

An Existential Assessment of Religion: A Path to Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria

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Abstract

To be an African man is to be notoriously religious, so says J.S Mbiti. Hence separating an African man from his religion is like taking away one of the most essential parts of his existence. Existentialists on the other hand, uphold that our existence precedes essence. Man is solely responsible for his actions as far as he continues to exist. The existentialists believes that, when one make choices, one do not only make choice for himself alone but individual's choices has a way of affecting the others. This paper examined the notion of existentialism as a philosophical school of thought vis-à-vis the inevitability of man's *fallenness* with the others. It attempted to address the problem of religious conflict in Nigeria with special recourse made to existentialist themes such as freedom, guilt, death, subjectivity among others. This paper also examined the concept of monotheism and its role in religious conflict in Nigeria. The paper concluded with a call on Nigerian's to always maintain a subject- subject relationship among themselves as against treating one another as objects in a subject-object relationship which has led to so many inter and intra religious conflicts that the nation has witnessed up till date.

Keywords: *Existentialism, Religion, Monotheism, Fallenness, Freedom.*

Introduction

“Existentialism is not just a philosophy but a way of reasoning and a path to accountable existence”

Violent conflict is a great predicament in any human society, and most times, it is predictable. While history shows that conflict is ubiquitous and often useful element in human relations and may occur within and among individuals and groups, violent conflict is rarely productive.

In the case of Nigeria, one of the several types of violent conflicts that constantly plague the socio-political history of the nation is the sort of conflict that is based on, or centrally involves, religious differences. Nigeria is one of the largest country in the world with an

evenly split population of Christians and Muslims. According to research by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, this population is perhaps the most intensely religious in the world¹. In a symposium hosted by the Council on Foreign Relations, Nigeria experts and religious scholars examined the political compromises that maintain relative stability in Africa's most populous country. 'To understand where Nigeria is headed, we need to understand the religious dynamics in Nigeria'.

However, J.S Mbiti (1969) noted that to be an African man is to be notoriously religious². Hence religion is intertwined with African culture, trying to separate an African man from his religion is like taking an essential aspect of his life away. In this part of the continent we have very few atheist and free thinkers. It should be noted that Christianity and Islam are not the only religions in Nigeria, Nigeria has three major religions. These are African Religions (Afrel), Christianity and Islam. With a population of about 170 million, Muslims are estimated to be 50%, Christians 40% and practitioners of African Religions are put at 10%. This estimation excludes practitioners of alternative religious ideologies from the eastern world. The current population estimate is being disputed by the Christians and African Religions, who argue that the long (1966-1979;1983-1999) domination of the nation's polity by military dictators, who are mostly Muslim from the Northern part of the country, placed them into the best positions to manipulate the figures in favour of Muslims³. However, judging by the status quo within the Nigeria society, one can say that there is little or no space for adherents of other religions. Almost all official documents in Nigeria gives credence to Islam and Christianity as the only existing religions. For instance, in taking of oath for public offices, court of law, filling documents, religion in Nigeria has been narrowed down majorly to two. Although in recent years, some scholars have argued for the inculcation of traditional oath taking system within the public sector, but one major setback with the traditional oath taking system has been the plurality in the traditional belief system. For instance, if one is to take an oath as a believer of traditional religion, which of the gods or elements will be used and how do we get truthful specialist within the multiplicity of the traditional religions.

¹ Summary: A Symposium on Religious Conflict in Nigeria May 8, 2007 <http://www.cfr.org>contents>meetings> Accessed 19th October 2017. 3:55pm. p.1.

² Mbiti J.S 1969 *African Religion and Philosophy*. London: Heineman.p.69.

³ Nwaomah, S. M. 2011 'Religious Crises in Nigeria: Manifestation, Effect and the way forward'. *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology in Practice* vol 3, no. 2 August.p.4

Nevertheless, it does not make these religions less relevant, but rather, one is only trying to point out why this paper has streamlined religious conflict in Nigeria down to the Christian and Islamic religions. These two religions have also been at the center stage of religious tussle over the years. On the other hand, existentialism is a humanitarian philosophy that places responsibility solely on the existing man. From the existential point of view, conflict is basically an offshoot of human activities and choice, hence, the only path to peaceful existence rests in the conscious choice of people as an existing individuals.

This paper shall attempt a trajectory of the origin of religious conflict in Nigeria, with special consideration to monotheism as a panacea for conflict, then examine the existential approach to religious conflict in Nigeria as a part to peaceful- co existence.

Trajectory of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria

“Both Christianity and Islam are alien to Nigerians and they have all been used as a tool to colonize us”

It is a general belief that both Christianity and Islam are foreign or alien religions to Nigerians. Islam started from Arab and eventually spread throughout the world. When Arab merchants entered into the Kanem Borno Empire in nineteenth century, it resulted in Jihad. So jihad resulted in the speedy spread of Islam especially in Northern part of Nigeria. The religion also gradually also spread to the Southern part of the country mostly in western region of the country. Islam is a religion which provides complete code of conduct for every human being and in Islam’s perspective all the Muslims are part of Islamic Ummah. Thus Muslims in any part of the world are referred to as being Ummah. But like every religions extremists some adherents are destroying the beauty of Islamic religion⁴.

Christianity found its way into Nigeria in different stages. The first contact came probably through Christian Berbers or Tuaregs. The second came through the Portuguese in 1488 in the neighborhood of Benin and Warri but failed to make lasting impact. Finally, Christianity began to take permanent root in Nigeria as from 1842 with the coming of the English speaking Christian missionaries in Badagry⁵. The quick spread of this faith in this region, especially in

⁴ Nuzhat. F. 2014. ‘Religious Conflicts In Nigeria And Their Impacts On Social Life’. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol.2, No.4, pp.15-19, June. United Kingdom, European Centre for Research Training and Development.p.1.

⁵ Aderibigbe, I. S. 1988. ‘Muslim-Christian Relations in Nigeria: History of Tolerance and Peaceful Coexistence’. In Momoh, C. S. et al (eds.) *Nigerian Studies in Religious Tolerance*, Vol. 111. Lagos: John West.p.137

Badagry and Abeokuta, was facilitated by some freed slaves who had been converted to Christianity and decided to contribute to its propagation. Following the establishment of Christianity in the southern part of Nigeria, it was introduced to the Northern part of the country.

Needless to say that conflict studies in Nigeria situate the distant root of religious conflict in Northern Nigeria to the pattern of colonial system of governance⁶ (Gofwen, 2004). This, it is assumed, is traceable to the pluralistic nature of the different colonial administrative arrangements which later became the Nigerian state-a stage set up following the Berlin Conference of 1884. Islam had taken a firm hold in the Northern part and Christianity was the flourishing faith in the Southern part. These circumstances left the emerging nation divided into two parts with deep ideological differences in politics and economic organization, as these are advocated by the two religions. Since colonial times, Nigeria has been divided between a Muslim north and a Christian south. This division became more important after the country's independence in 1960. Before that time, thirty percent of Nigerians were neither Christian nor Muslim. Now, both faiths have grown, but Christianity has risen dramatically from some twenty-one percent of the population in 1950 to about forty-eight percent today⁷. This increase in numbers heightened Christian participation in Nigerian politics, according to Father Mathew Kukah, Vicar General of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kaduna, Nigeria. It also increased religious tension between Christians and Muslims. The Nigerian government has reported up to fifty thousand deaths from religious violence since the mid-1990s, though this figure is disputed by other sources⁸.

In the wake of colonial influence in Nigeria, it would be unjust to solely attribute religious conflict based on the influences of the two alien religions. Prior to Nigerians contact with the western world, research has shown vividly that there were always intra-religious conflicts among the adherents of traditional religions in Nigeria, hence, the issue of religious conflict in Nigeria dated back before the contact of Nigeria with the western world. It must also be noted that religious conflict is not only peculiar to Nigeria or Africa alone, as religious conflict has become one of the rising cause for global tension both in the time past and in this present age.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.71

⁷ Nwaomah, S. M. 2011 'Religious Crises in Nigeria: Manifestation, Effect and the way forward'. *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology in Practice* vol 3, no. 2 August. p.5.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.1

However, the recurrent religious conflict in Nigeria between the two majorly dominated religion cannot but be traced back to the origin of this two religions which is full of conflict and power tussle.

Without any form of doubt, it is a well known fact that both Christianity and Islam came from a single source, 'the man Abraham', who gave birth to two sons according to history, the first son being an offspring on an Egyptian maid keturah and the second son being an offspring of the wife, Sarah. At this point, the tussle between who the heir should be began, as both sons could become the heir. Based on their birth, the first son deserves to be the heir, but from the point of legality of marriage, the second son deserves to be the heir. It was this power tussle and conflict that led to the separation of these two brothers which is still evident till date. Hence when tracing the issue of religious conflict between Christianity and Islam, it is important to point to the fact that the origin of this two religions is not devoid of conflict itself.

The import of colonialism to Nigeria in relation to the introduction of this two religions has resulted in more religious conflict with political undertones in recent years instead of mere religious conflicts. It seems as if the nation is not geographically divided but rather religiously divided. People from both religions are not in state of accepting each other, Muslim fanatics consider that Nigeria must be an Islamic State and the other party also feels that it must be a Christian State⁹. Some have also argued that the colonialist used religion as a means of penetrating into the system thereby leading to the fusion of religion with politics. The fusion of politics and religion was expressed by (Gofwen 2004) thus: "in an attempt made by the colonial masters to convince the Northern emirs and the sultan of the commitment of the colonial government towards maintaining the socio-political status quo, it became a matter of colonial policy not to interfere with the functioning of the existing institutions, rather, political power became a tool used to strengthen religious institutions on the condition that they were accountable and made subservient to the colonial government¹⁰". Some other scholars have also expressed their view on the fusion of religion with politics:

*Ellis and Haar (2007) describe religion as an emerging political language
whose pattern of interaction cannot be ignored in the study of African*

⁹ Nuzhat. F. 2014. 'Religious Conflicts In Nigeria And Their Impacts On Social Life'. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol.2, No.4, pp.15-19, June. United Kingdom, European Centre for Research Training and Development. p. 2

¹⁰ Gofwen, R. I. 2004. *Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria and Nation Building: The Throes of two Decades 1980-2000*. Kaduna: Human Rights Monitor (HRM).p. 59.

politics. For Matthew Kukah (1993), the process of political bargaining in Nigeria appears to increasingly embody the factor of religion. Toyin Falola (1998), in his part pushes this further by underscoring the profundity of religious attachment expressed by both Muslims and Christians and its instrumentality in political life and leadership in Nigeria¹¹.

From the forgoing we have been able to see religious trajectory in Nigeria. It is therefore important to examine the import of these two religions in Nigeria and the emergence of religious conflicts.

Religious Conflict in Nigeria: Christianity and Islam in Retrospect

“If the best way to serve a creator is killing and harming fellow subject, then such creator embarked on a thoughtless mission to have created humanity, howbeit; no religion preaches hate”

In religious conflicts, it is not clear which aims are to be achieved. Gofwen regards political aims as primary; in his view, religious conflicts form a specific form of conflict between groups which differ ideologically along religious lines within a pluralistic setting with each striving for political relevance¹². In a similar vein, Takaya emphasizes the political import of religions:

Religions are parochial and emotional socializers. They specialize in building one-faith exclusive brotherhood communities; ii. Religion, at some point, is politics and is the most potent and long lasting political association. Moreover, religious creeds excite and extract the deepest possible emotional and physical loyalties from their adherents when in political competition with people of other faiths¹³.

One significant element driving conflicts of this type is the attitude of superiority that religious persuasions as a sociological fact, often adopt in their dealings or assessment of others. This attitude tends to exclude others, classifies them as ignorant and doomed and invariably, creates an atmosphere of hostility. This atmosphere of hostility tends to intensify

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.98.

¹² Gofwen, R. I. 2004. *Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria and Nation Building: The Throes of two Decades 1980-2000*. Kaduna: Human Rights Monitor (HRM), p. 34.

¹³ Takaya, B. J. 1992. 'Religion, Politics and Peace: Resolving the Nigerian Dilemma'. In Olupona, J.K. (ed.). *Religion, Peace and Multi-faith Nigeria*. Ile-Ife: O. A. U. Press. P.10

where opposing religious persuasions see their numerical strengths as political advantage. In such a situation, the leaders think that new religions are threats to the hegemonies enjoyed. Further, where the political, social or economic factors are unfavorable, messianic rhetoric can exacerbate the tensions. However, before we go into the effect of religious conflict in Nigeria, it is important to know that just as we have inter-religious conflict, we also have intra-religious conflicts. Research has shown that The notion that religious violence in Nigeria is always characterized by conflicts between religions (Muslims versus Christians) is too simplistic. This study shows that between June 2006 and May 2014 the frequency of violent death incidents involving Islamic groups against Islamic groups is 60; a figure higher than 57, which is the frequency of violent death incidents involving Islamic groups against Christian groups or Churches within the same period¹⁴. Also, we have several cases of violent deaths between Christians and Christians, suffices to say that when discussing violent death in religion, it is not only a case of inter-religious violent but also intra-religious. Between June 2006 and May 2014, religious causes of violent deaths accounted for 11 384. Some other factors registered higher frequencies and two major variables included crime and car accidents with absolute figures of 27 647 and 15 109 respectively¹⁵. The data suggests that religious issues did not constitute the overarching cause of violent deaths. Hence, the causes of violent deaths in Nigeria is not basically religion, however, religion still contributes a lot to causes of violent death in Nigeria by ranking third. It is important to know that the rate of violent death in Nigeria has continued to increase over the years with religious conflicts having political undertones. Hence, the instability of the nation has been viewed by some as an achievement on the part of the British colonialist who used religion in manipulating our political system and for birthing several political unrest in the nation.

Some towns that have experienced some of the notable religious conflicts in the post-independence era include;

Maitatsine riots in Bulumkutu (1982); Maitatsine riots in Jimeta (1984); Kano(Maitatsine-1980,1982, 1987, 1990, 1995) Maitatsine riots in Gombe (1985,1991); Illorin religious conflict (1986); Jalingo (1992, 2009); Shagamu (1999); Kafanchan (1987); Tafawa Balewa (1991, 1995,2001);

¹⁴ Akinola. E.O. 2014. *Muslims, Christians and religious violence in Nigeria: patterns and mapping (June 2006 –May 2014)*. IFRA-Nigeria epapers series, n°32.p.11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.p. 13.*

Zangon-Kataf (1992); Tiv-Jukun and Tiv-Kuteb (1992-93); Potiskum (1994, 2009) Kuteb-Chamba (1997-1998); Igbirra-Bassa (1986-2000); Moon-Eclipse crisis in Borno (1996); Kaduna (Maitatsine riots in Rigassa 1982, 1992, 2000) Tiv and Others in Nassarawa (2001); Jos (1994,2000, 2001-2003,2008, 2009,2010); Ikulu-Bajju (2001); Yelwa-Shandam (2002,2004); Mangu-Bokkos (1992-1995); Bukuru-Gyero (1997); Maiduguri (2006,2009) Iggah-Oyikwa (2002); Kano(2004); Numan (2004); Azare (2001); Bauchi (2010); Ibadan(2010), Wukari (2010)¹⁶.

From all the above statistics laying claim to the rate of religious violence across the nation, it is important to note that, no matter how small the violence may be, it has a way of affecting the nations development, a nation which progresses is such that has internal rest. Nigeria spends billions of naira every year on internal security and not external security, thus the nation's development has been hampered by consistent religious tussle.

Furthermore, considering, the Boko Haram issue in Nigeria, although some have argued that it has political underpinnings, yet, it places religious ideology at her forefronts, This deadly sect has been responsible for cases of death, destruction of properties and valuables, several injuries, and without any doubt, the disappearance of the Chickbok girls who have not been completely seen years after their abduction. All these are not just destroying the nation, but also destroying the people. Religion as a powerful tool could be used to brainwash people and make them perpetrate a lot of evil and this is evident in the suicide bombing attack the nation has continue to witnessed.

However, discussing the havoc caused by religious conflict in the nation would amount to crying over a split milk, as the effect of religious conflict is evident is our day to day life as a people of a nation. One can summarize cases of religious conflict to one single cause as we to look for the way to peaceful co-existence as a nation.

¹⁶ Nuzhat. F. 2014. 'Religious Conflicts In Nigeria And Their Impacts On Social Life'. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol.2, No.4, pp.15-19, June. United Kingdom, European Centre for Research Training and Development .p. 2.

Religious Monotheism: A Critical Evaluation in the Nigerian Society

“It is not a concern for humanity to worry over who is or how many are the Supreme Being (s), the task of humanity should be to look for individual part to access him or them”

It is important to retreat what has been stated at the beginning of this discourse, that religion plays a vital role in the essence of an average African man; hence separating him from his religion is taking an essential aspect of his life away. In view of this, Africans take their religion with so much pride, dignity and preservation. It is within this purview that they are ready to do anything to protect their religion. This was what propelled Mbiti to say that to be an African man is not just to be religious but to be notoriously religious. At this point we must note the word ‘notorious’ used to qualify the religious attachment of an African man, he is radical, dedicated, committed and will not take anything for granted when it comes to the issue of his religion. This leads an average African man to be notoriously monotheistic. The belief that it is only his God that is the true God and there is no other God apart from his own God. This can be evident in the Christian scripture ‘Jesus said ... I am the way...’, the use of article “the” implies the only way, hence, this phrase makes the Christian faithful to opine that, aside their religion, others are on the wrong path. This is also evident in Islamic religion, where we have ‘...there is no other God except the Almighty Allah...’, the word no other God except Almighty Allah itself implies all other religions are on the wrong path. In the wake of this radical and notorious monotheism put forward by this two religion, we are faced with the battle of tolerating one another with special consideration given to our mode of worship and our practices.

It therefore, becomes easier to wrong a fellow from other religions since we have this belief that such a person is on the wrong path. It also becomes easier for us to be manipulated; hence the monotheistic belief in God, and the notoriety of African’s towards religion is an offshoot of every form of vices that comes from religion. Ordinarily, religion should be a way or path through which man returns and reconcile to God, so if in one’s quest to reconcile to whom one holds to be God, another person sees one’s path as wrong, then we have a problem already. The best thing is for every individual to focus on his or her God and moderate his practice within the cooperate society. We must have the consciousness that we live a subjective life and this is what existentialism preaches.

No One God: Existentialism in Retrospect

“It is either we have many Gods or just one God that accept plurality as a means to get to him, or we operate by laws of nature and no God in existence”

It is imperative to know that the path way to self actualization is subjectivism. The individual must be solely responsible to define his own life and existence, hence it is important to examine what existentialism means in this discourse before moving to the concept of ‘no one God’. Existentialism in a broader sense is a 20th century philosophy that is centered on the analysis of existence and the way humans find themselves existing in the world. The notion is that human exists first, and then each individual spends a life time changing his/her essence or nature. In other words, existentialism is a philosophy concerned with finding self and meaning of life through freewill, choice and personal responsibility¹⁷. The belief is that people are searching to find out who and what they are throughout life as they make choices based on experiences, beliefs and outlook. A personal choice becomes unique without the necessity of an objective form of truth.

Existentialistic idea came out at a time in the society when there was deep sense of despair following the great depression caused by the second world war. The despair was being articulated by philosophers well into the 1970s and continue up to this day as a popular way of thinking and reasoning. An existentialist could either be a religious moralist, agnostic or atheist moralist¹⁸. We have Soren Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jasper as a religious moralists, Fredrick Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus as an atheists.

To the existentialist, they belief that the idea of religion is very much subjective, the step to faith according to Kierkegaard is a step taken out of choice and not out of compulsion, hence the idea of serving a supreme being should not be out of compulsion but rather out of freewill and personal conviction to follow through such chosen part. Fredrick Nietzsche in his philosophy declares ‘the death of God’, as he sees religion as an excuse or a hiding point for people who are cowards and living an inauthentic life. Looking at Nietzsche’s death of God and the implication for religion in African, it is important to point out that religion should not be the basis for morality, each individual could uphold a moral standard, society could have a

¹⁷ Existentialism- A Philosophy. 2015. <http://www.allaboutphilosophy.org/existentialism.htm>. Accessed 19th October 2017. 3:55pm p.1

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.1

moral standard outside of religion, hence, we must dissuade our mind that our moral conviction should be rooted in religion. We must learn to live a moral life with the mind set of Nietzsche, 'that God is dead'. One should be moral not because one will be accountable to a God or because one God demands one to be moral but one should rather be moral because morality itself is an intrinsic part of one's existence, as one constantly makes choices, one must be aware that does choices are made for one's own good. At this point one might want to consider making egoistic decision on the basis of morality. But it must be noted, that egoism is not the same as selfishness because in selfishness, you might not be protecting your own self interest. We must understand that one of the greatest powers of the human race is the ability to make choices, we decide whatever we want to become, even though some might believe in predestination, the idea of predestination in no wise relegates man to machines or robots. Our value system and belief system should be decided by us based on choice and not on religion.

However, if we will not make moral rules and standards out of religion with the assumption that God is dead, we are then left to believe that God is alive. The implication of God being alive means that, if he is alive and he oversees the affairs of the universe which worships God in diverse ways. By implication, it is either God is not one or God is one, and can be gotten to in different ways because of his dynamic nature. From the existential point of view, we can draw allusion to the fact that God is not one, because individuals define their existence and what they choose to believe, just as language could be invented, the idea of God could also be invented. If I call on a God and he answers me and another person calls on a God using different approach from the one I used and such a person claims the God also responds, it implies that, we are either be calling on different Gods or calling on the same God that allows different root or path to get to him. If we view it from this perspective, then notorious monotheism among Africans ought to reduce.

Having the belief that our God is not the only God or if he is the only God, then we can access him through different means, helps individuals to adopt an existential way of life, by being responsible for the God you choose or the path through which you worship your own God, without interfering with the others.

Despair, guilt, death which is the awareness of our finitude is what leads us to become anxious of living an authentic life. This drives some towards religion, all these are subjective traits, you faces despair, guilt, death as an individual, nobody can face it on your behave, hence, if what drives us towards religion are subjective traits of existing being, then we must handle religion in a subjective way, the idea of God or deity must be subjective. Furthermore, no one can claim to have an empirical knowledge of God. Religion according to Kierkegaard is an act of faith¹⁹, hence, it becomes irrational and inauthentic existence to impose an act of faith on people. The best is to express an act of faith to people and leave them with the decision of making choices. Individuals are responsible for the choices they make, so forcing people against their choice will be forcing them not to be human because one of the characteristics of existing being is the ability to make choices.

Having examined the idea of no single God via existentialism, it becomes imperative to look at how existentialism can help to solve religious crises in Nigeria.

Existentialism: Path to Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria

“The world is neither a mosque, church nor any religious house; rationalism demands we make it not a religious home but a place where beings exist”

Conflict is a product of human activity, so peace also is an offshoot of human action. Although we cannot totally eradicate conflict among humans, because it will be reducing man to being an un emotional being, by implication a machine or a robot. Hence, an attempt is made to look at the role of existentialism as a system of thought towards reducing the rate of religious conflict in Nigeria.

First, the very consciousness of the freedom of man to make choices is in itself a path to pursuing peaceful existence. Man must be conscious of the fact that he has the right to choose to sustain a peaceful co-existence among ourselves and at the same time to live in an Hobbesian state of nature. One of the very facts that can lead man to peace in a nation is the recognition of our freedom as an individual to choose and make decisions that affect our lives.

In discussing freedom of man, one cannot but lay hold on Jean Paul Sartre who is being regarded as the philosopher of freedom. Freedom according to Sartre (1946) is not such

¹⁹ William. F. L 2002 *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*. U.S.A: Wadworthp.362.

freedom that is limitless or permits recklessness. According to Sartre, “when I choose, I am conscious of the fact that I not just choosing for myself alone but I choose for the others”²⁰. Hence, one must be conscious of the fact that in making choices, it has a way of affecting the others; hence one must be ready to take responsibility for the consequences of one’s choice. If men are conscious of the fact that their choices have a way of affecting the others, then religious extremism and barbarism will be moderated. Also, we must be ready to take responsibility for our actions. As noted by Sartre, in taking responsibility for one’s choices, one learns to moderate his actions, because one becomes aware of the fact that, when one performs actions as such that are to the detriment of our fellow being, then one must be responsible for the consequences of such actions.

Furthermore, Martin Buber (1923) in his philosophy of ‘I’ and ‘Thou’, he admonishes every individual to see their fellow human beings as subjects and not as objects. An object does not have the power of choice and can be used for anything, but a subject is an existing being. Hence we must be responsible towards fellow individuals, man must not use fellow man as a means to an end. An individual must know that just as he is a subject and wants to be treated well, he must also treat other subjects well. If men are conscious of our relationship with the others as fellow subjects and not just objects, religious excesses would be reduced and they would foster tolerance among individuals.

Gabriel Marcel’s notion of fidelity while discussing being in his (1963) essay on the *Existential Background to Human Dignity*, stated that fidelity is a path to peaceful co-existence. One of the causes of religious conflict is lack of trust and faithfulness; hence, he emphasizes more on fidelity as a part to authentic existence. He said subjects should express fidelity to fellow subjects, just as they do to their lover²¹. Lovers are bound to offend each other at times, but through an act of fidelity, they forge ahead and continue to tolerate each other. If we can transfer this fidelity among people of different faith, then there would be less cases of conflict within the nation.

Moreover, existentialism preaches discipline and personal responsibility. These are two cogent factors that can help to sustain peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. People must have self

²⁰ Stumpf . S.E. 2000. *Socrates to Sartre and Beyond: A History of Philosophy*. New York: McGraw Hill Publisher.p.464.

²¹ *Ibid*.p.459.

discipline, not because religion preaches it but because it is essential in life. It was this personal discipline that Nietzsche (1882) was discussing with his idea of the 'over man', someone who has control of himself and takes responsibility for his life. Religion preaches slave morality according to Nietzsche, Nietzsche wants us to grow outside the morality of religion, to master morality that is based on personal discipline and forming your personal standard of existence.²² If individuals are well disciplined, it will help to control our religious activities; individuals should not use our own religion to disturb other existing individuals. The world is neither a mosque nor a church; hence all activities of religious gathering must be moderated to allow for adherents of other faith to enjoy their own existence in the world. Religious houses must desist from disturbing the environment with noises coming out from their speakers or public address systems among other activities that infringe upon the convenience of fellow being.

Man is a being towards death²³, so says martin Heidegger. The day a child is born, he is old enough to die, hence, man must always be conscious of his finitude, that no matter what one choose to do on earth either good or bad, one day, one will die. The consciousness of death should be a trigger to authentic existence according to the existentialist. The fact of the awareness of one's finitude should make people want to live the best possible life they can live and make the best possible decisions, and since the notion of afterlife is still debatable, men should be conscious of this one life alone, and if peradventure, there is an afterlife, they can take a subjective decision to also live a good life in the afterlife. 'As long as we exist, we exist for now, for we do not know tomorrow, we make tomorrows decision tomorrow for we are not even sure if tomorrow exist'. Men must live an authentic life, Heidegger (1962) said that *fallenness* with the 'they' that is, losing one's self while trying to relate with other people will lead to inauthentic existence. Hence, life must not be based on religious doctrines or ideologies. Individuals must choose and live by our own ideologies.

²² *Ibid.p.427.*

²³ *Ibid.p.539.*

Conclusion

“The path to peaceful co-existence rests not in the hand of any Supreme Being but in our existential decisions”

When someone, a society, religious groups try to impose or demands that their beliefs, values or rules be faithfully accepted or obeyed, existentialists believes, this destroys individualism and makes a person become whatever the people in power want him to be. Hence, existential philosophy or thinking demands man to subject everything to criticality and take a conscious decision by himself, the decisions man must take, demands him to be responsible for his actions, hence, if Nigerian’s think existentially, the Kantian golden rule knitted into existential choices will be a guide to our conduct, and the nation can be on the path to peaceful co-existence irrespective of our religious differences and biases.

Recommendations

This research has been able to successfully carry out an x-ray on the path to peaceful co-existence in Nigeria admits religious conflicts. It is therefore imperative to prescribe the following as recommendations.

First, religious houses and academic environment should make it a core duty to educate people and dissuade them from both inter and intra religious conflict starting from cradle.

Second, people should be discouraged from being notorious with religious practices and to also desist from proving superiority of religion.

Furthermore, religious houses should advocate religious tolerance at all levels and encourage adherents to always shun anything that can lead to religious riot and crises.

Conclusively, all religions should learn to moderate their activities and be conscious of the fact that the cosmos is a home for existing beings that have different beliefs from theirs.

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