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Religious Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence in Contemporary Global Societies

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Abstract

The concept of Religious pluralism has dimensional and conflicting disciplinary usages and slippages between the factual notion of plurality and normative accounts of pluralism". Such, therefore, need necessary conceptual clarification if Religious Pluralism is to be understood. Pluralism can be given at least four different conceptual meanings. The first meaning is "Theological which assumes that other religious paths are true". The second is sociological which simply accepts pluralism to mean religious plurality or diversity. Thirdly, pluralism is a "philosophical school known as value-pluralism in which values are irreducible plural. Value – pluralism does not per se concern itself about religion but intrinsically can lead to a philosophical argument for valuing diversity. The fourth concept of religious pluralism refers to a political ideal of peaceful interaction among individuals and groups of different religious faith including non-believers. Furthermore in this paper, religious pluralism was seen to bridge the gap between the different religious sect and how their adherents can peacefully coexist together for global peace, unity and development. This paper adopted historical, theological, sociological and philosophical approaches to bring out the clear and true picture of the reality of religious pluralism and global peace and development. The study therefore believed that every religion has not the sole claim of religious monopoly of access to the Creator in terms of salvation. This claim is true because the world is cosmically diverse and pluralistic, religiously socialistic with Muslims, Buddhist, Hindus, Christians, Taoists, traditional religionists, Judaism, etc all occupying the same religious space on earth. All religious claims to have reverence to one Supreme Being or the like in whom they are responsible to now or thereafter life is rather subjective than objective to the possessor of the claims. The method adopted for this study is the literature review. It was however concluded that religious pluralism if properly understood by adherents of different religion can bring about a peaceful co-existence between the adherents of different religion, thereby guaranteeing global peace and development.

Keys: Religious pluralism, peaceful coexistence, global peace and development.

Introduction

The concepts of religious pluralism has always been a paradox, this is so because there exist an inherent disjoint about the relationships that exist between different religious groups, giving rise to impedance to issues of national and global peaceful co-existence among adherents of these different religions of the world. The coming together of different religions to amalgamate into religious pluralism came with people from different backgrounds, belief systems, cultures, languages and institutions. Little wonder, Ntamu, et al, (2017) posited that it is therefore necessary to state that this coming together of different people with different ideological thinking, culture and religion seems to be staking the different segments of the people with different religious belief systems against the other and these situations seem to be the albatross against sustainable national peace and global development.

What then is concept of religious pluralism? Baige, (2016) in the New Dictionary of Ideas states that “pluralism is derived from the Latin word ‘*plures*’, meaning “several” or “many” and it has formed the central concern of various intellectual debates through the history of the west” (Abdul, 1976; Baige, 2016). The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion defines “religious pluralism” as “the problem and opportunity of the simultaneous presence of different religious traditions within a single society” (McLennan, 2010). President Obama once told the Americans that their nation is “no longer just a Christian nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of non-believers” but a conglomeration of diverse religious sect, which must be respected and accepted as such (McLennan, 2010). Taking a view from this sense, therefore, religious pluralism is a global fact in existence.

Ntamu, et al., (2017), found that various authors have copied the concept of religious pluralism from Rick Rood in 1999, who defined religious pluralism as “the view that all religions are equally valid as ways to God. Religious pluralism sees all religions as legitimate and valid when viewed from within their own cultural background and tradition. The general conception is that no one religion has an exclusive claim to the truth, but all constitutes varying conceptions of

the Ultimate Reality. White, (2010) cited in Lamptey, (2010) opinion, “Pluralism is an affirmation of the validity of every religion, and the refusal to choose between them, and the rejection of world evangelism. Recent studies have shown that religious pluralism has become more visible, and religious issues have grown more established world over (Jackson, et al., 2007; Knauth, et al., 2008; Adekunle, et al., 2010).

Studies have further shown that the long held religious difference that existed among Protestant and Catholic churches, Orthodox Christians, and long-established Jewish groups have combined with growing multiculturalism from immigrant populations adhering to Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other faiths, as well as those adhering to none to create the synthesis of religious pluralism (Banchoff, 2007; Valk, et al., 2009). The genesis of religious pluralism can be traceable to when the West had religious and political conflicts and contentions leading to a distrust of living in harmony among the people. The concept got popularity in the modern West. It could be observed that a different approach in the Bible where exclusivist approach has been furnished to give confidence and consolation to the followers of Christ as stated in John 5:12, *he who has the son of God, has life*, he who has not the son of God has not life (Baige, 2016).

But does this mean that other religion who do not believe in Jesus Christ, do not have lives? The Christian exclusivists believe that salvation through Christ is the only way. The Latin phrase “*Extra ecclesiam nullasalus*” is captured by the Old Catholic version i.e. “outside the church there is no salvation” (Roumeas, 2015). The protestants also emphasize the belief in Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation, stressing the Bible exclusive position that states, *he who has the son of God has life and he who has not the son of God has not life* (1 John 5:12), and *Jesus said unto his disciples, I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, but by me* (John 14:6).

There is the sociological pluralism which explains the social phenomenon of religious plurality or diversity (Roumeas, 2012). The obvious diversity of societies in the world gave rise to the claim that many religions exist pluralistically too. If this obvious truth is substantial, then religious pluralism exists and also different as each culture demands freedom of choice for

religious practice. It has been established that there are diversities of cultures and as such each society or culture has a religion with “implicit” faith in a Supreme Being (god and goddess) and unbelievers (Anyacho, 2005; Austen, 2010; Baldwin, 2010; Bandyopadhyay & Elliot, 2012).

The philosophical school of thought also known as value pluralism places values to be irreducibly plural. Value pluralism is not per se about religion but it rather leads to a “philosophical argument for valuing diversity intrinsically (Chaney, 2008; Blaydes & Drew, 2008; Becker & Ludger, 2009; Gallego & Woodberry, 2010; Roumeas, 2015). In political theory pluralism can be envisaged either as a ‘fact’ or as an ‘instrumental value (Galston, 2002 in Roumeas, 2015).

Theology of Religious Pluralism

It is obvious that Christians claim and insistence prove that the only way to God or eternal truth is through Jesus Christ not through Mohammed (teachings of the Holy Koran) nor through the Torah, nor through Krishna nor the Buddha, neither Tao nor any other way. To buttress this claim, Jesus’ statement to His disciples, *I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me* (John 14:4) has every reason to the exclusive belief of the Christians, (Hariri, 2012). “Exclusivism” and “inclusivism” are two opposite theories in the areas of the only one way of faith to obtain salvation and obtaining it inclusive of “others” not in exclusive fold personified. The former believe salvation can be obtained through only one true faith and only one way. The later assume “there is one true religious faith and one path to salvation, but believe that non Christian might be saved through the Christian path (Ibhanawoh & Dibua, 2003; Kukah, 2007; Jekayinoluwa & Egbatola, 2010; Jowitt, 2010).

Between 1970s and 1990s, pluralistic theologies were developed in the Christian tradition and there exists different types of theological pluralism. Some pluralists argue there is a fundamental unity among religious traditions. Controversial philosopher of religion like John Hick opines that: “Religions are different cognitive responses to the same Ultimate Reality. There are different phenomenal manifestations of the same nonunion” (Hick, 1989). Therefore, these

believers from different faith can engage in truth seeking dialogue and can learn from each other's imperfect religious knowledge (Manglos-Weber, 2016). Even if there may be common Ultimate Reality or otherwise, dialogue becomes possible inasmuch as believers acknowledge the authenticity of the religious faith of others. The concern needed most, is not the content of beliefs but the sincerity of the faith. In this case inter-religious dialogue becomes interfaith dialogue (Pamkkar, 1978; Nunn, 2010; Meshram, 2013; Oloyede, 2015). Having recognized these circumstances, thus, the issue surrounding misunderstanding and criticism of "other" religions lies on the claim of superiority and lack of knowledge on the part of believers about the beliefs of "others religions". This is where inter-Religious dialogue becomes necessary for peaceful coexistence and understanding.

Sociological pluralism (plurality)

Confusion may arise when considering religious pluralism vis a vis sociological pluralism.

To this end, Boumeas explains that:

Sociological pluralism (or plurality) refers to a descriptive account of social diversities. This does not imply that all sociologists use the notion in a plural descriptive fashion. For example, it is critical of the conflation between descriptive and normative usages of "pluralism" in sociology. As a matter of "conceptual hygiene" "it is preferable to associate pluralism with ideological and normative positions (Beckford, 2003).

In pre-reformation Europe, religious plurality was already operational and is not therefore a new phenomenon as the Catholic Church was dealing with "infidels" that is Jews and Muslim), and the orthodox Church of Eastern Europe (Patel, 2007). As mentioned earlier, the battle of superposition between religious and political entities, "heresy" was thought as a crime against the political body, and as such, the struggle against heretics was fierce. With this fight, a group of dissidents the "Hustles of Bonemia" established themselves, in the fifteenth century into a pluralistic community with the sole aim of fighting and protecting themselves from external aggressions of the political state (Smith, 2015; Platas, 2016). The subsequent reformations in the sixteenth

century brought religious divisions between Catholics and Protestants. The Protestants within the Protestants also divided into rival Lutherans, Calvinists and Anabaptists which frequently cut across religious traditions due to religious disagreements and cleavages (Woodberry, 2012). In recent decades, sociological phenomenon of religious pluralism has taken another dimension in Europe and America (Banchoff, 2007). Religious diversity encompasses Christians, Jews, Muslims and also the new religious Movements which include a number of non-believers (Wolfgang & Klingholz, 2017). A further analysis of the situation revealed that globalization and migration played a significant role in pluralization of the western societies. This process and modernity, religion has not disappeared as some theories of secularization predicted but a deep plurality and internal pluralization became imminent (Wolfgang & Klingholz, 2017).

Hervieu-Leger (1999) in his “religious eclatée” speaks of exploded religion, describing this contemporary religious landscape. Religion increasingly became subjective and individual believers tend to come up with their own interpretation, believers of the different religion pick and choose what seems appealing to them than in other different religions. Berger, (1979) calls this “*heretical imperative*”; the prominent place of “choice” in modern beliefs (Berger, 1979). The issue of religious plurality becomes even more complex if considered not only in the diversities of religious traditions, but also the variety of religious movements within and outside their traditions as well as the diversity of unbelief’s as some religions are monotheist, polytheist and some godless. That will even bring doubt concerning the relevance of concept of religion encompassing all these phenomena (Wilfred, 1992 in Yusuff, 2010). Therefore religious plurality is not about one and the many; it embraces a multifaceted diversity which requires constant interpretation as they constantly appear (Yusuff, 2010).

Philosophical pluralism

In philosophical pluralism, value diversity intrinsically and standing between the factual account and an instrumental defense of diversity holds sway. Pluralism theory of value or value-

pluralism whose metaphysical assumptions are contested similarly with monism, holds the idea that values can be harmonized in a unified system or reduced to common denominator. Pluralism, according to Berlin (1990) in Ntamu, et al., (2017) is:

The conception that there are many different ends that men may scold and still be fully rational, fully men, capable of understanding each other and sympathizing and deriving lights from each other, as we derive from reading Plato or the novels of medieval Japan worlds outlooks, very remote from our own (1990).

Following this view, pluralism differs from vulgar relativism (or subjectivism) which would say: “I prefer coffee, you prefer champagne. We have different tastes. There is no more to be said. Contrary to relativism thus constructed, pluralism asserts that values are objective and that humans pursue them as ends in themselves. Such values can be in conflict, which means that they are incompatible with each other and incommensurable. As a result we are doomed to choose, and choice may entail an irreparable loss” (Banchoff, 2007; 2008). The choice between incompatible values implies a moral cost. Pluralism seeks autonomy, which is intimately linked to pluralism. Autonomy indeed required the possibility to choose between adversity of world while choices on the other hand argues that liberalism, should not be centrally concerned with autonomy, but rather with the protection of legitimate diversity (Galston, 2002).

A diverse society is one where individuals can choose freely among a plurality of conceptions of the good life. Diversity provides the necessary conditions for the exercise of autonomy, but also for expressive liberty which allows individuals and groups to lead their lives in conformity with their conviction, though these convictions do not always reflect the value of autonomy (Bender & Pamela, 2010). Value-pluralism concerns first of all goods, and ways of life, cultures or religions. However, the metaphysical premise of an irreducible plurality of value can easily be translated into a principle of respect for plurality insofar as it reflects the plurality of goods (Galston, 2002; Crowcher, 2007). Crowder, (2007) further added that pluralism should not only value the diversity of cultures, but diversity within cultures, insofar as it favors autonomy. If

value-pluralism is not properly speaking about religion, it can justify a normative position in favor of the valorization of diversity including religious diversity, (Dean, 2010).

Religious pluralism in a contemporary society

Studies have shown that pluralism does not take a theological stance alone about religious truth, nor does it make a metaphysical claim about the nature of value. Pluralism is also not to be confused with mere plurality or diversity. Rather, it refers to a political ideal of peaceful interaction of individuals and groups of different religious tradition and confessions, as well as non-believers. Pluralism portrays a world that has moved beyond mere toleration” towards the active engagement with religious difference.

A school of thought may put a poser if pluralism relates to toleration? Toleration can be understood in many different ways. Let us define it quite narrowly as an attitude of self-restraint when confronted with beliefs or behaviors judged to be reprehensible to others and one self. To be tolerant is to refrain from acting to eradicate what is perceived as wrong. Toleration presupposes some kind of moral judgment, but accepts a resignation in the face of evil. This kind of toleration leads, at best, to peaceful co-existence. By contrast, the pluralistic attitude points to recognition and promotes the enthusiastic endorsement of difference or diversity in all sheds of opinion, belief, religion, values and ideologies (Jenkins, 2004; Lampsey, 2010). Difference should not be deplored, but celebrated as a facet of the inherent diversity of free society.

Here pluralism goes beyond toleration-that leads to mere coexistence-to refer to an active engagement across boundaries of faith and interfaith cooperation within a single democratic and liberal society. This understanding of religious pluralism is consistent with the definition of a commitment to recognize and understand others across perceived or claimed lines of religious differences, (Bender & Klasen, 2010). This also vary to Banchoff et al.’s, (2008) definition in which religious pluralism refers to patterns of peaceful interaction among diverse religious actors-individuals and groups who identify with and act out of particular religious tradition (Banchoff,

2008). Why speak of peaceful interaction? Because the ideal of religious pluralism ends where violence begins (Banchoff, 2007). Such conceptions of religious pluralism do not contradict the fact that religious plurality pertains to differences, disagreements and conflicting interests. Pluralism does not deny the existence of strong controversies within religions, between religious and between the secular; instead, pluralism raises an ideal of the regulation of conflicts through peaceful interactions (Scoutty-McLennan, 2011).

Religious pluralism should be discussed, though, by raising up how each religious tradition in its particularity speaks to that value. So a Catholic adherent might say, I really admire how the pope embodied mercy when he forgave the man who tried to assassinate him, and a Muslim adherent might respond, there is a story like that in my religion: when the Prophet Muhammad returned to Mecca, he extended mercy by forgiving many of the people who had waged war against him. This approach to religious pluralism isn't trying to teach that all religions are the same, but it demonstrates that religions have powerful commonalities, even though they each come to those shared values along their own paths. Each religion has something unique to say about universal values through its particular set of scriptures, rituals and heroes.

It is clearly shows that religious pluralism with its diversities in nature calls for religious dialogue. There should be frequent meetings of these various religions; they need constant ideas to concretize cordial relationship. Religious awareness of issues of contentions should be given to adherents from time to time to avoid clashes which may result to religious conflicts as against peaceful co-existence.

Conclusion

In our contemporary times, it is necessary that for people to live peacefully, there must be a high level of religious pluralism, this can guarantee the belief of global cooperation and peace, pluralism does not advocate for violence or terrorism, it does not look down on the religion of others, but it encourages the peaceful co-existence of people across creed, race, sex and

international boundaries. In this approach to religious pluralism, it is somewhat different from descriptive and the theological claims already explained, although it has element of each. Religious pluralists hold that people believing in different creeds and belonging to different communities need to learn to live together. Religious pluralism is neither mere coexistence nor forced consensus. It is a form of proactive cooperation that affirms the identity of the constituent communities while emphasizing that the well being of each and all depends on the health of the whole, it is the belief that the common good is best served when each community has a chance to make it unique contribution.

It is however concluded that religious pluralism according to the Christian synthesis is the way, the truth and the life. The Lord Jesus in his word described loving your neighbor as yourself with the example of a hated foreigner not of his own tradition, a Samaritan. The good Samaritan in that story saved the life of a traveler who was attacked by robbers, just like Jesus himself who saved the life of the adulterous woman He never met. He fed five thousand people with words of institution that sounded like communion, even though the vast majorities were not followers of his. He communed with Roman soldiers and ate with tax collectors. In terms of who would be with his Father in heaven, it was not just Jesus at his side; He told of Abraham being there too. And when Jesus was transfigured on a mountaintop in the presence of God, Moses and Elijah were at his side. May we choose to step off the faith line onto the side of religious pluralism, make our voices heard, and engage in saving the world with our bodies, hearts and minds. This is the only time globalization will work for the goods of the common man; there will be peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims, between Buddhist and Hindus and the Jews, between the Blacks and the Whites.

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