The Conflict Among Religious Clergy: A Factor to Nigeria Social Disintegration

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ABSTRACT

Social disintegration has been a menace in Nigeria. The daily struggle for the peaceful cohabitation of multi ethnoreligious citizens in Nigeria seems endless. This study examined the conflict in belief, goals and values perpetrated by religious leaders of various religious groups as a factor to social disintegration in Nigeria. Based on Transformational Leadership theory and Group Conflict Theory, it was noted that through the influence of the religious clergies, members of a religious group are indoctrinated in religious intolerance, ignorance and spiritual arrogance, that results to prejudice and social imbalance in the country. Since the disagreement originates from the clergies, the members can achieve a harmonious living with other group members through indoctrination of peace, love and tolerance for other religious adherents

Keywords: Conflict, Religious conflict, Social disintegration; Religious Clergy

Introduction

Nigeria is of recent, one of the known countries with a high rate of conflict. The conflicts have gotten global attention that other country leaders caution their citizens about residing in Nigeria. It is worst in that the presence of an individual from a different tribe or religion brings the sense of insecurity and social distancing. Often, the conflicts in Nigeria are attributed to different factors such as political issues, ethnic differences, and most specifically, religious differences. Canci and Odukoya (2016) generally noted that due to an intricate network of silent identities in politics, coupled with a history of prolonged and endless wars and instability arising from ethnic and religious differences, Nigeria is high on the list of the most unstable states in Africa. The conflict due to religious differences is based on belief, perception, teachings and doctrines that differ among the religious groups in Nigeria. Such belief and perceptions are often geared by the convincing ability of the clergy.

Clergies are ordained members of a religious order. They lead and conduct worship and rituals for their spiritual activity. They include the religious leaders in Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Traditional religions (Wikipedia, 2020). Religious clergies are of crucial importance and impact to their members both in physical and spiritual spheres. They play roles in the emotional and spiritual life of their members, engage in the community, educational and recreational activities, organize and participate in the financial and administrative activities or their congregations etc. In Nigeria, the three main religious groups are; Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion, with more populace in Christianity and Islam. Several conflicts experienced in Nigeria are attributed to misunderstandings among the religious groups. The Christian clergy belief that they have the true word and revelation of God, the Islam Clergy, belief that they are the true descendants of God and their belief must be paramount whereas the traditional religious clergy believes he sees and hears from his God and so they cannot be silenced. The different belief of superiority often leads to religious bigoty and spiritual arrogance and hence becomes the major cause of conflicts. The impression among some religionists is that they are of the truth and others have a lesser form of God's revelation (Olupana, 1992). This categorically applies to the members of the different religious group who form the population and engage in the social practices of Nigeria.

Social integration in Nigeria has become one among the hardest national objectives to be achieved. This is not only a result of ethnic and cultural differences but also religious differences. Ifeanacho & Nwagwu (2009) observed that Nigeria's efforts to achieve social integration have seemingly been unrealized. Onifade & Imhonopi (2013) also noted that the integration crisis facing Nigeria is as a result of the minority question, religious fundamentalism and conflicts, ethnic politics etc. Specifically, the interest of this study is the conflict generated by religious clergy through their transformational leadership and their impact on the social disintegration of Nigeria. The conflict at these stage among the clergies may not be violent but contributes to the creation of intolerance and fundamentalism in their members. This study, therefore, filled the gap by stating how religious clergies inflict social disintegration through beliefs and value teachings in their various religious groups.

Since religious teachings are imbedded into members of different religious groups by their clergy, embedding a mutual belief or respect for other religious beliefs can as well be achieved. Njimezi and Egonu (2013) noted that to nationally integrate the various ethnic groups and languages in Nigeria, there is need for a national common language. Therefore, it can as well be noted that the sociological environment of Nigeria can be enhanced through mutual belief or respect for individual religious beliefs without a feeling of superiority.

The prevalence of Conflict in Nigeria

The concept of conflict has gained different views and definitions due to its unfailing occurrence among humans. Conflict is perceived among every category of human; young, old, learned, unlearned, as long as there is disagreement. Conflict notwithstanding occurs in an individual; disagreement with oneself. Conflict is a disagreement or contest in beliefs, needs, goals, ideas, or values (Axt, Milososki, & Schwarz, 2006). Diez, Stetter and Albert, (2006) in their study stated that Conflict is bound to occur in regardless of subject positions, that is it can be perceived between individuals, groups or societal positions. Conflict, as defined by Phi-Eze (2009), is the expression of discrepancy over important goals, views, needs and values between two people, groups, states or nations. It occurs at different levels including the intra-personal, inter-personal, intra-ethnic, inter-ethnic, intra-national, intra-religion, inter-religion, intra-races, inter- races, and even at international level (Moore 1986; Deutsch 1973; Folger et al. 1995; Apollos 2008). Conflict, therefore, is a universal phenomenon that is perceived when there are disagreement in needs, goals and desire and misunderstanding in values, and beliefs between two or more people.

Often, conflict can be constructive and healthy in achieving a stated objective and goals. However, if mismanaged or neglected can escalate to destructive and violent forms. Mwania, (2020) noted that "Conflict takes on different dimensions and can move from constructive to destructive and from mild to violent if unchecked". The violence arising from conflict has invariably been the major cause of distress in the world, particularly in Nigeria. It has negatively affected every sector of the nation including but not limited to the economy, politics, social integration and the overall development. conflict in the social relations of people can increase the bias in social integration and facilitate social disintegration (Dovidio, L.Gaetner, Wright, & Perry, 2012). In Nigeria, intra-Religion and inter-religion conflict are among the levels of conflict that negatively affect social integration. Religious conflicts emanate from ignorance of peoples' belief, sense of superiority and arrogance by members of the society resulting from the transformational clergy leadership of the different religious groups and their members.

Religious conflict has been on the rise notwithstanding the high proliferation of religious groups in the world. Religious conflict is noted as one of the major causes of violence and social disintegration in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Several factors are seen as the causes of religious conflict in Nigeria of which are; religious intolerance, religious fundamentalism and religious extremist (Sampson, 2012). It was noted by several authors that of the major causes of religious conflict is ignorance of other peoples' belief (Jasim, 2018; Yusuf, 2018; & Arifin, 2018). However, this study is focused on conflict among religious leaders as a cause of religious conflict and how it affects social integration in Nigeria.

The Place of Religious Clergies in Nigeria

Clergies are official leaders found in existing and recognized religions. They are ordained in a religious order to conduct and perform spiritual functions relating the religious faith and aid in the spiritual well-being of the congregation (Sokana, 2020). Their roles and functions vary in different religious traditions, but usually involve presiding over specific rituals and teaching their religion's doctrines and practices ((Wikipedia, 2020). Religious clergies provide affectionate assistance to their members. The main responsibility of clergy is teaching the doctrines of the religion and their duties as identified by Sokanu (2020) are; giving advice to members on their spiritual and emotional needs, plan and lead religious education programs for the congregation, participate in community education and recreational activities etc. They are believed to have the responsibilities of hearing from God and preaching his word to the people, separate and higher than the rest of the members (Yeubanks, 2005).

Religious clergies include the leaders in various religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism, Buddhism and traditional religions. They are of greater authority than other members of the religion among their group. Often the religious leaders are packed with scriptures that affirm their authority and order in the religious group. For instance, in Christianity, the members are compelled in the book of Romans chapter 13:2 not to rebel against the authority as such is against what God has constituted and whoever does so would bring Judgement against themselves. This means that, the religious leaders as seen as representatives of God and as such presents the belief of the religious group.

Also, the religious leaders are expected to possess essential qualities, skills and competencies for effective clergy leadership. The leadership qualities include; A perfecting spirituality in one's relationship to God, integrity, a caring heart (compassion), excellence in ministry. The skills and competencies are; proclamation and formation, leadership skills, organization and administration, pastoral relationships, self-care, community and social involvement, diocesan involvement (Dioceserg.org, 2016). These qualities, skills and competencies enhance their leadership and achievement of their religious goals and objectives.

Related Review of Literature

The causes of religious conflicts by different researchers are mostly stated to be under the umbrella of religious intolerance, religious fundamentalism, and religious extremist. Sampson (2012) undertook an analytical inquiry into the immediate and visible factors that causes religious conflict in Nigeria and evaluated the nature and state management of religious conflicts in Nigeria. He noted that manifestation of religious intolerance and fundamentalism birthed religious extremism which can lead to violence is not well managed. He further stated that for social and religious harmony to be achieved in Nigeria, the religious educate their members/laity on the need to keep their sermons within the realm of moderation and modesty. Unenwojo (2014) used Group Conflict theory and Rational Choice theory as the background to discuss the issue of Unbeliever as critical to the persistent religious clashes in Northern Nigeria. Focusing on the destination of beliefs, religious practice in Nigeria, religious hypocrisy and the need for religious tolerance. He subjectively stated that the greatest problem to the peaceful living of

different religious groups in Northern Nigeria is the method of proselyting and orientation of Muslims. The author concluded by quoting Onwuejeogwu (1992) that "religious practice encourages social solidarity, cohesion and bonding of a people, but if not carefully managed can be a source of disintegration and destabilization". In the same vein, Mmahi & Ojo, (2018) based on inter-group threat theory to argue that religious conflicts in Nigeria have been traced to prejudice resulting from religious dogmatism expressed through intolerance, clashes, riots and discrimination. They stated that through religious teachings, religious leaders have instilled dogmatic prejudice in their followers which has culminated in religious intolerance, violence, discrimination and resentment perpetrated by religious groups against other religious groups which they defined as out-groups. The authors further concluded that religious leaders and teachers should be sensitized to indoctrinate their members in a way that would promote love, peace, and tolerance and abstain from any form of teaching and utterances that could cause their members to be prejudiced against other religious groups. Freedman, (2019) examined the role of religious leaders during different military and political conflicts. Drawing on an original collection of Sabbath pamphlets distributed to Synagogues, the author demonstrated that religious rhetoric is highly responsive to levels of violence for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He conclusively stated that the religious leaders infuse conflict with a religious tone, among the religious public. The findings of Freedman's study reflect the objects of this study in that, the influence of religious leaders to their members can be a threat to the social harmony of the society.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on transformational leadership theory and the group conflict theory

The transformational leadership theory was introduced by James MacGregor Burns in the late 1970s and later expanded by Bernard M. Bass in 1985 (Gomes, 2014). The theory explains that leadership is a process of influencing changes in the attitudes, beliefs, and values of followers to achieve the goals of an organization. This theory also posits that as a result of the leaders' influence, the followers are inspired and motivated to actualize the vision of the leader and achieve performances beyond expectations. In this leadership process, there is a mutual elevation of leaders and followers' level of morality and motivation (Carlson & Perrewe, 1995) and the best effort of the followers are achieved by an inspirational vision that surpassed their personal interests (Gomes, 2014). This implies that the functionality of the followers is based on the leaders' impact. The theory of transformational leadership is of four different components that can be used by the leaders in motivating and inspiring the followers. The four components as posited by Bass (1985) include; intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation and idealized influence.

The transformational leadership theory applies to religious leadership. Religious leaders or clergies lead, inspire, guide and direct their followers (Kannan, 2020). Kannan (2020) also noted that religious leaders are of great influence to their followers in that they are seen as the expert and guiding light in their various religious groups giving an instance of Pope being the ultimate interpreter of the scripture and the intentions behind it in the catholic church. Also, the religious holy books acclaimed the influence of the leader on the member who believes. The Holy book of Muslims noted in Quran 4: 59 that believer should obey Allah, obey Mohammed and those vested with authority among you. The holy bible also noted in 1 Corinthians 11:1 "follow my example as I follow the example of Christ. This implies that the leaders of the various religious groups influence the members' fundamentalism and intolerance of other religious groups. Their teachings, guidance and motivational vision are for achieving their religious goals. The four components of transformational leadership theory are in line with the characteristics of effective clergy leadership stated by (Dioceserg, 2016). This implies that the clergy leadership of various religious groups is of great influence to the attitude, beliefs and values of their members. Deductively, the members of the various religious groups who have been influenced, motivated and inspired by their clergy to achieve their various vision and goals are the populace of the society, who would share the limited available resources for survival. It's of no doubt therefore, that the social integration of people in different beliefs, attitudes and values with minimal or no tolerance of ones' belief is difficult. This was noted by Blau (1960) that Social integration exists in society if bonds of attraction unite its members.

George Vold's Group Conflict theory was propounded in 1968. The theory explains how group disposition and activities by members of the society breed conflict. Relating to the functionalist theoretical perspective, the theory posits that human beings are primarily group-intricate, that in human societies, groups are formed based on common interests. The common interests are often advanced through collective action (Vold, 1986). A society to Vold is a connection of groups driven by various interests. Formation of the group becomes an effective action unit through the direction and coordination of activities by the leaders (Unenwojo, 2014). In a society of different people,

as new interests arise, new groups are formed and members develop group consciousness and experience through active participation in group activities. Advancement of interest in a group emerges due to consequent emotional attachments to group activities rather than rational thinking (Unenwojo, 2014). Vold further posits that as the interests and purpose of the groups in a society overlaps or encroach on one another, their relationship tends to become competitive. Owing to the emotional attachment and loyalty of the group members to their various groups, the competitive environment engenders conflicts. However, Vold and other theorists believe that the conflicts perceived by the various groups in a society are not entirely destructive because it gingers principles and social interaction process in ensuring stability, cohesion and social order of the society (Vold, 1986; kukah, !993; Ritzer, 1996; Coser, 1998 & Okunola, 2002).

This theory will form as a base for this study in that the proliferation of various religious groups and increased rise in a conflict never ceases in the world, particularly in Nigeria. Religious groups are organized, sensitized, lead and coordinated by clergies. These various groups in Nigeria are formed on basis of different beliefs, values and goals and advanced by active participation and collective actions. The leader educates their members on the goal and purpose of the group and why it is the best for them, hence forming devoted and committed members who would become leaders of the same or new group in the future. When such religious groups are formed, members become allegiance and emotionally attached to the group. This emotional but not rational attachment to the group forms a strong challenge in relating to people from another religious group and a feeling of superiority and spiritual arrogance towards others. This, therefore, affects the social relationship with members of other groups who in togetherness made up the society.

The Imperative Nature of Religion in Nigeria and the Influence of Religious Clergies

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious entity with divided religious dominance among the geopolitical zones. Although there is no scientific indication of the number of the religious groups or their geographical distribution in Nigeria, the Islamic adherents dominate the northern region (northeast and northwest) while the Christians dominate the southern region (south-east and south-south). The permission to religious practice was stated in the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 Cap 3, Section 38(1), and so the practice of any choice of religion is unhindered. This has enhanced the proliferation of religious groups in Nigeria and is considered the most religious nation in the world. The report by BBC News (2004) showed that over 90% of the Nigerian population believe in God, prayed to God and can die for their belief.

Nonetheless, several conflicts in Nigeria were stated to be a result of religious conflict. Sampson (2012) noted a series of national distress dating from July 1999 to Jan 2012 that are related to religious violence and has caused a loss of thousands of lives. Nevertheless, the end is not yet at reach. Religious leaders have a great influence on the behaviour of their constituents (Freedman, 2019). This becomes a concern to scholars and researchers as to how contradictory it is to have a 90% Nigerian population believing and praying to God, yet there is a relative occurrence of violence and social disintegration. The response was not farfetched from the findings by Akintola (2011), that hypocrisy, deceit, narrow mindedness, ignorance and mediocrity has eaten the religious lives of most Nigerian citizens including the clergy. Also, Unenwojo (2014) stated in his study that "The greatest challenge to peaceful cohabitation of religious groups in northern Nigeria is no doubt the method of proselyting and orientation of Muslims as exemplified in the strategy of Usthman Danfodio, Islam is better propagated through jihads and aggressive evangelism". It is the unfailing duty of religious clergy to proselytize and orient members on their goals and objectives.

Lewis & Bratton (2000), conducted a study where 99.5% of the respondents chose to identify with members of their religious group. This supports the idea that instinct conflict among the religious clergies is manifested in their adherents and relatively becomes a factor to social disintegration in Nigeria. The imperative nature of religion in Nigeria posits the repeated violence caused by religious groups in Nigeria and has heightened social disintegration. This is measured in the adherent members of the various religious groups, who have different beliefs, values and goals and are co-habituating in the same society. The religion they say represents the belief and value of an individual. This is possible because, people's religion is basically on their conviction and personal perception (Unewojo, 2014). However, it the duty of the religious clergy to orientate and convince the members on the belief and maxim of the religious group.

The Issue of Social Disintegration in Nigeria and the Role of Religious Clergies

Social disintegration involves activities that discourage social integration in society. Socially integrating members of a society involves processes that unify them to enhance a harmonious and equitable social practice (Otunko, Omerie, Nwaoha, & Ndubisi, 2017). The process of social disintegration is destructive and unharmonious for human life. Social disintegration according to Fedderke and Klitgaard (1995) is seen in the same dimensions as conflicts and instability, political crises and denial of civil rights, continuous violence and crime and civil distress. Maher (2011) defined social disintegration as the tendency for a "society" to disunite overtime due to inconsistent traditional support systems. The author defined society in this context as the other in a social context rather than political which maintains the social practices of a people. Social disintegration, therefore, is the disruption of peace, order, equity, and harmony in society, communities, groups or family. It is usually the outcome of conflicts and violence. In the context of this study, social disintegration is seen as disunity, instability and national disintegration among the citizens of Nigeria.

Nigeria is an independent nation with heterogeneous ethnic groups, moral values, cultures, religious beliefs, attitude towards life and death (Kunene 2012; Njemezi &Egonu, 2012). It is stated that before the colonial dawn, each ethnic group sustained her identity, ethnic values, security and social relevance (Njemezi &Egonu, 2013). The pre-colonial history of Nigeria showed that there was social harmony among the various ethnic and religious groups. Until the arrival of the British colonial government, the social relevance and ethnic values of the various groups strived to upheld after the 1914 amalgamation by Lord Lugard. (Ojukwu & Ojukwu, n.d). This has been the case until present-day Nigeria. It's a case that each of the various ethnic groups wants to be heard and recognized. Certain religion wants to dominate Nigerian religious and social activities, the struggle and fight never ceased. This brought about the narration by many writers and scholars that Nigeria was a colonial contraption of individual entities in terms of ethnic origin, religion, cultural and language, political aspirations and governance (Onifade & Imhonopi, 2013). Thus, it becomes difficult to nationally integrate unwilling and varied partners who are forced to achieve a goal through colonialism.

Notwithstanding the natural hostility among the citizens of Nigeria, several attempts have been made to enhance social integration in Nigeria. The scholarly work by Ojo (2009), Ugoh & Ukpere (2012) and Akpan (1990) cited in (Onifade & Imhonopi, 2013) explained some programmes instigated to promote social integration in Nigeria. Some of the programmes include; introduction of federalism into Nigeria by the colonial administration in Nigerian in 1954. The creation of states and the land use decree to strengthen the Unity of Nigeria was another programme by General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1978. Then comes the National Youth Service Corps created by Decree No.24 in May 1973 to help unite the country and the Federal Character Principle initiated by the government in 1979 to fair and effectively represent every section of the federation in the country's position of power, status and influence. After over 50 years of sovereignty by Nigerians and implementation of these programmes to promote social integration, Nigeria is still dealing with distress and disunity that a lot of predictions are on the fall and total disintegration.

The cause of continuous social disintegration and disunity in Nigeria is not far from the multi-ethnic and religious foundation with versed interests and goals. This is as a result of the individualistic view of the interests and goals of these multi-social entities rather than a social view. The versed interest and goals certainly result in contradictory goals, poor incentives, poor cooperation, poor trust, dysfunctional norms and varied and selfish political ambitions (Kaplan, 2017). Religion and ethnicity are seen as the basic to formation and transformation of an individual's belief, values and principles. Religion plays crucial roles in the life of people. In most cases, it directs the actions of believers particularly from the standpoint of the conscience (Unenwojo, 2014). The various religious groups in Nigeria are in pursuit of different goals which invariably vary among other groups. Thereby generating different individuals with varying interest and spiritual goal in a society with political instability. The argument, therefore, is that, since religion plays a crucial role in the life of a people and the clergies are seen as the forerunners, therefore, it is unfailingly possible that they can change the social belief, values and attitudes of their members towards members of other groups.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Social disintegration affects the social environment of a society. This is seen in the relationship among members of society. It is also observed in the shared values, beliefs and goals among the members. In Nigeria, notwithstanding the efforts in promoting social integration, disintegration has been the norm. Nigeria is a multi-ethnoreligious entity and this has been of negative effect rather than positive. A religious nation like Nigeria is expected to be a peaceful

and well-integrated nation rather than a violence nation. The varied intents and goals gingered by the leaders of the religious groups resulted in prejudice, ignorance, spiritual arrogance and feeling of superiority over other groups. This invariably becomes a major factor to social disintegration in Nigeria.

Conflicts among religious leaders are not seen as a direct verbal or physical conflict, but the disagreement in goals and orders that are manifested in their members. The various goals with specific intentions by hundreds of religious groups including group proliferations in Nigeria is a serious factor to social disintegration. This is because virtually every Nigerian citizen belongs to a religious group and is being transformed and oriented to achieve their peculiar goal by the clergies. Thus, resulting in a social imbalance among members of the society in terms of prejudice. Prejudice about other religious groups develops through the religious teachings and messages from a misconstruction of their ideologies and perception of their members as a believer to misleading ideology.

Nonetheless, members of a religious group are adherent due to conviction and influence from the clergy. The religious clergies, therefore, have significant roles in promoting social balance or social integration in the society. Religious leaders should always indoctrinate their members such that it promotes love, peace and tolerance in the society. They should avoid teachings and utterances that could cause prejudice against other religious groups. Also, since the religious clergies have great influence in the life of the people they lead, the National Orientation Agency should enforce them to orientate and prelatize their members in a way that would promote tolerance, harmony and peace among the religious group members.

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