

## The Role of Religious Education in Peace Building and National Security

**Ishaku Zamani**

Department of Christian Studies

Faculty of Education

Bauchi State University, Gadau

[zamaniishaku71@gmail.com](mailto:zamaniishaku71@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*Religion is central to the spiritual uplift of man; it unites man if its tenets are kept and also teaches men to live in peace with one another and to shun greed. Therefore, divorcing religion and moral education is an impossible task because of their long-standing historical antecedents. Religious education forms a backbone to moral education. This paper however looked at the role of religious education in peace building and national security using the library and oral sources as methods in qualitative and thematic analysis. The paper revealed that religious education instils values and high morals in the citizenry. It also integrates individuals into the larger society, thereby giving them a sense of identity within the larger community. The paper therefore recommended that teachers of religious education at all levels of Nigerian educational system should be consistent in promoting moral and ethical values while imparting religious knowledge in students; the student should be encouraged to demonstrate such moral values in their day-to-day dealings or affairs with fellow human beings. Adherents of different religions in Nigeria must join hands to replace religious violence with peaceful co-existence, injustice with justice, conflict with peace, ignorance with education, disease with health, and human degradation with human dignity through teachings in Churches and Mosques as well as through exemplary godly living.*

**Key terms:** Religion, Religious Education, Peace building, National Security. Security

### Introduction

From history, we learn that religions are not only the foundation for major world civilization but are also crucial in national security and peace building. Although there are many religions with different world views, they share certain areas of commonalities that are central to the well-being of humanity. Human beings as religious adherents have the potentials that are definitely central in sowing the crisis facing mankind in any given community. These crises include issues of peace, farmer-pastoralist conflict, banditry violence, environment, family institutions and nation building (Enizahura, 2013). Nation-building is the old process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state. This process aims at the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically, economically and socially stable.

In effect, this makes the nation to become strong and resistant in the long run. A nation is perceived to be doing well when it is able to defend itself against the internal and

external threats that aim to weaken the foundation of a society. In a multi-religious, multi-cultural and ethnically diverse nation like Nigeria, peace building and national security are not a smooth sailing journey as they require the continuous and collaborative efforts of various parties that are sincere in transforming the country to become more dynamic and successful. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to appraise how religion can ensure peace and security in Nigeria.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Religion**

In a deeply religious and multi-faith society like Nigeria, religion can be taken for granted because it is widely felt and seen, and because of the many religious structures and symbols that colour the social space. However, scholars and lay persons alike have different understanding of the concept. According to Johnston and Sampson (1994), religion may be defined as "... an institutional framework which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued, usually among a community of like-minded believers". This may broadly include the socio-political and economic structures that support such believers, on the one hand, and those that are continually produced by it, as well as the ideology, philosophy and social relationships generated and encountered by the religion in question. Heynes (1993) opines that religion is 'a system of language and practices that organises the world in terms of what is deemed holy'. It is perhaps the specific features of religion like institutionalism, doctrines, belief and its reproduction, rituals, community spirit, social relationships, a sense of holiness, association with values, etc., that easily associate it with conflict, as well as make it a potential instrument of conflict.

### **Religious Education**

The term "religious education" accurately describes the general investigation of the religious dimension of life and the common human quest for a transcendent ground of being. But if a religious community uses its specific tradition to sponsor people in their transcendent quest; if a certain relationship with a transcendent ground of being is advocated and a particular symbol system offered for expressing that relationship in the community, then that educational activity should be specifically identified with that tradition. For this reason, when religious education is done by and from within a Christian community, the most descriptive term for it is Christian religious education (Groove, 1980).

### **Peace-Building**

Peace building "is the employment of measures to consolidate peaceful relations and create an environment which deters the emergence or escalation of tensions which may lead to conflicts" (International Alert, 1995). More often, however, peace building refers to

Post-hostility actions, military and civilian, taken to forestall future eruptions by strengthening structures capable of consolidating a political settlement. Durable peace building can only be achieved by the establishment of local, state, regional and international systems of procedural and distributive justice which are responsive to basic human needs and which give [an] adequate decision making 'voice' to individuals and identity groups, thus providing constructive ways for need and grievances to be expressed and addressed (Enizahura, 2013).

Lederach describes peace building using the metaphor of building a house, a process requiring different components and stages. It includes, for instance, a vision usually contemplated in the architectural design, the structure and its details, sourcing for materials, a strong foundation with strategically placed pillars, cross cutting beams and board to strengthen the structure, detailed finishing and maintenance, etc., (Lederach, 2001). He provides what is called a “comprehensive framework” for peace building that should incorporate structure, processes, relationships, resources, and coordination. Peace building is not a one-off event that can be started and completed, after which its main stakeholders can walk away, believing it has been achieved. Peace building is a continuous exercise needing constant investment, re-investment and counter-investment. It gulps resources and these have to be sourced for and provided. Peace building at the maintenance stage, like the metaphor of building a house, should be taken seriously, otherwise the structure will deteriorate.

### **National Security**

National security has been a subject of debate among security experts, the academia, government and non-government organizations for some time now. It is a concept that has been exhaustively debated upon, but there is less agreement as to what really constitutes the concept. Traditionally, the concept is relevant only when there is military capability to deal with military threats that are dominantly external. For others, the concept is more than military capabilities and threats, incorporating non-military elements into the definition.

Thus, Danjuma defines national security as “the defense and protection of the sovereignty of the country and its territorial and political jurisdiction against external threats”(1980). For Luckham, the imperative of national security is basically in terms of protection of life and property and economics resources of the country by constituted authorities using security is not just the physical survival of the people in their state that is the issue rather it is the satisfaction of their needs such as food, clothing, health, education and shelter(1993). More so, national security entails the ability of Nigeria to advance her interest and objectives to contain instability, control crime, eliminate corruption, and improve the welfare and quality of life of every citizen (Obasanjo, 1999). Security is also the protection from physical harm, especially assassination, protection from “Boko Haram”, kidnapping, protection from future financial difficulty and freedom from vulnerability to political robbery. Among the core issues of national security are law and order.

### **Security**

The word ‘security’ can be viewed from various angles, depending on the situation, with references to specific cases. Hornby (1974) defined security as safety from danger or anxiety. In another word, security refers to something valuable. To Ambi (2005), security is seen as the quality or condition of being freed from anxiety or doubt. Security can also be described as the protection of persons and property against a range of hazards, including crime, fire and attendant risks such as explosion, accidents, disasters, sabotage, subversion, civil disturbances, and bombings and, in some instances, attacks from external enemies (Chalmers, 2003). Security, therefore, is not just military protection or repulsion of external aggression and internal upheaval that could threaten the peace and security of a nation. It also includes environmental stability, economy well-being, demographic issues, good governance, etc.

## Peace Building Role of Religion/Religious Education

Religion is often viewed as a motive for conflict and has emerged as a key component in many past and current conflicts. However, religion does not always generate conflict and violence; it is often an integral factor in the peace building and reconciliation process (USAID, 2010). Religion and peace building involve religious peace building and religious actors. Religious actors have been defined by a USAID document as referring to:

Mainstreams and indigenous religious/ spiritual leaders, institutions and organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOS), and communities that identify with specific religion or spirituality, as well as informal networks and youth groups. This includes faith-based, faith-inspired, indigenous and other actors. These actors play an important role in many societies as a key stake holder in communities where they are often trusted more by individuals than secular government actors (USAID 2010).

Religion matters a lot in peace building because it transcends ethnic and geographic boundaries and provides a wider network for its followers, as both useful assets for development and peace building programmes. It is often a core of identity of adherents; actors in a conflict may employ religious authorities or religious language to mobilize followers and widen their base of support. Religious actors engaged in peace building may draw on a common world view, theological language and shared values by adherents to gain support for peace, and religious teachings can provide justification for extreme action or peace. The fundamental role which religious education plays in society at the national and international levels, in both developed and developing nations, is globally acknowledged. The importance is so paramount. The roles of religious education are basically to inform, educate and guide.

Religious education teaches peace and tolerance. It also promotes the virtue of peaceful co-existence such as forgiveness, reconciliation, love, respect for life and other values that promote non-violence, leading to progress and lasting peace in the society. Religious education has always been a tool for peace building in the nation. Religious education has a definite role for world peace. The moral principles and values contained in the teachings of the great religious teachers are essential factors for the reduction and ultimate eradication of greed, hatred and delusion which form the root cause of various conflicts and wars, within and without. Within oneself, these three evils (greed, hatred and delusion) or unwholesome roots bring about great unrest in the mind, resulting in physical outburst of violence and culminating in global warfare ([www.drbachinese.org](http://www.drbachinese.org), accessed 15/04/23). Religious education governs the social as well as personal behaviour of man by providing guidelines, laws and principles relating to his interaction with his fellow man. Religious education is not only a promoter of peace, but it has also worked in the field of conflict prevention and resolution for ages.

Religious education not only inspires and guides people, but also provides them with the necessary tools to reduce greed with the practice of charity: to avoid hate and aversion with loving kindness and to remove ignorance with the development of wisdom and insight, in order to understand the true nature of beings and see things as they really are. It must be known to everybody that there is no alternative to peace; without it, we cannot develop and we cannot worship our creator. Therefore, we should begin to move out from ethnic enclaves to a more embracing concept of love for one another, respect for our neighbours, cultures and traditions, as well as work for the common good of all.

## **National Security Challenges**

The following are some of the factors that can undermine the security of a nation: injustice, poverty, health issues, religious issues, etc.

### **Injustice**

Injustice in the area of resource allocation and environmental degradation has led to violent eruptions, particularly in the Niger Delta region.

### **Poverty**

Poverty may be in the area of lack of basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, clothing and good health care.

### **Health Issues**

Health care is also important in the equation of national security. Chen (2003) says there is a link between global and human security. One quarter of deaths in the world is due to infectious diseases. The impact of diseases on national security and development is enormous. It creates political and social tension, stunts economic and human development and reduces the effectiveness of the military.

### **Religious Issues**

A lot of crises experienced in this country have traces of religious undertone. Examples include the *Maitatsin* riots and the *Boko Haram* Islamic Sect in north eastern Nigeria (Sampson, 2012).

## **The Role of Religion in the Management and Control of National Security Threats**

The imperative of religion for addressing the above security challenges cannot be overemphasized.

Religion and security have a strong linkage because human beings need security. So, religion can be tailored and re-package to address, manage and control national security threats. Therefore, the three major religions in Nigeria - Africa Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam - should focus on promoting the security of individual citizens of the country in the following ways.

### **1. Intensifying economic security**

The provision of productive and remunerative work should not be left to government and private sectors alone. Religious organisations in Nigeria should get involved in enhancing economic security, especially now, in the face of poverty and acute unemployment of teeming masses of this country. Rather than acquiring private jets, expensive cars building mansions like temples, religious bodies/leaders can invest in agriculture production, transportation, estate acquisition and sales, computer/business centers, printing of recharge cards, bakery, textile and block making, etc., which will generate jobs for some people. Presently, religious bodies are seriously into educational business in Nigeria, as many schools (primary, secondary and tertiary) have been established by religious organisations. Unfortunately, the poor (from whom the money was generated) cannot afford to attend these schools because of the exorbitant fees.

Apart from schools, religious organisations can look into other sectors of the economy and invest in large and medium scales. This could be done by partnering with individuals at small-scale levels for the purpose of reducing joblessness among the productive Nigerian youths. However, their involvement in business should not be for the sole aim of profit making but from the sense of divine ministry in order to assist the indigent.

2. Intensifying food, shelter and clothing security

There are starvation and plenty in Nigeria. However, people's access to food, shelter and clothing depends on their purchasing power. Many are denied access to basic food supply because they cannot afford it. Thus, food security is closely related to economic security. Religious bodies can make free food available to the hungry and the highly deprived people of this country.

3. Intensifying environmental services

Religion should be used to promote environmental security. Religious functionaries should discourage human abuse of the environment through their messages and actions. In view of the fact that many environmental threats and long-lasting issues such as water pollution, air pollution, deforestation, poor sanitation, etc., should be vehemently decried, religion should, therefore, promote healthy lifestyle (Osatowe, 2001).

### **Functions of Religion/Religious Education to Peace Building in Nigeria**

- Religion, by its value and moral teachings, shapes the ethical and moral life of the people. This in turn makes societies habitable and peaceful to a large extent.
- It integrates individuals into the larger society, giving them a sense of identity within the larger community.
- It implores individuals to live lives that are honourable and fitting with the ideals of one's faith and with the expectations of the community, thereby facilitating an atmosphere for positive structural and infrastructural development.
- It integrates individuals into the larger society, giving them a sense of identity within the larger community.
- Religion has had a large positive impact on the history and development of Nigeria: it incentivises action, change and hope. Often, this is seen in the form of charity and support networks. However, I believe the largest positive impact of this is seen at the individual level. By providing a purpose in life, or by giving some form of social awareness, religion often provides a hope that makes people change to become better people, as seen in the establishment of mission schools which made many people to become literate. This is evident in the level of literacy among Nigerians today. The acquired knowledge has assisted in curbing wanton destructions that could have risen from ignorance. The coming of religion into the Nigerian culture has ushered in religious education which is a way of imparting the knowledge of God's word into man so as to influence or bring a change or transformation of life to become useful to God and others. Economic freedom: while poverty has not been completely eradicated from Nigeria, most people are now economically free based on the influence of religious education which has widened their horizons.
- We get to understand that God created all people, regardless of gender, race, and religion. So, there is no need for conflict or discrimination.

- Religious education contributes to the national goals of education, for example, patriotism and nationalism.
  - In religious education, the truth of God is brought to bear upon every aspect of daily living.
  - Religious education contributes to the Church, its ministry of discipleship, and the life of the individual in the society. As a consequence of this, the impact of religion cannot be ignored in peace building and national security.
- Consequently, a faith-based view of development would necessarily emphasize an attitudinal change in projects of human development, be it individually or at the organisational level (Daramola, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

The task in this discourse has been an evaluation of the role of religious education in peace building and national security. In attempting this task, the paper overviewed the peace building role of religious education in the society which is enormous. And if the nation must experience relative peace within its boundaries, then attention must be given to the ethical values which, over the years, is what is responsible for the crises being experienced which have helmed Nigeria. Religious education is therefore an instrument per excellence in promoting peace. National security, on the other hand, embraces all aspects of national life. It is best evaluated in the context of trust, goodwill and mutually supportive responsibilities by individuals and groups that are working together.

## **Recommendations**

1. Religious leaders should be true to the tenets of their religions and be vigilant so as to not allow themselves or their followers to be used by others who parade themselves as champions of their interests.
2. Adherents of religions in Nigeria must join hands to replace religious violence with peaceful co-existence, injustice with justice, conflict with peace, ignorance with education, disease with health, and human degradation with human dignity through teachings in Churches and Mosques.
3. Government should always address the problems of unemployment, food insecurity, poverty and youth mobilization which are threats to security.
4. To ensure effective security in Nigeria, there is the need for those in government to be more transparent and accountable in their official functions to their citizens, so as to avoid mistrust/suspensions.
5. The teachers of religious education at all levels of Nigerian educational system should be consistent in promoting morality and ethical values while imparting religious knowledge in students
6. Students should be encouraged to demonstrate such moral values in their day-to-day dealings or affairs with fellow human beings.
7. Government agencies and society agencies at all levels must emphasize dialogue among communities, groups and individuals to be open and frank on issues which can bring harmony and better understanding among them.
8. Nigeria and the world at large cannot have peace until nations and people begin to reduce their selfish desires for more and more material possessions, give up their racial arrogance and eliminate their madness for worldly power. Material wealth alone cannot bring peace and happiness in the minds of people. The key to real and lasting peace lies in “mental disarmaments” - disarming the mind from all kinds of poisonous defilements such as greed, hatred, jealousy, egotism, etc.

9. The fundamental key to peace is the ability of the government to govern well. Unless and until there is good governance, government will not only be part of the problem but the cause of problems. Democratization today in the world is all about good governance and integration. The good thing with good governance is that it makes life easy, happy, meaningful, peaceful and reasonable. It develops society and makes the government interesting and lovable to all. There is no two ways to peace. Peace is the only way. It is worthwhile and valuable. All stakeholders must work towards it in Nigeria.



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