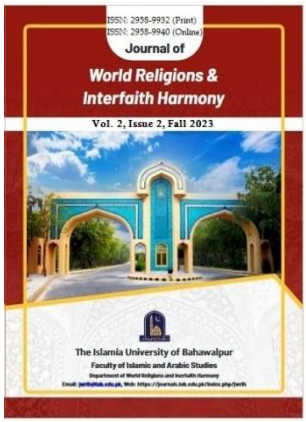


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Religious Freedom: Impact and Prospects among Religious Communities Relations in Nigeria

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Abstract

Religious freedom is an integral part of the community development that will enhance and maintain the peace, harmony and prosperity among the followers as such this research used historical, geographical, cultural and temporal context of the religious communities in Nigeria, furthermore, the study decipher there were discrimination, subordinations, dominations citizenship issues, unequal allocation of resources, economic decline ,ethno-religious clashes among religious followers, intolerance, ignorance and injustice among the religious leaders. Finally, the research brings some measure which if carefully applied would solve the problems which include: qualitative religious literacy, equity, justice, patience, perseverance, kindness, generosity among the religious followers. Seminars, workshops and conferences on Religious Freedom should be organized and maintained.

Keywords: Nigeria, Religious Freedom, Religious communities, Harmony, Peace.

Introduction

Religious Community relations in Nigeria is often a negative one, the aim of religion is protect people's dignity and avoid harassment, maltreatment, fanaticism and sectionalism so that the introduction or provisions for gender equality, peace, harmony and prosperity will exist, this is why religions guides and accepts the human rights advocates in which they expresses their voices within the societies on the human rights violations or discrimination against social vices that are not actually ethical, but rather they are unethical. In an attempt to mitigate these religious community relations problems in Nigeria and the claim to freedom of religion, is a distinction and drawn between societies. What is insinuated is that tribal and geographical differences are the problems, not religion.

However, this research attempts to smooth over incompatibilities between religious communities leaders and their followers in which religion runs into problems when it is faced with the reality that in many cases, this distinction between followers and religion is not so distinct, with cultural practices becoming "regional" and religious ideas and spaces becoming part of the culture. While acknowledgement of this interaction might throw into question this particular strategy of distinction to promote religious freedom and can open up other avenues for a more positive, so that unity will prevail and love one another will exist among the societies in which peace, harmony and prosperity will prevail so that peace brotherliness and mutual help prevail in the society.

Definition of Freedom

Freedom as the ability to behave in an ethical way of life that produces goodness in a society.[1]

Definition of Religion

Religion as a system of beliefs and practices that relate Man to his Creator.[2]

Conceptual Definitions of Religious Freedom

However, the classes of religious freedom among of the societies which are those which focus on the free exercise of religion that is the right to practice religion

[1] New World Encyclopedia available at www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/freedom retrieved on 26/12/2021

[2] Gaitanous, G. (2019) Definitions of Religion available at researchgate www.researchgate.net/publications/336898781 retrieved on 26/12/2021

and maintain religious institutions and those which focus on treating all religions equally, also known as the level playing field model.[3]

Further, others scholars having the view that, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson led the development of religious liberty, shifting the debate from toleration to free exercise, and advocating for religious diversity.[4]

Drayman, defined Freedom of religion as a common term used by political philosophers, politicians, lawyers, and laymen alike, it figures prominent role in the constitutions of many nations. The U.S. Constitution's First. Amendment on the free exercise of religion is an example, ascribing powers, privileges, and rights to religious persons while subordinating others, including the state, power and religion. [5]

Durham, opined that, the freedom of religion or belief is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is the right of individuals to act in accordance with conscientious beliefs, to worship (or not worship) freely, and to be able to enjoy life in society without discrimination on the basis of such beliefs. As a practical matter, however, the enjoyment of such primary religious freedom rights depends in critical ways on the legal structures available to religious communities to organize their affairs.[6]

Mariam, described relationship between culture and freedom of religion or belief is often seen as a negative one, with freedom of religion often invoked to defend human rights violations. In response, many human rights advocates draw a distinction between culture and religion, and what is insinuated is that culture is the problem not religion. [7]

Freedom of Religion in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution

Appreciating the fact of man being a homo religious, Nigeria guarantees the right to freedom of religion as one of the fundamental rights in the Constitution.[8] (as amended) provides:

[3]Fox, J. Religious Freedom in Theory and Practice, available at www.religionandstate.orgDoi:10,1007(2015) retrieved on 20/12/2021

[4] Shattuck, J, and Mathians, R. Religious Freedom, Centre for Human Rights Policy Harvard Kennedy School(2021)

[5] Darfman, A.Freedom of Religious, Canadian. Journal of Law and Jurisprudence 21 (02). An International Journal of Legal Thought.(2001)

[6] Durham, Cole. Freedom of Religion or belief: Laws Affecting the structure of religious communities organizations or security and cooperation's in Europe Review conference, September 1999, ODIHR Background paper 1999/4(1999)

[7] Marian, R.A. Culture, Religion and Freedom of Religious or Beliefs. The Review of Faiths and International affairs vol.16.(2018)

[8] Nigerian Constitution. Section 38 of the 1999 as amended.

(1) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and Religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (Either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to Manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
(2) No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive Religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or a religion not approved by his parent or guardian.
(3) No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination.

Religious Communities Relations in Nigeria

Mc Kinnon, asserted that absence of census data on religious identification in Nigeria since 1963 leaves much uncertainty about the most basic religious composition of the country. It is generally accepted that identification with traditional worship declined over the middle of the twentieth century as identification with Islam and Christianity increased, leaving these to be the two dominant religious groups in the country. The current relative proportions of Christians and Muslims have often been the subject of conjecture, guesswork and assertion, as have trajectories of growth or decline.[9]

Religious Communities Problems in Nigeria

Haldun and Opeyini, described Nigerian religious communities problems like many other countries in the world, lacks a consensus on how necessary changes and reforms are effected. This is caused by the fact that different religious and ethnic groups have varying benefits in which case some groups will have their interests met while others will not. This means that tension occurred when individuals who feel that they are deprived attempt to increase their stake of power or wealth or to alter the central beliefs, values, norms and philosophies.[10] Haldun and Opeyimi From one perspective, the 'failure' of the Nigerian political elite to enact good governments, promote national integration and foster good

[9] McKinnon, A (2021) Christians, Muslims and Traditional Worshipers in Nigeria: Estimating the Relative and Propositions from Eleven Nationally Representative Social Survey. Available at https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007 retrieved on 22/12/2021 (2021)

[10] Haldun, C. and Opeyimi, A.O. Ethics and Religious Crises in Nigeria Ethinicity, Identity in Nigeria. Religion (A Specific analysis upon identities 1999-2013) available at https://www.accord.org.2a/ajr retrieved on 24/12/2021 (2016)

economic progress via thoughtful and pronounced policies has resulted in massive unemployment. This has in turn led to the rise of communal, ethnic and religious conflicts that are characteristic of the Nigerian politics. Since poverty and unemployment have acted as the mainstay for various ethno-religious conflicts in the country, an accumulation of pauperized people can end up acting as paid militants. This could be the reason why any conflict in Nigeria is usually characterized by a large number of fighters.[11]

Alice, there is a correlation between ethno-religious conflicts and low standards of democracy due to protracted military interferences in politics. This appears to legalize the application of coercion and violence as tools for social change and for the achievement of anticipated desires and objectives. Based on this understanding, it is common in Nigeria to observe that as a consequence or an after-effect of a military period, the application of both force and intimidation as a means of settling a misunderstanding has become very frequent. When this is coupled with easy acquisition of illegal fire arms, violence erupts more quickly and there is more difficulty in negotiating peaceful settlements.

The absence of vehicles of social control that were characteristic of traditional African societies, such as kinship, religious and political systems concerned with the well-being of the community, has led to the escalation of ethno-religious conflicts. The failure of these institutions is partly to blame for the ethnic and communal conflicts witnessed in Nigeria today. Broken families and the inability to make ends meet in many homes have led to an increase in the level of immorality while at the same time providing a reservoir of youths who readily take up arms to execute ethno-religious conflicts at a fee.

Christianity and Islamic Responds to Religious Communities Problems in Nigeria

Freedom of religion is a principle now accepted by almost all religious communities as a universal norm. As stated in the Qur'an and Bible its includes both internal and external freedom. Its guarantee can be categorized from a theological and sociological perspective. Theologically, it is seen basically from the absence of compulsion in accepting a religion, the freedom to choose a religion or belief, the prohibition of faith under a compulsion, and no power which can force ones to accept a religion. Sociologically, it is seen in ethical

[11] Alice, D and Erica, H.(2015). The Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief and its Intersections with other right; Middlesex University. A Research paper for ILGA –Europe .(Human Right) 50,45,100 sci,80soc

relations and social interaction among religious followers, tolerance and peaceful living, and the respect for religious plurality.

As the Holy Bible stated under the chapter on Religion Freedom as follows:

> "For you were called to freedom, brethren: only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another'' [12]

And also illustrated in the following verse:

> "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"[13]

In the Glorious Qur'an, Allah (S) says: ;

> "O You who believe! Enter absolutely into peace (Islam). Do not follow in the footsteps of satan. He is an outright enemy to you." [14]

In the above verse, Islam intrinsically calls for peace and fosters a life in absolute sincerity and honesty before Allah (S). Therefore it is vitally important for an individual to believe in Allah (S) with his own will and aspiration, and observe Allah's commands and advice through personal conscientious contentment

Position of others Religions in Islam

> "There is no compulsion where the religion is concerned." [15]

As stated in the verse, no one can be force to embrace your religion rather for his own desired.

> *"You cannot guide those you would like to but God guides those He wills. He has best knowledge of the guided."*[16]

Protection of Thought and Religion Islam

The Quran provides an environment where people can fully enjoy freedom of thought and freedom of religion and allows people to live by the faith and values they believe in. According to Islam, everyone has the right to live freely by his beliefs, whatever they may be. Anyone who wants to support a church, a synagogue or a mosque must be free to do so. In this sense, freedom of religion, or freedom of belief, is one of the basic tenets of Islam. There is always freedom of religion wherever the moral values of the Qur'an prevail.

[12] Galatians book 5: verse:13 King James Version for Public Domain. Bible Gateway, available at biblegateway.com/passage/? (1973-1978…)

[13] Galatians book 3 verse 13, ibid.

[14] Al-Baqarah 2:208

[15] Al-Baqarah: 2:256

[16] Al-Qasas 28: 56

That is why Muslims instructed to treat Jews and Christians fairly, as described them in the Qur'an as "the People of the Book," and shows them great justice, love and compassion.

Conclusion

Societies who share these basic values believe in the need to act together with Christians and Muslims. They therefore strive to eliminate prejudices stemming from provocations by whims and fanatics. Religious Freedom should strive together to spread moral virtues across the Nigeria.

Recommendations

- Religious Freedom should be an independent course in our tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
- Youth inclusion on religious freedom dialogue, seminars and workshops should be encouraged among of the societies in Nigeria.
- Imam, Pastors and Traditional Leaders must be present during Religious Freedom Dialogues.
- Religious Freedom Conference should be encouraged and maintained annually in all Geo-Political Zone across the country.