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The Role of African Religion in Promoting National Security in Nigeria

ALAMU, AKITI GLORY Ph.D

Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Introduction

Today's global age has lost its security. Thus, the world is in a state of security. In fact, greed, hate, passion, killing, restiveness, agitation and lust are sweeping the world. We seem to be moving towards Armageddon. Nigeria cannot be excused from these social ills. The security of the Nigerian state has become a major problem in recent times. Cases of abduction, kidnapping, armed robbery, stealing, child abuse, child trafficking, killing, maiming, rape, adultery and burgeoning restlessness have become rampant. The Nigerian citizens, despite the state apparatus to ensure safety and protection of lives and property are incessantly living in perpetual fear and worry. Obviously, the state can no longer protect her citizens from attacks, killings, and to maintain adequate armed forces and guard state secrets.

The concept of security which has often been stressed by Christianity and Islam has woefully failed and cannot help either. Rather than promoting security and safety of lives and property, Christians and Muslims engage in tumultuous and interminable religious crises. In sum, all the organs that have been entrusted with the job of protecting lives and property have joined the dawn marchers to orchestrate and as well supervise moral evils such as senseless killings, assassination, abduction and other vices in contemporary Nigeria. The result of which is insecurity. Insecurity brings a concatenation of appalling circumstances that make it difficult for people to live in peace and safety and as well overcome their developmental problems.

Nevertheless, African Religion which has been relegated by Christianity and Islam has security as one of its fundamentals. Apparently, African Religion (AFREL) is the religion of the African

people and it is autochthonous to them since it has been handed down from generation to generation by the forefathers. African Religion has been a source of life to the people who do not know how to live without religion. It is pertinent to note that African Religion provides a sense of protection and safety against loss, killing, attack, harm, stealing and cheat. Thus, the central message of African Religion is security and protection. Through these African traditional values, the role and relevance of African Religion in the nation cannot be over-emphasized. Apparently, African Religion as a source of life is suffused in security as people are convinced that safety and security are derived from the Supreme Being, spirits and ancestors. Whichever security measure evolved, African Religion sacralized virtually all kinds of the process. In other words, in African Religion, the sacred and mundane are inseparably tied together. This leads to compartmentalization of life such that what religion forbids, society also forbids and similarly, what society approves is also approved by the people's religion. Therefore, an offence against the Creator is an offence against humankind.

In spite of the fact that African Religion does not possess written laws, it has a code of conduct which is known. Thus, this code of conduct ensures that individuals conform to the norms and welfare of the society. The composites of the code have been transmitted from generation to generation. Pivotal religious symbols such as shrines and ritual objects showcase the unity of the different segments of society. Clearly, the extent of the interrelationship was well expressed in the coalescing of functions of this religion of the Africans. It is therefore the thrust of this paper to explore the historical account of African Religion and its role in fostering security in contemporary Nigeria where insecurity is a carnival.

African Religion: A Brief Account

In all human society and at all ages, religion comes to grips with the existence of all human endeavours. Religion at all times plays important role in shaping human history, thought, perception, place, time among others. In otherwise, African Religion embraces

all aspects of life. Dopamu attests to the fact that Africans do not know how to exist without religion playing a leading and major role. According to him, "Africans do not know how to live without religion. They celebrate life religiously and they never embark on everything without bringing in religion."

The foregoing reveals that Africans are incurably religious hence they bring in the understanding of God and His vicegerents in the theocratic rule of the universe. Africans take off from religion and their lives terminate at religion. Put differently, Africans transit with religion. Thus, African understanding of the universe points to the fact that there is one universe that accommodates the tangible and intangible, sensible and super sensible, material and immaterial.

For Africans, religion is simply life and life is all about religion. This assertion critically supports Kungs' interpretation of religion thus:

A believing view of life, approaches to life, way of life, and society, humankind and the world, through which is a person, though only partially conscious of sees and experiences, thinks and feels, acts and suffers, everything. It is a transcendently grounded experience and immanent operative system of co-ordinates by which human beings orient themselves intellectually, emotionally and existentially.²

For Africans, religion is far more exceeding way of life or an approach to life as directed by a holy writ. It is a way of life and life itself, where there is no dichotomy between religion and human nature vis-a-vis existence.

Gaiya emphasizes that a study of the beliefs and practices of the African peoples lead to the theological understanding that African Religion is a religion of salvation and wholeness.³ As a matter of fact, African Religion is careful in analysing both worldly and spiritual salvation. Africans believe that life is a complex web of relationships that may either promote and preserve life or diminish and destroy it.⁴ According to Gaiya

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