

RELIGION AND SECURITY CHALLENGES: THE NIGERIAN SITUATION (1999 - 2019)

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Abstract

Most countries of the world are presently on red alert with regards to the issue of the security of their citizenry both locally and globally. What is more disturbing is that this security challenge and emergency is emanating from a sector which should ordinarily and otherwise be regarded as a low security risk area and that sector is religion. A cursory survey of various parts of the world, Nigeria inclusive, reveals a convulsive atmosphere of insecurity, violence, insurgency and terrorism, fueled by religious extremists and fundamentalists. This state of affairs have prompted most nations of the world to institute very strict immigration policies and also adopt more stringent security measures in their airports and other key sectors of their economy and infrastructure. In the midst of these ugly developments and the misuse of religion for selfish and mischievous activities, how then can religion be rescued from such negative connotations and be seen in its true light and nature, not as a security threat but as a harbinger of peace? The methodology employed in this research is historical phenomenology. Findings show that although religion is seen to be playing ambivalent roles with regards to either threatening or promoting security depending on how it is applied, however other mitigating factors such as political, economic, ethnic or territorial ones can take advantage of religion or use it as a cover to perpetrate mayhem and cause security breaches. Recommendations include advising governments and religious leaders and practitioners to practice the ethics of inclusiveness among others.

Keywords: Religion, International Security challenges, Nigeria

Introduction

Many countries of the world are currently on red alert and standing on their toes with regards to the issue of the security of their citizenry, both locally and globally. What is more disturbing is that this security challenge and emergency is emanating from a sector which should ordinarily and otherwise be regarded as a low security-risk area, and that sector is religion. For instance, quite recently the present United States' administration of President Donald Trump, on assumption of office, issued what is termed an immigration/travel restriction or ban from countries that are regarded as 'high-risk'

security zones stemming from the prevalence of Islamic militancy and terrorist activities and operations from those countries. This is one of the instances where religion is being indicted as constituting one of the major security challenging issues in the contemporary world.

Some security experts have noted that ever since the 9/11/2001 Islamic terror attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center and other targets in the United States, religion has been regarded as constituting a major security threat to the world. Thus according to HPCR International (2007 – 2008), “In the post 9/11 world, religions and religious actors are more commonly associated with extremism and conflict between religious communities than before, in particular in the popular mind.”

A cursory survey of various parts of the world reveals a convulsive atmosphere of insecurity, violence, insurgency and terrorism, fueled by religious extremism and fundamentalism. From the genocidal campaign of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria fighting to enthrone an all Islamic caliphate, to the Taliban Islamic war in Afghanistan, to the Boko Haram insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria, the Al-Shabab Islamic warfare in Somalia and the long-running civil war in South Sudan among others. All these have religious under-tones as the causative factor. Furthermore, most nations of the world have instituted stricter immigration policies and also adopted more stringent security measures in their airports and other key sectors of their economy and infrastructure due to the threat of religious extremists and terrorist masterminds. Thus people dressed in erstwhile sanctimonious religious gabs are now held suspect since terrorists can hide under such religious gabs or use them as undercover while carrying heavy explosives with which they perpetrate their suicide-bombing activities with heavy tolls on the unsuspecting public and security agencies. Also such terrorists, hiding under the gab of religion, do employ the use of seemingly harmless and innocent children and especially girls, to perpetrate their heinous and dastardly acts in a bid to beat the security agents and take them unawares.

There is no doubt that these turn of events could lead to undue harassment of true, innocent and harmless religious practitioners and also of undue security search and surveillance of children especially the girl-child. For instance, some countries like France and Belgium among others recently proposed a ban on the wearing of full-face hijab by Islamic women in the public as a result of such threats, thus offending true religious people desirous of putting on their religious wears. In the midst of these ugly developments and the misuse of religion for selfish and other ends, how then can religion be rescued from such negative connotations and colorations and be seen in its true light, not as a security threat but as a harbinger of peace? Why have people and groups with mundane ambitions found religion as a ready tool to perpetrate their unholy and obnoxious agenda, and how can such trends be reversed and/or stopped altogether? These are the pressing issues and questions that this paper is out to investigate. The methodology employed in this research is historical phenomenology.

Religion, conflicts and the emergent security challenges in the world

A review of world history from at least the last 2000 years, as well as scholarly opinions show that religion has been implicated in many conflicts and wars down the ages. According to one of such opinions as expressed by Bakaki (2009:2), citing David Little, “for many centuries religion has been involved in both inter-communal and international conflicts. It is in fact broadly accepted that religion is a cause rather than a solution to many conflicts in the world today.” Supporting this view, Wikipedia citing Encyclopedia of

Wars (2004: 1484-1485), pointed out that out of all 1,763 known/recorded historical conflicts, 123, or 6.98%, had religion as their primary cause. Furthermore, White (2011:544) gives religion as the cause of 11 of the world's 100 deadliest atrocities.

Reflecting on historical cases of religious conflicts, Bakaki cited above noted that religion has systematically been attached to numerous genocides and dehumanization in various civilizations. He thus noted that: “one may argue that religion cannot exist without bloodshed while violence may be credited for readily and intimately being available at the heart of religion. The question why religion openly permits/supports violence and destruction actually still baffles” (Bakaki 2009:3).

A further review shows that the most popular religious conflicts usually referred to as 'holy wars' began with the Islamic expansion missions within the 7th century and the emergent crusades of the 11th century, as well as the restoration wars in the 16th century by the Roman Church. Further expatiating on this, Bakaki pointed out that:

It is often revealed that Muslims mistreated and pressed their religious beliefs upon Christians in the Holy Land. In retaliation, the Roman Christians started to persecute the Jews and Muslims, pagans and Protestants (Mc Bride 2002). The Roman Catholic Church also grew zeal to (re)capture the 'sacred' territories, extend its influence and explicitly condemn the growing spirit of liberalism, religious pluralism, and take over democratic platforms.

So the conflict between Christians, Muslims and Jews continued to escalate in the Crusades which were declared toward the close of the 11th century by the Church against the Muslims to recapture the holy places and restore Christianity. Pointing to how these events and conflicts contributed in bringing about the present security challenges, Bakaki (2009:3) explained that:

It is worth keeping in mind that the democratic thoughts of the Catholic Church were not bearable at all, because it granted discriminations against other religious faiths. While such platforms were being sought by the Christian Church, the Muslims were fighting for space to spread their doctrines, something which inflamed brutalities and violence. Such cases are still very fresh in the minds of fundamentalists, Muslims, Protestants and thus, acts of terrorism have been inevitable even today.

Moving on to the Crusades, Bakaki noted that:

In 1095, Pope Urban II started what historians have named 'Crusades' against the Muslims to recapture the holy places and restore Christianity (Snell, M. 2009). Speaking at the Council of Clermont, he claimed that the war would have God's mercy and support as he pronounced that wars could be justified as “just wars” but also “holy wars.” Christians inhumanly invaded and seized Jerusalem and massacred its residents. J. Denny Weaver (2001) noted that; “the crusades, the multiple blessings of wars, warrior popes, support for capital punishment, corporal punishment under the guise of 'spare the rod and spoil the child,' justification of slavery, world-wide colonialism in the name of conversion to Christianity, the systemic violence of women subjected to men, and more.” This infringement is still engraved among Islamic fundamentalists, and this has been a driving force in the Islamic invasions of Christianity in many parts of the world. The late 1500's Crusades and the modern religious conflicts, violence and wars are a serialization of the so-called crusades of 1095... Sadly, these crusades sowed seeds for the modern

terrorist attacks in many parts of the globe. The terrorist attacks on the twin tower buildings which most scholars have branded '9/11 attacks' is a classic example of such terrorist activities.

Along that line also, the Israel-Arab wars which have been raging since 1947 have also often been seen as a war fought along religious lines although other issues like nationalism, self-defense and liberation of territory are involved. The war started after the United Nations General Assembly divided Palestine which erstwhile had been a Muslim State into two parts between the Jews and the Palestinians who are Muslims and who did not accept the partitioning. Referring to this and similar conflicts in the region, Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia pointed out that in several conflicts including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian civil war, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, religious elements are overtly present but variously described as fundamentalism or religious extremism - depending upon the observers sympathies. Supporting this view Bakaki, cited earlier, noted that:

One could ascertain that the partitioning of Palestine was a factor that triggered the Israel-Arab war, a sign of inhumanity. The September 11th, 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks on Washington D.C. U.S.A can actually be counted as an extension of the Israel-Arab conflict. In 2004, the terrorists (Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden) claimed and defined their reason for the attack on USA. The source indicates that terrorists accused USA for its continued support to Israel.

The foregoing analysis thus reveals the history of religion and conflicts leading to the present day security challenges in the form of terrorism and similar attacks as an inevitable build-up of events culminating in the contemporary undesirable out-come. Although terrorism cannot be justified by any reasons or arguments whatsoever, the natural build-up to it should share much of the blame and also serve as eye-opener on the trend of events. The question however is whether religion is to be blamed for these outcomes or rather other arising and contributory factors or variables as can be deduced from the unfolded events.

Reflecting on the causes of religious conflicts, Bakaki citing Jeffrey Haynes (2009:53) pointed out that “Religion can increase aggressiveness and the willingness to use violence,” and further noted that most of the wars in the world have been instigated by religion. On the factors responsible for this, Bakaki (2009:3) commenting on the external forces responsible, noted that “religion is inseparably attached to politics, a well-recognized agent of violence. Religion is often put at the forefront in mobilizing people to enrich support of politicians to take over resourceful regions or even states.”

Religion and present security challenges in the world

Although religion has been inextricably linked with conflicts and violence down the ages leading to the present state of security challenges in the world today, the arising question is whether religion is intrinsically violent and constituting security risk and challenges. The consensus opinion gathered does not portray religion in that negative light, as intrinsically violent and constituting security risk and challenges as such. Rather accusing fingers are being pointed to other factors and intervening variables. For instance, Wolffe and Moorhead (2014:33) summarizing their findings on the inter-connectedness of religion and security threats and challenges pointed out that:

In general, our participants have the view that religion in itself was seldom a threat to security. Rather problems arise when religion operates in tandem with other factors, especially political ones, or as Rooney puts it, provides

'competitive branding' for divisions with political, cultural and territorial roots. At the extreme it can provide spurious legitimacy for violent actions by marginalized and/or unbalanced individuals, who may in fact have been stimulated by wider social norms that glorify violence.

Thus from this viewpoint, religion in itself does not often constitute a security threat, rather problems arise when other factors take advantage of religion and use it to achieve their unwholesome objectives – such factors as political, ethnic or territorial ones. Supporting this view, Bakaki (2009:1) argues that: “ethnicity, nationalism, colonialism, economic struggles, terrorism, political insurgencies have put religion at the front-doors of violence...” Along this line, Wikipedia the online encyclopedia, noted that studies on many of the cases often conclude that ethnic animosities drive much of the conflicts. According to Wikipedia:

Some historians argue that what is termed "religious wars" is a largely "Western dichotomy" and a modern invention from the past few centuries, arguing that all wars classed as "religious" have secular (economic or political) ramification.

According to Jeffrey Burton Russell, numerous cases of supposed acts of religious wars such as the Thirty Years War, the French Wars of Religion... were all primarily motivated by social, political and economic issues rather than religion. (Accessed on July 9, 2020).

Further exonerating religion, some respondents cited by Wolffe and Moorhead (2014:32) even saw religion as the last resort of the oppressed common man and rather heaped the blame on some oppressive State Authorities. According to them:

Religion is often a response to the failure of the state to deal with human security And that if the state experiences religion as a threat to its security, rather than human security, that often is a consequence of its failure. Once the breakdown occurs, there may become negative consequences for human security more generally, if the state and religious groups fall in conflicts with one another, as we are seeing with *Boko Haram* in Northern Nigeria. But *Boko Haram* arises in a situation in which the Nigerian State has spectacularly failed to provide for the human security of the Nigeria population.

Thus it is obvious that various factors are responsible for the arising security challenges and problems other than heaping the whole blame on religion which is often made the scape-goat. So in tackling the arising problems, the various contributory factors ought to be taken into consideration. Wolffe and Moorhead (2014:34) pointed to such other contributory factors posing security threat when they noted that:

The other elements that are thought to contribute to radicalization include disenfranchisement and exclusion, economic marginalization and poverty, and threats to identity, including secularization. All these are rooted in a failure of government sufficiently 'to encourage an ethic of inclusivity.'

Thus instead of blaming or scape-goating religion as a threat to security, the governments have to play their own roles sufficiently well to discourage the radicalization of disgruntled groups who are aggrieved by various deprivations. Governments are also advised to always endeavour to encourage an ethic of inclusivity so as to sufficiently give every segment of the society a sense of belonging and to carry everyone along in the scheme of things.

However, on a more consensus viewpoint regarding whether religion is a threat to security or not, Wolffe and Moorhead (2014:2) came to the conclusion that: Religion plays an ambivalent role when it comes to threatening or promoting security. That is, in certain situations it can be a threat, in other situations it promotes security. As a consequence, it is crucial that practitioners (policymakers, academics and journalists) get a deep understanding of a particular context before they evaluate or seek to predict the role of religion in security issues.

Assessing the view that religion plays an ambivalent role in either threatening or promoting security, it therefore means that religion can serve either way, depending on how it is handled. This then calls for a more careful handling of religious matters, since a mishandling will yield unpleasant consequences. Along this line Wolffe and Moorhead (2014:34) noted that “religion is often used to conceal other non-religious motives and to justify aggression and violence.” They thus further gathered from their respondents that:

Killing in the name of religion is morally more comfortable. So, if you want to kill someone because you want to have his house, well it is not a very nice thing. But if you want to kill him because he is an infidel and he is God's enemy, and God wants you to kill him, then it's a morally laudable thing and you can have his house as well.

Thus people use religion to achieve their unreligious, sinister and misguided goals and in the end, religion is blamed. Wolffe and Moorhead therefore observed that “used in this way, religion is an effective tool because it 'hardens conflicts' by providing 'emotional ammunition.’” And this is exactly how and why terrorists and insurgents employ religion to perpetrate their heinous agenda as evident in various parts of the world today and consequently giving religion a bad name.

Religion and security challenges in Nigeria

The present situation in the Nigerian nation could be cited as a classical example where religion have played a major pervasive role in bringing about a very critical and worsening security situation in the world. Previously in Nigeria, it had been cases of minor and sometimes major misunderstandings and skirmishes between the adherents of the two major/prevalent religions in the land – Islam and Christianity. However, since the emergence of the dreaded *Boko Haram* Islamic terror group from the year 2002, with their avowed aims of dismantling Western education, the civil service and the Christian religion from across the Northern states of Nigeria, as well as to purify Islam and spread it by force, since then the security situation in Nigeria, especially in the North-Eastern section of the country have continued to deteriorate to alarming proportions. Coupled with that is the emergence of the blood-letting and killer Fulani Herdsmen that are ravaging almost every section of the country, armed with automatic AK47 and other deadly weapons; with similar aims as the *Boko Haram* terror group.

Currently in Nigeria, the headlines from the daily Newspapers read as follows:

- “Herdsmen kill 25 farmers, students in Bornu, Plateau. Victims for mass burial Friday. Four die in Bornu attack.” (New Telegraph, Wednesday, March 7, 2018).
- “Herdsmen kill four in Southern Kaduna; kill two Policemen in Benue. OPC moves against Herders in Ondo.” (Daily Independent, Monday, February 12, 2018).

- “Five feared dead, worship centers, houses torched in Kaduna. Army admits withdrawing troops before girls' abduction... Says it handed over to Police in Dapchi. Army didn't hand over to us – Yobe Police Commissioner.” (The Punch, Tuesday, February 27, 2018).
- “Murder in the Cathedral – Anguish as herdsmen kill 2 priests, 17 others in Benue. Bring Back our Girls now and alive – *THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY OF GOVERNMENT IS THE PROTECTION OF LIVES AND PROPERTIES.*” (Daily Sun, Wednesday, April 25, 2018).
- BREAKING: Scores killed as Herdsmen Strike in Itakpa, near Otukpo in Benue on Sunday, May 30, 2020 (from Operanewsonline, Monday, June 1, 2020).

These are only but few tips of the horrendous and blood-letting escapades of these murderous hordes which almost on a daily basis harass, kill and maim helpless, innocent and law-abiding citizens, rendering many homeless and driving numerous others into IDP camps. Even in the present-day lock-down period occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic ravaging both Nigeria and the entire world, these murderous hordes are still bent on terrorizing helpless and unarmed citizens, like the incidents presently happening in the Kajuru area of Kaduna State which has been described as a genocide being committed by the Herdsmen against the indigenes of the area.

Thus presently, no day passes in Nigeria without such gory tales of woes and shedding of innocent blood of helpless Nigerians by these blood-thirsty Islamists who are bent on what is termed ethnic cleansing and dispossessing other Nigerians of their lawful property with the aim of Islamizing the whole land. Their ultimate aim is to take the country to the primitive and dark ages since they are fighting against both Western and Christian education and consequently against everything modern and contemporary.

The daily and unrestrained onslaught of both the *Boko Haram* terror group and the killer Fulani Herdsmen on the helpless Nigerians is seen as stemming from the failure and inability of the Government to secure the citizenry from such horrendous onslaughts. Some are even of the opinion that the Government seem to be conniving with the Islamists and the terror groups to terrorize the citizenry so as to actualize their hidden agenda. Thus, according to the Guardian Newspaper of Thursday, February 8, 2018 titled “Herdsmen's Killing: CAN passes vote of no confidence in Buhari,” the report noted that:

The Kaduna chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has passed a no confidence vote on President Muhammadu Buhari, saying his administration had failed to decisively tackle the herdsmen pogrom currently threatening the corporate existence of the nation. The body also opposed the establishment of cattle colonies across the Federation, pointing out that the move was tantamount to creating the colonies for the “foreigners to continue to wage unrelenting war against innocent Nigerians.” Speaking while receiving the leadership of the State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Ibrahim said government had failed in delivering governance. His words: “The Federal Government has consistently told us that these Fulani herdsmen attackers are foreigners. They said that the attackers are members of the Islamic State of West Africa (ISWA), who are on a Jihad mission. If that is true, it then means that the government of Nigeria has failed us. But we are saying that enough of this blood-shed in our land.”

Pathetically, the situation in Nigeria is quite complicated as the citizenry does not actually know who the real enemies are. For instance, are the killer Fulani Herdsmen actually Nigerians or are they of the Islamic State of West Africa on a Jihad mission here as the government are claiming? If they belong to the Islamic mission, why is the Government reluctant to declare an all-out war against them and why are they allowed into the country in the first place and marauding freely everywhere and causing mayhem on the citizenry? These are very nagging questions seeking for answers.

The Guardian Newspaper cited above also reported a statement credited to a serving State Governor, Nyesom Wike of Rivers State Nigeria, who was said to have slammed the Federal Government of Nigeria, accusing them of failure in providing security to lives and property of Nigerians. He made the statement on February 7, 2018 when he went to Makurdi to commiserate with the people and government of Benue on the massacre of over 70 of its citizens by the Fulani Herdsmen.

The Vanguard Newspaper of Wednesday, February 7, 2018 also reported on the damages caused by Fulani herdsmen in Imo State to include invasion of farmlands, raping of women and mayhem visited on host communities. These ugly incidences have been occurring in various Imo communities from the year 2013 to the present day.

Massive Displacement of People

The security situation in the Middle Belt and the North Central States of the country have continued to deteriorate resulting to huge humanitarian crises and massive displacement of people from their homes and turning them into refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). A report from the Daily Sun Newspaper of Wednesday, April 25, 2018 noted that “there were over 170,000 internally displaced persons in eight camps in Benue before the Naka invasion, stressing that the current invasion of Mbalom would further swell the humanitarian crises in the state.”

Also a Daily Independent Newspaper report of Monday, February 12, 2018 described similar situations in Taraba State, noting that “several communities (were) deserted over Herdsmen attack in Taraba.” According to the report:

Following yet another night raid by suspected Fulani herdsmen several hamlets and farmsteads in Gassol Local Government Area have been deserted. Suspected herders few days ago raided Ikyaagba village in Wuro Jam Ward of Gassol Local Government Area of Taraba State, killing four persons including a pregnant woman... As at the time of writing this report, virtually all the hamlets and farmsteads that traverse the road stretching deep into the interior from Sabon Gidan in Gassol LGA have been deserted by their occupants for fear of attacks. Villagers were seen evacuating their farm produce and other belongings to take refuge in Sabon Gidan which is along the Jalingo Wukari highway.

Thus the humanitarian crises continues to worsen, leading to the displacement of over 700,000 persons in the affected areas and the death toll of victims continue to rise daily.

Abduction of Large Number of School Girls

A dangerous twist in the onslaught of the Islamic terrorists in the Northeastern part of Nigeria is the resort to the invasion of schools, especially Girls' schools and abduction of large number of female students by the terrorists. In April 2014, it was the case of the abduction of about 276 girls from the Government Secondary School Chibok in Bornu

State. After the abduction, most of the girls were reportedly forcefully married away by the terrorists and the greater number of them who were Christians, were forced to convert to Islam. Though since the abduction some of the girls who had suffered untold abuses and forced to become mothers have been released through government-sponsored negotiations and possible ransom payment, however a greater number of them have not returned nor regained their freedom. The terrorists even claimed that there is no hope of the girls' return since according to them, they are now 'happily' married away to even foreign countries. What a terrible occurrence and experience by the helpless girls.

The latest abduction which occurred on February 19, 2018 was that of the Government Science and Technical Girls' College in Dapchi, Yobe State, where the Boko Haram terrorists invaded and abducted about 110 school girls and took them to an unknown destination after beating all the security apparatus of the Nigerian Government stationed all over the place. Though the latest report shows that most of the girls from the Dapchi school have been released except one named Leah Sharibu who the terrorists refused to release due to her refusal to renounce her Christian faith, however the cases of abduction of school girls have been described as very distressing incidences. According to a Punch Newspaper report of Tuesday, February 27, 2018 (p.7), the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) among others, pointed out that it was distressed by the attack on the Dapchi schoolgirls, and the inability of the government to immediately rescue them. The report noted that:

The NUT, in a statement by its Secretary General... demanded “an urgent upgrade of the security architecture, deployment of security personnel in all schools in the North-East and a 24-hour military patrol. The union is distressed by the news of the terrorist attack on the Government Science and Technical Girls College, Dapchi, Yobe State, with the resultant missing of as many as 110 pupils of the school. We are vexed by the security operatives' inability to gather enough intelligence to avert the situation and their failure to swiftly move in to rescue the pupils. With this development, it has become evident that pupils, teachers and the academic activities in North-East Nigeria remain vulnerable.

Thus, all the reports and complaints point to security lapses and failures on the part of the Government and security agencies to adequately secure the citizenry from these attacks. The attacks also point to increasing and outright affronts by the Islamists and terror groups on the adherents of Christianity whose members they attack, kill, maim and abduct with the intent of either forcing them to convert to the Islamic faith or have them killed as infidels if they refuse to give in. The Christians who are not prone to the use of violence and bloodletting are thus increasingly pushed to the wall and the eventual outcome may lead to an all out religious or civil war which will be very disastrous and detrimental for the nation.

Commenting on this incident, the Daily Sun report of Wednesday, April 25, 2018 has it that, “As Herdsmen attack Benue Church... 2 Catholic Priests, 17 worshippers (were) killed.” According to the report:

There was palpable tension and near breakdown of law and order in Makurdi, Benue State capital, yesterday, following fresh killings by suspected Fulani herders. In the attack, two Catholic priests and 17 parishioners of St. Ignatius Quasi Parish, Ukpor Mbalon, Ayar Mbalon village, Gwer East Local Government Area were confirmed killed. Daily Sun gathered that the parishioners and the priests have gone for early morning Mass at about 5.30 am when the herders invaded and mowed them down.

Reactions following such mindless and callous killings which have even defied and negated the sanctity of worship places as well as casting aspersion on the immunity which should be accorded to the servants of God in their own sanctuaries have generally been outrageous with condemnation of such horrendous and barbaric acts. No wonder the spokesman of the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi, while regretting the destructive and murderous escapades of the herdsmen, maintained that the police seemed to know nothing of the attacks which have been going on in other villages within the State since the Anti-open Grazing Law came into effect in the State. The Spokesman then traced the root of the mayhem going on presently to the Jihadists mission of the perpetrators. According to him, “It has been the goal of the Jihadists to conquer Benue and Tiv people who resisted their advance into the Middle Belt and the eastern part of Nigeria since 1804, the people who rejected Islam and fought for the unification of Nigeria in the civil war of 1967-1970...”

Thus, each attack incident by the herdsmen and the reactions to it show obvious uncoordinated and insensitive attitude of the security agencies to the murderous acts of the herdsmen and the grave distress of the citizenry. Although the security outfits especially the armed forces have been making huge claims about their efforts in addressing the security situation, however, their outlandish claims have not tallied with the situation on ground but have rather aggravated it. This is because, as the security forces and the Federal Government of Nigeria claim to have degraded the terrorist insurgents and almost blotted them out, the insurgents on the other hand make fresh incursions and launch fresh deadly attacks on various targets to counteract the claims of the Government and prove the point that they are still very much alive and active.

The Federal Government of Nigeria on their part also make statements which tend to portray them as playing politics with the whole scenario and also with peoples' lives when they blame the insecurity situation and the killings going on, on the machinations of their perceived political enemies to instigate war in the country. In one of such statements credited to the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari himself and which was made available to newsmen by the Presidential Spokesman and reported by the Vanguard Newspaper of Tuesday, May 8, 2018, the President was reported to have said that “the continuous killings in the country were planned by enemies of peace to instigate war in the country for selfish purposes.” Although the Government went further to outline their plans and strategies to equip the security forces to checkmate the gruesome attacks, however the general opinion is that they should match their statements with swift actions in order to restore hope and confidence on the traumatized citizenry.

Resolving Religious Security Challenges

Going back to the initial arising question of how religion could be rescued from the negative connotations and colorations as a result of its misuse for selfish and mischievous activities and be seen in its true light and nature, not as a security threat but as a harbinger of peace, the following suggestions are proffered:

In order to make any appreciable progress in the attempt to free religion from the entanglement of being complicit in constituting security challenge both in the Nigerian nation in particular and the world generally, it demands that proactive steps be adopted by all concerned in the realization of that objective.

First, the study of religion should be widely encouraged and promoted in the Universities and other institutions of learning both locally and globally with a view to exposing and emphasizing the peaceful tenets and attributes of religion and as well disabusing it from any violent or conflict-producing tendencies. It seems presently that the

important and preeminent place that religion occupies in the society is not being sufficiently recognized and appreciated. Also the study of religion is not being given the pride of place it deserves and thus the society is paying dearly for such negligence. According to Obiefuna & Uzoigwe (2012: 132):

Institutions of learning shy away from studying religion as such. Religion, nonetheless underpins and gives force to ethnicity and culture... Religion is then seen as dysfunctional to development. The problem however, is that people are not educated formally and informally, on the possible contributions of religion in human development. Nigeria's tertiary institutions serve as the starting point.

Emphasizing further on this, Obiefuna & Uzoigwe cited above noted that:

Religion is fundamental to humans' life and living, thinking pattern, attitudes and relationships. Religion is therefore considered critical for any meaningful, total and sustainable development in human society. In pluralistic societies of culture, ethnicity and political affiliations, religion can institutionalize along those lines. This is because religion originates in a culture that is more often than not determined by an ethnic group that is defined by a dominant political party/body. If this plural structure of the society (including religious) is not properly managed, it becomes an instrument of conflict than stability, a situation that undermines development... The way out of dysfunctional character of religion in human society is rigorous study of religion especially in institutions of learning. The aim would be to understand religion as such; its meaning and content, the basic differences and similarities with the determination to play down the differences and emphasize the similarities.

So the study of religion should be emphasized so as to reap the great benefits and dividends thereof, which would include the prevalence of peace, avoidance of conflicts and the realization of sustainable development among others.

Secondly, to effectively resolve religious security challenges prevalent in our society and the world today, the Government(s) of the day should not overlook religion and its importance. This is to avert the obvious danger such negligence may portend to the nation. It is thus suggested that the government considers as necessary and urgent the need to create a Ministry for Religion/Religious Affairs, to supervise and oversee this very important and delicate aspect of the national life.

It is no gainsaying that religion occupies an important place in the lives of not only Nigerians but quite a considerable number of others throughout the world, since it a truism that man is a religious being. Thus the place and role of religion should not be underestimated or underplayed in our nation and the world over. Obiefuna & Uzoigwe (2012:139) cited Udoidem who made an inciting study of the place of religion in the political life of Nigeria by carrying out a survey of religious-related crises in Nigeria since independence. For him, religion and politics are related. After all, it is often said that all power belongs to God. Continuing the analysis, they further pointed out that:

Islam sees a fusion of religion and politics. Christianity, coming from a more secular West upholds a separation of the two. Granted there are doctrinal foundations for religious conflicts in Nigeria... the major problem is the political manipulation of religion to hang on to power. It is the struggle between Islam and Christianity on who owns Nigeria. Udoidem cites

Matthew Hassan Kukah as asserting that “ these two religions are straddled across the Nigerian polity, each no longer knocking and pleading to be admitted but seeking to take over the architectural design and construction of the Nigerian polity.” He went on to examine the underpinning causative factors of religious conflicts, the magnitude of infrastructural destruction and number of deaths in various periods and administrations (civilian and military) in Nigeria. For him, it is the “struggle for control that is the root cause of the conflicts and crises in the nation's political and religious life.” Property worth trillions of Naira and thousands of lives are lost in these conflicts and crises. It would be convulsive to imagine the added numbers lost in the recent *Boko Haram* crises, Jos crises, and the post-2011 election crises.

All these arising religiously motivated crises make imperative the need to create a Ministry of Religious affairs solely charged with the management of religious matters in the country to ensure peaceful co-existence, speedy resolution of arising conflicts and the sustenance of inter-faith dialogue. This will make for a more stable and prosperous nation.

Conclusion

Security is a fundamental need and right of every human person all over the world and governments exist in each and every country of the world to provide security of lives and property to its citizenry. Where this is lacking or the government and its security apparatus fail to meet up with this their fundamental duty to the citizenry, then the legitimacy of such a government will be called into question. Governments are also advised to practice the ethic of inclusivity so as to avoid the radicalization of disenfranchised, excluded and marginalized individuals and groups.

On the other hand, religion which is the desire and need of each individual to commune with the Supernatural Ultimate Reality (the Creator God), while being practiced with a guarantee of freedom and right of each individual to choose his/her religious affiliation, should as well be practiced with tolerance and recognition of the other's right to practice his chosen religion unhindered and undisturbed, without force or coercion. Religious intolerance should therefore be eschewed and rejected.

Furthermore, people with various ill-motives and selfish ambitions should not hide under the guise of religion to perpetrate violence, evil and crime in a bid to achieve their hidden agenda because religion is antithetic to such negative tendencies. Killing in the name of religion is an aberration as all 'true' religions abhor violence and the shedding of blood, especially innocent blood. God, who the religionists profess to worship is, according to the Holy Scriptures an advocate of peace and also eschews violence, bloodshed and lawlessness. Insecurity should not emanate from the religious sector.

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