battle against terrorism.

Here in Nigeria it remains dicey for any Christian to sleep with his or her two eyes closed in the North for the uncertainty of who will remember that a page of the Qu'an was blasphemously used twenty years ago by Okoro whose name is synonymous with Saint Peter; whether he is a Christian or not. The Muslim on other hand is afraid of when and how the Christians in the South will react concerning the statement of Abubaka that incited the spread of Islam donkey years ago or which of his Muslim brothers that will see vision of the Prophet Muhammad who must have commissioned a new reform in Islam with the sword in his hand to behead those who may attempt to resist the injunctions of Allah Muslims and non Muslims alike.

“The Jos religious crisis past and present show the huddle the nation is jumping through, (while) the introduction of the Shariah legal System in some Northern States brought the country into a standstill. In Kaduna, the clash between the Muslims and the Christians led to the loss of about 1,000 lives” (Okwueze 2003:101-102). All these are in the name of religious fundamentalism. The various religious groups in Nigeria indeed leave in fears of each other in a nation of peace and unity. There is no mutual trust among the religious bodies because of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism.

Some other Recorded Religious Crises in Nigeria

Between 1991 and now there are several incidences of negative religious fundamentalism against Nigeria which had left lives and property worth billions of Naira destroyed in the name of religion. More of these are listed under:

- Discretion of Qu'an leaflet 1994
- Kaduna 1/2/2000 and 23/3/2000
- Kachia and Walingo 21 and 22/ 2/2000
- Aba and Onitsha religious riots 2000 (a reactionary reappraisal attack to the Kaduna riot)
- Damboa in Borno 26 /3/2000 (*A Diary of Clashes Since. 1999, Tell*. No39. September, 24, 2001: p. 27.)
- Afikpo/Edda Christianity against Egbela, (2004. witness)
- Ohazara Christians against Akaa (Nnaochie) (2005 eye witness)
- Jos religious riot 2009.
- Nkaleha Christians against Manwu (2001 eye witness)

The Nature of Religious Fundamentalism in Nigeria

Like we had tried to distinguish religious fundamentalism to fall into two categories of positive and negative characteristics, we may go a little further to discuss the nature of the same in Nigeria. Ogwu, in *Religion and National Integration*, (2001), regrets that religion which should function to unit all men and create a harmonious society,

... remains in the hands of man, divider of peoples and communities within and between nation states. For, it is to religious discord and intolerance that we owe the roots of the recurring clashes and conflicts that plague nation states. The ethnic-cleansing outrages in some parts of the world as well as the ubiquitous expressions of sectarian strife and destruction bear ample testimony to this disturbing trend. (1)

By global assessment Nigeria rightly belongs to the nation of states that is bedevilled by negative religious fundamentalism with its developmental impeding effects. In the case of Nigeria the nature of our religious fundamentalism is that of enemy within and without. Ours is the case of enemy within, because we respond to outside religious occurrences negatively more than the countries and people who suffer the direct impact of such religious differences to our detriment. We least consider the wellbeing of our nation and unstable economy when we react in sympathy with nations who are even socio-economically ahead of us. The little developments made rise in flames as though God or Allah was in need of such sacrifice. For example Middle-east conflicts had been a source of negative concern among our religious people in Nigeria. The trouble of the book *Satanic Verses* in far away countries of Great Britain raised dust here in Nigeria more than the country of its authorship. It is very obvious that our religious people often place their faith above the welfare of Nigeria hence our suffered of irrational responses. On the other hand immigrants as we may note have had their negative religious fundamentalist exuberances on us. To mention but one is the Maitatsine fundamentalism “led by Marwa believed to have emigrated from Northern Cameroon into Kaduna” (Oтите: 285). The nature of fundamentalism in Nigeria has

remained negatively disastrous to raise our curiosity unto possible control as we talk of the rebranding of the nation.

Causes of Religious Fundamentalism

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

Intolerance: Intolerance has always showed itself as the major factor responsible for inter and intra religious fundamental crises world over. For instance the Catholic Church would not tolerate Luther's reform articles, which resulted to major a crisis in the early Church. The Shiitte Muslims were not accepted by the Adakwa Gwammaja people for their style of preaching which was said to blaspheme the men of Allah. (Osa & Nmobu. *Tell*, August 26, 1996:12). Other examples abound, like in Kano (1980) where the use of words was the bane of trouble.

Politics: Our desperate politicians now creep in among these religious fanatics in pursuit of their ulterior motives as a leeway to achieve their motive under cover. Indeed the situation is so mixed up than we can separate religiously motivated war from politically engineered aggression. Religious fundamentalism remains the channel of wanton destruction of lives and property, which culminates into retrogression and insecurity that scares away investors, takes its negative toll on our national development. Suleman (Offi & Adeyi. *Tell* No.39. 2001:27), commenting on the tension in the north blamed religious crisis on our politicians as corroborated by Felix Chukwuma of the Nigerian Army thus, "Relationship between the Christians and Muslims in the Northern Nigeria was tensed up by the introduction of Sharia Islamic Law in the North ...and inflammatory statements made by eminent Nigerians of northern extraction" Our politicians most a times appeal to Religious fundamentalism and fanaticism as weapons as they weep up of sentiments in their favour as they play their game of number.

Youthful exuberance: The general tendency among our youths to exploit every available adventure is also contributory to the problem of Religious fundamentalism. The young people in their unguided life and utterances enter into arguments that naturally snowball into crisis. None issues are over stretched into hot exchange of words and blows. These over zealous youths create disaffection inter and intra religiously.

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

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

Consequences of Religious Fundamentalism

The consequences of religious fundamentalism cannot be over emphasized. Its impact is clear for every one to see. However, for the purpose of this paper, we may consider some of the side effects as:

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

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

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

Retrogression: When government or communities provide Schools, Hospitals, Electricity, Good roads, life is made easier for any such fortunate community or communities. But where for any reason at all; religiously or otherwise these amenities are destroyed hardship and retrogression sets in. If the individual society or government decides to replace the destroyed facilities, it will tantamount to double spending and wasting their resources that could have been use for new facilities lending sustenance to earlier developmental achievements. In circumstances such as this the community will just be marking time instead of marching forward. Religious fundamentalism in circumstances under review sets the hand of the clock backward contrary to sustainable development.

Economic Paralysis: During this time of flexing of religious muscle economic activities are at a halt and manpower hours lost. Irreparable lives and property go down leaving the individuals affected and the larger society victims of intolerance. Such times when the youths go restive for religious reasons nothing goes commercially positive. These are to mention but a few of the side and negative effects of religious fundamentalism.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings we recommend thus:

Patriotism as a priority: To find a solution to this problem we want state that every individual Nigerian must first think as a Nigerian before thinking as Nigeria Christian or Muslim. We must have it at the back of

our mind that the co-operate existence of Nigeria is a project bequeath to us from our forefathers. Before the coming of new religions or religious sects we had belong to a nation that had values. We must realize that Jesus Christ was of the stock of the Jews according to God's divine economy, while Muhammad's biography can neither be complete without reference to Saudi Arabia nor his religious motive separated from Ishmael. Of course there is never a religion without cultural bias. Nigeria should provide the prime Culture which should be tailored with religion for the enhancement of our common good instead of religious fundamentalism.

Recognition of the Basic Rudiment of Religion: We may need to insist here that the basic rudiment of religion cannot be located else where outside love and peace. For love Christ came and for the same Allah revealed his purpose through Muhammad. According to the bible, only the living worship God. If you hate and kill you cannot love.

Emphasis on Uniting Factors: Religious teachers who are probably knowledgeable and matured should teach all such uniting factors that abound in religion than the factors of ember. No body should fool himself to believe or teach that God will offer us the angels' wings for killing our fellow brothers or a seat at right hand of Christ if we hate and look down on others. We should teach right virtues that will enhance the society.

Control of National Borders: The fact that the Maitatsine religious riot of the 1980s was partly the hand work of immigrants from other countries of Africa obviously places the onus of conscious effort to protect our borders as of first priority on us. Our security agents should make concerted efforts to see to it that our borders are not left porous particularly now there are cases of threat on global religiously minded terrorism.

Conclusion

We have laboured to establish the fact that religious fundamentalism is the deep seated belief of religious faithful to the extent that the adherents give no room to other strands of belief system and reasonable teachings. It is also a fact that this is responsible hooliganism and other attendant evils around us. We wish to conclude that from our studies and inferences religious fundamentalism remains an ill wind that does not favour sustainable development in the in which it is found. It occasions lose of

both life, property and deters capacity building as well as slow down developmental pace.

The traumatic experience of victims of religious fundamentalism on teenagers and youths make them deride such religion(s) that brought upon them psychological trauma. They lose hope in religion and hate the same to the extreme. They also look down on religious values, symbols, actors and actresses. Concerted efforts, therefore, should be made toward checking this unwholesome and unacceptable religious trend for sustainable Development.

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