



ABSTRACT

Religion as a concept has attracted various definitions and explanations over the years. In the words of various sociological scholars it is considered any relationship between man and the super-humans. To certain scholars of various works of life religion and religious groups may attract diverse meanings. Nigeria no doubt has been seen or known to be a country with different religious inclinations. It will not be out of place to say at this point that certain people see religious groups in Nigeria as just a few. That actually is not true. Nigeria has many religious groups in it. Be that as it may. The question is that from

RELIGION: A UNIFYING INSTRUMENT IN A MULTI-ETHNIC GEOGRAPHICAL ENTITY LIKE NIGERIA. AN APPRAISAL.

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Introduction

DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS.

It won't be out of place to establish that given key concept enshrined in the question above will definitely require some degree of explanations. Such words include but not related to these:

RELIGION

According to Oxford online dictionary, Religion is taken for the belief and worship of superhuman controlling power especially a personal God or gods. It can also be taken for a particular system of faith and worship .

UNIFYING INSTRUMENT.

According to the Collins online dictionary 2022 edition, Bringing about unification. Any instrument that brings things or persons together.

NIGERIA

A country in west Africa with close to 200 million population.

ETHNIC GROUP.

The number or population of people from different originalities making up a country.



sociological angle or perspective, religion is considered one of the sub-structures making up the society. That in essence underlines its imperativeness. But every right thinking person will ask is to what extent has religion in Nigeria played the expected roles that it is expected to play? If no, what factors has actually hindered it from carrying out the expected functions. This research is occasioned by the fact that religion has fallen short in its discharging the roles it ought to discharge without anyone having sufficient answers to factors have been responsible. Various data collection techniques served as instruments of data collection in the course of the study. They included oral interviews, use of questionnaire, textbooks, the internet and journals to mention just a few. The interactionist school of thought was adopted for this study to serve as theoretical framework. The work concluded with the scholars making their unreserved recommendations on how religion can still take its pride of place in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, Unifying Instrument, Nigeria, Ethnic Group.

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF RELIGION IN NIGERIA.

It has to be stated that Religion has been discovered to be the most popular phenomenon eminence due to its overwhelming impacts and contributions in the Nigerian society. As a tangible and veritable agent of change, religion has undeniably exerted great deal of influence positively and negatively on the Nigerian people in many known ways.

Even if it is known that religion in Nigeria has fueled and led to tensions and conflicts. (Agi 1998) It is also important to mention that it is a great force of peace and unity according to Taraki (2010) It is evident too that Religious affiliations has been a uniting force in Nigeria. It is equally a known fact that religion no matter which in Nigeria has been able to successfully bind or unite the various ethnic groups in the country together and also make them exist side with each other.

According to Omoregbe (1996), it can hardly be denied that religion has been the source of a lot of intolerance, feud, discrimination and devastating wars in the different parts of the world not only in Nigeria, both in the past and present. To say the fact as it is, religion has done more good than bad to mankind. In fact, it has produced saints in virtually every part of the world. That is not all, it has equally

Inculcated into many people the spirit of self discipline and dedicated service to ones fellow men. It has in fact given meaning to several lives. Back home in Nigeria some of the predominant religions as Christianity and muslim religions have made huge impacts that cannot be overlooked. The two religions have been involved in the education of the Nigerian populace to a very reasonable extent. This has been through the establishment of various missionary and quranic schools in Nigeria, Lemu 2002, Mkpa (2010)

In his own observation, Schumacher maintains that development does not start with goods, it starts with people and their education, organization and discipline. This is a fact. It is actually people who are knowledgeable, competent, honest and skilled that builds a nation. In furtherance,



it can therefore be said that the work of nation building solidly hinges on the way the state enjoys the goodness. The building of the nation is first and foremost the building of the people that make up the nation, which in effect boils down to to the building up of the individuals themselves.- justice, love and peace which are essential ingredients for nation building.

Religion has also produced great leaders in Nigeria.

Understandably too the three major religions have have equally contributed immensely in the political development of the country. They also produced competent individuals who championed the cause of leadership in the country.

As said elsewhere, religion is one of the key sub structures that make up every country. In essence therefore we cannot do without it.

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF RELIGION IN NIGERIA.

In as much as we have taken a good look at the positive impacts that religion have made and even its benefits perse, it also have a million and one negative effects

Below are some of those negative effects .

BREEDING BITTERNESS AND RANCOUR

One of the things that religion has fallen foul of encouraging bitterness among Nigerians. I will be in sheer doubt if any body will come up to tell us that about 60 percent of wars fought in Nigeria is not religious. Though many scholars have always outlined the positive impact of religion neglecting the numerous hazards that it has done. To be frank though it tantamount to condemnation to say that religion is an ill wind which blows no one any good. It will important to draw analogy from the typical traditional Igbo society before the advent of colonialism. The people were so united, loved themselves and cared so much about themselves and equally defending the interest of all and sundry. Since religion craftily crept in with the white lords, the amount divisions existing or evident among the families , communities and societies. Things began to even fall apart when we started have break away from the central religion, like the case of Christians and other religious practitioners.

INSTRUMENT OF SEGREGATION

It has also been observed in recent times that religion has simply become instrument of segregation, division and discrimination. People now see practitioners of other religions as being evil believing ony that their religious practices are simply the best and taht other practitioners are evil or inferior. Therefore to a very reasonable but yet debatable extent, religion disintegrates rather than unites .



ELEMENT OR INSTRUMENT OF CHAOS

In as much as we praise religion as have brought about peace, and all what nots, scholars like us are also stating with all sense of conviction that religion as we see or have evidenced in Nigeria has served as an instrument for chaos, crisis, killings and maiming of people. For example, over the years in Nigeria, we have witnessed situations where religious disagreements have degenerated into violent killings. While will any one come up to tell us or preach sermons about how religion has done this or that with taking a recourse to such an unguarded statement. Since nothing on this earth has all the advantages without disadvantages, religion is not an exception.

INSTRUMENT OF SUBJUGATION.

It must be stated without mincing words that religion has created divisions and unhealthy cum unequal arrangement between people. This is solely because people from certain religious beliefs see themselves as being superior while others from different religions are considered to be inferior to them. A typical example is the situation where one simply thinks and adjudges him/herself as one that knows God while others of different faith are considered as infidel or inferior to them. People get subjugated and relegated to the background simply because they are of different belief systems from them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

Interactionism is a social behaviour that relates an individual's action to possible cost reward implications. It is a theoretical perspective that derives social processes from human interaction. It is the study of how individuals act within a society. It is therefore, understandable that in a secular state like Nigeria, it is not unusual for people of different religious backgrounds to relate to one another wherever it will be more rewarding to them than to live in isolation, Blau 1969 describes reward to mean a positive reinforcement in any form that gratifies a person's needs. For example, religion is faith based reward that satisfies an individual's mode of worship, freedom of association and room for interaction with others, thereby satisfying some of the human needs. Coser and Rosenberg (1969) trace the origin of interactionism to the work of Simmel, Malinowski, Homan and Blau. They also observe that by Malinowski's conviction, basic obligations and rights must be understood in terms of reciprocal obligations which the members of society have towards each other as people worship in groups they interact with one another and conform to common doctrine.

The Nigeria constitution presupposes that an individual has freedom to practise religion of his or her choice without government interference. This is where secularism comes into play. Secularism is a legal position in the supreme law of Nigeria, stating that religious belief should not influence any public or/and governmental decisions. In other words, secularism is a documented position in a constitution relating to political belief in the separation of religion and state. While people are



allowed to practise whatever they believe in as their religion , the government must not allow that to influence public policy. Religion is the service and worship of God or gods. The word 'religion' which was first used in the 13th century is Latin in its origin . From a sociologist perspective, the society creates religion as an instrument in moulding, controlling and directing societal thinking and behaviour(Durkheim 1915, 207-211)

Durkheim's theory of religion further sees God as a personification of the society where all the laws and commandments of God are demanded from all members of the society for societal self – preservation. By this concept, a country ought to adopt a state religion to be in a position to demand good religious conduct from all members of her society. As Mayhovich 1980 explains, interaction theory assumes interpretative approach where the individual interprets the situation and thus determines his or her behaviour accordingly. Such behaviour does not appear to be a product of adherence to normative orientation to macro social structure(functionalism), he argues . Secularism in the constitution could have been borne out of previous experiences encountered for either non-inclusion or viewed from the population's diversity in beliefs culture and societal self preservation. It could also have been included in the constitution in fulfilment of human needs which generally arise out of existence of concrete histories of each society and to help colonial power subdue the people through religious conversion. Danbatta 2016, was alarmed by the inclusion of religion as a non governmental affair. He says, by writing a clause about religious freedom in our constitution, we are causing the elimination of that freedom, inviting unrest. Events that followed thereafter in over 50 years of Nigerian independence tend to confirm this alarm.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

Having summed up this scintillating treatise, we make these recommendations.

- 1) Let Nigerian Government do everything within her powers to constitutionalize the equality of all religions in the country.
- 2) Religious tolerance is a cross, let everybody pick theirs up and go no matter the cost.
- 3) Crimes against religion should not be treated with soft gloves to deter people from engaging in it.
- 4) Religious le

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