

An Appraisal that Religion on its Own Does Not Breed Violence

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ABSTRACT

It will be rare to have a discussion on human existence without mentioning violence; but it will be unfair to see religion as the main reason for violence. Although, religion has an input in violence, but religion in isolation can't breed violence without the input of some other factors which are further explain in this article. This article adopted qualitative method and secondary data. The secondary data was collected through website, publications, journals and textbooks. The data collected through secondary data reveals that religion on its own does not breed violence but it is a component of violence that can be aided by poverty, inequality, bad governance among other factors.

Keywords: Religion, Violence, Conflict

Introduction

Religion, gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, political affiliation are some of the variable that are used to classified people of the world. Religion is one of the strong variable because of the spirituality involve and the belief that there is a supreme being that created the earth and heaven, hence, this tend to have impact on the day to day activities of man. Lot of literatures and discourse has been centred around the relationship between violence and religion. Hence, this article will seek to exclusively explain that religion on its own does not breed violence. Secondary data will be collected through publications, websites, textbooks, journals for the purpose of explaining the theme of this article.

What is Religion?

Religion is as old as human and every human regardless of their race and origin have a way of communicating to the spiritual realm. In many civilizations, religion has been used as a tool to promote social harmony [1], because it brings people of diverse culture across various continent and countries even with different ethnic group and various language to belief in a cause and also have similar shared view with one another. Religion breed peace and violence, it depends on how the society and other factors such as poverty, literacy, good governance among others contribute to it. For those who identify with or are affiliated with a religious group, religion also functions as a form of identification as a corporate phenomena.

Religions in practice are the result of interpretation, typically generated by religious leaders, which also serves as one form

of identity to those who associate with or are associated with a religious group. Religion is a powerful force that can inspire and mobilize nations, societies, and individuals. Additionally, religions in practice are not constant but rather change over time in accordance with historical context [2].

Durkheim explains religion by dividing human phenomenon into two opposed worlds, the holy and profane. He furthered by saying real religious views are always shared by a particular group. They are not just accepted individually by each member of this group; they are a part of this group and contribute to its cohesiveness. Because they have a common religion, the people who make up the group feel connected to one another.

As a result, religion is not just about beliefs and rituals, but shared beliefs and rituals that bind a group of people into a community; this is why Durkheim's definition of religion is crucial for understanding the causes of religious violence [2]. The sacred aspect of religion makes the follower see it as something that needs to be protected against external form of interference. Hence, strict religious followers are likely to do everything possible to preserve their shared beliefs, which violence might be an option in the cause of preserving their religion.

Geertz's defines religion as a "general order of existence;". This shows that religion is seen by human as a way of life and that religion gives the right manual on how human life is meant to be lived. The general order of existence also covers the part where religion is seen to predict what will happen in future and here after, in the course of that, the followers of this religion try to engage in some sought of violence in other to achieve what has

been preached by their religion and also to forestall what will happen in the future by fighting to keep their religion scared and afloat of any dent. In the course of seeing religion as a general order of existence, some religions fanatics believe killing non faithfuls according to their religion will make them to be entitled to 7 virgins after their death. This belief by religious fanatics has makes it possible for some of the religious leaders to want to incorporate violence into religion.

According to a Spanish study, societies divided along religious lines are more likely to experience severe and protracted conflict than societies split along political, territorial, or ethnic lines [3].

What is Violence?

The term “violence” can refer to a wide range of experiences, such as blood shedding, physical harm, forcing against one’s right to privacy, passionate conduct or language, or emotions such as fury and passion, making it a very broad concept that is difficult to define [4]. Religious violence is when someone or group of people physically harms another person or group of people because of their religion or in a way that is at least somewhat related to it [5]. Religious violence occur when a group people molest, harass, harm and commit all sort of inhumane activity against another group of people for the sake of their personal gains.

All world religions contain stories, images, and allegories of violence and war; religious violence refers to phenomena in which religion is either the subject or the object of violent behavior [6]. Some of the teachings and stories are most often than not filled with narration of how a group fight those that does not believe in their faith. This narration have spread across various generations and countries and it has become imperative that most of the religious followers engage in some sort of violence in defence of their religion.

Religious violence includes violence against religious institutions, people, things, or events and it motivated by or in response to religious precepts, texts, or the doctrines of a target or an attacker. Religious violence does not only include acts committed by religious groups; it also includes acts committed against religious groups [7].

Various religious violence has taken place all over the world. The most notable one is the 9/11 Terrorist attack on the USA, Chibok School Girls Kidnapping in Northern Nigeria and France Charlie Hebdo shooting are of the most notable religious violence that spike outrage all over the world. There have been lot of religious violence in Nigeria too where lots of lives have been lost. Most of the religious violence mostly take place in Northern Region of Nigeria because of their conservative view on religion and their high level of religion Some of the notable religious violence. Some of the notable religious violence in Nigeria are the killing of Deborah Samuel, a student of Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, In the Nigerian city of Owo, Ondo State, a Catholic church was the target of a mass shooting and bombing on June 5, 2022, the killing of a Eunice Olawale, she was killed in Abuja, Nigeria, by suspected religion extremist while preaching in the early hours of July 2016, and the most recent one is the consistent religious crisis between the Fulani and the residents of th the Southern Kaduna who are predominantly Christians.

Why Religion on its Own Does Not Breed Violence

Although religion on its is own is capable of breeding violence but in most cases, religious violence are been escalated by the following factors such as: poverty, bad governance, tribal conflict, inequality, intolerance and illiteracy. Most of this factors will be explained using Nigeria as a point of reference.

Poverty

One of the major factor that aid violence is poverty. In some of the Third World Countries, politicians and government opposition manipulate religion in order to unleash mayhem in the society. Religious Institution most often than not provide succour to the halves-not in the society and this makes them to be more endear to the ethos of religion in the society. It is pertinent to note that religion can be used to provide relief to the poor and also ensure that through their religion participation they are given a voice in the society.

Religion tends to be more popular in Africa due to the high poverty rate because people living below the poverty line sees religion as a medium to deal with the menace of poverty; this assertion was backed by a research that was carried out by Geogory Paul in 2008, where he compared 25 socioeconomic indicators against data on religious belief and practice in 17 developed nations, it was revealed that religion tend to thrive in a serious dysfunctional societies [8].

Most of the society that is been ravaged by high religious violence has an high rate of poverty. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 63% of Nigerians are multidimensionally poor, and more than 35, 000 lives have been lost as a result of religious crisis in the Northern Part of Nigeria [9,10]. The stated data reveals that there is an inferential relationship between poverty rate and religious violence in Nigeria. The insurgency in the Northern part of Nigeria is an example of religious violence that has fester and wreck havoc for more than 10 years. Although it is a religious violence but socioeconomic stance of the people is an aiding factor of the violence.

Religious violence such as terrorism and poverty are related through social, economic, and political elements, making their association complex [11]. Religious violence won’t have foster if the people have sustainable means of income and they don’t have to rely on their religious leader who has ulterior motives or political motives. Most of the people that are recruited into the terrorism follows the preaching of their religious leaders and they see their religious leader has been paramount and sacred because of not just their religious affiliation but because of the religious leader provide for their means of living, an aspect which the government has failed the people.

In Northern Nigeria, unemployment and poverty are socioeconomic issues that are not only closely related but also painfully obvious. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) of Nigeria reports that from 2006 until 2011, when poverty rate reached an all-time high of 23.90 percent, the country’s jobless rate averaged 14.60 percent. Nigeria’s poverty rate increased from 54.7 percent in 2004 to 60.9 percent in 2010. In 2011, 12.6 million more Nigerians were moderately poor and 100 million people lived in abject poverty [12]. This has put the young people in the Northern Nigeria to a dilemma of engaging in religious violence.

Religion alone is not capable of causing violence but the influence of poverty on its followers makes it possible for non state actors to recruit some of the religious followers that are socially and economically disadvantaged to wreck havoc on the society for the sake of violence.

Bad Governance

Bad governance is the direct opposite of good governance, where by government shy away from their major responsibility such as provision of quality infrastructure facilities, provision of security, maintenance of law and order, ensuring effective and efficient judicial system. One of the issues that escalated the issues of boko haram in Northern Nigeria was as a result of the extra judicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf who happens to be the religious sect leader of boko haram. This made the religious sect to become more deadly and act out of control. If the government has acted in accordance to the law and ensure proper judicial process was followed, the issue of Boko Haram won't have fester for this long.

Most of the countries that has high level of bad governance are mostly affected by religious violence because there is absence of leadership quality that can be used to ensure a coordinated and serene society that is devoid of constant religious violence. But in recent years, religion has gained prominence as one of the things people most easily identify with, allowing leaders to incite violence whenever it suited their goals [13].

Tribal Conflict

Tribal conflict is a disagreement that occurs between two or more different ethnic group. The tribal conflict at times is been given religious coloration in other to gain sympathy from the government, civil society, international society. Lagos State is a cosmopolitan state in Nigeria and it houses almost all the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Once there is a tribal conflict between the Northerners and the Southerners in Lagos, it is a matter of time before it will degenerate in to a religious violence because it is widely believed that the Northerners are mostly Muslim while the Southerners are mostly Christians. Meanwhile the Yoruba tribe, which is primarily found in the South West, was found to be 55% Muslim, 35% Christian, and 10% religiously affiliated, while just 2% of the Igbos and Ijaw people in the south south and south east, respectively, practice traditional faiths, 98% of them are Christians while the Hausa ethnic group, which is primarily found in the northern part of Nigeria, was found to be 95% Muslim and 5% Christian [14]. The data reveals that each region have various religion but whenever there is tribal or ethnic conflict, it is most times given religious coloration which will make it degenerate into a religious violence.

During the clashes between the Hausa and the Kataf (a predominantly Christian ethnic group) in Zangon-Kataf between February and May 1992, which became known as the "Zangon-Kataf crisis," Muslim reprisals for Hausa killings included the murder of Christians which led to the killings of other Christians in other parts of Kaduna State [13]. Similar issue still persist till date, which is the current religious violence in Kaduna State, Nigeria where there is an ethnic crisis between the Southern Kaduna and the Fulani. The Southern Kaduna are mostly Christians while the Fulani are mostly Muslims. The ethnic crisis between the two ethnic groups has turned to a religious

violence where most of the Southern Kaduna residence have been killed due to their religious affiliation rather than their ethnic difference.

Ehigiator further assert that tribal differences, political and economic conflicts, rather than theological differences, are the root causes of most religious violence because Muslims and Christians are frequently set against one another in other to gain sympathy from concerns groups and stakeholders [13].

Inequality

Inequality refers to the phenomena of an unfair and/or unequal distribution of opportunities and resources among the people who make up a society [15]. When there is high level of inequality in the society there is likely occurrence of violence in the society. Inequality might be inform of gender base, infrastructural facilities, political positions and other aspect of the society.

In the just concluded general election in Nigeria, the ruling party, All Progressive Congress (APC) Presidential Candidate and Vice Presidential Candidate are both Muslims while the opposition party fielded a Muslim and a Christian candidate in the election. During the electioneering campaign, the election almost led to a Muslim and a Christian election which almost led to religious violence in some part of the country as some of the religious leader gave the choice of candidates of the APC a religious coloration.

In the Northern Part of the country too, some of the religious violence are as a result of the political inequality in the states and some of the ethnic group who are predominantly Christians will want to challenge the status quo which will then lead to religious violence in the society. As rightly noted in the various political appointments of the current government of President Muhammad Buhari, the struggle for power and position in Nigeria has also led to the manipulation of religion and ethnicity by the political elite for selfish reasons and as a result, it will not be incorrect to say that there is hardly an appointment that is not tinted with religious inference made to it; this breeds mutual distrust, discrimination, and a sense of general insecurity within the society especially in the Northern Region of Nigeria [16].

Intolerance

Intolerance is the refusal to accept concepts, viewpoints, or behaviors that differ from your own [17]. Some of the religious violence that is been caused is a result of lack of tolerance or respect to other people beliefs. Religion in Africa is taken very serious that people see an attack on their religion as an attack to their personal belief and their entire society. Falola argues that in nations where Islam and Christianity coexist, as in the cases of Sudan and Nigeria, rivalries for religious ascendancy have exacerbated issues with stability and identity, leading to a desire for religious conflict or even the transformation of the state into a theocracy and the imposition of religious ideology [18].

It is important to recognize that religious intolerance has influenced the way many Nigerian Muslims and Christians think, leading them to fiercely oppose anything that appears to contradict their beliefs which will in turn leads to religious violence [19]. Some of the religious violence can be avoided if there is respect for other people beliefs and doctrine.

The most recent victim of religion intolerance is Deborah Samuel, a Christian Student in Sokoto State, Nigeria. She was beaten to death and set ablaze by Muslim Student who finds her response to their message on a whatsapp group chat as an insult to their religion. The lack of tolerance from the student led to religion violence in the state.

In all societies that have existed throughout humanity's history, religious intolerance has been identified as the primary cause of religious conflict and violence, as well as its concomitant destructive tendencies [20].

Illiteracy

literacy is the ability to read and write. But the definition of UNESCO, made us understand that literacy is beyond reading and writing but it is the ability to use printed and written materials associated with various contexts to recognize, comprehend, interpret, create, communicate, and compute [21]. Some of the people that practise the major religion in Nigeria, rely on their religious leaders to help them translate the reading from the Holy Book. The religious leader then have the liberty to transcribe what is not inherent in the holy book just to suit his/her own interest. By so doing, the religious leader have been able to manipulate the mindset of his/her followers due to the fact that they can not read, write and also comprehend what they have read. A typical religious fanatics in Nigeria believes whatever his/her religious leader said because of their level of illiteracy.

Boko Haram is able to recruit more people because Borno State, where the organization was founded, has one of the lowest literacy rates among all of Nigeria's Northeastern States and about 72% of children between the ages of 6 and 16 have never attended school, this made it possible for boko haram to have ready made people available for recruitment due to the high level of illiteracy rate in State [22].

Conclusion

One of the doctrine of religion is togetherness and oneness because it infuse unity among the member of the same faith and makes them see reasons to think as one and also choose to live the same life as written in the holy book in which they adopt. Religion became violence as a result of dominating attitude of man and insatiable want of man. Most of the religious violence can be linked to intolerance by the people. Religious if left to foster on the part of togetherness and oneness devoid of politics will brings about peace and harmony within the society. The developing countries should also do more to educate their citizens and not leave the welfare and education of their citizens in the hand of religions fanatics.

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