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## Religious Ideologies as a Factor of Insecurity in Nigeria: An Ethical Perspective

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### Abstract

The underlying ideologies and practical profession of some religions in Nigeria have become so caustic that the nation's social formation is being dismantled. By ideology is meant the unreal or imaginary relation to the real conditions of existence. When adherents of certain religions perceive their religions as the only ones deserving commitment and recognition in a secular and religious pluralistic society, realisation of peaceful coexistence is bound to be a mirage. Several works have been done on Nigeria's religious pluralism vis-a- vis social insecurity in the country. Analysing the various ideologies held by different religious adherents and their volatile implications in the context of ethical principles is the gap in scholarship that this paper intends to fill. Within the theoretical construct of *Vacuum Filling Theory*, the study shows that the gap between what the leaders of religions in Nigeria ought to do and what they actually do and the gap between what the masses needed and what is provided caused and heightened the religious crises in Nigeria. Through library research, views from the media, personal interviews and observations the impacts of ideologies of various religions in Nigeria are re-examined, highlighting their nature and how they engender conflicts in the polity. The extent to which such ideologies and their inherent traits of exclusiveness and superiority have spawn conflicts and their attendant insecurity is emphasized with the outcome including the destabilization of the economic, political and civil landscape of the nation. Allowing the ethical values inherent in the various religions to be models for interpersonal relationships and governance are recommended instead of projecting ideologies that only rouse tension and insecurity.

### Introduction

Insecurity is one of the greatest challenges that is facing the world in the twenty-first century. Many nations have been enmeshed in one crisis or the other. These have put question marks on the corporate existence of democratic nations. In Nigeria, there is a palpable feeling of insecurity which has assumed an epidemic dimension with instances of bomb explosions, armed robbery, kidnapping, rape and other mindless acts of violence. At the background of almost all these cases are issues that are not unconnected with religion. Religious hostility and its

accompanying insecurity in Nigeria have been variously addressed by scholars and social analysts without paying much attention to the ethical implications of the religious ideologies of the major religions practised in Nigeria. This is the gap this paper is poised to fill. The submission of this paper is that Nigeria as well as many nations is presently plunged into a state of religion –related crises not because religion is conflicting in nature but because adherents of some religions have imbibed some corrosive ideologies that are not consistent with the primordial tenets of their faiths. It is the intent of this paper to unearth some of these ideologies and their ethical implications, and also suggest how the nation can experience the much needed national unity amidst the multiple religions that she inherited. In order to achieve this goal, this paper employs both descriptive and analytical research methods which border on the concepts of religion, religious ideologies in Nigeria and societal stability. The analysis is carried out within the ambit of Vacuum Filling theory and Durkheim’s Functional theory of religion.

### **Concept of Religion**

Religion as a concept may appear simple but it is shrouded in ambiguity and controversy. Religion pervades every aspect of the African life (Mbiti, 1982). Almost everybody claims to be religious and also claims to know much about religion. However, when people are called upon to explain what they know about religion and why, some level of elevated ignorance is displayed. Similarly, there are as many definitions of religion as there are scholars of religion. Carlston sees religion as a traditional system of beliefs toward the supernatural world, interaction with the temporal world, and man’s linkage with the supernatural world. Emile Durkheim defines religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things...which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them (Durkheim, 1965). To have a religion is to pay allegiance to a supernatural being(s) through rituals, offerings and obedience to their dictates which determines the adherents’ relationship with the supernatural and other natural things including humans. Unlike Comte and Marx who perceive religion as an illusion and a mere fantasy, Emile Durkheim believes in the truth and usefulness of religion. According to Durkheim, religion is the most primitive of all social phenomena. It was the source through which all successive transformations of knowledge were manifested into collective activities like law, morality, art, science and politics and so on. Thus in the beginning, all is religion. Still from a functional perspective, Yinger adds that religion is a system of beliefs and practices through which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of human life. It is the refusal to capitulate to death, to give up in the face of frustration, to allow hostility to tear apart one’s human associations (Yinger, 1967). Emmanuel Kant defines religion as the recognition of our duties as divine commands (Gundry, 1958). In his descriptive or substantive viewpoint, Taylor defines religion as “belief in supernatural beings”.

Religion is more than a system of beliefs that guides social actions, because this can also be said of magic and science. Religion was said to have been originally instituted to invoke the supernatural essence into the affairs of man. It explains those perplexing issues and mysteries of life that mortals cannot comprehend such

as the fragility, temporality and the fittingness of the entity called life and the riddle and inevitability of death (AKinola, 1999). In religion, beliefs are supported by a community which can be referred to as church, and so on. In addition, religion is concerned with veneration of the sacred or the holy. Owing to the pervasive nature of religion (touching theology, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, morality, law and the rest of them) and individual opinions about it, there are myriads of disagreements surrounding the concept of religion. It is this complex nature of religion that makes it capable of being easily understood or misunderstood, depending on the individual's perception of it and the ideology of who is passing the judgement on one's view of the subject. This brings us to the explanation of religious ideology.

### **Religious Ideology**

An adequate description of the concept of religious ideology can only be provided by splitting the words into two: religion and ideology. Having given a considerably detailed definition of religion, one can focus on the word ideology. The synonyms for ideology are philosophy, belief, creed, system and dogma. There are political ideologies, economic ideologies, religious ideologies and so on. According to Collins English Dictionary, a political ideology is a body of ideas that reflects the beliefs and interests of a nation or a political party. Unlike a political ideology like democracy or socialism, religious ideologies are mystical and esoteric. Religious ideology reserves special recognition to sacredness. In spite of the fact that religion can play a number of didactic and humanistic roles in the society, its ideologies can be so rigid and unflinching that compromising or abandoning its essence is presumptuous. This is so because most of such ideologies are acclaimed to be fundamental to the tenets of the faith. It is the underlying principles behind a chosen course. Ideology provides the reason or basis for an action. It can evolve from ideas (real or imagined), perceptions or views that are biased by cultural or situational thoughts which galvanised to influence or determine a given course of action (Ugwulebo, (2001). In other words, religious ideologies are products of both revealed and sacred guiding posts and human foibles. It is often characterised by a mixture of doctrinal statements and excessive enthusiastic stance by the adherents of a particular religion in order to assert and superimpose the said religion over others. It is what usually gives impetus to the attitudes of exclusiveness and superiority found in religious fundamentalism, the duo that has made religious harmony to be a mirage in a pluralistic society as Nigeria.

In the ideologies of Christianity and Islam, each claims to be the sole dispenser of salvation. Christians and Muslims differently claim to be the "best and the only universal religion that vouchsafes salvation to all mankind" (Mala, 1985). Though some religious ideologies are not apparently conflict-laden and dysfunctional, many creed, for example, provide the ideologies that inspire the adherents to form strong associations, brotherhood and communities of believers, they are often overstretched to the exclusion of other members of the society.

The particularity of Christian religious ideology includes the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity as the only way to God. This claim is made on the basis of some Biblical records such as:

a. "I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

b. "Whoever believes in the Son Has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36).

c. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12)

Similarly, Muslims claim that Islam is the only true and unique religion Allah provided for mankind with Mohammad as His Prophet and Messenger. Therefore punishment awaits those who will not accept him. Interestingly, there are also Quranic texts that underline such beliefs:

a "Surely the true religion with God is Islam" (Q. 3:19)

b "Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed my blessing upon you and I have approved Islam for your religion" (Q.5:3)

c "And I am (Mohammad) the first of the Moslems" (Q.6:194)

These different claims reveal among other things ideologies that arrogate exclusiveness, superiority and fanaticism. Is it therefore surprising that a society that harbours both religions should be susceptible to some levels of conflicts and insecurities?

#### Religious Ideology in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the basic ideologies that guide some religions are so volatile that the social structure of the nation is at the brink of somersaulting. Nigeria is in a sense a jungle of numerous religions with three religions as the most outstanding. These three dominant religions are the traditional religion, Christianity and Islam. Among these three, the ideologies of Christianity and Islam have the most caustic tendencies. The traditional religion has some ideologies that possess a tranquilizing mien. To a considerable extent, it accommodates and tolerates. African traditional religion does not proselyte, nor does it pick up arms when its worshippers desert it. And it does not claim that its object of worship is superior. For Christianity and Islam, it is a different case altogether. In the ideologies of both religions, there is a claim of being the sole dispenser of salvation. Each religion claims to be the most practicable that leads to eternal life. From a survey conducted in Ibadan some years back, it has been discovered that in Nigeria, these differences in ideology has degenerated to making the adherents of each of the two religions being prejudiced and embarking on pejorative name-calling. Christians accused Moslems of being: unforgiving, immoral, syncretic, filthy, *hardhearted*, copying, hypocritical, fetish, legalistic and barbaric. Muslims, on the other hand accuse Christians of being idolatrous, arrogant, complacent, hypocritical, gluttonous (Christians eat pork and they drink alcohol), hateful, domineering, deification of Jesus, adoption of western culture (like western dressing and Western education) (Mala, 1985). Such accusations appear to be petty, advert-laden and irrelevant to what is expected to be the goals of the Christian faith, which is to preach the gospel, make disciple and teach them to observe what is commanded (Mtt.28:20 & Mk.16:15).

In about four decades ago, the aforementioned diverse ideologies and the accompanying prejudices only ended up in name calling and civil discrimination. Presently, divergent religious ideologies have become so caustic in Nigeria as well as other parts of the world that life has become terribly unsafe. The idea of

perceiving one religion or the other as the only true and practicable religion in a secular nation has made peaceful co-existence impossible. Among the ideologies that have succeeded in plunging our beloved nation into a state of unprecedented insecurity are: 1) As recorded in the African Concord “Islam today is interpreted in many ways, sometimes according to the whims of religious and political leaders. The fundamentalist ideology is broadly based on the fact that Islam alone can create the necessary political, cultural, economic and social change without which no real democracy can be achieved. Unless and until Islamists assimilate this concept in their thought and behaviour, and embody it in various institutions, they will be betraying their faith” (African Concord Magazine, Jan. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1986:25) “. That Islam alone can create ideal political, economic and social change amidst other religions in a pluralistic society is unfair and provocative. 2) Another volcanic religious ideology is that of indoctrination. In Nigeria, people are socialized from infancy to hate other religions and denominations outside the one they are born into. In the early 1960s in Igboland, there used to be a ‘semi religious war’ among school children. At the close of the school period each day, children from a Catholic school and an Anglican (CMS) school situated in an opposite direction would leave their respective schools. On meeting themselves at a central spot, the children from the Anglican School would start singing ‘Fada, Fada tara akwa okuko rere ere mbom’ (Rev. Father ate so much eggs from parishioners that he ate a rotten egg). The Catholic school children in return will start singing : ‘CMS ori mai mai’ (CMS members are so poor that all they eat is moi-moi). After some exchange of derogatory songs, they would put down their school bags and fighting would ensue. All these were as a result of indoctrination that people of the ‘other’ denomination (though same religion). Innocent children were made to believe that people from other denominations are enemies. It will be interesting to note that these biases are still there even now that children from the two denominations attend the same school. In the same vein, Moslems and Christians socialize their children to see their religion as the only God-sent religion that must be embraced by the entire mankind. Anything short of this must not be tolerated. By so doing, people’s freedom to belong to religions of their choice is being infringed upon. The Qur’an has not helped matters, regarding this matter. It says: ‘Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the last days...until they pay *the Jizyah* with willing submission and, feel themselves subdued (Yusuf, 1989)).

Worst still is the ideology that socializes adherents into believing that anybody who dies fighting for Allah will automatically go to heaven. God should only be seen as a creator and sustainer of life and not a killer. Such ideology was buttressed by Sheik Gumi, a learned cleric, in his interview, with the Quality magazine. He was quoted as saying: “Once you are a Muslim, you cannot accept to choose a non-Muslim to be your leader...So if we want Nigeria to be a good country, we must follow one faith ...I do not think we can accept a ...to be our leader unless we are forced. If Christians do not accept Muslims as their leader, then we have to divide this country” (Yusuf, 1989). However, a counter idea from Momoh ,C.S insists that one of the central teachings of Islam is submission or surrender. This submission is primarily to Allah’s will. Anyone who dares to cultivate the habit of surrendering or submission would invariably find it easy to sympathise, cooperate, empathize,

respect life, creation and creatures of God. Such culture of submission to the will of God will imply submission to rules, law, authority and human beings. This is because, 'there is no authority except that which God has established' (Romans 13:2) The Islamic ideology of not training ones children and wards constitutes the evil of living with the egg of a python. Bringing children into the world without caring for them, and driving them away at a tender age to be on tutelage to a largely unorganised Quranic school amounts to amputating a well oiled system. These "almajiris" (children of the air) most times end up being directionless, frustrated, and hopeless members of the society. They often see their lives to be worthless, and therefore can cause trouble anytime, even if it will entail ending their lives and the life of anybody they come in contact with. Based on the Bulunkutu El-Badawy Report, 1983, and the 1983 Jimeta-Uwais' Report, it was revealed that the almajiri and their teachers played a dominant role in Maitatsine, especially in providing ideological leadership and rational justification for the movement (Bako, 1991). There is a mutual relationship between these almajiris and the bourgeoisie. While the latter feed the former and use them for bohemian mischief, the former constitute ready hands for manipulation in the orbit of religious conflagration. Even when there are no religious crises, these almajiris are compelled to create one, at least to remain relevant in the system.

The last but not the least is the idea of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is a terminology that has a Christian origin. It came into use in the early years of the last century and it denotes certain protestant churches and organisations, especially those that maintained the literal divine origin and the inerrancy of the bible. In this they oppose the liberal and modernist theologians who tend to be more critical and hold a historical view of scripture. In Islam, fundamentalism is a religious ideology that advocates a return to the fundamentals of Islam, which are enshrined in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Among the features of Islamic fundamentalists are political sensitivity and exclusivism. According to Oliver Roy, 'The fundamentalists are passionate in their opposition to the perceived "corrupting influence of Western culture", like Western education, Western dress, neckties, laughter and Western form of salutation(handshake and applause)'. For such fundamentalists, other sects and religions whose adherents do not conform to the above ideology should be eradicated (Oliver Roy in Ugwulebo, 2001). Unfortunately, it is these sects that have advanced into Boko Haram terrorist groups that have kept the nation sleepless since 2009.

### **Religious Ideology and Nigeria's Insecurity**

Global insecurity has toppled the many challenges of the twenty- first century, and religious issues have proved to be the greatest underlying factor. Security is being in a state of assured freedom. It could be freedom from want and poverty(food security), freedom from danger and destruction(personal and corporate security), freedom from being toppled and destabilized(national security). Insecurity on the other hand presupposes scarcity, anxiety, fear, lack of confidence, uncertainty, lack of protection and instability. In recent times, Nigeria has been bedevilled by an unprecedented wave of insecurity. The spate is alarmingly unparalleled, and the bitter truth is that the situation is capable of drifting the nation to a failed state if nothing is done about it. The impact of insecurity is holistic,

cutting across the old and the young, rich and poor, religious and secular. A few years ago, the Emir of Kano, Alhaji Ado Bayero narrowly escaped death by whiskers. His two aids and driver were not so lucky as they were hacked down to death by the assailants. In Okene, Kogi State, gunmen alleged to be sympathetic to the cause of Islamic rebels in Mali ambushed and opened fire on Nigerian soldiers on their way to be deployed in Mali by a faceless new group known as “Vanguard for the Protection of Moslems in Black Africa.’

At the background of all the above crises and cases of insecurity are issues that are not unconnected with religion. Religion, however, is not a destructive weapon. It recognizes nationhood, kingdom, government, leadership, citizenship, rights, freedom, authority and power (Durgba, A. (1999)). Nigeria is very richly endowed in multiple religions as well as in the areas of human population, mineral resources and ideal weather. Every religion is underlined with both written and unwritten codes, conducts, taboos and principles by which it fosters peace, social integration, justice, and stability which are pivotal to national development. It is therefore, the submission of this thesis that the problem is not with existing religions in Nigeria but the ideologies of religious practitioners. The constant experiences of religious-insecurity resulting from the menace of hostilities, uprisings, attacks and assaults in our society is a product of limited knowledge, misinterpretation and misapplication of the religions’ sacred texts. No society exists without religion and no religion exists without society. In spite of the apparent popularity of science and technology, and the Comtean form of Positivism in humanism, religion has come to pervade and permeate our cultures and social structures. In the area of politics, religion has a great influence on its ideology, campaign busting, party affiliation, voting behaviour, pressure-group formation and diplomatic relations. Even legislative policy-decisions, government programmes and the constitution are influenced by religion. It is this garb of imbroglia-laden religious ideologies that some Nigerian politicians use to entrench politics of exclusion, intimidation, blackmail, ethnic sentiments and violence. The present religious crisis is taking another dimension as the Igbo ethnic group is considering an option of declaring war against the North owing to the continuous merciless killing and maiming of the Igbo by Boko Haram-one of the Muslim fundamentalists with an ideology that is totally anti-Western culture (Punch, 29 March,2013).

### **Ethical Appraisal of Religious Ideologies and Insecurity in Nigeria**

It is important to analyse Nigerian’s religious ideologies and their consequent insecurity from ethical stand point because they are human conducts. Ethics judges human conduct as to determine its rightness or wrongness based on some laid-down principles. Hence, ethics is defined as the normative science of what is morally right and wrong, good and bad (Lillie, 1961).Ethics motivates people to make proper judgement and proper decisions. Ethics evaluates human conduct, and every human conduct is a community affair as it must link an individual to another person or group of people. Furthermore, every religion is undergirded with ethical principles. Religion according to Taylor involves belief and practice. Religious ethics and ethical conduct has to do with the practical aspect of religion. Every religion,( Christianity and Islam inclusive) preach good conduct, honesty, chastity, respect

for life, kindness, tolerance, hospitality, responsibility, gentleness, endurance etc. Based on the objectivity of ethics, good conduct is recognizable in every religion and it always leads to peace, prestige, good reputation, honour and progress, both for individuals and for the community. Sociologists have confirmed that religion is the source of morality, and it is through its moral attributes that it contributes to the stabilization of the society (Akinola, 1999:82). Nigeria's religious practitioners should realize that religion needs to play a positive role in human society for it to retain its worthiness. Violence, destruction of lives and property, segregation against fellow human beings cannot be considered ethically right and Nigerians should desist from such behaviours, because they do not represent any particular religious code and creed but ideologies that are borne out of pride, anger, jealousy and hatred.

### **The Way Forward**

In a system of obvious diversity and plurality of religions as is the case with Nigeria, recognition, acceptance and tolerance are inevitable if there will be peaceful cohabitation and safety. In other words, Nigerians should realise and acknowledge that we differ in so many areas, religious matters inclusive. With the monumental blunder of amalgamating peoples who were culturally incompatible in 1914, religion is the only chord that can bind us together. Fortunately, Nigeria is a very religious nation. Religion as a concept is not intrinsically bad. It is rather, characteristically, integrative. It is a concept of peace and a source of development. All religions place high values on human life and security. In Judeo-Christian religions, an injunction in the Decalogue is "Thou shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13). In Islam, it is recorded that 'A person loses his right to life if he is proved to be responsible for engineering serious dissension and turmoil in the society (Sura 2:191).

Examining the fundamental values and teachings espoused by Islam, they could be laudable. In the argument of Suleiman Ibrahim, Islam upholds values such as the following:

- i) Tawhid as the basis of faith
- ii) Tagwa as the basis of personality
- iii) Adl, justice as the prime value for socio-economic interrelationship
- iv) Shura as the process of involving people in decision making.
- v) Hurriyya to enable the individual to protect his rights and play his rightful role in society (Suleiman, 1994) (Yusuf, 1989).

Religious leaders should encourage their members to read understand and interpret the sacred texts correctly. It is difficult to reconcile a religion with the above guiding principles with the present state of gruesome violence that is displayed in praxis in our country. It all boils down to the fact that these occurrences of religious violence are engineered by human factors. Certain ideologies are imported from some people's mental wind waves. Such imported ideologies should be expunged from peoples psyche so that the contents of the original sacred texts of the two popular religions in Nigeria will be expressed. For the Christian religion, the holy book says, "Love is the greatest...You shall love the Lord your God...and love your neighbour as yourself"(1 Cor.13:8&Matt.22:37-39 ).If both religions 'sacred texts are read and interpreted from a 'God-like' and 'humane' perspectives, cases of

unleashing wickedness and destruction of lives and properties will be drastically reduced. Both religions (Christianity and Islam) claim to be monotheistic in nature and the same descriptions are alluded to their Deity. In both religions, their God is referred to as the forgiving God, merciful and the God in who is love personified and in whom there is no wickedness. The essence of religion is ultimately about humans being equal in God's sight, being created by the same God to resemble and represent Him on earth in every facet of human endeavour.

To inculcate the right attitude to religious matters, the Government of Nigerian should entrench 'Emancipatory Education' This will help Nigerians to understand that religion is meant to engender peace, mercy and non-violence . In addition, the Almajiris and other northern parents should be enlightened on the implications of the dialectical relationship that exists between the bourgeoisie and the Almajiris. Since a typical Muslim illiterate parent will not train their children but push them to koranic scholars who are unable to adequately take care of them, and in order to eke out subsistence to avoid dying of hunger ,they will submit to these bourgeoisie who will offer to feed them and then use them to execute dastard wickedness against perceived political opponents and people of other religions. This rich class will subject the Almajiris to such hazards while their own children are receiving quality education outside the country.

Similarly, politicians and the elite should desist from manipulating and manoeuvring religious creed and dogma to perpetrate caustic ideologies that will snowball into religious conflicts. This is necessary because of the understanding that God is love, merciful and compassionate. Any religion that holds Him as its object of worship should uphold a religious tradition that does not allow hatred, murder, violence intolerance and rancour. Therefore, Nigerian religious practitioners should avoid those one-sided and self-serving textual interpretations that promote aggression against fellow human beings. Any religion that falls short of mercy, compassion and peace has fallen into ideological dogma and stone-headedness. Moreover, any religious interpretation that justifies aggression and acts of killing presents its text as the shallow and purposeful reading of religious text that aim at political ill-intensions.

### **Closing Remark**

It is the submission of this paper that all the three major religions should go back and re-examine the basic values and the guiding principles of their respective religions. In doing this, sincere efforts should be made to expunge the ideologies that are man-made and provocative. The various adherents must repent from these man-made, self-serving and pride motivated ideologies that have crept into the creeds and dogmas of the various religions. This will translate into the much needed ethical re-orientation. The religious sanity that will ensue will positively reflect on every facet of the national existence. This is because, religion, especially in Africa, permeates every facet of the people's existence ranging from political to economic life of the people. There will be restoration of peace and trust. Governance ,employment and even business contracts will be conducted on the basis of merit and not to unqualified persons on the basis of religious brotherhood, a situation

which is responsible for the present political, fiscal, economic and social insecurity in Nigeria and has ridiculed the 'giant of Africa' in the comity of nations.

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