

Religious conflict research paper example

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Religious conflict

Introduction

Religious conflicts are feuds that arise because of religious rivalry or misunderstandings. Religion is considered an important aspect to human beings because it determines one's beliefs and faith. Over the years, there have been many religious conflicts between different religions. The most common and established religions around the world include Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Buddhism is found in China and faces little rivalry hence; it has not been involved in the religious conflicts before. The most significant religious conflicts witnessed are between the vibrant Christianity, the growing Islam and the revived Hinduism. These three religions are the largest religions in the world. The most heated religious rivalry has been witnessed in Asian and African countries. A good example is Nigeria, where to date there are tensions between Islamists and Christians.

The rivalry

Religious rivalry arises due to many reasons. Usually it is a misunderstanding about ideologies, beliefs or conflict that arises as the religions expand.

Nigeria is a West African nation with a huge population of over 150 million people. This nation got its independence from Britain in 1960, and since then it has been marred with religious conflicts between Islamists and Christians.

The population comprises of diverse ethnic groupings and several religions.

The major religions are Christianity and Islam. However, there are other religions such as Hinduism for the minority Indians in major cities such as Abuja and Lagos and other people are said to be pagans. 1

The nation is made up of 36 states, which are economically interdependent. Nigeria also has huge natural resource deposits such as oil. However, despite these raw ingredients to make the nation thrive both economically and socially, the country's growth has been stunted, and economic expansion inhibited due to ethnic and religious conflicts throughout the country since independence. The rivalry is mainly as a result of selfishness, intolerance, ignorance, suspicion and mistrust between the followers or believers of the various religions.

Conflicting religions

The north of Nigeria is mainly composed of Islamic dominated states while the south is dominated by Christians. These two religions have been disputing one another, with the main cause being the formal implementation of criminal aspects of the Islamic laws, the Sharia legal code. There are often riots and demonstrations according to religious affiliations and policies. To some extents, these end up in confrontations, for instance, the one witnessed between February and May in 2000 in the city of Kaduna. 2

Even though, the religious conflict in Nigeria is mainly between Christianity and Islam, it is misleading to conclude that all Christians take part.

Christianity is made up of multiple denominations. There are many churches, from mainstream traditional churches such as the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches to many small protestant churches. Protestant churches are further made up of many denominations of Pentecostal faith that are aggressive in proselytizing.

Causes of religious conflicts

Mistrust

Religious conflicts could come about because of the mistrust between the rival religions. Usually, each religion wants to expand its territory and acquire as many followers as possible. The religions also look to outdo each other to become the dominant religion in the area. This results in the mistrust between the people of the two religions. They start mistrusting each other on the agreements they had earlier on set to ensure peaceful coexistence of the followers of all religions. This mistrust results in violation of agreements and at times confrontations between the followers of the religions which leaves people injured and even killed. 3

Suspicion

Suspicion is common among religions that coexist in one geographical area. Since religions differ in beliefs and the way of worship, it is easy to suspect a rival religion for mischief and undermining. For instance, in Nigeria, the Muslims suspect the Christians for any action they take. They always assume Christians are planning ways of overthrowing the Islamic laws in the country's constitution. A good example is the current president's rule. President Goodluck Jonathan is from the southern Christian dominated states in Niger Delta. Any political move by the president is usually viewed by Muslims as a mischievous move to enhance Christian grip on national powers. Most of the presidential elections are usually marred by violence and unfairness. Most of these inconsistencies are religiously inspired in order to ensure that one religion rules over the other.

Selfishness and intolerance

Religious leaders usually have vested interests in wherever they want to spread their religion. The leaders of every religion want their interests safeguarded. Therefore, they resort to dirty tricks and selfish tactics to outdo their rival religions so as to achieve their objective. This also leads to intolerance where one religion wants to only focus on its own people and beliefs without caring about their actions on other religions. Intolerance usually leads to tension and misunderstandings which could result in hostility and conflicts. This is the main cause of religious conflicts especially in Nigeria where each religion wants its will done at the expense of the other's welfare.

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Ignorance

Ignorance plays a major role in religious conflicts in Asia, Middle East and African countries. Usually, religious leaders use ignorant citizens, whom they recruit into their religions, to pursue their selfish interests. The ignorant supporters of the religion are easily convinced to confront the rival religion to “fight for their religion.” This is exactly what occurs in Nigeria where ignorant citizens are convinced by religious leaders to engage in riots and confrontations. It is also because of the ignorance of some religious leaders that some conflicts arise. Some leaders formulate wrong strategies that agitate rival religions hence causing tension and conflicts. In Nigeria, some religious leaders are barely educated, all they have is the faith in their religion that they forget there has to be peaceful coexistence between people of different faiths and religion.

History of conflicts

Before the arrival of colonial masters from Europe, the native Africans in West Africa used to trade with the North Africans and Arabs from Asia. The main religion in North Africa then was Islam. The West African communities adopted the Islamic religion since they intermarried and interacted closely with the North Africans. The area around Northern Nigeria became entirely Islamic by the end of the 17th century. Areas like Katsina, Sokoto and Kano became emirates, ruled by emirs. The southern Nigeria remained mainly unaffected by the spreading Islam because the communities there did not take part in the trade with the North Africans. In fact, the south was the area slaves were caught and traded to the north. 5

With the arrival of Europeans by the end of the 18th century, Islam was already established in present day northern Nigeria. It was easier for the Europeans to spread Christianity in the south while the north resisted European rule and stuck by their Islamic religion. That is when the rivalry started. The northern Islamists became hostile to the southern Christians for accepting European rule. After independence, it developed into a religious conflict where the north Islamists wanted to rule over the southern Christians while the Christians also resisted. This conflict has brewed over the years to date. All political and social issues are treated as religious tactics by a rival religion to outdo the other.

Possible solutions to religious conflicts

Public education

Enhance Nationalism

It is imperative that citizens in religious conflicting nations learn to be nationalists rather than religious extremists. The countries affected should take the initiative to ensure that citizens consider themselves as countries citizens rather than members of different religious sects. This will help in promoting national cohesion. For instance, in Nigeria, the Sunni group, the Christians and the Islamists are all conflicting over national ideas hence affecting the country's development and peace. If those warring religions considered each other fellow citizens, they would coexist without conflicts. 7

Mediation

Conflicting religions are difficult to reconcile. However, mediation between the conflicting parties could bring consensus. National leaders should volunteer themselves as neutral mediators to try and listen to both religions and bring them to peaceful agreements. For instance, in Nigeria, the religious conflicts can be reduced by the government forming a delegation of top leaders who would mediate all conflicting parties to come to a peaceful agreement. Even though, this option is hard to implement, it may be the most effective. 8

Conclusion

Therefore, religious conflicts have a detrimental effect on the followers because it causes hostility, hatred, mischief, intolerance, mistrust and unnecessary rivalry. Furthermore, all human beings have a right to have their own religious beliefs and should join a religion they prefer. Religious conflicts should be effectively tackled by ensuring that the cause of the conflict is identified and the conflicting religions reach a consensus. The

major religions, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, which are the ones that engage in conflicts, should each have strong visionary leaders who can guide their followers through potential conflicts in a peaceful manner. 9

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