

RELIGION AND POLITICS: THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBAL CRISES ON NIGERIA EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

It is difficult to differentiate between religion and politics. Religion can be used as well as politics in a negative way. In contemporary society, much attention is given to science and technology thereby less attention on religion. This paper begins with the definition of religion, education and politics. The paper examines the role of religion in education and politics. Religion and politics have equal responsibility in the welfare of citizens and thus, those in authority have the mandate bestowed on them to act on political and religious matters in a complementary way. Religion and politics share an intimate and complex relationship, however, when properly used, it helps in educating the society. The paper further explains that when people understand the fact that religion is a personal affair, the future of the society will be good. It concludes that dialogue between different religious groups can be arranged to educate the populace on the need for tolerance and peaceful coexistence. This paper recommends that a forum for exchange of ideas and information for common understanding, consensus and cooperation should be created.

Keywords: Politics, religion, education, tolerance and cooperation.

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-religious society with different religions; the major being Christianity, Islam and traditional religions. Religion is seen as a force to reckon within modern Nigeria. According to Uka (2013), "public education of Nigerian citizens on issues of religion is a necessity". The role played by religion in education and politics is indispensable to human nature, even though religion has its positive and negation roles. Religion can serve as a catalyst for national development. Even in a scientific and technological age, the role played by religion in education and politics is an important factor for educational and political development.

It is obvious that religion plays an important function in educating the society. It influences the traditional setting that has greatly influenced the life pattern of the people. Bassey (2010) opines that, "Religion and politics is an attempt to relate a religion to the political character of the society in which it exists". Some scholars share divergent views about the relationship between these two words. Some believe that, religion is a private choice and has nothing to do with politics. On the other hand for others, it is like drinking water. Therefore, it should not be mixed.

The Concept of Religion

There is no single accepted definition of religion because of varied reasons which is based on individual perception. However, scholars define it from different perspectives. Anyawu (2004) defines religion as, "human interaction with the supernatural in order to cope with life's crises ...". This means that for one to accept religion, there must be an interaction of a being which transcends any other; a supreme being. Omoregbe (1999) opines that, "Religion is man's relationship with the supernatural. It is essentially a relationship, a link established between two persons namely: a human person and a divine person believed to exist". It goes to show here, that a divine person exists for a relation to exist.

Uka (2013:125) writes that:

Religion is a reality in human experience and pervades through life. It describes man's relationship with the supernatural world or the ultimate reality generally referred to as God. This relationship finds expression in beliefs, creeds, symbols and forms of worship. The notion of religion is different from that of a religion. Religion deals with questions of human expression, that are deep and serious such as: why do some people suffer while others prosper? Why and how do things exist? What lies beyond death?

There is no single acceptable definition of religion from scholars. What is presented is based on their beliefs, values and norms.

Iwe (1987:2) defines religion thus:

Religion is man's natural and innate consciousness of his dependence on a transcendent supra human being and the consequent natural and spontaneous propensity to render homage and worship to him or a configuration of doctrines, laws and rituals by which man expresses his loyalty to a transcendental being.

One can say that, religion is concerned with the worship of transcendent or supernatural beings, since there is no precise and agreed definition of religion. Umoh (2010:45) traced the origin of religion from the Latin *relegate*, to bind, which suggests the broadest possible boundaries for the territory of religious belief and encourages the acceptance of the argument.

These questions spring from the problem of human existence and meaning. The question of human meaning has to do with values, its conservation and enhancement. Therefore, our concern for religion has to do with facts and feelings about ultimate value questions, which are related to the meaning and purpose of human life here and in the hereafter.

A "religion" has to do with a particular religious group does or beliefs. For example; why do Muslims go to pilgrimage to Mecca? Why do they pray five times a day? Why do Christians take Holy Communion? Why do they observe such festivals as Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, and so on. Why do Buddhists lay flower before the Buddha's image in their temple? Any question that has to do with "why" sometimes is difficult to answer. Even the adherer's will find it difficult to answer such questions. Some of these questions are beyond human understanding hence, cannot be answered from the human point of view.

When we talk about religion, we use it in a wider sense. Specifically, we refer to religions in a plural form. Uka (2013:125) elucidates that:

What we call "religion" today refers to religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Shintoism, Confucianism, African Traditional Religion (ATR) and others. These religions belong to a particular people's way of interpreting reality, or their belief system through which they relate to the seen and the unseen world around them...this religious identity has been the foundation of the separation of each from other and the case of inter-group conflict.

For example, religious conflicts have been known to exist between the Canaanites and the Israelites, the Jews and the Muslims, the Muslims and the Christians (as in Nigeria)... Each particular religion has a particular character because of the people who practice it. Jegede (2012:54) asserts that, "Without doubt, the greatest threat to peaceful coexistence, economic and political development as well as national security has always been religious conflict". Religion therefore, can be seen as a universal phenomenon as man's response to God.

Religion is often used to educate people wrongly. Whenever and wherever this is done, much protest and conflict ensues leading to injury (both physical and internal), destruction of properties and even death.

An Overview of Politics

Politics is a word that is fast replacing many administrative, social, religious, economic and even moral modes of human life and existence especially in Nigeria. This is because of the role politics plays in the gradual change of human life and activities as it is used to relate to it. The definition given by scholars push people to use as desired. Babalola (2005), posit that, "politics is the protection of domain, acquisition of power, support building, influence gathering and self-serving". Some people based their political affiliation based on power and the protection of their domain.

Keywood (2000) in Babalola (2005), described politics in four broad fold. He succinctly elucidates them as:

Politics in government is (primarily associated with the art of government and the affairs of the state); politics of life (concerned with the conduct and management of community affairs); politics as conflict resolution (concerned with the expression and resolution of conflicts through compromise, conciliation, negotiation and other strategies) and politics as power (a process through which the production, distribution and use of scarce resources is determined in all areas of social existence).

Other scholars have defined politics from different perception. Amadioha (2008:87) cites Ban Field (1955) who defines politics as, the "activity by which an issue is agitated or settled". In his opinion, an agitation or a settlement is considered, politics. He further captures Abernathy and Combo (1956) to define politics in terms of "its interrelated components thus: authority and control, presence of public interest and actions and presence of legitimacy and accountability". The presence of an authority in control, depicts interest and actions as politics.

The Concept of Education

Education is a word that has received various definitions. Fafunwa (2004), views education as, "the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitude and other forms of behavior which are of positive value to the society in which he lives". The inculcation of right attitude and behavior is what Fafunwa advocates in his definition of education. Aliyu (2001), defines education as, "the method by which a society transmits from one generation to the next its knowledge, culture and values". In this definition, the transmission of knowledge also encompasses the inclusion of culture and values.

Mehta and Poonga (1997), in their description of education state that education is not only to equip the new generations with skills so essential for earning a livelihood, but also to create among them an awareness to social and environmental realities and inculcate in them scientific temper, independence of mind and spirit which are of paramount importance for them to become responsible citizens. Lawrence (1977:34) defines education as, "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke or acquire knowledge, attitude, values, skills

or sensibilities as well as any outcome of that effort". An importance of education is to inculcate right discipline, attitude and desirable attribute to life.

Education sharpens the learner's mind to be able to do what is expected of him in bringing progress and development of the society at large. When learning takes place, it brings development. O'Connor (1957:22) is of the view that, education seeks to provide both men and women with the basic minimum skills for further knowledge as they properly exist in the society. The knowledge acquired helps them keep in touch with more training which also make them appreciate the culture and moral of human achievement. In view of this, education develops an individual and society at large. If an individual is educated, it is expected that he/she will practice what he has acquired.

Uka (2013:127), further observe that:

In all these we find that education takes place within the society. Consequently, the society demands from its members they acquire at school, a minimum body of knowledge and skills and certain desirable attitudes and modes of behavior such as self-discipline and a sense of responsibility. In other words, the value of any study or any education is its relatedness and usefulness to social life.

Education in a multi-cultural or multi-religious society is expected to teach individuals certain things about life, other people's culture and religions other than the one they belong or adhere to.

Educating an individual means educating the society, since the educated person lives within the society. The society benefits from his/her education. Okon, (2011:38) cites Scoff Anne Daughtrey who point out that:

The educated citizen is sensitive to the disparities of human circumstances; the educated citizen acts correct unsatisfactory conditions; the educated citizen seeks to understanding social structures and social process; ... citizen has defenses against propaganda; ... respects honest differences of opinion; ...has a regard for the nations resources; ...measures scientific advance by its contribution to the general welfare and is a cooperative member of the world community.

In addition to the above, the educated citizen is expected to respect the law, be economically literate, must be ready and willing to accept his civic responsibilities and stand to uphold the loyalty to democratic ideals. This is an obvious fact that, it is in the education for citizenship that education and politics meets.

The Socio-ethical Values of Religion in the Society

Religion plays an important role in shaping the political, economic and social landscape of the Nigerian society. Africans generally are religious. Africans hardly find it easy to separate their religious beliefs and practices from politics. Where an African man is found, he goes with his religion. Thus, Lere (2011:10) cites Mbiti who asserts that most Africans are "in all things religious" arguing that religion plays a vital role in the moral, spiritual, educational, political and social development of the country. According to him, the fact that "about 99% of Nigerians profess membership of one religion or the other is no news. The number of Nigerians who perform pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Mecca and Rome annually is the highest in Africa. This intense sense of religiosity is also reflected in the high number of religious public holidays, which amount to about twelve annually (Lere, 2011:30).

Uka (2013:126) presents the following as the socio-ethical values of religion in society:

- They encourage love expressed in friendship, kinship, good neighborliness, benevolence and self-service;
- They insist on justice which is a moral virtue that regulates interpersonal and social relations and the external conducts of human beings;

- They stand for truth, expressed in wisdom and knowledge of their God;
- They encourage tolerance, both in thought, worship and belief;
- They generate power internally through self-conduct resolution, coverage, perseverance, initiative and drive to overcome evil;
- They seek to secure good health by ensuring adequate functioning of their body and spirit.

The Role of Religion in Education

Religion has and plays a vital role in education and politics. Iwe (2003) listed the following:

- Mutual respect for members of the group and others outside the group;
- The equitable allocation of whatever is one's due within the group;
- Scrupulous avoidance of such attitudes and practices which subvert or corrode mutual love and respect such as class spirit, ethnicism, statism and sexism;
- Readiness for services and sacrifice for the welfare of the group, it and when legitimate circumstance so demand;
- Refraining from all acts capable of weakening or tarnishing the image and teaching of the group or their prophets;
- The promotion of the good name of the religious group through achievement in the area of mobility and the pursuit of excellence; merit and social justice;
- Prayer for welfare of the country for its leaders, its economy and its inhabitants;
- Loyalty and rational obedience to constituted authority. (both within the group and in the nation) and to the principles of the rule of law and public order;
- The recognition and the exercise of religious liberty, power and privilege **asp** sacred trust to be used with mobility and accountability.

One can confidently say that, where religion is properly understood and practiced, it can bring a transformation to the community, foster tolerance, mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and unity. For this to be achieved, we need the educational process to be implemented in enlightening the populace.

The Effect of Politics on Religion

In every sector of human endeavour such as: religion, education, admission or appointment processes and others, politics is used as a measuring yardstick. Belonging to a particular political party, ethnicity or religion entails your securing favours, opportunity or attention for hearing or fulfilment of desires. Where one does not belong to a particular party, especially the ruling party, then favours may not be granted and this has often led to bias and conflicts in many undertakings. Umoh (2010:48) opines that:

The injection of politics into almost any other realm automatically creates a general sense of conflict because politics is at its basest levels, a power struggle. This interaction can cause difficulty for religious groups that prefer to present themselves in an inclusive, rather than divisive way. Conflict is however, almost unavoidable.

The politics of any religious group involve factions with different perspective. Those who adhere to other faith (or to no faith at all) often take offence at their actions. And when a particular religion controls a government anyone who does not agree with the tenets of the faith will have conflict not only with the religion but also with the government that it administers.

Sometimes, government policies affect a particular religion based on a law passed which can be a threat to lives or religion. Okeke (2007), a Nigerian author, views politics as “a civilizing agent and a way of ruling in divided society without violence”. It becomes imperative for individuals and government to be mindful of policy implementation or laws being passed

as this may adversely affect the peaceful coexistence of the people and deter progress in all spheres of life.

Conclusion

It is difficult to put a clear distinction between religion and politics. This is because the two share an intimate and complex relationship. There is a form of cooperation between the two terms. The church and the mosque must be aware of its duties toward its members. It is the responsibilities of the religious institutions to educate their members so that the society will have a better future. Religious leaders should adhere strictly to the teachings of their religious tenets. This will minimise religious fanaticism and bigotry. The ideals of religious and political education in a multi-religious society should be protected. It should be noted that, religious education could become a veritable instrument for promoting harmony, good neighbourliness, and stability in an unstable, multi-religious society like Nigeria.

Recommendations

In the light of the above discussion, the following recommendations are hereby proffered as the role of religion in education and politics:

1. Proper religious education should be taught and orientation to be given so that ignorance can be wiped away;
2. Parents and siblings should encourage folk stories that will emphasize tolerance, endurance, justice and peaceful co-existence;
3. Dialogue between different religious groups can be arranged to hold. This will create a common forum for exchange of ideas and information for common understanding, consensus and cooperation;
4. Professional body for the study of religion should be set up. This will eradicate ignorance through conferences and seminars;
5. Religious institutions are to be encouraged to avoid deliberate use of arms in resolving conflicts.

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