

Chapter Seven

ROLES OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE PROMOTION OF NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

by

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The current security challenges facing Nigeria are, according to the popular notion the consequence of social injustice and corruption that gives birth to insurgency robbery and other violent crimes. Our observation in these alarming predicaments is that; those who indulge in corruption, and injustice as well as perpetrators of violent crimes, are all religious adherents bearing a Muslim or Christian name, though some of these people might be practising their indigenous religion along the way. It is also said that all the faiths practised in Nigeria, particularly Islam and Christianity frown upon injustice and those violent crimes which give rise to anxiety, poverty, low development and the loss of lives and properties of thousands of people in the country. It is in this regard that this paper examines the roles of the two prominent religions in the promotion of National security. Thus, it looks into the root causes of the violent conflicts. It also assesses the extent to which the religions endeavour to combat various evil actions of the people which metamorphose into the menace of insecurity.

The paper concludes by suggesting the solutions to the obstacle militating against the success of the religious bids to promote National Security.

7:1 Introduction

The concept of God and the life after death manifest in the culture of various ethnic groups dwelling in Nigeria. It is however observed that every civilised Nigerian citizen, including those who still practise their indigenous religious rites, claims to be either Muslim or Christian. That is why only both or one of the Muslim and Christian supplications is said in the opening and closing prayers in all National or State occasions. Nevertheless, there are pockets of adherents of traditional religion in some places.¹

Hence, the implication of the religious conviction is that every religious adherent must be conscious of the fact that there is divine punishment for evil deeds of man, and rewards for righteousness, and therefore they should avoid evil and do good. Though what is regarded as an abomination in one religion may be permitted by another one, the fact of the matter still remains that both Christianity and Islam frown upon injustice, financial and violent crimes against humanity. Odey confirms as follows;

“The two religions tell us that God hates injustice, oppression or exploitation, discrimination, stealing, killing of one's fellow man etc. and that those who do such things will be punished by God... the two religions encourage kindness to the poor, the weak, the orphan, the widow, the neglected, the marginalised, the down trodden and the suffering”².

It is against this background that this paper attempts to examine the roles of Islam and Christianity on the security of lives and properties of the people in Nigeria which exists today as a pluralistic society with different culture and religious groups. It therefore assesses the root causes of crimes and violent conflicts in the country, as well as the roles of the two predominant religions in the promotion of National security.

Root Causes of Violent Conflicts and Crimes

The root causes crimes and violent conflicts in Nigeria are said to be complex and systematic in nature. But the prominent among them are; injustice, religious and ethnic sentiments, corruption, demand for the change of a system or policy crime inclination, ignorance, arrogance and above all, lack of sincere belief in Allah and the Day of Judgment. All these evils are systematic in nature as one gives birth to other. And both the people in authority and their subjects share the blame of these ill causes. Indeed, people in authorities in every sector are alleged of injustice and corruption. An evidence to this effect is the well-known activities of Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (I.C.P.C.) and Economic and Financial Crime Commission (E.F.C.C.) which have recovered some public money embezzled by some people in authority. Likewise, various election tribunals have annulled several elections alleged of certain frauds.

However, if we admit that some people in position of authority are corrupt and unjust, those perpetrators of violent crimes are also arrogant brutal pt crime and inclined, ethno-religious sentimental, and they lack the fear of Allah for they destroyed lives and properties of innocent people. To this effect, Allah frowns upon these violent crimes in Qur'an 2:205

“When he turns his back, his aim everywhere is to spread mischief through the earth and destroy crops and progeny but Allah loves not mischief. When it is said to him “Fear Allah” he is led by arrogance to more crime. Enough to him is Hell.”³

In this regard, we observe that many Nigerian youths seems to be violent and crime inclined. This is due to many factors among which are; lack of religious-moral training at home and schools, unemployment, lack of sound education and residing in a corrupt environment with bad associates.

Thus, if all these problems are curbed, the crimes and violent conflicts will be combated in our society. Ogunsola recommends that

“Religious bodies and parents should combine efforts to discourage their children and wards from joining secret cults through moral instruction, sermons and parental guidance”⁴

Another main root cause of violent conflict is the belief in the armed struggle to demand for the change of a system or policy of government. Various militant groups fight for different changes. Niger Delta Militants in South-South of Nigeria Movement for Emancipation of Republic of Biafra in the South East, and various Islamic Movements in the Northern Nigeria, all fight for one thing or the other.

Our concern here is those Islamic Movements which fight in the name of Islam.

Islamic Movement

Islamic movement which is known in the western ideology, as Muslim fundamentalist or extremists, is largely precipitated as a result of consequences of Western colonisation of Muslim world.⁵ The initial aim of the movement is to propagate true teachings of Islam to Muslims and non-Muslims. Afterwards, they believe that society has to be changed and brought into conformity with the dictates of Allah, the Creator of the universe.⁶

The three different methods employed by various groups of the movement are⁷; armed struggle, perpetual struggle from outside un-Islamic system and peaceful struggle from within (the existing system).

In the light of this, we observe that the best method of the struggle for Islamic change is the peaceful struggle from within. This has been tested and successful to a great extent. Examples of those who employed this method are; Ikhwanul

Musimin (Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt) which renounced the perpetual struggle from outside the system in the early 1980s because of the failure of the method.⁸

The group has now become the ruling party in Egypt, and it has also established the full implementation of Shariah in 2012. Another good example are the efforts of Ahmad Sanni Yerimah of Zamfara State⁹ and the early Muslim politicians that fought for the use of penal code in the North, establishment of Shariah court of appeal and the freedom of the teaching of Arabic and Islamic education in the public schools. The recent peaceful struggle for the approval of Non-Interest bank and prohibition of homosexual marriage are another good example of this method. These are some achievements of the gradual peaceful struggle from within for the realisation of Islamic change particularly in Nigeria which is ethno-religious pluralistic society.

To this end, it is observed that the armed struggle method only results into the loss of lives and properties of the fighters and innocent people and thus threaten the national unity and security. On the other hand, the perpetual struggle outside the system leads to the loss of 100% of the Muslims' rights. This method implies that the Muslims should not have any affair with the government nor participate in the politics. To this effect, Mallam Aminu Aliyu Gusau¹⁰ argues that:

“Islam has a complete code and as Muslims, were supposed to implement that in full. But in practice it is not possible for us because we are living within a system, which does not allow for that. And that is our problem. But now, what we are doing practically is that we do realise that we cannot achieve this one hundred percent. But we also believe that whatever percentage we achieve is still an achievement and we will not forsake it”¹¹

Roles of Islam and Christianity in the Promotion of National Security

The religious faithful through the following steps strive to combat the crimes and violent practices in Nigerian society.

Sound Moral Training for Muslim Children at Home

Through the religious training at home, the Muslim children are inculcated with the Islamic values of God consciousness, piety, justice, kindness, patience honesty among many others. These are some of the provisions of shariah with which every Muslim family is expected to comply. According to Oladosu A.A, “The clamour for an official implementation of the Islamic law shall remain an empty noise if individual Muslim families do not have spiritual will to comply with the provisions of the shariah.”¹²

Allah says in Qur’an 16:90 “Allah commands justice, the doing of good and giving to kith and kin, and He forbids all indecent deeds, and evil and rebellion: He instructs you that you may receive admonition”¹³

To this effect, Prophet Muhammad says “Honour your children and give them sound moral education”¹⁴

Sound Moral Training for Christian Children

Christianity and Islam agree with each other on the necessity of giving moral training to the children. According to Odumuyiwa “Christianity therefore encourages sound moral and religious training for Christian children.”¹⁵ Proverbs 22:6 also says: “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”¹⁶

Thus, Shittu and Baiyewu¹⁷ confirm the Christian moral teachings when they quote from the Bible as follows: “According to the Bible: “But the fruit of the spirit is love. Joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Religious Moral Instruction in the School

Religious adherents particularly Muslims and Christians strive to ensure that their children receive moral teachings according to their faiths. The school curriculum therefore reflects all positive values and ideals promoted at home. As for the Muslim children, Oladosu suggests that the government and stake holders in educational institution should “ensure that school curricula, syllabi, text books and instructional materials and resources are in line with the values of Islam curriculum which cherish transparency, honesty, trustfulness etc. and condemn corrupt practices in all its ramifications.”¹⁸

It is in this regard that we submit that the content of the updated syllabi for primary and secondary schools are, if effectively taught, capable of making the learners imbibe Islamic values of honesty, kindness, tolerance and avoidance of social vices as spelt out in the Glorious Qur’an. Those social vices are indecent deeds, wickedness and rebellion (*Qur'an 16:90*).

As for the Christian children, Odumuyiwa submits that through the mission schools and Sunday schools, Christian teachers effectively inculcated the moral instructions and disciplined into their students in 19th and 20th centuries.”¹⁹ He however lamented that “Lack of moral and religious instructions in the schools is the problem facing Christian family (presently).”²⁰

Thus, we observe the similar problems in some Muslim families where many children do not attend the Islamic training at home, mosque and at school.

Efforts of Religious Bodies in the Promotion of National Security

It is observed that the religious bodies promote National security in the following ways:

1. Through enlightening the adherents of their religions on the need to live peacefully with other religious adherents, and not to instigate religious crises. Some of those religious organisations include Supreme Council for Islamic Affair, Jama'at Nasrul Islam and Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N).
2. These religious organisations stand as the representatives of their religious adherents whenever there is the need to fight for their rights or make a request from the government. This representation has no doubt averted many religious tensions and promoted the peaceful interaction between one religion and the government.

3. By taking some measures to curb the religious conflicts. A good example of this is the establishment of different schools by the Muslim communities and organisations. This is to avert violent conflict that may erupt as a result of forcing their children to receive other religious instruction apart from theirs

Preaching in Public, Places of Worship or over the Media

The roles of the religious preachers in the promotion of National Security are attested by the fact that many obedient religious adherents in Nigeria imbibe the religious values learnt from their religious preachers. Those religious faithful do not perpetrate in any violent crime nor involve in corruption or injustice for they are very conscious of Allah, God, the Judge who witnesses all things, both secret and open.

However, there are some preachers who provoke other religious adherents by the use of vulgar language against other faith. It is to this effect that both Islam and Christianity urge their adherents to be gentle, kind and self-discipline.

According to the Bible:²¹ “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23)

Ekwue recommends that “The Christian leaders should encourage Christians to avoid derogatory remarks on non-Christian religions”.²²

Allah says in Qur'an 6:108 “Reville not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah” Allah also enjoins the Muslim preachers in Qur'an 17:125 “*Invite (all) to the way of your lord with wisdom and beautiful and preaching: and argue with them in ways that are best and most generous.*”²³

Roles of Religious Leaders in Promotion of National Security

The religious leaders in Islam are referred to as “Imâm” and Amiru (Emir) etc. while in Christianity, they are called Pastors, or Reverend fathers, e.t.c. These leaders often perform the role of the third party between two warring parties.²⁴ The leaders have the loyalty, respect, fear, and reference of their followers. They are recognized by their followers as men of God²⁵. The followers therefore abide by the resolution passed by the leaders.

The religious leaders also perform the role of representatives of their followers in the resolution of the ethno-religious conflict. A good example of this is the Jos religious crises which was resolved by the religious leaders in compliance with the directive from federal and state government.²⁶

It is in this regard that we observe the failure of many religious leaders to hesitate to intervene in the conflict before it escalates. We note that if necessary measures and steps are appropriately taken, the provoked violence will be averted.

Obstacle to the Religious Roles

It is noted that the materialism is the main obstacle militating against the success of religions in its bids to promote National Security. We observe that many parents do not border to let their children and wards receive religious training at home and schools. With regard to the religious leader and preachers, the materialism carries some of them away to the extent that some preachers could not admonish the religious adherents with the true teachings of their faith that affect the corrupt and unjust personalities. On its own part, Nigerian government had made religious instruction inferior to those newly introduced compulsory subjects particularly civic education. This is, indeed, the fulfillment of the dream of the past governments to replace religious moral instruction with their human moral instruction, According to Badmas M.A, the exponents of moral instruction say:

Moral instruction was not the business of the Islamic or Bible Knowledge teachers. So, special teachers were hurriedly assembled...²⁷

Thus, for the government to make the religious instruction optional and civic education compulsory is an attempt to get rid the society of religious influence by the gradual process of expunging it from the school curriculum.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that every civilised Nigerian including those who still practice their indigenous religion, claims to be either Muslim or Christian, the forbidden crimes are still perpetrated by several people. This undoubtedly affects social economic and even religious affairs and unity of Nigeria. It is against this background that this paper has revealed the root causes of violent crimes and conflicts. Prominent among these include injustice, corruption, crime and violence inclination of the youths, and belief in the violent struggle to demand for the change of an existing policy of government. We therefore observe that if it is admitted that some people in authority engage in acts of injustice and corruption which lead to sufferings of the populace, those who foment and involve in violence are also arrogant and wicked in the sight of Allah for they destroy lives and properties of their fellow human beings.

Roles of the two prominent religions in Nigeria, Islam and Christianity are also examined. Our observation shows that the religions take the various steps to promote the national security. Some of those steps are religious moral training at home and schools, efforts of religious bodies,

preaching at places of worship, public and over the media, and effort of religious leaders who also perform the role of the third party in social conflict resolution.

To this end, we observe that if all the religious stake-holders play their roles diligently, all the religious adherents will be credible and patriotic and the society will be free from social and violent crimes.

Recommendations

- Government should give priority to the religious moral instruction. This is because Nigerians are religious faithful and not atheists. The religious adherents prefer to heed to the divine moral instruction to the human moral instruction which seem to be accorded priority by the Nigerian government.
- More so, parents should cater for the religious up-bringing of their children and wards for the benefits of the society to which they belong.
- Government should also perform the role of the third party appropriately without bias in the conflict resolution.
- Government should not relent its effort to eradicate the problems of child abuse, illiteracy and unemployment in our society.
- Finally, Religious adherents should be enlightened constantly by their religious leaders on the need to resort to dialogue, and participation in decision making rather than resorting to violent struggle for their demand.

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