

Religious Tolerance and Peace Building in Nigeria: Implications for Community and Socio-Economic Development

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Abstract:

This study evaluates how religious tolerance and peace building can impact community and socio-economic development in Nigeria. The paper went historical in tracing the consequences of religious intolerance in Nigeria as well as extract relevant information for the purposes of peace building and harmonious co-existence between Muslims and Christians. The specific objectives shall be to identify the visible causes of religious conflict between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, evaluate the extent to which religious tolerance will enhance community and socio-economic development, and also to estimate the cost implication of peace building for socio-economic development. The study being a descriptive study engages secondary data, and as well makes recommendation that economic and societal wellbeing can only be achieved in an environment where multi-culturality and multi-religiosity are guaranteed.

Keywords:

Peace-building; Religion; Ethnicity; Conflict resolution; Nigeria.

I. Introduction

“Hatred and intolerance are destabilizing when Governments crack down on religious expression, when politicians or public try to use religious bigotry and cause discrimination based on religious identity, they embolden extremists and fuel sectarian strife. Therefore, our core conviction is that religious freedom and respect for religious diversity is essential for a peaceful society. And it's an element of successful democracy as well because people who see that their rights and dignity are respected are more likely to have a stake in the success of their country and their society”(Susan Johnson, 2011)

Human history is the history of conflicts or values expressed in various inter and intra-religious, ethnic, regional or class conflict and contradictions. This idea was aptly expressed by Marx and Engels (1968) when they argued that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. Conflicts, therefore, are synonymous with the initialization and aggregation of human interests. This implies that religious, ethnic or class conflict is inevitable unless there exists compatibility between different values, desires or needs of people that co-exist (Agboduke, 1991 and Stewart, 1987;).

While class conflict exists between social classes, inter-state conflicts exist between Africa States. While ethnic conflict exists between ethnic groups (Osadola, 2012), religious conflicts exist within and without class, ethnic groups and nation states (Marx 1968, Ake 1981, Nnoli 1978, Igwe 2003 and Okolie 2001). Religion exists at the level of super structure, expressed as an ideology. However, resources, ideologies and values remained the causes of conflict across the globe since the end of the Cold War (Akaeze, 2009). The issue of religious

fundamentalism illustrates the fact that religion appears to be associated with conflict in many parts of the World (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). This affirmation is equally re-inforced by Takaya (1992), when he asserts that the first of religious crisis is the upheaval of the Judeo-Christian tradition, established in the book of Exodus 32:28. When Moses returned from Mount Sinai, three thousand people were massacred on the spot by the Levites on instruction from him because the people turned to “idol worship” while he was still communicating with God on their behalf. The same terror represented itself during the spread of Islam to North Africa, the Mediterranean and Europe (Khan, cited by Takaya 1992). Moreover, within the same faiths, cases of intra-religious disputes have been recorded in which sufferings and bloodshed were the result of factional rivalries for power, doctrinal supremacy or leadership tussle (Winkworth, 1994). It is important to note that the history of the two major received religions in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam is more or less stories of conflict. Hence, ethnic Chauvinism, border disputes and religious conflicts (Islam Vs Christianity) remain the sources of instability in Nigeria (Osadola & Ajayi, 2021).

However, these religious conflicts are not peculiar to Nigeria alone, as it is also a routine crisis in other regions such as Middle East and other parts of Africa like Egypt, Sudan, Chad and Tanzania (Waqf, 1993). Meanwhile, Islam Vs Christianity crises in Nigeria have reached the state that it could be referred to as war in various parts of the country, ranging from Kano revolt (1980), BulukutuBizane (1982), Kaduna crisis (1982), Siweda war, (1984), Gombe revolt (1980), Katsina crisis (1999), Kano riot (1995), Sharia crisis in Zamfara, Kaduna, Bauchi and Sokoto, in 1999, sharia reactions in Aba, Onitsha and Owerri in 1999. Jos crisis in 2008, Boko haram in 2009 till date, and of course the current yearning of the people of the State of Osun on the supposed Islamization by the Government. These instances weren't few as there has been no year without three to four instances of religious conflict in Nigeria (Opeoluwa, Oluwatobi and James, 2022)

These conflicts are not without cost to the Nigerian people. The disintegration, dispersion, instability, loss of lives and properties, discontinuing economic programmes and projects. The increase in the number of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) that escapes the country cannot go without notice alongside the consequential unemployment, hunger, diseases, infrastructural decay; corruption and low income per capital that still pervade the economy. It has equally been explained that this structural violence has confined to exist because they serve the political and economic interests of ethnic, religious leaders in Nigeria, who use the violence as bait for Federal negotiations (Muhammed et al., 2023, Chukwoulozie 1986, Berghe 1973 and Madukewu 1991).

Consequent upon explosion of riots and conflicts in areas affected by religious crisis, the need to embark on peace building becomes inevitable. This is as a result of the need to ensure that those who might be grieved or suffered setback during crisis do not end up sparking other conflict by way of vengeance. Meanwhile, the fact that there is diversity of beliefs, cultures and religion; it is somewhat difficult, but peace building, though costly cannot be pushed aside in an attempt to ensure that peace returns to any community or society affected by the woes of religious crisis (Iremeka 2009).

The objective of this study is to examine the phenomenon of religious conflict vis-à-vis religious tolerance, highlighting the causes of the religious conflict in Nigeria as well as its implications for socio-economic development.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Conceptual Discourses

The term conflict etymologically derived from the Latin word *confligere*, which means to engage or to contend. According to Coser cited in Adejo (2002) “is a struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals”. It is so clear from the above that conflict is all about clash of interests and values and thus, it emerged naturally from the pursuit of divergent interests, objectives and aspirations of groups in an ecosystem.

Religious conflict on the other hand is “conceptualized as a specific form of conflict between groups which differed ideologically along religious lines within a pluralistic setting with each striving for political relevance” (Gofwen, 2004). The word tolerance means to bear, to endure or suffer, but this is not a quality of passivity or indifference. In a simple presentation, tolerance is the appreciation of diversity and the ability to live and let other live. It is the ability to exercise a fair and objective attitude towards those whose opinions, practices, religion, nationality and so on differ from one’s own.

III. Research Method

3.1 Religious Conflict and Its Own Forms in Nigeria

Religion could serve, and has indeed served as an instrument of social harmony in many civilizations. Paradoxically, however, it has also served as a motivation for violence, hence its indication in some literatures as a ‘double edged sword’ (Maregere 2011, Obasi 2009). From time immemorial, religious bigots have attempted to legitimize in the name of God and advance contemporary acts of extreme violence such as terrorists attacks as Holy warfare (Jihad).

Conflict is the inevitable paradox of human existence and civilization, while dynamism, a geometric matrix in human existence usually creates complexity in human society thereby entangling in a web of men with different tastes and needs which are insatiable. Men, therefore, become antagonistic as they organize towards satisfaction of needs in society (Otte, cited by Gofwen, 2004 and Gbadeyan, Idris Kumoye and Zubair, 2016). Conflict can be described as a stubborn ubiquitous fact of social life. Thus, the nature of human interaction is that, if every interaction among men is a satiation, conflict then is one of the most vivid interactions (Simmel, cited by Gofwen, 2004:47). Terrorism is one of the dynamics in the spectrum of religio-political conflict which covers organization of agitation groups like Maitatsine sect led by Mohammed Marwa in the 1980s, Darul Islam, Boko Haram and Kalakato sects. The Maitatsine sect had as its rallying point in the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria, but the Boko Haram opposes Western education and insists on upholding and imposing sharia legal system (Kukah, 2010:14). The expression ‘Boko Haram’ has become popular name for the sect also known unofficially as the ‘Yusufiya’. ‘Boko’ is the Hausa word for western system of education while ‘Haram’ means ‘forbidden’. That is to say, the group is opposing western education for Muslim children. The sect went about to express their resentment over what they perceived as negative elements being propagated through western education and thought. Clarifying the fact that they are opposed mainly to what they consider depraved from the Islamic perspective, they are referring to only negative side of it which they perceived as contradictory to Islamic principles and some basic heretical and anti-Islamic ideas embodied in western education. However, educational dimension of the Boko Haram

activities should not be considered in isolation from the general attitude of Nigerians about the type of education that prevails in the country. It is common knowledge that not a few stakeholders in education have decried and continued to raise an alarm about the prohibitive retrogression in the country's educational sector (Anyanwu, 2010:36-37).

The rejection of western education by the Boko Haram sect is, therefore, understandably a protest against the mediocrity and the eclipse of spiritual, moral and intellectual fervor that are bastardizing formal education at various levels in the country. It is, as it were, an overreaction, against the enthronement of a type of education that is bankrupt, unable to promote people's genuine freedom, empowerment and integral human development. However, the Boko Haram offensive against western education should be considered from the background of qualitative education. The horrible and objectionable violence notwithstanding, the search for qualitative education should be seen as what accounted for the recourse of thousands of young men to Mohammed Yusuf and his Boko Haram sect to search for a liberating and self-fulfilling education perceived as not possible in the educational set-up on ground (Anyanwu, 2010). Against this background, terrorism is manifested in the following activities such as laying of mines and explosives at strategic places, arrests, kidnapping, and detention, beating and torturing, murder and assassination, arson, sabotage of installations; mysterious phone calls, intimidation and suicide bombing. (Nwolise, 2005: 12-13; Anyanwu, 2010:39 and The Nation, 2012: 1&5).

Religious conflict has conceptualized in Nigeria here is a specific form of conflict between Christians and Muslims which differed ideologically along religious lines within a pluralistic setting with each striving for political relevance. One distinctive feature that is ubiquitous with all religions is the categorization of the world, such that every religion is characterized by sharp subdivisions of the world, specifically with clear-cut dichotomies as follows: the 'good' and the 'bad', the 'we' versus 'they', the 'saved' and the 'lost'; 'sacred' and 'profane', or 'brethren' versus 'the rest of the world', who are expected to share in the life after (Takaya 1992:110). This 'we' feeling among members propels the fencing out on non-believers who are technically condemned to hell except they repent. Historical trends have been found to replete with various atrocities committed in the name of God. All these come about as fall-outs of either inter-religious or even intra-faith competition for political supremacy in Nigeria.

3.2 Timeline of Religious conflicts in Nigeria

| S/N | Date | Location | Remarks. |
|-----|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. | Thursday, May 1, 1980 | Zaria (Kaduna State) | Disturbances in Zaria during which property belonging to mainly Christians were destroyed |
| 2. | December, 18-29, 1980 | Yan-Awaki Ward in Kano (Kano State) | Riots by Maitatsine Sect. 118 people died. Extensive damage to property |
| 3. | October 29-30, 1982 | Bullumkutu, Maiduguri (Borno State) | Kala-Kato and Maitatisinesects. 118 people died. Extensive damage to property. |
| 4. | October 29-30, 1982 | Kano (Kano State) | Muslim demonstrators burnt down churches |
| 5. | February 27-March 5, 1984 | Dobeli Ward, | MaitatsineSect. 568 died. Wanton destruction of property |
| 6. | April 26-28, | Pantami Ward, | MaitatsineSect. 105 died. Wanton |

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| | 1985 | Gombe (Bauchi State) | destruction of property |
| 7. | March, 1986 | Ilorin (Kwara State) | Muslims and Christians clashed during a Christian procession at Easter |
| 8. | March, 1987 | Kafanchan (Kaduna State) | Clash between Muslims and Christians at the College of Education, Kafanchan. Loss of some lives and the burning of some mosques by Christians and native Kajes. |
| 9. | March 1987 | Katsina, Funtua, Zaria, Gusau and Kaduna (Kaduna State) | Wave of religious riots in which Muslims burnt down numerous church buildings, and damaged property belonging to Christians. Many lives were lost. |
| 10. | February. 1988 | Kaduna, Kaduna Polytechnic (Kaduna State) | Religious riots, ostensibly among students, destroyed the foundation walls of the Christian chapel |
| 11. | April, 1991 | Katsina (Katsina State) | Religious violence spear-headed by Malam Yahaya Yakubu, leader of the fundamentalist Shiite sect in Katsina. It was protest against a blasphemous publication Fidi Times. Several lives were lost and property destroyed. |
| 12. | April, 1991 | Tafawa Balewa (Bauchi State) | Started as a quarrel between a Fulani man and a Suya meat seller in Tafawa Balewa. Escalated into full blown violence and later took the colouration of a religious war in Bauchi. Several lives were lost and property valued over hundreds of millions naira were destroyed. |
| 13. | October, 1991 | Kano (Kano State) | A peaceful procession initiated by the Izalasect to halt Rev. Reinhard Bonnke from having a crusade in Kano later degenerated into a very violent and bloody religious confrontation. Thousands of lives were lost and property valued in millions of Naira were destroyed. |
| 14. | May, 1992 | ZangonKataf, (Kaduna state) | A communal feud between the Katafs and the Hausas later took the dimension of inter-religious war between Muslims and Christians in other major cities of Kaduna State. Several lives were lost and property were destroyed |
| 15. | January, 1993 | Funtua, (Katsina State) | The Kalakatoreligious sect assaulted the Village Head of Funtua and burnt down the police vehicle. Lives and property were also lost |
| 16. | December, 1994 | Kano (Kano State) | Communal violence triggered off by the beheading of a Christian who had allegedly desecrated the Quran. |
| 17. | May, 1995 | Kano (Kano State) | Communal violence triggered off by quarrel |

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| | | State) | between Hausa and Igbo-tribes men led to the burning of houses, churches, shops and killing of innocent people. |
| 18. | Thursday, July 22, 1999 | Kano Reprisal Killing | Hausa/Fulani youth took vengeance on the killing of their Kith and Kin in Sagamu. Their target was the Yoruba community. |
| 19. | February 28, 2000 | Kaduna Mayhem (Kaduna State) | Kaduna city exploded in violence as Muslim and Christian extremists and other hoodlums clashed over the proposal to introduce Sharia. |
| 20. | Friday, April 14, 2000 | Agyaragu Crisis (Nasarawa State) | Communal clash that started with a protest against the location of Local Government Headquarters. The militant youth group started the riot and later took to the streets, killing and destroying. |
| 21. | July 2000 | Tsaragi Crisis (Kwara) | Clash between Tsaragi and Share communities of Kwara State which claimed several lives |
| 22. | September 8, 2000 | Kaltungo religious (Gombe State) | A religious violence that was sparked off by the presence of the state's Sharia implementation committee. |
| 23. | October 17, 2000 | OPC-Hausa/Fulani (Kwara) | A face off between the militant members of OPC and Hausa/Fulani community over supremacy of Emirate system in the state. |
| 24. | Saturday, October 27, 2000 | Minna reprisal (Niger) | Violent ethnic crisis erupted after the OPC assaults in Kwara and Lagos States. |
| 25. | Saturday, December 02, 2000 | Hadejia Crisis (Jigawa) | A sectarian disturbance that was caused by a debate between Muslims and Christians in Hadeji (Jigawa). There was wanton destruction of worship places |
| 26. | Thursday, June, 28, 2001 | Azara crisis (Nasarawa) | An ethnic conflict between the Tiv and the Azara indigenes. It started with gruesome killing of an Azara traditional leader, and later spread to the Tiv village, with the Tiv community on the defence. |
| 27. | Friday, September 07, 2001 | Jos crisis | A violent ethnic/religious crisis between the Muslim Hausa/Fulani and Christian/Indigenes. The subject of discord between the Jasawa Development Association and Plateau Youth council was over political appointment in Jos North. |
| 28. | October 12, 2001 | Kano Riot | A peaceful anti-American protest over the bombing of Afghanistan turned violent, taking ethnic and religious dimension. It degenerated into uncontrollable violence which claimed lives and damaged properties and places of worship. |
| 29. | Monday, | Tiv-Jukun/Fulani | An ethnic clash between Tivs and |

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| | October, 29, 2003 | Conflict | Jukun/Fulani which was an extension of the May, 2001 clash being linked to the protracted dispute between both sides. Newswatch reported that 16 soldiers were killed which later led to the gruesome revenge on the Tivs, by the Nigerian Army. |
| 30. | Friday, November 02, 2001 | Gwantu crisis | A clash that started on a political ground (over the relocation of LG Headquarters) later took an ethno-religious dimension, in which places of worship were destroyed |
| 31. | Sunday, December 30, 2001 | Vwang crisis | A violent communal conflict in Vwang district between the indigenes and non-indigenes exploded in the backdrop of the September 7 Jos crisis. It started when an illegal group of 40 men attacked the district Head of vwang. It also had religious colouration. |
| 32. | January 18, 2002 | Awe crisis | A renewed communal clash between two indigenous communities in Awe Local Government of Nasarawa State. The cause was not certain but two people were killed and several others injured. |
| 33. | May 2, 2000 | Jos Mayhem | Another mayhem that followed PDP congress but later assumed an ethno-religious colouration |
| 34. | May 2, 2002 | Fulani-Irigwe crisis | An ethnic clash between the Hausa/Fulani and the Irigwe indigenes in Bassa, Plateau which was said to be a reprisal attack. |
| 35. | Saturday, June 01, 2002 | Yelwa-Shendam Mayhem (Plateau) | A religious-cum ethnic fracas between the native people (predominantly Christians) and Hausa settlers (predominantly Muslims). This violence extended to about four Local Government councils in Southern Plateau. |
| 36. | Monday, July 01, 2002 | Wase (Plateau) | The Yelwa-Shendam riots spilt over to Wase |
| 37. | Tuesday, July 01, 2003 | Edo/Kogi | Communal clashes between border communities in Edo and Kogi States (Ekepedo and Ogori) over land ownerships. |
| 38. | Thursday, January 1, 2004 | Ganye, Adamawa | Clash between Fulani herdsmen and farmers over grazing lands. |
| 39. | Thursday, January 1, 2004 | Yobe | Militant Islamic group operating under the name of Muhajiran launched a Taliban-like attack on police. Men of the Nigerian Army killed five and arrested several others. |
| 40. | Sunday; February 1, 2004 | Wase/Kanam (Plateau) | Violent clash between Mavo and Taroh communities, which claimed 11 lives. Suspected Taroh youth were alleged to have |

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| | | | raided Mavo villages. |
| 41. | Saturday, February 1, 2004 | Wase/Kanam (Plateau) | Communal clash over land ownership between Minda and Kparev groups. Several lives were lost. |
| 42. | Saturday, April 3, 2004 | Makarfi, Kaduna | Religious protest in Makarfi town over the desecration of the Quran by a Christian teenager. |
| 43. | Sunday; April 11, 2004 | Lantang South, Plateau | Continued clashes that led to the sacking of Taroh villages in Lantang South LGA by suspected Hausa-Fulani insurgents. |
| 44. | Monday, April 26, 2004 | BakinChiyawa Plateau | Renewed hostilities launched by suspected displaced Fulani herdsmen. The conflict was believed to be spill over of the ethno-religious crisis that has been bedeviling southern Plateau Local Government of Langtang South and North, Wase, Kanam and Shendam. |
| 45. | Saturday, May 1, 2004 | Yelwa Shendam, Plateau State | A fresh ethno-religious mayhem that claimed over 650 lives and over 250 women abducted by suspected Taroh militia. |
| 46. | Wednesday, May 12, 2004 | Kano | Kano mayhem following the Yelwa Shendam ethno-religious crisis in Plateau. Non-Muslims were attacked in reprisal of the Plateau crisis. Over 200 lives were lost and the traditional ruler of the area deposed. |
| 47. | Saturday, June 8, 2008 | Konshisha/Gwer, Benue | Boundary disputes between neighbouring Konshisha and Gwer communities. Thirteen lives were lost. |
| 48. | Tuesday, June 8, 2004 | Numan, Adamawa | Ethno-religious crisis in Numan over the construction of a mosque's minaret over the Numan Bachama's palace. Over 50 people were feared killed and the traditional ruler of the area deposed. |
| 49. | Tuesday, August 3, 2004 | Quan-pam, Plateau | Fresh outbreak of violence in Lankaka village. Suspected armed militia from neighbouring state allegedly stormed the village killing two and razing twenty houses. |
| 50. | Monday, September 27, 2004 | Limankara, Borno | A self-styled Taliban group hiding on the Goza hills and Madara mountains on the north-eastern border with Cameroon raided police station killing officers and stealing ammunition. |

Source: Authors compilation

3.3 The Visible Causes of Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Several causes of religious violence in Nigeria have been identified by public analysts, politicians, researchers, and scholars in the field of conflict studies. In this article, however, the focus is on the immediate and visible factors that generate religious violence rather than the remote precipitating and other social factors that energise it.

A cursory perusal of extant literature on the remote socio-political, economic and governance factors that drive religious violence in Nigeria does show, however, that government neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and bigotry are some of the predisposing factors (Salawu 2010:348). In his treatise, Kwaja (2009:107) also identifies fragility of the institutions of the state in terms of their ability and capacity to manage diversity, corruption, rising inequality between the rich and poor, gross violation of human rights, environmental degradation, contestations over land, among others, as the underlying causes of violent conflicts in Nigeria since the enthronement of democratic rule in 1999. In his view, Danjibo believes the failure of governance is responsible for the recurring sectarian violence in Nigeria; while Omotosho (2003) recognizes disparaging literature/publications by both Christian and Muslim elite as the major cause of religious violence in the country. Contributing to the debate, Achunike (2008: 287) opined that the wrong perception of other people's religion or faith, wrong religious orientation, the low literacy level of religious adherents, selfishness on the part of religious personalities, pervasive poverty, government involvement in religious matters, among others, are responsible for inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Religious intolerance has been identified as the major source of religious conflict in all multi-faith societies existing as long as the history of mankind. Balogun (1988:166) defines religious intolerance as the hostility towards other religions as well as the inability of religious adherents to harmonize between the theories and the practical aspects of religion in areas like the diversity of interpretations of doctrine, acculturation process and indoctrination. Unreasoning imitation of religious prime movers by their adherents and other obvious cases of indulging in an extravagant notion towards the pursuit of religion. Against this background, religious fundamentalists thereby re-present the scriptural text as 'timely, out of time, and so valid for all time'. Whereas the fundamentalists' knowledge of history is at variance with that of modernism, the differing political philosophy of the major religions in Nigeria is another cause of religious conflict. The mutual suspicions and fear of domination between the adherents of major two religions have been basis for rivalry. This is equally supported by mutual ignorance of the belief and teachings of each one's faith and followed by provocative acts which hurt the religious sensibilities of people of other faiths whether they are intended or inadvertent (Metuh 1994:88-89).

Religious fundamentalism and extremism are deliberately chosen to kick-start discussions on the drivers of religious violence in Nigeria because they form the base (sub-structure) upon which other sources of religious violence (super-structure) rest. Religious intolerance has been defined as 'hostility towards other religions, as well as the inability of religious adherents to harmonize between the theories and the practical aspect of religion' (Balogun 1988:166). It encompasses bigotry, which is the obstinate and intolerant devotion to one's opinions and prejudices, especially the exhibition of intolerance and animosity toward persons of differing beliefs (Baird and Rosenbaum 1999). Religious intolerance has been identified as the major source of religious conflict/violence in all societies existing as long as the history of mankind, and permeating all forms of human civilisations, with attendant destructive tendencies (Osadola, Gbadeyan,Asiyanbi, &Oludemi, 2023).

Religious fundamentalism and extremism are similar to, and indeed, manifestations of religious intolerance. Komonchak, Collins and Lane (1996:411) view religious fundamentalism from three perspectives: from a cognitive understanding where the word is associated with a closed personality type that expresses exclusivity, particularity, literality and moral rigour; from a cultural theological viewpoint, where the word expresses opposition to religious and cultural liberalism in defence of orthodoxy and religious traditions; and from a social movement perspective, where it denotes organisational and ideological uniqueness from other types of religious movement. Ultimately therefore, religious fundamentalism is a religious movement that promotes the literal/original interpretation of, and strict adherence to religious doctrine, especially as a return to orthodox scriptural prescriptions and doctrinal originality. It seeks strict adherence to the orthodox principles of particular faiths – in the case of Nigeria, Christianity and Islam – and abhors modernism with its propensity to adulterating or diminishing original doctrinal principles. Religious fundamentalists, therefore, place great emphasis ‘on right doctrine and the necessity of organized warfare against the forces of modernism’ (Komonchak, Collins and Lane 1996:411). Religious intolerance and fundamentalism may not necessarily entail violence; however, it is the extreme manifestation of intolerance and fundamentalist ideals that embraces violence. Religious extremists are therefore religious fundamentalists, who take religious conservatism and intolerance to an unreasonable extent, by manifesting violence against those who hold contrary religious views. Religious extremists take the position that if others do not follow their ways, they will be damned (Akan, Gbadeyan and Ojizele, 2022). They abhor the preaching of other faiths and resort to violence to stop it. They insist that their religious doctrines must be universally entrenched by brute force, while the political, social and economic systems must conform to their religious tenets. Religious extremism does not admit of any compromise with social change, particularly that which contradicts religious orthodoxy. In terms of hierarchy, therefore, religious extremism is the farthest and most lethal form of religious intolerance.

Also identified, are the accelerating process of globalization and democratization, the deepening economic hardship and social inequality, the resurgence of neo-liberal ideology, seeking to enforce market reforms, whittling down of state legitimacy and capacity, have sharpened the crisis of the nation state project in post-colonial Africa, particularly Nigeria. These have also led to the emergence of different individual groups such as Maitatsine, and Boko Haram sects redefining and reinventing the identities. Ifedayo and Gbadeyan (2022), submits that the very nature of the federal government and struggle for state powers contribute immensely to ethnic and religious conflicts. The result may be that the struggle for state power may be wrongly or correctly perceived. Besides, the unevenness generated by the modernization process is also perceived to be the major incentive to ethnic and religious conflicts. It has become an issue of contention as the effect of ethnicity and religion on the politics of resource allocation has redefined the nature of Nigerian politics around distribution of resources and not around production.

In 1977-1978 Constituent Assembly, the issue of religion and politics became political problem in Nigeria. In the debate, for the Christians, introducing sharia or a federal sharia court of appeal amounts to giving undue preference to the Muslims in a religiously pluralistic society with secular constitution. On the other hand, for Muslims, the common law is essentially Christian law and even the spirit of the Constitution is Christian in orientation. The Muslims have to struggle to get a position in the constitution (Mu’cizzam and Ibrahim, 2000:64). Since this controversy, the history of Nigeria has been plagued by problematic events right up to, as it were, the year 2012. Topical of these has been the heated debate in January 1986 over Nigeria’s membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

Jama'atu NASTRI Islam in a counter offensive called on the government for a work-free day on Friday (Mu'azzam et.al 2000). Other incidents that pointed to the change of attitude in politics of religion in Nigeria were: the 1987 Kaduna State religious riots, the Katsina March 27, 1991 religious riots, the December 26 1994, the July 26 2009 Boko Haram religious uprising in Maiduguri among others (Gbadeyan, Ola, Osadola& Ojo, 2024). The exploration of the root causes of religious conflict gives dual purposes. Apart from the exposition of the roots of the conflict, it opens the possible pathway which may be followed to resolving the conflict.

3.4 Implications of Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Egwu (1998), observes that communal crises, devastating religious uprisings and conflicts which have engulfed several states in Nigeria have become major issues for media coverage. Religious conflict has adverse consequences for a virile and good nation building. Apart from the killing of innocent citizens, the psychological trauma and destruction of property is great. Religious conflict vis-à-vis terrorism leads to a breakdown of law and order, weakens government resolve and ability to govern effectively, discourages investors both domestic and foreign, and as well threatens national productivity. The country's international image is badly affected by destructive conflict and terrorist activities. As indicated earlier, conflict can be revolutionary and at times desirable as an instrument of pursuing and achieving positive change in the society. The inference is that it may become legitimate, aimed at promoting the common good in the face of hardship and corruption.

However, there is no justification under the name of God, for criminal terrorists to violently pursue their private gains and repudiate the authority of a government. The key aims of terrorists are to kill, gain publicity, seek revenge, and force a change in policy or societal structures. The implications of conflict/terrorism may vary in accordance with the root causes, objective and amount of forces applied. Nevertheless, the following are identified as the negative implications of conflict/terrorism: physical injury and pain, death, mental agony from psychic terror, feeling of helplessness, destruction of property, damage to infrastructural facilities like electricity, installations and police posts, diversion of public funds from socio-economic development to security, abuse of human rights and loss of resources.

3.5 Religious Tolerance and Sustainable Mutual Confidence in Nigeria Inculcation of the Spirit of Tolerance

Downs (1999), defines tolerance as the posture and cordial effort to understand another's beliefs, practices, and habits without necessarily sharing or accepting them. This does not imply a shift from one's belief; however, it helps to consolidate the distinct primordial ties from shattering or being pulverized into various fragile tiles. The principle is simply to show empathy or indulgence for beliefs and practices differing from or conflicting with one's own. The ultimate reality is the same divine personality who is at the center of all religions. Thus, there are many paths that lead to the Truth, the only One, who knows no distinction. Therefore, no single tradition can legitimately claim superiority or definitive truth.

Nigeria is a religiously pluralistic society housing African traditional adherents, Christians, Muslims, and adherents of other secular ideologies; their harmonious co-existence requires positive tolerance. This is because; there will be no lasting peace in Nigeria unless the people learn not merely to tolerate but to respect other faith as their own.

IV. Conclusion

Economic development and societal wellbeing can only be achieved in an environment where multi-culturalism and multi-religiosity are guaranteed. The significant growth in human development in the Middle-Eastern states of United Arab Emirates and Qatar, and in Malaysia, among others, eloquently testifies to this assertion. Religious diversity should not constitute a barrier to human relations and development; rather it should be a tool or resource for national development. The religious faithful in Nigeria should, therefore, realise the fact that religious tolerance and harmony are both legally sanctioned and socially inevitable, as the world can never be composed of one religion or culture. Accordingly, whereas every religious group has the right to uninhibited religious practice, this must be done with commensurate or reciprocal respect for the rights of other faithful to practise their own religious traditions; provided that such does not constitute any derogation to the right of others to observe their own rituals.

This desirable scenario of religious harmony can be achieved in Nigeria only through the establishment and sustenance of a neo-religious educational praxis/system that would generate a culture and orientation of multi-religiosity in our children and youth, as well as a commensurate programme of re-orientation of the adult population. Hitherto, the dominant model of religious education in Nigeria has been faith-oriented and overwhelmed by religious indoctrination and dogma. Religious education is used to get people to embrace Christianity or Islam, rather than as a process or formation for religious tolerance and dialogue. Consequently, most children and youths are educated within this framework and are thus inclined to adopting a blind faith. This religious pedagogic gives little room for inter-faith understanding and harmony; hence religious intolerance is rife even among school children. There is, therefore, the need to reform the current curriculum on religious studies – which hitherto privileged the exclusive teaching of dogmatic Christian and Islamic doctrines – to a new praxis/system that would build in comparative religious studies, and expose students and pupils to basic principles of Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion – religious harmony and moral instructions. All religious communities must understand that there is no alternative to inter-faith dialogue, as there can never be a universal religion or an exclusive society for adherents of a particular religion. Furthermore, all religious communities must educate their clergy on the need for religious harmony and the toleration of other faiths, while also educating their clergy and laity on the need to keep their sermons within the realm of moderation and modesty. There is the need to strengthen inter-faith dialogue at the national, state and local levels in order to prevent future manifestations of religious violence. The Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), together with relevant Faith-Based Organisations and Civil Society Organisations should constantly engage in dialogue with the various religious communities, while also serving as a platform for conflict analysis and early warning on religious violence.

On the part of Government, there is a need for the development of a long-term strategy for the management of religious conflict/violence. First, Government should convene an ad-hoc 'National Summit on Religion' with the primary mandate of developing a National Policy/Strategy on Religion and the State (NPSRS). This summit should be drawn from major stakeholders, i.e. the three religious groups in the country (Christians, Muslims and Traditional Religious Practitioners) as well as state representatives. The summit could work on preliminary issues and subsequently recommend the establishment of a standing 'National Commission on Religion' (NCR) to continue a dialogue that would crystallise into the development of an NPSRS. The NPSRS would, among other things, discuss issues of secularity, thereby

delineating the role of religion in state affairs and vice versa. It should also design the rules of state-religion engagement in order to establish clear, consistent and predictable standards in state-religion relations as a basis for fairness and equity in the relationship between religion and the state. It would settle issues of proselytisation (encompassing all modes and methods of preaching), mutual engagement by all religious groups (perhaps this would ensure the strengthening of NIREC), the methods, means and extent of worship (involving consensus on acceptable and unacceptable modes of worship), punishment for acts that trigger religious violence, and a comprehensive 'Religious Conflicts Early Warning System' (RCEWS) that would configure an intelligence gathering and evaluation system on religious violence, and also design the means to its timely containment through preventive dialogue.

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