

EXPLORING FREEDOM OF RELIGION AS A TOOL IN PROMOTING ATTITUDE OF NIGERIANS AND RUSSIANS TOWARD RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

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Abstract

Nigeria is a multicultural and multi-religious nation where Islam and Christianity are the two dominant, conventional and officially patronised religions, with less attention given to other religions. In Russia, Orthodox Christianity is predominantly practiced. Thus, while Muslims and Christians contest for religious space, the followers of minority religions in Nigeria are often marginalised, discriminated, restricted and, to some extent, persecuted. Similarly, other Christian beliefs besides Orthodox Christianity in Russia face discrimination. Using qualitative research method, this paper seeks to address religious partiality and its associated vices in Nigeria by promoting religious tolerance through the instrumentality of Freedom of Religion. This study opines that freedom of religion can promote religious tolerance in Nigeria; thereby reducing incessant interreligious conflicts and social hostilities in the religious pluralised Nigerian and Russian societies. Freedom of Religion's legal status, scope, dimensions, significance, tenets, misunderstanding and limitations are discussed. The present state of Freedom of Religion in Nigeria and Russia are explained with a view to revealing the need for religious tolerance in these countries searching for peace, security and progress. Furthermore, the paper identifies religious tolerance as part of the principles of national ethics of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Russian Federation, and argues that Freedom of Religious education can help to inculcate religious tolerance and dispel religious ignorance from the masses of these countries. Finally, it concludes by recommending that religious leaders should be exemplary on religious liberty; media should be conscious of religious sensitivity of Nigerians and Russians; governments should be neutral on religious matters through their policies and encourage religious freedom, and studies that promote inter-faith conversations.

Keywords: Religion, Tolerance, Freedom of Religion, Religious Tolerance

Introduction

Religion is a universal phenomenon. Nigeria, though a secular state is a nation confronted with the burning challenge of religion. However, let it be adequate that religion is a system of belief in and a worship of some supernatural being as well as practices that relate that Supernatural Being (God) called different names by different nations around the world and man together. It is the grouping of people around a faith perspective (Daudu and Bongotons, 2006). These definitions reveal the centrality of belief, worship and practices in religion. Belief is more cardinal among these three elements, such that religions are identical with beliefs, especially in Africa. This informs our use of religion and belief as synonyms in this paper.

The universal nature of religion necessitates freedom in this regard. Thus, freedom of religion is a universal human right. Hence, many countries of the world have enshrined religion in their Constitutions as fundamental human right. Nigeria is one of such countries where religion is a fundamental human right, as clearly specified in the country's Constitution (Stephen, 2017). As stated above, Nigeria is a secular State and a multi-religious/cultural country for that matter where the duo of Islam and Christianity are officially recognised and patronised than other religions. The secularity of Nigeria implies that religion is not binding on anyone in the country as well as government. Unfortunately, the secularity of Nigeria is on paper and not in practice as religion controls almost everything and everyone in the country. As a result, it is grossly violated in diverse ways by government, private sectors and everyone (Fadahunsi, 2018).

Abuse or violation of citizens' religion in Nigeria usually takes the form of

marginalisation, stigmatization, discrimination, intimidation, restriction and persecution of religions other than Islam and Christianity. In fact, some official forms which have to be filled by citizens only have space for Islam and Christianity, leaving out other religions in the country. Holidays are declared for Islamic and Christian festivals as if the country exclusively belongs to these two religions. Muslims and Christians could hijack public facilities like roads, halls, and fields for religious functions, with or without the approval of constituted authorities, a privilege not enjoyed by members of other religions. Muslims, on Fridays, turn some public roads to praying ground while on Sundays and some weekends, Christians also take over some public roads for church services.

More specifically, African traditional religion is highly marginalised in the country such that many adherents are not as free as Muslims and Christians in exercising their religion openly (Stephen, 2017). Due to stigmatization, many traditionalists secretly practise their religion as if it is a criminal offence to be a traditionalist. The stigmatization is in form of name callings and contempt as traditional religion is generally viewed as *abọ'gib'òpè*, (heathenism, animism, paganism, idolatry, polytheism, Satanism, fetishism, witchcraft, ancestor worship, juju and a host other bad labels). Hence, they are not as free as Muslims and Christians in openly identifying themselves as traditionalists (Nabofa, 1988), except few who are bold enough possibly as a result of their callings. It is no gainsaying, therefore, that Islam and Christianity enjoy more freedom of religion than other religions in the country. Thus, in practice, the country seems to belong to Islam and Christianity, leaving out other religions in spite of its

Constitutional claim as a secular nation. However, the role of religion as a viable tool to achieving religious tolerance among Nigerians has not been sufficiently stressed by previous studies, which is the gap this paper intends to address.

Migacheva (2018) stated that contrary to a once-popular prediction of the inevitable demise of religion as a global force, religion today continues to be at the forefront of world affairs. In fact, a cursory look at the world today suggests that religion plays a crucial role in global peace and conflict dynamics. Across the globe, religious and traditional rhetoric have grown in prominence in an apparent reaction against globalization, massive migration flows, diversification of societies, and multiculturalism. Religious sectarianism has been woven into conflicts within and among many societies undergoing transition. Religious differences appear to widen existing chasms in civil wars and struggles for self-determination. Religious fundamentalism, present in all of the world's prominent religions, has often served as a legitimizing platform for acts of violence and terror.

Here, we are trying to examine through this medium how religion can be used to foster unity and religious tolerance in our various communities. It identifies two relevant theories for understanding the origin of religion, discusses the concept of religion, its legal status, scope, dimensions, importance, tenets, misunderstanding and limitations; and the present state of religion in the Nigerian context. It also examines the concept of religious tolerance and its role in the promotion of peaceful inter-faith co-existence in the country; and proffers pertinent recommendations for raising the level of awareness of religion as a veritable tool for religious tolerance.

Conceptual Clarification of Terms

What is freedom of religion?

Religion is an issue of faith. This faith is personal as well as public. Religious liberty means freedom to hold personal faith as well as manifest it within the ambit of the rule of law. With this in mind, Brown, Kristin and Winther define freedom of religion as personal "right to have a religion; change one's religion; and practise one's religion as one likes" (Brown, Storaker and Winther, 2017).

The paper defines freedom of religion as the right to choose, practise or change one's religion without any form of coercion, compulsion, persecution, marginalisation and discrimination. Thus, freedom of religion means the right of individuals to profess and practise any kind of religion within the acceptable limit of the society one finds himself/herself or to profess and practice none at all. Rightly construed, freedom of religion protects individuals who profess or do not profess any religion. It protects Muslims, Christians, traditionalists, non-traditionalists, atheists, agnostics and followers of religious ideology like Grail Message, Enchancha, Guru Maraj, etc. Moreover, freedom of religion in the context of this paper, also includes the right of religious bodies to obtain legal recognition as a religious community; the right to decide over their internal affairs (like choosing suitable leaders); the right to create religious schools and to provide services to the public (Brown, *et al.* 2017).

What is Religious Tolerance?

Religious tolerance is part of the principles of national ethics of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Section 23 of the 1999 Constitution states that the national ethics of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be Discipline, Integrity, Dignity of Labour, Social Justice, Religious Tolerance, Self-

reliance, and Patriotism (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Religious connotes divine, pious, holy, sacred, spiritual, sacramental, deistic (from the word deity) and theistic. The word tolerate connotes conform, assent, be lax, permit, consent, be patient, and forgive. Putting these two words together, religious tolerance means being patient with one another's religious beliefs and practices. It means accepting and agreeing on areas of commonalities as bases for religious harmony. It means permitting one another's religious views and expressions. It also means forgiving one another when necessary or required.

Unarguably, religious intolerance is one of the serious problems confronting Nigeria as a nation today. As a multi-religious country, Nigeria has a bad record of incessant religious conflicts, riots and wars, especially in the northern parts of the country. Each time religious conflict occurs, it usually claims innocent lives and precious property. On this note, Adeyeri, (2010) asserted that religious intolerance is one of the causes of religious conflict. Therefore, religious intolerance is a great threat to national cohesion and integration. This fact brings to the fore the importance of the national ethics of religious tolerance, which should also be taught via religious education. When Nigerians learn to tolerate or celebrate one another's religion, then inter-religious conflict will scarcely occur, peace will be guaranteed and this in turn will lead to national development.

Legal Status of Freedom of Religion in Local and Global Contexts

In his own opinion, Fadahunsi, (2018) avered that religion is a fundamental and universal human right. This is expressed in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights treaties such as the Convention on the

Right of the Child, Article 14); the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (Article 12); and the UN Declaration of the Rights of Person Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UNGA).

Explaining the Constitutional provisions on religion in Nigeria, Fadahunsi, (2018) cited section 10 of the Nigerian Constitution which states that "the Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as a State Religion"; and section 38, sub-section 1 which states that:

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 or propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

This provision is what religion is all about; hence, religion is enshrined in the Constitution of Nigeria. It reveals the inner freedom (right to choose or change one's religion) and outer freedom (right to manifest or practice one's religion) of citizen's religious liberty. It is sad to note that this provision is not really being fully implemented by the government and people of Nigeria. Abuse or violation of this provision is self-evident in Nigeria where religious marginalisation, stigmatization (such as equating traditional religion with heathenism, animism, paganism, idolatry, polytheism, Satanism, fetishism, witchcraft, ancestor worship, magic and medicine) and persecution at all levels of the society are

rife, a situation which have made traditionalists to be playing “hide and seek” game in the exercise of their religion. For instance, land can be readily released (on purchase) for the purpose of erecting mosque or church but not for shrine. Although, this may be a pay back because when these two foreign religions first came, they were not given better places to build their religious worship centres more than sacred forest known as *igbó orò*(evil forest) with a notion or view for them to perish.

Religions in Russia

Sawe, (2018) stated that Russia's 144 million inhabitants engage in diverse religions. The most popular religion is the Russian Orthodox Church. However, non-religious beliefs have also become more and more popular in Russia over recent times. During the era of the Soviet Union, atheism was a widespread practice. However, following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, religious beliefs began to re-emerge, setting the foundation for the present day religious associations.

Orthodox Christianity in Russia can be traced back to at least the year 988 when it was introduced in Russia under the governance of Prince Vladimir of Kiev. About 71% of Russia's population practices this religion today. Orthodox Christianity is still the most popular Christian denomination in Russia. Although religious activity was highly intertwined within Russian society throughout many centuries, the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church lessened following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. After the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922, religious participation was at best discouraged and at worst persecuted.

There are other beliefs, such as Atheism, that came into vogue in Russia during the Soviet era, and constituted about 15% of its population, as it was regarded to

be communism-appropriate. Today, atheist beliefs prevail in Russia to an extent, with around 13% of the country identifying as such. However, it is difficult to determine exactly how many people are atheists in Russia, as many who identify as Orthodox Russians do not participate in any religious practices and are in fact atheists. Those who identify their religious beliefs as "non-affiliated" include Russians who consider themselves to be agnostic or just generally non-religious. Many of those who are non-religiously affiliated are opposed to the major religions having influence in the affairs of the state. Non-believers remain generally unrepresented in Russia despite their relatively large numbers. Atheism and Agnosticism do not have any overt role in the matters of the nation.

Around 10% of Russians engage in Islam. The religion was introduced to Russia through Dagestan around the mid-7th century. The central point of Islam's integration in Russia was the Volga region, from which it spread to other parts of the country. Today, Muslim communities in Russia are mainly concentrated in the Volga Region and the North Caucasus, with smaller numbers in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Tatarstan and Bashkortostan are the two major Islamic Republics in Russia. There are over 5,000 registered Muslim communities in Russia. However, like Orthodoxy, Islam was suppressed during the Soviet Union, and many mosques were closed down during this time.

Besides, Orthodox Christianity, the other Christian beliefs practiced in Russia include: Protestant Christians, Jehovah's Witness, the Old Believers, Catholics and Seventh Day Adventists which are about 2%. These groups represent around 2% of the population.

The other faiths followed in Russia include Pagan beliefs, Slavic Folk Religion, and/or Central Asia Shamanism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Taoism. There is a small community of Scientologists in Russia. However, these beliefs have a combined followership that represents only 1% of the population.

Hofmann, (2004) reported that religion may be a factor contributing to the revival of Russia, but at the same time it can also be a factor contributing to the disintegration of the Russian state, according to Anatoly Krasikov, et al at a seminar in Kennan Institute, United States of America (2004). Krasikov argued that without a culture of religious freedom and tolerance, the Russian Federation will not survive. Krasikov notes that the increasing religious pluralism has also coincided with increasing intolerance. Many Russian Orthodox Church leaders are demanding legal restrictions on the freedom of non-Orthodox religious groups, while trying to establish a special relationship between the Orthodox Church and the state. These reactionary clergymen found allies among politicians. For example, in 1997, the Russian government, supported by the Orthodox Church, passed a law that significantly limited the legal rights of "non-native" religious groups in the country. Many religious groups encountered difficulties in obtaining visas for missionaries, teachers, or other church members from abroad.

The 1997 Law on Religion, despite its restrictive content, has had a limited impact on most religious organizations. After it was passed, several groups successfully challenged the law in court, resulting in restrictions the law's enforcement that allowed the majority of religious groups to retain their legal rights. Before the passage of the 1997 law, Russia

had 16,000 religious organizations registered with the state, today, there are 22,000. The Orthodox clergy are particularly upset about the activities of Catholics and Protestants in Russia, and a number of senior Church leaders have spoken out very aggressively against Western Christianity. Conflict between Orthodox Christians and Muslims looms. However, there is no record of religious conflict between Christians and Muslims in Russia.

Freedom of Religion in Russia

Freedom of conscience and freedom of religion (article 28 of the Constitution of Russia):

Freedom of conscience and freedom of religion are based on the secular nature of the Russian state, in which no religion can be established as state or compulsory. Religious associations are separated from the state and equal before the law. Conscience is understood as a spiritual property of a person, a manifestation of moral self-awareness, self-control, recognition of the need to observe certain rules of life. For religious people, conscience is primarily concerned with the dogmas of faith. For atheists, conscience is based on moral criteria for distinguishing between good and evil. Thus, the content of freedom of conscience presupposes the freedom to self-determination of the individual and the freedom of a person's worldview choice. One of the elements of freedom of conscience is freedom of religion (Freedom of Religion, Article 28).

The content of freedom of religion includes, among other things, the right to profess, individually or jointly with others, any religion or not to profess any, to freely choose and change, to have and propagate religious beliefs and to act in accordance with them. It is not allowed to establish

advantages, restrictions or other forms of discrimination depending on the attitude to religion in the Russian Federation. The guarantee of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion in Russia is that no one is obliged to report their attitude to religion and cannot be forced to determine their attitude to religion, to profess or refuse to profess religion, to participate or not participate in worship services, other religious rites and ceremonies, in the activities of religious associations, or to teach religion.

An important element of religious freedom is the right of citizens to receive religious education of their choice, either individually or jointly with others. The upbringing and education of children is carried out by parents or persons who replace them, taking into account the child's right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. At the request of parents or persons replacing them, with the consent of children studying in state and municipal educational institutions, the administration of these institutions, in coordination with the relevant local government body, provides a religious organization with the opportunity to teach children religion outside the educational programme.

Religious Tolerance

Corwin, (2006) investigated Catherine's II policy on Religious Tolerance. After seizing the throne in 1762, Catherine II sought to foster stability to the far reaches of the Russian empire.

As part of this effort, the Tsarina forced the Russian Orthodox Church to stop seeking new converts in Muslim lands and accept a kind of religious pluralism.

Catherine professed a belief that every Russian subject had to have a religion, but it

did not necessarily have to be Russian Orthodox Christianity.

Catherine II had seen from her predecessors that attempts at repressing non-Orthodox Christian faiths had led to violence and had in many cases failed.

Her regime sought religious support for its policies. In other words, it tried to co-opt local Muslim authorities who might be in a position to confer some kind of religious legitimacy upon state policies in order to reduce the chance of resistance.

Co-opting Muslim Leaders

Catherine was heavily influenced by 18th-century French thinkers who thought religion provided an alternative means of social discipline. Having studied the Ottoman Empire, Catherine and her advisers wanted to create a hierarchical Muslim structure that would work in tandem with the Russian state. But Catherine eventually found a few leaders open to collaboration. They received not only a nice wage from the Russian state, but they also were able to use the authority of the Russian state and its police organs to advance their own status within their community.

In Karpov (2006), religious intolerance is defined as the unwillingness to give religious freedom to people of other faiths. Familusi, (2019) identifies religious plurality as a factor responsible for religious disharmony and unhealthy intra and inter religious relations. Experience has shown that intra-religious conflicts also abound. Among Christians for instance, the impact of denominationalism is evident. As the church continues to divide, so unity continues to elude her. Similarly, it will be illogical to think that all Muslims have the same ideology despite the fact that Islam is one. Hence, some element dissonance among

Muslims is apparent too. A major factor responsible for religious intolerance is ignorance. Many religious adherents are blindly fanatical without knowing what their religion stand for or what they teach. As a result of this, they are either intolerant of other religions or they simply take to violent acts at the slightest provocation.

Another factor is religious particularity, which can be defined as the belief that one's own religion is a special or distinctive religion is a bane of religious harmony. Particularity is a claim that one's own religion is the best and the only universal religion that offers salvation to man. This claim is made in a religiously pluralistic society where one of the existing and competing religions asserts and superimposes itself over the others.

An overwhelming majority of Russians are strongly intolerant of Western churches. Most Russian Orthodox Christians and Muslims would not allow these groups to engage in basic religious activities, not even charity work. Although religious intolerance is generally strong in Russia, Western churches are the least tolerated religious minority among the country's Orthodox and Muslims. Both groups are less tolerant of Western churches than they are of the Jews. The Orthodox is less willing to put up with them than with Muslims, and the latter are less tolerant of Western groups than of Orthodox minorities in Islamic areas. Thus, hostility towards Western churches is the strongest indicator of the general climate of religious intolerance in Russia.

The intolerance towards Western groups has little to do with Muslims and Orthodox religiosity. Instead, the intolerance towards them proves to be more directly connected to illiberal and ethnocentric beliefs about religions, and with such secular influences as reactionary and anti-Western

political orientations, aversion to non-conformity. Also, the legal constraints and governmental policies have severely limited religious freedom for Western groups. The restrictive law treats Western groups more liberally than a vast majority of Russians would. To achieve sustainable religious freedom for them as well as for other religious minorities will take lengthy and consistent policy efforts aimed at the transformation of public opinion towards greater acceptance of religious diversity.

Obrazkova, (2013) observed that Moscow's Jewish Museum might serve as the template for a national network of tolerance centers. Russia's Minister of Regional Development, Igor Slyunyaev, announced that his agency is prepared to look into projects helping to promote tolerance and ease inter-ethnic tensions. A proposal by [the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center](#) to set up similar institutions across the country might be one way to achieve this.

Building inter-ethnic ties has always been on the Regional Development Ministry's agenda. That includes organizing exhibitions and concerts, publishing literature and holding seminars to educate Russians in the cultures of the various peoples of this country. The opening of museums, centers of tolerance is logical. Russia is a multi-ethnic nation with an extremely rich history and culture. The country has followed an incredible development path. There is need to learn how to listen and to hear what our society is lacking. Such centers are far from the only possible tool for building inter-ethnic relations.

Freedom of Religion as a tool for Fostering Religious Tolerance in Nigeria

Freedom of religion, whether private or public is a useful tool for religious

tolerance. Brown, *et al.* (2013) revealed seven dimensions of freedom of religion as a useful tool for religious tolerance, namely:

- The freedom to have, choose and change a religion (that is, freedom of religion gives everyone the right to freely have, choose and change a religion).

- The freedom to practice a religion (that is, the right to manifest, practice and express one's belief in private or public, alone or in community with others).

- Freedom from coercion (nobody has the right to force another person to have, maintain or change a belief).

- Freedom from discrimination (it is forbidden to discriminate in any way because of a person's beliefs or the religious community to which a person belongs).

- Rights of parents and guardians and the rights of the child (parents or guardians have the right to raise their children in accordance with their own religion or life stance; but every child of age 18 and above also has the right to choose any religions of his/her choice);

- The right to corporate freedom and legal recognition (every religious group has the right to official registration or legal entity status); and finally,

- The right to conscientious objection (freedom of religion also protects people from being forced to act against their conscience and the core of their beliefs, especially regarding the use of weapons or deadly force).

The aforementioned dimensions justify the use of freedom of religion as a tool for promoting religious tolerance among our people. Freedom of religion is an important tool for fostering religious freedom and other forms of human rights such as freedom of speech, freedom from want and freedom from fear (Brown, *et al.*, 2013). In Africa, where religion is hardly

separated from culture, and where people find religion as a necessary part of life, violation of freedom of religion can indeed implies violation of "right to life, privacy, assembly, expression as well as social, economic and cultural rights". The authors add that "the status of freedom of religion can often be an indicator of the general human rights situation in a country". Thus, a real democratic society is one where freedom of religion thrives. A strong and vibrant civil society is one where freedom of religion is promoted, protected and respected, whereas a weak civil society is one where freedom of religion is limited, restricted or denied. Research findings by the authors confirm that developed and prosperous countries are countries where freedom of religion thrives (Brown, *et al.*, 2013). Supporting these findings, Fadahunsi, (2018) states that countries with greater religious freedom are generally more prosperous than countries with less religious freedom.

Freedom of religious education can help in fostering religious tolerance because it can assist people to embrace right attitude to religion. Four attitudes to religion in Nigeria, according to Umejesi and Igboin, (2010) are: exclusivism (my religion is the only way to God), inclusivism (other religions are also ways to God but mine is the best), pluralism (all religions are ways to God and should therefore co-exist peacefully) and parallelism (all religions are equal ways to God). Out of these, the first (that is, exclusivism) is the major threat to freedom of religion and religious tolerance in Nigeria. However, freedom of religion can bring about re-orientation of exclusivist Nigerian citizens into either inclusivity, or pluralists or parallelisms which in turn can foster religious tolerance.

Gross ignorance of majority of Nigerian citizens, as well as government's rights, duties and obligations constitute the need for inculcating freedom of religion as a tool for fostering religious tolerance. Freedom of religious education is a means of dispelling religious ignorance from the masses of this country. Generally, this kind of education should be acquired formally and informally. Supporting this assertion, Otishi, (2014) noted that education can take different forms such as classroom-based learning, informed training, experiential learning and mass media campaigns. Hence, freedom of religious education can be disseminated via non-classroom as well as classroom instructions.

The role of freedom of religious education for advancing religious tolerance can further be demonstrated via the ten (10) characteristics of an effective citizen as identified by Chetle, (2009) who asserted that a good/effective citizen is one who embraces core democratic values and strives to live by them; accepts responsibility for the well-being of oneself, one's family and the community; has knowledge of the people, history and traditions that have shaped our local communities, our nations and the world; has knowledge about our nation's founding documents, civic institutions and political processes; is aware of the issues and events that have impact on people at local, state, national and global levels; seeks information from varied sources and perspectives to develop informed opinions and creates solutions; asks meaningful questions and is able to analyse and evaluate information and ideas; uses effective decision-making and problem solving skills in public and private life; has ability to collaborate effectively as a member of a group; and actively participates in civic and community life. In view of the foregoing

characteristics, the role of freedom of religion in fostering religious tolerance cannot be downplayed.

Tenets of Freedom of Religion and its Limitations

There are three basic tenets of freedom of religion namely: everyone has the right to decide for himself/herself what to believe in, and what not to believe in and live his/her life according to these beliefs without fear; everyone has the right to protection from coercion to believe or practice his/her beliefs in ways that are against his/her wills; and nobody should be discriminated because of these choices. As indicated earlier, freedom of religion has its limitation just as other human rights like freedom of speech; associations and education have their limitations. For instance, neither freedom of religion, nor freedom of speech gives licence for hate speech, derogatory statement about a religion or blasphemy. These are red lines that must not be crossed in the name of freedom of speech or freedom of religion. Nigerians should be educated about freedom of religion. Citizens must be taught that freedom of religion and freedom of expression should not be used to undermine each other, but rather complement each other and contribute to peaceful co-existence among diverse groups in Nigeria.

However, there can be legitimate or illegitimate restrictions/limitation. Legitimate restrictions, according to Brown, *et al*, (2017) have to meet the following three requirements. One, it must be grounded in (just) national laws. Two, it must be necessary in order to protect one of the following public good: public security, public order, public health, public morals and basic human rights and freedom of others. Three, it must be proportionate (punishment commensurate with offence)

and non-discriminatory (applies to all religions). The authors observe that illegitimate restrictions on freedom of religion are usually in forms of social hostilities (from private individuals, organisations and social groups). Social hostilities, a form of persecution, on account of religion is very high in Nigeria, especially in the northern part of the country. Converts and re-converts from one religion to another often face these kinds of hostilities in Nigeria. Hopefully, freedom of religious education can be used to address and correct this ugly trend.

Conclusion

In this paper, freedom of religion has been demonstrated as a universal right for everyone towards good governance, development, rule of law, peace and stability at local and global contexts since many of today's conflicts are rooted in, or aggravated by religious differences or misappropriation of religion. It is also established that religious harmony is achievable by organising meetings, seminars, exhibitions. Religious education similarly can play important role in securing religious tolerance, peace and stability in our volatile world.

Recommendations

Some pertinent suggestions for enabling freedom of religion for effective value re-orientation in Nigeria on religious tolerance are proffered as follows. The role of teachers, schools and Ministry of Education in promoting religious tolerance via freedom of religious education in Nigeria context is important. Religious tolerance should be taught at all levels of education via integrated religious/citizenship education curriculum, with emphasis on democratic values, civic knowledge, skills, and active participation in local and national affairs through teachers. Inculcation of family

values and training on freedom of religion in children is paramount for achieving religious tolerance.

Religious leaders should lead by example on religious liberty. They should organize workshop, seminar and conferences on religious liberty. They should embark on socio-infrastructure development of the immediate community and be tolerant of other religions without bias or prejudice. They, in line with the principle of freedom of religion, should exchange visits among themselves and downplay economic value of religion. Rather, they should focus on the supremacy of God and human dignity and provide basic understanding on various issues as religious freedom, human rights, basic religious/civic education, and studies that promote inter-faith conversations.

The roles of Parliament in promoting religious tolerance via freedom of religion in Nigeria are also sacrosanct. Rather than fanning the ember of religious violence as we can see in some religious violence in the past, they should in their programmes include re-orientation of the electorate; frequent interactions among parliamentarians and religious leaders; promulgation of laws on religious liberty rather than pretending that Nigeria is a secular state and protection of the letters and spirit of the Constitution.

The media should be conscious of religious sensitivity of Nigerians. As a result, it should propagate information that will promote peace and harmony. Media should be non-partisan in approach and always balance their arguments and be able to manage information very well during crisis to avoid escalation of such crisis. It should serve as watchdog to the politico-religious leaders. Users of social media should also make efforts to verify any information before sharing. They should always inquire about the source of such information.

Religious leaders should educate people on the dangers of social media. Media Regulatory Agencies should monitor the activities of media houses; discipline and revoke the license of defaulters on religious rules.

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