

The Implications Of Religious Crises On Quality Assurance In The 21st Century Nigeria

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Abstract

Crisis, whether religious, political or ethnic is gradually becoming a permanent feature of Nigerian communities. Consequently, the assurance of quality needed for development of 21st century Nigeria is becoming elusive and a mirage. With reference to religious crisis; many people had been killed and properties worth millions of naira had been destroyed. The perpetrators believed that those who do not share their mode of worship or doctrine of their religion are better dead than alive. The Boko Haram saga and the incessant Jos crises are still very much with us. The paper therefore aims to examine the various religious crises in the country, their causes and how they had affected negatively the development of Nigeria. It also aims at proffering solutions that will have a lasting grip on the Nigerian society so that the quality needed for the development of 21st century Nigeria can be assured. The study adopts both historical and sociological approaches to achieve these aims. The paper recommends religious tolerance, dialogue, mutual understanding, etc. as the panacea for religious crisis in the country. It concludes on the note that, it is from a peaceful environment that quality assurance needed for rapid development in the 21st century can emerge.

Key words: Religious Crisis, Implication, Quality Assurance and 21st Century Nigeria.

Introduction

For any country or nation to have quality assurance that is needed for a meaningful development, there must be peace and harmonious relationship among the people and groups that make up that country. Peace, therefore, is a *sine qua non* of harmonious existence. Nigeria is a country blessed with a triple religious heritage namely: African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity. Each of these religions relates to the Nigerian society differently and they fulfill different roles which are deeply rooted in the nature of each of the religions. (Akanmidu, 1993). Since Nigeria is made up of people of diverse religious backgrounds one may not be surprised that it is a pluralist religious country. Sequel to this, manipulators tend to

cash on sensitive nature of religion to create confusion and disrupt the peace in the society by promoting crisis and war.

Quality assurance as used in this study refers to the determination of government, corporate organizations and individuals to deliver qualitative services to their society. However, the frequent occurrence of religious crisis in some parts of the country makes one feel that the quality assurance that will usher in rapid development, especially in this 21st century, is a mirage. Although one may not be sure of the relativity of the term 'peace' yet, human beings desire peace and religion is believed to be the source and guarantor of individual and societal peace. It is therefore surprising that, in spite of the preaching of peace by all religions, Nigerians are still witnessing religious crises in this 21st Century.

Religious Crisis in Nigeria

Nigerians have witnessed series of religious crises in the past and they are still witnessing such today. As a result of these crises, many people had died and properties worth millions of naira were destroyed. In recent times, religious crisis, especially between Muslims and Christians had reached a dimension whereby each group of adherents enthusiastically calls on God to annihilate the other group (Okoduwa, 2000). By the nature of Islam, Christians are infidels; in the same vein, the Christians regard the Muslims as pagans.

In 1978, the Muslim members of the House of Representative insisted that the *Shariah* law court be established throughout the federation. This demand was refused by the members of Assembly (mostly Christians) on the ground that Nigeria is a secular state. As a result, the Muslim representatives staged a walk out. Though the request was not granted a place in the constitution, yet it marked a landmark in the gradual build up of religious tensions (Okoduwa, 2000).

Intra-Religious Crisis

There are different levels and forms of religious crisis in Nigeria. These include; intra and inter-religious crisis. Intra-religious crisis exists within a particular sect or denomination. Examples are the Maitatsine riot of 1980 in Kano and skirmishes between the Izala and the Tijjanyya in Gombe in 1987 (Larkin, 2009). With the emergence of the new era of religious crisis in Nigeria in 1980 when maitatsine sect launched a violent attack on the people of Kano (Ekoko and Amadi, 2000), there have been several similar upheavals in some parts of the country (Akinseye, 1999).

Inter-Religious Crisis

These are crises that occur between two or more different religious groups or traditions. Among the religious crises that fell under this category are: the Bulumkutu riot of October 1982, the various Kaduna riots of 1987, 1988 and the year 2000. As if these were not enough, there was Kaduna riot of 22nd November, 2002 where about 200 people were reportedly killed and properties worth millions of naira were also destroyed. This crisis was said to have been caused by what the people termed 'blasphemous publication' (Nigerian Tribune, 2002). Also, on the

same day there was a protest against “Miss World Beauty Contest” scheduled to hold on December 7th, 2002 in Abuja (*The Hope*, 2002).

Coming down to the Southern part of the country, there were crises that erupted because of religious symbols. For instance, there was a religious crisis in May 1986 at the chapel of Resurrection, University of Ibadan when the statue of the Rising Christ’ was set ablaze by an unknown group of people. Besides, in Imo State the Ikenga symbol which signifies an upright man struggling through the vicissitudes of life in Igbo land was destroyed by a group of religious fanatics who described the symbol as an object of Idol worship (Adamolekun, 2003).

Recently, *Boko Haram*, an Islamic sect launched its attack on the people of Bauchi, Jos, Maiduguri and Abuja where a suicide bomber attacked the United Nations house. During these attacks, many Nigerians lost their lives. Also, the incessant Jos crises is manifesting the alarming rate at which crises are moving in this country. Through bomb attacks and other deadly means, both human and material resources are being wasted. These and many others are bitter experiences of religious crisis that does not augur well with the quality assurance needed for development of the 21st century Nigeria.

Causes of Religious Crisis in Nigeria

In some cases, the various religious crises that occurred are linked with Christian-Muslim- disagreements. However, the remote causes are not always religious. Prominent among the various causes of conflict in Nigeria *is* intolerance. The three major religions in the country see themselves as the distinct entities that have nothing to share in common. With the arrival of modern religions (Christianity & Islam) in Nigeria, the religious scenario no longer remains the same. Both Islam and Christianity see each other as something to be treated with contempt. This further generated intolerant attitude towards themselves with extension to indigenous belief system and their places of worship (Ositelu, 1999). Since then, the struggle has been on how to get rid of each other.

The second cause of conflict in this country is the inordinate ambition of the politicians. Politics in Nigeria today is taking a new dimension. The average politicians see politics as the shortcut to instant wealth. Hence, it is pursued with ‘do or die approach’. Their major aim is to amass wealth as much as they can and save up much money to fight future elections so that they can continue to be the choice of their constituencies for political posts (Adesina, 2005). They can do and use anything (including religion) to achieve their aims. It is even on record that religion is fast becoming one of the ready made weapons that are often manipulated by self-seeking leaders (Adiele, 1993). In the observation of MAMSER as cited by Alana (1993:215), it was observed that: “Today, religion has become one of the important weapons which selfish leaders use to manipulate and dividing the people. Their misuse of religion has led to ugly riot and loss of lives and properties.”

From the above quotation one can see that some of the religious crises often experienced in Nigeria were more of political than religious. It is therefore

necessary for the masses who are being used to know that those who claim to be championing their course are not without hidden motives (Adiele, 1993).

The third cause is fanaticism. The word, according to Hornby (1984) is a violent, unreasoning enthusiasm. By this, we simply mean religious claim to absoluteness. This is a common feature of the modern religions in Nigeria. Religious fanaticism in Nigeria especially between Muslims and Christians has reached a dangerous dimension whereby each group of adherents enthusiastically call on God to annihilate the other group (Okoduwa, 2000). They are therefore not ready to tolerate others who do not think and feel the way they do. In the word of Aruna, summarized by Babs Mala (1985).

The fanatics see other believers as those who have gone astray and who needs some sermon or preaching to make them fall in line with their doctrine, which to them is always the best and most reliable basis for redemption of the judgment day... they believe, rather wrongly, that those who do not share their mode of worship or the doctrine of their religions were better dead than alive. (p.111).

It is no longer a hidden thing these days to see fanatics implementing their thought in action. They often engage in physical violence to make those they classify as unbelievers pursue the same course with them (Ogunleye, 2007).

Furthermore, unguarded and reckless utterances are also part of the major causes of both religious and political riots in Nigeria. In a pluralist religious state like Nigeria, one expects that a preacher would preach the idea of the religion and leave his audience to compare with those of other religions and made their choice. Instead of this, some preachers dabble into the doctrine of another religion, distort facts and misrepresent its teaching in order to impress the audience. Many conflicts that could have been averted had been experienced as a result of reckless publications and unguarded utterances. Some religious and political groups have gone to the extent of having their own newspapers and magazines through which they publish their nasty and provocative articles (Sheriki, 1993). Even, some public newspapers are being used to disseminate these unhallowed messages that have led to conflicts in many occasions.

Moreover, fear of domination is another contributing factor to the eruption of crisis in Nigeria. Both religions (Islam and Christianity) are moving towards having dominion over each other. They always manifest this in their aggressive evangelism throughout the nook and cranny of the country. The fear of extinction by non-Muslim in a densely populated Islamic community often generates conflict. Likewise in Christian community, non-Christians may find their survival at stake. Each religious group therefore would want to protect her territorial integrity and free from any form of external domination. Anything short of this will surely lead to crisis.

Last but not the least is the influence of the political class. This class of people also can not be left out of this menace. They often display their influence on

other parties in the country. Political power is seen as a way of protecting the religious interest of the office holder and fostering the spread of such religions. Some African rulers such as Idi Amin used political power to advance religious persecution with devastating consequences for the state (Oguagha, 1994).

Impacts of Religious Crisis on Quality Assurance in the Development of 21st Century Nigeria

Since there is no value-free action, every piece of action carries consequences on the actor and the society at large (Igboin and Awoniyi, 2006). Thus, religious crisis, whether premeditated or not, produces negative effects on the Nigerian socio-economic and political development. To start with, religious crisis in Nigeria had served and is still serving as a cog in the wheel of achieving national objectives which have to do with socio-economic and political development. It is pertinent to state that national development is a historical problem that shows a scenario of the dilemma of a people bound together in an irreconcilable struggle between their diversities as different peoples and their goals as one nation. Fundamental among the militating factors against the efforts of the people toward nation building is religious crisis with political undertone (Gofwen, 2004).

Secondly, religious crisis often lead to loss of lives and properties. Arising from these losses is the fact that the nation is deprived of much needed manpower. Affected families have lost either their bread winners or economically useful members. All these have negative impact on the socio-economic wellbeing of the country in general. Apart from the loss of lives, there were widespread disruptions of various activities, occasioning loss of precious hours, which have negative effects on productivity. A rough estimate of these losses in addition to the cost of damaged properties and economic structures run into billions. The huge sum which the nation is spending to replace the damaged properties or to pay compensations would have been profitably invested on other pressing areas in the country.

Furthermore, religious crisis has exerted a sense of security risk and fear of uncertainty on both local and foreign investors. This no doubt, has discouraged investment in the country. There are many cases where international and local businesses concerned have pulled out of certain areas considered trouble spots. To win these investors back, a lot of money and time will be spent on over seas trips in order to regain their confidence. In a fresh crisis that broke out in Jos on the 5th of September, 2011 where at least six people were killed, all activities were paralyzed. All banks were closed, markets and schools deserted, workers went on strike and the safety of life and properties could no longer be guaranteed.

In addition, religious crisis has always been a threat to political stability. In some cases most of these crises are politically motivated. The most prominent of this is the threat it poses to the democratic process, which is a cardinal pillar on which nation building as a process is laid. Right from the time of independence there has been a gradual and continuing polarization of the country across religious lines. For instance, whenever the choice of presidential or governorship candidate is

to be made in any political party, the major concern is often the religion the candidate professes.

Commenting on the above fact, Abdul (2002) observes that “political actors have turned religious terrain into battle ground for contesting perceived marginalization and to gain political recognition and support from their communities.” (p.172). From all indications above, one can say categorically that the menace of religious crisis is now a serious matter that deserves urgent attention.

Towards Peaceful Crisis Management in Nigeria

One of the responsibilities of government in any given society is to provide a quality assurance that will see to the country’s economic, social, political and religious development. However, when it seems that government, from its past attempts to bring the situation under control, cannot single handedly handle the case of various religious crises in the country, then the academia need to wade in and proffer solution that will have a lasting grip on the situation.

First and foremost is the emulation of indigenous worshippers in the area of tolerance. In fact, peace-making through tolerance is a major task of indigenous religious functionaries. It is on this ground that Rweyemami (1989) says:

In African Traditional Religion, the peace-maker represents divine power on the one hand and social harmony on the other. In his person he expresses the divine origin of peace, a peace that is associated with the virtues of loyalty, honesty and trust in God.(p.394).

As religious groups, there is need to tolerate one another. Tolerance as used in this context refers to ability of religious man, politician or man from different ethnic groups to give allowance for the opinions, beliefs and practices of other people (Ayantayo 2002). The real reason for African ecumenism is simply the capacity of African Religion to tolerate and accommodate alternative religious cultures. Although, there are few cases of conflicts between indigenous adherents and other religious worshippers yet, it is apparent that Nigeria has been witnessing mostly Muslim/Christian conflicts since independence which gives an impression that it is these two religions alone that have monopoly of violence. Certainly they are not it is because adherents of African Religion are the most tolerant of the three religious groups in the country. In the observation of Dime (19936):

One of the greatest virtues of Africa religion (Afrer) is its religious tolerance. There is hardly any religion in the world that teaches religious tolerance as does African religion. It teaches it not so much by precept as by practice that is, by example. (146).

If adherents of both Islam and Christianity can emulate indigenous worshippers in the area of tolerance, then the issue of religious conflicts will soon become a forgotten issue. In the past, before the emergence of modern religions, Nigeria accommodates innumerable number of religious sects and cults such as: Ekpo, Ala, Ifa and so on, yet there was mutual understanding.

The second way of getting out of conflict situation is through dialogue. This is exchange of opinions between people with opposing interests or points of view. Dialogue can be based on religion, culture, politics or ethnic group. One of the major characteristics of dialogue is that it encourages those involved to respect all that is good in the other and also to respect others' sincerity in the matters where they cannot agree. This has been the position of indigenous religion from the time immemorial, and it affords her the opportunity to ascertain peaceful co-existence and tolerance with other religions in Nigeria. In recognition of this, the Vatican Council II (1962-1965) issued a declaration pleading with all to "forget the past and urges a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding for the benefit of all men and to let them, together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral value." (Austin, 1981).

Dialogue therefore does not bury the conviction of people involved but openly avow them. This makes it to be popular among the means of getting conflict under control.

Furthermore, establishment of committee of community leaders will be of great help in conflict management. This committee will include: traditional rulers, religious leaders, chiefs and clan heads. It is this committee that will teach the youth of the community the moral and human values as enshrined in their religions and culture. In traditional African society, peace is not an abstract poetic concept, but rather a practical concept. In indigenous religion of Africa, peace is conceived in relation to order, harmony and equilibrium. Thus, society is believed to be divinely established and the obligation to maintain them is religious (Onah, 2009). The effort of traditional rulers in conflict resolution and crisis management which show them as leaders worthy of emulation was described by Malami (1989) when he said:

Over the years whether under the British colonial rule, civilian rule after independence, or even under military rule, with the strongest weapon of coercion at its disposal, traditional rulers have been called upon and used to stabilize crisis situations.

It is therefore believed that, if this committee is established, peace which is the goal of all moral conducts, shall be attained.

Moreover, the mass media through which both religious and political people publicize their activities must be objective in discharging their duties so as not to cause confusion. Before any announcement or programme could be made on the air, it should be carefully edited since in some cases, what is seen and heard often determine the way people act and react. Programms that will promote peace and harmonious relationship should be encouraged and promoted. This must be manifested in their information dissemination.

Also, government at all levels should not be biased towards one religion at the expense of others. Any attempt by government to pitch its tent with a particular religion will run contrary to the provision of the 1979 constitution which states that "the government of the federation or a state shall not adopt any religion as state

religion” (Okoduwa, 2002). This clearly shows that Nigeria is a secular state that does not have an official religion.

Besides, what happened in 1986 must not be allowed to repeat itself. In 1986, the then administration in Nigeria set up the National Advisory Council on Religious Affairs with membership from two of the three major religions in Nigeria namely: Islam and Christianity. It is unfortunate that the third, indigenous religion was not represented in that an important council. It is a pity that the intolerance of the two invited religions emasculated the Council and rendered it ineffective. The magnanimity of indigenous religion would have perhaps saved the Council if it were represented (Dime, 1993).

In addition, government at all levels must make provision for job opportunities. In traditional African society, there is no room for loiterers or idlers because it is a general belief that an idle hand is a devil’s workshop. It is through job opportunity that suffering and poverty, which in some cases often lead to conflict, can be alleviated. When people are gainfully employed, the menace of religious crisis will be reduced to the barest minimum if not totally eradicated.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is obvious that Nigerians have suffered a lot from series of religious crises and riots. Bearing in mind the causes of those crises and the failure of the past attempts to bring them under control, it was discovered that these crises have generated negative effects on the quality assurance needed for rapid development in the 21st century Nigeria. Prominent among the effects are; loss of human and material resources, socio-economic and political instability, fear of insecurity, wasting of money and time meant for developmental projects on crisis management. This paper therefore recommended some ways through which religious crises could be managed in the country. These include; emulation of indigenous worshippers in the areas of tolerance, mutual understanding and moral consciousness. Others include; establishment of committee of community leaders, unbiased attitude of government towards all religions and provision of job opportunity for youths. The paper concludes on the note that, it is from a peaceful and harmonious environment that the needed qualitative development in the 21st century Nigeria can be assured.

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