International Digital Organization for Scientific Research ISSN: 2550-7974
IDOSR JOURNAL OF ARTS AND MANAGEMENT 3(1): 88-92, 2018.

Religiosity: The Bane of Restructuring in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
This paper presents a brief definition of religion in order to highlight its features. The concepts of religiosity and restructuring are discussed. Religiosity alludes to being too religious, and this could lead to fanaticism and exclusivism. Restructuring connotes rearranging or reorganizing the existing structure aimed at improving it, or giving birth to a new one. The paper examines the adverse effects of religiosity on restructuring efforts in Nigeria; it notes various obstacles which impede checking of religiosity in the country, such as commoditization of religion and intrigues of the elite class. The paper also suggests ways of surmounting these obstacles. A table showing the ethnic and religious realities in Nigeria's geo-political zones is presented to show clearly the variegated nature of the nation's religious structure which if not carefully managed could lead to an unpleasant result.
Keywords: Religiosity, Restructuring and Religion.

INTRODUCTION

Religion has been viewed as a double edged sword, capable of fanning the embers of peace and discord simultaneously [1, 2]. As an instrument of peace, it tends to provide suitable palliative to troubled minds, soothing man's afflictions, putting his emotions under check and ensuring that his spiritual self is continuously attuned to God [3]. In this regard therefore, it is often employed by the society in finding solutions not only to the heavenly matters but to the mundane or earthly issues as well, no wonder it atimes forms part of solutions to political tumoils and controversies [4].

Restructuring has stirred up the most heated controversy in Nigeria's political discourse [5, 6]. While restructuring is viewed as a disruptive construct in some quarters, it is looked upon as the only solution to the nation's ailments by many Nigerians [7]. In a bid to justify their stands both the proponents and opponents of restructuring have, though tangentially or inadvertently, recognized the efficacy of religion in influencing people's psyche, thinking pattern, actions and inactions either positively or negatively [8].

Religion: Its meaning

The term 'Religion' is derived from three Latin words, 'Relegere' (which means to read again, to observe), "Religare' (which means to bind again) and 'Religio' (which means relationship), [9]. Explaining further, Omoregbe in Asalu (2005:6) asserts that "religion is essentially a relationship, a link established between two persons, namely, a human person (the religious man) and a divine person (the worshiped deity), who is believed to exist" [10].

Microsoft Encarta in [11] equally holds that "the word religion is a Latin word that denotes both earnest observance of ritual obligations and an inward spirit of reverence". Similarly, [12] maintains that religion refers to belief or powers, and that it is typically manifested in obedience, reverence and worship.

Durkheim in [13] also defines religion as a unified system of belief and practices relative to sacred things. Concerning the conceptualization of religion, [14], warns that "it seems a mistake to define religion very narrowly but it is dangerous to define it so broadly that the term loses all significance". However, various definitions of religion have assisted in bringing to the fore the following as its features:

- It is emotion – laden;
- It abhors disobedience;
- It recognizes and reveres sacred things;
- It adopts systematic and orderly practices;

- It is unifying agent among the adherents, not minding race, ethnic group or social status;

These features combine to fortify its efficacy in addressing societal issues and challenges.

Religion can encourage economic development by promoting positive attitudes such as honesty, trust, accountability, and reduce high levels of corruption in the society, [15]. [16] holds that "religion as a powerful instrument of social change and liberation can transform the most criminal of all men in various societies through the teachings of religious beliefs, values, morality and ethics". According to him, by preaching peace and obedience to the law of the land, religion promotes order which can lead to a favourable atmosphere for business to thrive. Viewing the usefulness of religion as presented above the question is: why is it that religion and its practices have paradoxically been accused of subverting the peace and good order of the society?

Religiosity: A Conceptualization

[17] simply describes religiosity as being too religious. An extreme case of religiousness can lead to fanaticism or exclusivism with its attendant maladies and destructive tendencies. Bemoaning this ugly state of affair, [18], agreeing with [19] notes that though there is no religionless society, Africans (Nigerians inclusive) are "notoriously religious as a way of life". This tends not only to hoodwink their sights but their minds as well, forcing them not to be receptive to the existence of other people's rights, feelings and beliefs. Each religious group tends to present its faith as ultimate and suppresses the others, [18].

Religiosity erodes the positive contributions of religion and earns religion and its practices such smearing attributes as instrument of disintegration, disharmony and hatred.

Concept of restructuring in Nigeria

Structure simply means the way in which the parts of something are connected together, arranged or organized. Restructuring thus alludes to action(s) aimed at rearranging or re-organizing the existing structure. In the ensuing process, some hitherto accepted norms or beliefs may be improved upon, given a new philosophical basis, or can be obliterated completely, to give birth to a new structure, [2].

Restructuring has been viewed from different perspectives – geographical, political, economic, etc. [9] views it from two perspectives, namely, planned restructuring (a collaborative or systematic type), and default restructuring (uncontrolled type, not by choice). Restructuring viewed from geo-political prism could involve state creation, changes in regional arrangements, and oscillation of governance between military and civil rules. Economic restructuring can take the form of changes in budgetary and fiscal policies, Constitutional restructuring in Nigeria has taken such forms as the reformation of Clifford Constitution of 1922 down to the present one of 1999, while in the educational realm such restructuring as the revision of the National Policy on Education from 1977, 2004, 2007 to 2014 has taken place. Viewing restructuring in its various gabs one wonders whether it can be affected by religiosity.

Religiosity and Restructuring in Nigeria

For restructuring in any form to take place and enjoy acceptability by the greater number of the people for whom it is instituted, there must exist oneness and unity amongst the people; mutual suspicion must be eschewed and expected benefits therefrom ought to be generally applauded. Unfortunately, religiosity is antithesis of this posture. It breeds and encourages divisiveness, and as noted by DeFleur, D'Antonia and Nelson in [8], "there are still tensions between believers and non-believers, between protestants and Catholics, among some branches of Protestantism, within some protestant denominations, and within the Catholic Church, and Christians clash with Muslims". This dysfunctional role could work against any effort at restructuring considering the volatile nature of religiousness in Nigeria.Religiosity results in each religious body claiming God with a matchless vigour and monopoly, even to

the extent of declaring that their God and other people's God are not the same, [7]. The three major religious adherents, namely, the Christians, Muslims, and African Traditional Practitioners have created such a centrifugal tension in Nigeria that the possibility of dialoguing to fashion out any meaningful restructuring remains an illusion and delusion. For example, some Muslims see Christians as infidels, some Christians see Muslims as non-converts that have no salvation [2], and some African Traditional religion adherents regard both Muslims and Christians as impostors and traitors who have abandoned their ancestors to worship alien deities. This state of affair renders any attempt at a successful and generally acceptable restructuring a far dream.

Obstacles to checking religiosity and its effects on restructuring in Nigeria

Many factors have constituted obstacles to subduing religiosity in Nigeria. While some manifest easily, others are insidious. The visible ones include.

Elite groups

This group often hides under religion to achieve their aim of subjugation of the unsuspecting masses. They join in condemning Western education in the country while their children and wards are abroad acquiring Western education. They pretend to be adhering to some dictates of the prophets and indulge in mental poisoning of the uniformed followers.

Commercialization of religion

Idyorough in [4] cries out that "religion has been commoditized and commercialized into money making ventures". [8] refers to this phenomenon as "churchpreneurship", and [2] wonders whether "there is any difference between the sole proprietors of the church and money doublers". The perpetrators of these heinous acts hide under religiosity to achieve their selfish motives.

Illiteracy and poverty

Illiteracy and poverty combine to render the masses subservient to bogus claims of the fundamentalists. They are deceived into believing the preaching and admonitions of their dubious religious leaders especially in relation to soothing the pains of their abject misery. Presenting a clearer picture on why man continues to hold tenaciously to religion, [10] says that "to bear the sorrows of life man needs strength; to face the daily battle for survival he needs protection; in the hour of conflict he needs assurance; in the hour of grief he needs comfort". [12] adds that "the promises of prosperity, defeat of enemies, deliverance and likes have created room for laziness, selfishness and selfish persuasiveness". All these block reasoning and objectivity which are essential weapons to fight religiosity.

Surmounting the obstacles

Most effective instrument for fighting religiosity is Religious Education. This is believed to be capable of instilling in the Nigerian youth the required and desired knowledge, values, behaviours, attitudes and skills that would ensure their effective adaptation in an ever-changing multifaith and multiethnic society, Nigeria, [5]. [9] explains that Religious Education helps the individual to appreciate the faith and tradition of others, and equally builds in men spirit of contentment.

By emphasizing peace and obedience to the law of the land, Religious Education promotes social norms that can keep the society together and review social commitment to the socially desirable behaviour [5]. Religious Education re-directs the feelings of the people to the importance of social co-existence by reiterating the brotherhood of all human beings and fatherhood of God in man-man and man-God interrelationship.

Another powerful instrument to check religiosity and its debilitating effects is Constitution Education. The Nigerian constitution is replete with injunctions and provisions which abhor religiosity in all its forms. The constitution affirms that Nigeria is one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign state and that its governance is based on the principles of freedom, equality and justice for the purpose of consolidating the unity of all Nigerians. More specifically, Section 38(1) of the said Constitution guarantees every Nigerian "freedom of

thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief…" and Section 10 insists that "the government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as State Religion". (1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended). The combined import of these constitutional provisions ensures secularity of Nigeria in relation to religion and it is an unequivocal adumbration that religiosity is unconstitutional and therefore, unacceptable [7].

Another area that needs urgent attention in the warfare against religiosity is the economic realm. All efforts must be put in place by the government at all levels to ensure that people's welfare is not neglected. Budgetary allocation of resources to the rural areas, agricultural sector of the economy, and youth empowerment should be revisited with a view to ensuring proper appropriation and utilization.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigeria is pluralistic in terms of religious beliefs, and its corporate existence is threatened by religiosity and religious cleavages. To ameliorate some of the nation's hindrances to nation building, proposals are made for restructuring of its fabrics – be it economic, political, educational, social or cultural – but considering the efficacy of religion in influencing man's actions and thoughts, religiosity constitutes a clog to a successful implementation and implantation of restructuring in the country.

A look at the ethnic and religious realities in Nigeria's geo-political zones would help to add to the fact that the ugly influence of religiosity must be controlled with vigor before it slides to an unmanageable dimension.

Ethnic/Religious structure in Nigeria's geo-political zones

S/N	Zone	State	Religious Domination	
			Christian	Muslim
1.	South- West	Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti	Majority	Minority
2.	South-East	Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo	Majority	Minority
3.	South-South	Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, Rivers	Majority	Minority
4.	North-Central	Benue, Kogi, Kwara. Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau	Almost equal	Almost equal
5.	North-East	Adamawa, Bauchi, Bornu, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe.	Minority	Majority
6.	North-West	Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Jigawa, Sokoto, Zamfara.	Minority	Majority

Source: Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 2001.

The table above shows clearly the variegated nature of religiousness and religious structure of Nigeria which can easily be mangled by religiosity – a precursor to fanaticism, exclusivism and fundamentalism. To forestall this unpleasant scenario, suggestions presented earlier on how to overcome religiosity should be adopted. These include (but not limited to) re-invigorating Religious Education, institutionalizing Constitution Education, assuaging people's hardship and eradicating illiteracy among the citizenry.

In what seems like an admonition against religiosity, Mahatma Gandhi, says:

> the need of the moment is not one religion but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the

different religions; we want to reach not dead level, but unity in diversity; the soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms, [15].

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