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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION, COMMUNICATION AND HUMAN RELATIONS: A SYMBIOTIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

The relationship between religion, communication and human relations is a study conceived as a result of the need to examine the impact of communication on the evolution, growth and development of religion. The study relied on a review of previous studies to understand the symbiotic relationship between the duo with special reference to human relations in Nigeria. Relying on the relational theory of social reality, the study concluded that both religion and communication are integral parts of human relations. The review further exposed the challenge of hunger and unemployment in the peoples' use of words and communication for religious purposes. From the studies reviewed, it was clear that religion was weaponised in Nigeria in the interest of acquiring political power, which translates to the negative use of communication and its gadgets, causing crises at all times. It concludes that although religion and communication were important, their use in the country must be guided to foster unity and enhance human relations. It recommends that the government should stop weaponising religion but use the people's resources to work for them.

Keywords: Religion, Communication, Symbiotic, Human Relations

Introduction

Religion is an integral part of society, which shapes the thinking, views and behaviours of the people of each religious group. It executes positive roles in society by inculcating values that give purpose and meaning to the lives of the people in society (Kim & Kim, 2016), enhancing life satisfaction in the changing world, and strengthening the bond and sense of belonging among members of society. According to Wachukwu (2018), religion occupies an important place in human society to the extent that many see it as being instinctive in men. This is because virtually all aspects of society, including the economic state of things, the political life and leadership of the state, are guided and controlled by religion and religious beliefs. In this manner, the religion of a people shapes and reshapes all forms of human conduct, behaviour and all sense of morality. Furthermore, religion, according to Mahoney, Pargament, Swank and Swank (2003), helps the mind in resolving intrapersonal conflicts.

Like religion, another pervasive aspect of human cultural heritage that started exactly at the same time man was created is communication. In modern society, communication is taking different dimensions and shapes, which in turn control the views of the people and their lives. Importantly, at the centre of all these roles played by religion is communication considering the fact that meaning cannot be shared without communication. Drawing from the above, it is important to note that as a means of proclamation of faith, religion survives on communication and relationships among human beings. The relationship between religion and communication is as good as that between fish and water. Specifically, religion cannot survive without communication and human relations. This is because communication is the major instrument for the propagation of all



religious beliefs and the spread of religion of different kinds. This simply means that should communication cease to exist, there should be no religion again. People are exposed to religious views, beliefs, and ideologies through communication. All kinds of human relations are also sustained through communication.

Both religion and communication are agents of human socialisation. Importantly, the socialization process through which a person gets acquainted with the norms, values, mores and even the religion of a given society is the communication process, as Udomisor, Akoje and Udomisor (2013) posit. This means that communication is a *sine-qua-non* in the growth and development of religion and every other form of human relations. Symbiotically, within every society, some principles define how the communication process works. These principles are often traceable to the religious norms, values and mores prevalent in that society, be it traditional or modern. As a business and economic venture, communication is very crucial and critical that it needs to be controlled by certain factors in order to contain its use for negative ends. Considering the enormous power of media use, Tonga, Martins & Awoshiri (2021) concluded that the consequences of a totally free media in society can be very disastrous. Among the means of controlling the media is through the preachings of the different religious institutions and organisations.

Moreover, the proliferation of the media in society has also encouraged the proliferation of churches and all other religious institutions/organisations and beliefs. The plurality in modern societies today requires that there is a need for policies to guide interpersonal, group and mass communication to minimize clashes of interest and, ultimately, societal conflict. Today, conflicts of various kinds abound in Nigeria, especially in religious circles. Most of these conflicts erupt as a wrong use of the media and its gadgets. Across the globe, different religious organisations and preachers make use of one communication gadget or the other to reach out to the audience who are their potential adherents. While some organisations use traditional media such as newspapers, television and magazines, others subscribe to the use of new and internet-enabled media to pass their messages and get their target audience to accept their preaching or beliefs. In the course of advancing these beliefs to get the audience and increase their population, some wrong use of communication and its enabling gadgets translates into conflict, leading to the loss of lives and properties. Understanding the symbiotic relationship between the duo of religion and communication will enhance the effective use of communication in the management of conflicts.

Religion and communication: A symbiotic review

Generally, it has been adjudged among scholars such as Ottuh & Jemegbe, (2020) that religion and communication are grossly involved in executing a very important task of societal integration. This task is performed by religion and communication through the dissemination of positive ideas, feelings, desires, knowledge and the right attitude that can sustain human relationships for a better and peaceful society. The degree to which the sense of understanding of ideas and views is disseminated determines the degree to which appreciation and tolerance among the people of different cultures and religions are deepened in a society. The implication of this is that there is a need for religious tolerance for there to be a unified, harmonious and peaceful Nigeria. The impact of the connectivity between religion and communication was captured in the views of Ottuh and Jemegbe (2020), where it is stated that the existence of positive religion and effective communication in a



heterogeneous society is the bedrock of promoting harmonious living and the attainment of societal integration. As is in the case of Nigeria with different ethnic and religious backgrounds, there is a need to apply the symbiotic connectivity between religion and communication in fostering unity and societal understanding through the sharing of positive values and virtues that fasten positive human relations that can breed love of one another. With the aid of effective communication and religion, a heterogeneous society like Nigeria can understand itself, share its success stories and challenges, and proffer possible solutions to all forms of socio-economic, educational, spiritual, political and developmental problems together.

Societies can hardly exist without communication and religion. This is because the two concepts are the sustaining factors of social interaction and connection among people. It is through religion that morals are taught to the people for the safety of all. The teaching of morals and virtues in society cannot be possible without communication. It, therefore, means that without religion and communication, there is likely to be a total lack of social and spiritual interactions, which is going to negatively influence human relations. The implication of lack of social and spiritual orientation in a society cannot be far from lawlessness, the existence of conflicts, violence and chaos of different magnitude. Studies (Ikegbunam and Ekweonu, 2020; Ottuh and Jemegbe, 2020) have shown that positive religious behaviour domiciled in religious tolerance and accommodation crowned with effective communication can enhance a better informed and peaceful society. This is because Religion is part and parcel of communication and also influences communication in certain manners. This means that a mishap in religious behaviour of a certain people in a society can influence the communication pattern which in turn affects human relations in that area. This underscores the complementary roles played in human relations and the sustenance of a harmonious society by religion and communication.

The symbiotic nature of religion and communication can best be appreciated from the complementary roles they play in shaping and reshaping the views and perceptions of the people in a given human society. According to Kim and Kim, (2016) religion and communication are expected to serve as an avenue for the execution of symbiotic values in a society in order to inculcate and sustain morality and virtue for the benefit of all. Symbiotic value is a value in which the acting agents as social beings pursue harmonic and ideal symbiosis based on mutual understanding and trust where politic, social, cultural and environmental varieties coexist (Ottuh and Jemegbe, 2020).

Religion and Communication in Nigeria

Over the years, the growth of Christianity as well as Islamic religion has been driven by the media. There is hardly any church, mosque or even recently some African Traditional Religion worship centres in Nigeria without at least a public addressing system. In Nigeria religious based media organisations are flourishing everywhere. The likes of TB Joshua's Emmanuel Television, Oyedepo, Kumuyi and the rest all have their media of disseminating the gospel. It is important at this point to also acknowledge the fact that the social media is also being used among priests and clergy men to advance the course of Christianity. This is not only among Christian religion. All religions including the African Traditional believers also make use of the media to pass across their messages. Chief priests of deities and native doctors including marine and water spirit worshipers also make use of the mass media and internet to communicate and get their followers. For example, *Akwa Okuku Tiwalu Aki* from

Oba in Anambra State is native doctor who communicates his practices using the media. In Anambra, every diocese in the Catholic Church has a newspaper through which evangelization is carried out. These include Maranatha of Ekwulobia Diocese, Fides newspapers of Awka Diocese, Trinitas of Onitsha Arch-Diocese and so on; used to promote the activities of Christianity in the area. Religion of different kinds today make use of the internet, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Television, Satellite dishes, Compact discs and Audio recorded tapes to achieve their motives. Also, the use of electronic media houses like Emmanuel TV, Ajara Gospel TV, Seraphic TV, His Divine Word TV, Joy Radio, Adventist Radio, Eternal Word Radio and host of other social media platforms like YouTube is on the increase among religious groups (Tonga, Martins, & Awoshiri, 2021).

Significantly, while some maintained the original preaching as contained in the doctrine of faith as handed down by the founders of different religions, others employ the communication gadgets of different strength in distorting the realities to achieve their personal motive. This has formed the bases of criticism of the use of the media in religion and its related activities among media and religious scholars. It is clear also that some religious groups make use of the communication gadgets and channels to castigate other religious groups. In Nigeria, it is rampant to get such words like 'infidel' in Islamic communication channels or platforms. Similarly, among Christians, it is rampant to make use of the media in castigating the worshipers of African Traditional Religion and all that concerns them with the claim that their God is the overall one and maker of the earth. Evangelism has long been sustained by propagating the views of the founders at all time by their fans and sympathisers in the hope of making themselves the real men of God that will see heaven after life. In the need to make the people believe in their views, some preachers end up misinterpreting the scriptures to suit them.

Religion, Communication and Conflicts: The Nigerian Perspective

As a multiple religious state, Nigeria has suffered and is still suffering from conflicts which have its origin from religion. As a catalyst, religion has penetrated the nooks and crannies of Nigeria to the extent that it also determines the state power and natural resources in the country. This situation makes religion a very important aspect of the lives of the people in the country. Because of the fact religion commands respect in the allocation of values and political power distribution different individuals with some ulterior motives join one religion or the other to achieve one goal or the other. These categories of people or persons hide under their religion to make some utterances that are usually in bad taste which sometimes leads to crisis in the country.

Patronising religion is among the means of making ends meet in Nigeria. This makes it a material to weaponise in order to get catch with the target. To allow the people to take actions according their wish without same to their religion will sublet some members of the public to hunger. This forces Nigerians to act more religious than even the Jews. According WIN-Gallup International, (2012) Nigeria ranks second most religious country in the world behind another African country- Ghana. The study which sampled 50,000 respondents across 57 countries demonstrated that while religion is declining in other countries it is increasing in Nigeria. Nigeria is a diverse country manifested by culture, religion, ethnicity, language, climate, occupation, and education. Unfortunately, instead of applying and utilising the diversity in building strength, people find favour in using their diversity in



causing avoidable threats to corporate existence of the country (Ikegbunam and Ekweonu, 2020; Okibe, 2022).

It is not out of tune that people who are hungry hardly communicate well. This is because their mind has been crippled by their challenge and inability to make ends meet. This mental state of the mind and the desire to remain alive, influences peoples' communication behaviour and language use, a situation which is instrumental to the religious conflict. Invoking the religion of one's belief as a means to get to political power is what has generated virtually all the religious conflicts experienced in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The relationship between religion, communication and human relations is a symbiotic one that favours the trio in all societies and clans. While the religious ideas are promoted and disseminated through the use of communication, religious views and principles provide a guide for communication. On its side of contribution to national development, effective and all-inclusive human relations helps in sustaining harmonious existence of different institutions in a society. However, the role played in the society by religion cannot survive and be sustained without the use of the media and the enabling gadgets. Likewise, sincere human relations encouraged by ethno-religious tolerance and socio-political accommodation is necessary for a peaceful Nigeria. The importance of communication to religion is made manifest in global use of different media of communication in the dissemination and propagation of religious faith and beliefs to the public. This study as well, has revealed that although both religion and communication are important aspect of the society, they need to be properly used to encourage good human relations for the unity Nigeria rather than the termination of the corporate existence of the country. This can only be achieved through the practice of good religious beliefs disseminated through effective communication that has the capacity of fostering harmonious human relations that cuts across interreligious groups in Nigeria. Among Nigerians, what is common is the use of the religion in destroying human relations by creating all sorts of ethno-religious hatred in order to get state power. This action weaponizes religion making it more important among the people that some decide to whip up sentiment through wrong communication provided that such action will help them to get what they wanted. The weaponization of religion in Nigeria creates an atmosphere of zero tolerance and accommodation which murdered sincere human relations leading to several religious crises that have claimed many lives in the country.

Recommendations

Relying on the review of the studies and opinions of popular scholars as seen above, this study recommend as follows:

1. That Nigeria and Nigerians should stop weaponizing religion to allow for the diversity that will make Nigeria better.
2. That the much use of religion as a means of acquiring political power is a challenge that will sustain ill fated religious communication among Nigeria. Creating jobs and employing the youths will reduce the level of dependency and make the country better.
3. Nigerian government should use the resources in the country to work for the people and provide for them. Doing this will reduce the number of times Nigerians pray daily.

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