

Religious Faith and Militancy in Contemporary Nigeria: Interrogating the Links

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Abstract: The traditions and traditional religion of Pre-Islamic and Pre-Christianity societies in Africa were imbued with a lot of virtues that kept delinquent and other unethical behaviours at bay. The traditions and traditional religious practices guided and guard the societies of the past. In pre-colonial African society, feuding was undertaken as response to an offense or after provocation. The cardinal characteristics of feuding parties undertake the responsibility or obligation to end conflict by peaceful means. With the introduction of alien religions such as Christianity and Islam, the rhythms and rhymes of intra and inter-religious relations became substantially obliterated. This has produced huge negative intra-and inter-ethnic cum inter-religious results among the diverse cultural groups in Nigeria and indeed in most African societies; leading to communal conflicts between and among ethnic and religious groups. The paper, using oral and written sources, shows how this new development has created some overstrained irritable conditions, leading to religious militancy in Nigeria. The paper is of the view that old values and norms should be incorporated into the modern governance system and used to tackle security challenges, obliterate religious militancy so as to enhance harmonious co-existence in contemporary Nigerian society. The study therefore gave an overview of the general concept and causes of religious militancy in Nigeria and, advocated for ethical principles such as the common solidarity of humanity by origin, forgiveness and tolerance that could engender cordiality and understanding rather than sustained hostility and suspicion in Christian-Muslim relation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Contemporary, Faith, Interrogating, Militancy, Nigeria, Religion

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, makes an interesting case study of the uneasy nexus between religious identity and violence. This is largely because of its complex web of politically salient identities and history of chronic and seemingly intractable conflicts which qualify her as one of the most deeply divided countries in Africa. To be sure, Nigeria's vast heterogeneity, specifically its ethnic and religious diversity, rather than be a source of unity and strength, remains an abiding source of her societal tensions and political instability. The mixture which should serve as a source of national strength and potential, has become a seam interminably threatening to tear at the core of national peace, unity and posterity. A lot of fissures emanated as a result of the infiltration of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria, which are

results of the influence of these new religions and have become worrisome. This is a stark evidence for the neglect of the age-long cherished values of pre-colonial Nigerian societies. In the quest for political space, for instance, materialistic ethos was replaced with all-long-time values of most contemporary Nigerian societies. The stark neglect of the age-long cherished values of respect for the constituted authorities, elders and the aged, virtues of honesty, patriotism and the sacredness of human lives, among others, suffer huge neglect. The neglect of these pre-colonial virtues is evident in the moral laxity, insecurity and discordant intergroup relations and of course religious militancy in contemporary Nigeria. Traditions and traditional religion held an aura of moral rectitude in most African societies prior to the advent of Islam and Christianity. In the quest for the adoption of these new religions and their stoic beliefs system, the old African

traditions and traditional religious practices were regarded as heathen and so, of no value. More so in the quest for political space, these new religions are used as yardsticks for appointments, relations in the society and even in academic circles, to the detriment of merits which the African traditions and traditional religion emphasis. All these among others are sources of religious tensions and militant actions prevalent in most contemporary Africa societies.¹

The Problem

Conflict is a great predicament in any human society, and most times, it is predictable. In fact, history indicates that conflict is an on-going process in human relations and may occur within and among groups and communities at any time. Religious militancy is a serious problem that has threatened the security of various countries the world over for a long time, more especially the Arab nations. It should however be noted that the tentacles of militancy have recently spread to Africa in general, in the past three decades and Nigeria in particular, in the past one and half decade. In the case of Nigeria, the frequency of religious militancy in the contemporary period especially between 1987 to present has left adverse effects on the socio-economic polity of the people. One major question is, why religious militancy in contemporary Nigeria or why does religion seem to need violence, and violence in religion? In a religiously pluralistic society such as Nigeria, it has been observed that the divisible aspects of religion, rather than the integrative, have been allowed to thrive at the detriment of the well-being of the society. Religious tensions have led to riots and intolerance. As a result of this unhealthy rivalry, this atmosphere charge with suspicion, distrust and hatred has become characteristic of religious relations in Nigeria.

Theoretical Conception

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 landscape of the nation is the sort of conflict that is based on, or centrally involves, religious differences. Such 'religious conflicts' are quite frequent and occur mostly between the Christian and Muslim population in the Northern part of the country. These conflicts have resulted in the loss of lives and properties and have tremendously fractured the Christian-Muslim relationship in the country. Furthermore, these religious

conflicts and crises have also hindered genuine national integration more than fifty years after Nigeria's independence, thus, raising serious concerns on the unity of the nation. In this vein, several debates and attempts have been made towards resolving the many crises facing Nigeria. The potential for conflict subsists whenever and wherever people have contact. As people are organized into groups to seek a common goal, the probability of conflict greatly increases. Conflicts may occur at several levels and include families, friends and colleagues at work place. Conflict has also been regarded as a strategy and an attempt to coerce power when and where understanding and reason fall short. There are individuals and groups who use conflict as a strategy to achieve their goals and change existing statuses. They may instigate conflict to gain recognition and call attention to their message. The ultimate goal is, however, not recognition as such but to motivate people higher in the power structure to address a certain problem. Otite and Albert, suggest:

Conflicts have their objective bases in the society. The concept is validated daily over access to a variety of limited resources which are created and distributed within defined establishment and location: Conflicts are real, and serve in the above circumstances in the achievement of goal or the maintenance of claims.²

Commenting further on the concept of conflict, Magagula claims:

conflict is a serious disagreement, struggle, and fight arising out of, differences of opinions, wishes, needs, values, and interests between and among individuals or groups.³

This view is buttressed by the views of Coser as cited by Okai thus:

A struggle between and among individuals or groups over values and claims to scarce resources, status symbols, and power bases. The objective of the individuals or groups engaged in conflict is to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals so that they can enjoy the scarce resources, the status symbols, and power bases.⁴

Conflict is a phenomenon that is an important part of human existence and a natural part of our daily lives. Conflict relationship is that in which individuals, groups and societies assert their claims as they interact with a view of benefiting exclusively from the others. This is achieved through restricting the access of the other groups to any reward that arises from their interaction. In conflict relations therefore, there is no indication of pursuing reward jointly. According to David J. Francis, conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. He, however, admonished violent conflict, armed conflict, mass murder and genocide against unarmed civilians as not inevitable and as such is an anomaly.⁵

It is, therefore, not startling to discover that conflict is envisioned as an intentional struggle among collective players who employ social power to conquer or eliminate real or imagined adversaries in order to achieve status or resources, or to impose their values on other social groups.⁶ Thus, conflict is rife within and between social relations such as ethnic groups, social institutions and organizations, religious groups, political parties and States. Furthermore, it is prevalent in situations where the goals, aspirations, interests, and needs of the social groups cannot be achieved simultaneously and the value systems of such groups are at variance. Invariably, the social parties purposely employ their power bases to fight for their position with a view to defeat, neutralize or eliminate one another.⁷ In Nigeria Islam which should be a religion of peace, is at the fore burner of religious intolerance. Instances of this are abundant and as it can be seen in the current Boko Haram internecine war or terrorism in the north east and which has now gradually engulfed the entire country. Nigeria is bedevilled by myriads of problems which, despite its oil riches, inhibit its development and even threaten its continued existence as a sovereign nation. This is shown in the proceeding analysis.

Precolonial Islamic Siege in Northern Nigeria

The assertion of Kadala on religions as a portentous source of conflict is affirmed in the case of Plateau State. Quoting the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Of all the differentiating factors in society, perhaps religious affiliation has the greatest potential for fuelling dissension and strife since it touches very deep emotions and convictions. Rather than inspire and guide humans to heights of loving and generous behaviour, religion can also be utilised to express the most narrow, bigoted and vicious of attitude towards those outside the community.⁸

The above assertion has been given prominence in Plateau State, for instance. Any act of omission or commission by any of the other religious divide is quickly given religious understanding. The jihad carried out under the leadership of Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817), the Fulani scholar who founded the Sokoto Caliphate, has being the focal point of the history of Islam in Nigeria. The undue emphasis on its centrality and dominance had, however, become a source of consternation among other Muslims and scholars in what made up the former northern Nigeria. Some of the reasons have been cultural, theological, historical and political. The people of Bornu Empire for example, argued that their Islam predated that of the Sokoto by seven centuries.⁹ They need not to be evangelized. Kano, on the other hand, snubbed Sokoto on the ground that Islam had

been in Kano since the reign of Yaji in the 14th century. In the Middle Belt areas on the other hand, Harold Gunn asserts that, "...it appears that Muslims lived with pagans in a condition of social symbiosis that no attempt was made to convert the hill peoples, and that, in fact, indigenous life was little influenced by Islam until after the area was first administered."¹⁰ Inter-communal relations create avenues for interaction, and given their ethnic differences, Frank Salamone noted that "...Ethnic boundaries are permeable and people, sometimes singly and sometimes in groups, cross them. They do so in general, either to maximize their opportunities or to minimize or neutralize threats."¹¹ These views were corroborated by Ames when he said that,

Contrary to what is often asserted, it would seem that these Mohammadans have not so far affected the conversion of any appreciable number of Pagans, in spite of the fact that their ranks include a number of returned ex-slaves who adopted the Mohammadan faith during their enforced exile from their native lands.¹²

After the overthrow of the Hausa-city-states, the Islamic society developed to become a sort of indigenous imperial system. The new Fulani aristocrats began the annexation of territories and appointment of those who were flag bearers during the jihadist wars as emirs and district heads in non-Muslim areas. Zaria emirate, for example, is notorious in this territorial expansionist policy. The expansion of the territories and sway of Islamic religion was aggressively followed. In the Middle Belt region, the Fulani state-builders had its basic characteristic features manifested in the period between 1817 and 1900. In that period,

A domination which was established in the name of religion of justice had fallen into tyranny, tempered only by the weakness or the moderation of personal rule. Under Dan Fodio and Bello, the conquering armies of the Fulani were enjoined to spread the true faith and to convert the pagans to Islamism. At a later period, it was found more profitable to leave the pagans in a condition in which it was lawful to make slaves and to exact tributes and Fulani wars degenerated into little more than slave raiding expedition.¹³

This imperialistic onslaught on the Middle Belt groups was derived from the despatches of Dan Fodio when he launched the Jihad. He had written,

The waging of Holy war (al-jihad) is obligatory by assent...and that to make war upon the heathen king who will not say 'There is no God but Allah' is obligatory by assent and to take the government from him is obligatory by assent; and that to make war upon the heathen king who does not say 'There is no God but Allah' on account of the custom of his town (bi-Sahabi 'urfi 'L-baladi) and who makes no profession of Islam is (also) obligatory by assent; and that to take the government from him is obligatory by assent.¹⁴

The siege and disdainful attitudes of the Muslim society on non-Muslims have therefore a historical antecedent. Thus, when Sultan Bello took over the reins of religious and political authority, he laid down three social and religious categories of people in the territories he claimed as God-given for the purpose of Islamic society.

Firstly there are the pure Moslems; secondly there are those that have mingled heathen and Moslem practices...the third category are those of heathen origins who have never entered Islam...let their children and women be taken as slaves and their property divided...The Mallams are in entire agreement upon this point.¹⁵

By these assertions the territories of the Middle Belt peoples became conceived as peripheries of Islamic exploitation and slave-raids. It is in this light that current ethno-religious conflicts/militancy in contemporary Nigeria should be viewed and understood.

In the Plateau area for example, there were three most aggressive emirates of Bauchi, Ningi and Zazzau which attempted severally to extend their sway on the Plateau area. These efforts were often than not, rebuffed both peacefully, as evidenced in the "amana alliance" and militarily, as shown in the series of resistance to the infiltration of Islam. Following the declaration of the Sokoto jihad and establishment of Bauchi emirate, the Anaguta people for example entered into a mutual pact, known as "amana" with the emirate administration. The emirate wanted the Anaguta people to pay tribute without a corresponding gesture. The Anaguta resisted this and many other policies of the emirate on them. In reaction to this, the emirate organised forces against them. The Anaguta invited their neighbours such as Amo, Buji, Rebina, among others to assist them which they did. The combined forces of Amo, Anaguta, Afizere, Berom and Buji defeated the jihadists. Thus, by 1873, the "amana alliance" between the Anaguta and the Bauchi emirate establishment broke down. During Anaguta Group interview conducted by the present researcher, the Group noted that the alliance worked in favour of the Hausa and Fulani to the detriment of the indigenous people. Thus, the need for concerted efforts to dislodge the intruders.¹⁶ The victory of this combined force put an end to further emirate attacks in the area until the coming of the British colonialists in 1894 and the introduction of British Native administration in the area by 1902.¹⁷

Thus, since then the Plateau area has been perceived by the Islamic world in Nigeria as an enemy of Islam. The September 2001 conflict for example and subsequent conflicts on the Plateau area have full religious connotations.

Although religion is a defining factor in relations between the people of Plateau State and the surrounding emirates in the pre-colonial, colonial and immediate post-colonial

period, religious differences have not been as destructive as they have been since Nigeria's return to democratic dispensation in 1999. There has never been a high-level conflict that hinged on religion. There are of course tensions between the two major religions, but the resultant anxieties were minimal to produce conflict.

The initial conflict that brought the Muslim Hausa/Fulani and the indigenous Berom, Anaguta and Afizere at loggerhead was on the appointment by the colonial adventurers of a Hausa as the Sarkin Jos in person of Mallam Ishiaku. This appointment was a source of unctuous nerves flexing. Ayaka and Yongo forcefully noted that, "The selection and installation of Rwang Pam, an indigene as the Sarki of Jos as well as Gbong Gwom of the Berom did not go down well with the Hausa community, they have ever since been against being ruled by someone they considered a Pagan."¹⁸ For the indigenes the quest for power and control of resources was achieved in 1948 when Rwang Pam was installed as the Gwong Gwom of Berom and Sarki of Jos.¹⁹ While the indigenes were happy, the settlers especially the Hausa who constitute a significant number of Plateau areas "did not like it especially as their religion forbids them to be ruled by Pagans."²⁰ This state of garbed religious distrust has been the situation in Plateau State and most northern States of Nigeria with significant Christian population during and immediately after colonial rule. It is in this vein that many Nigerian observers agree that religion has been a powerful instrument deviously manipulated (especially by local political elites) to achieve political ends in northern States of Nigeria.

The Contemporary Religious Militancy

In religious conflicts, it is not clear which aims are to be achieved. Nwaomah observes conversion campaigns, as in Nigeria, "by opposing religion(s) and fanaticism arising from indoctrination of the adherents, mostly due to parochial education, can also reinforce religious hostilities and thus create a conflict."²¹ In other words, what makes religious conflicts special are the unique effects of religious doctrines on the psyche of the adversaries, the formation of values, and the central role of feelings and emotions for group identification. But Kenny noted that religion in the politics of 1970 onwards was a major vehicle which the politicians used for secular interests, especially in the Nigerian Muslim-Christian relations.²² This, might be because of the regional dominance of the two major religions in Nigeria - Islamic North and Christian South and the gullibility of the masses when greedy political leaders appeal to threat on their religion as an easy excuse to protect political status. The political class and religious clerics most often harp on religious difference to achieve political or religious gains. According to Audu Musa, a resident of Jos, politicians and

religious leaders of both Christianity and Islam are the main culprits in the ongoing religious militancy in Nigeria.²³ If this duo have it right, Nigerians will be at peace with one another, he concluded. His conclusion is derived from the massive influence they have on the populace across the country. It is therefore forthright to aver that most conflicts in Nigeria, have indeed found some expression along religious fault lines, and particularly in relation to Islam in Nigeria. In fact, further scholarly import from the academic literature is instructive in the way it guides our thoughts on the central role of religion. Ellis and Haar describe religion as an emerging political language whose pattern of interaction cannot be ignored in the study of African politics.²⁴

Rev Fr (Dr) Matthew Hassan Kukah's very insightful and wide-range in analysis book, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*, achieved a sophisticated analysis of the role of religion in northern Nigeria. He combines an analysis of ethnicity and religion as well as politics and religion and offers interesting insights into the complex Nigeria situation. Kukah tersely noted:

The ascendancy of Hausa-Fulani hegemony has coincided with the alienation and marginalization of the non-Muslims, Christians and adherents of traditional religions in the region. Although the predicament of the non-Muslims predated colonialism, post-colonial politics, education, western modernization and Christianity have made non-Muslims ask themselves questions relating to their positions within the region as a people. Such questions include the reasons for their perceived economic and political alienation vis-à-vis the rise of Hausa-Fulani hegemony in the region in particular and the nation as a whole.²⁵

According to him, the major limitation of this political ecumenism was the fact that in matters of political power, it attached an expiration label on non-Hausa and Fulani Muslims on one hand and non-Muslims in general on the other. For Kukah, the process of political bargaining in Nigeria appears to increasingly embody the factor of religion.²⁶ Toyin Falola 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 Nigeria.²⁷ It was in this vein that Kukah noted that Mrs. Ladi Shehu, a political activist, lamented to a journalist, "People from the upper North were okay, they were properly northerners, and if you are a Muslim, well, that improves your position, but if you were from the Middle Belt, you are another class of northerner."²⁸

In the overall estimation of various scholars writing on religion and politics in Nigeria, there appears to be an almost seamless connection between several violent incidents from the 1960s through the decades up to the current period. And at different phases in this historical trajectory, the controversy between Muslims

and Christians over the definition and interpretation of 'secularity' for instance has offered opportunities for analysts to gauge what they see as diametrically-opposed platforms of Muslims against Christians in Nigeria. On the one hand for instance, northern Nigerian Christians arguing self-defence, have in the past justified the use of militancy to protect their lives and defend their faith through the use of physical violence. On the other hand, however, Islam appears to have gained wider reputation for militancy than Christianity, as clearly more cases of religious violence involving Islamist groups are reported.²⁹ Notably, between January and September 2012, at least 119 police officers were killed in suspected Boko Haram attacks, more than in all of 2010 and 2011 combined. On December 26, 2011, the day after Boko Haram's bombing of a church in Madalla, Niger State, the group's spokesperson Abu Qaqa avowed: 'There will never be peace until our demands are met.'³⁰

Gofwen identifies four reasons that inflame the religious bigotry prevalent in Nigeria. These are:

- (i) The differing political philosophy of the major religions in Nigeria, Islam and Christianity.
- (ii) The mutual suspicions and fear of domination between the two religions.
- (iii) Mutual ignorance of the beliefs and teachings of each other's religion and sometimes even of one's own faith.
- (iv) Provocative acts of pronouncements which hurt the religious sensibilities of people of other faiths, whether they are intended or inadvertent.³¹

The causes of militancy are many and they include political, economic, social, ethnic, racial and religious factors. The factor focused on in the current study, noted in the discourse thus far, is religion. This is because of its highly volatile nature in Nigeria. Religion plays a serious role in fostering terrorist tendencies because of its penchant for labelling one group as superior and others as inferior based on their monopoly of access and ownership of a supposed supreme universal being. It is quite disheartening that Islam; a religion that translates to peace is in the forefront of religious militancy (various violent militant groups like Boko Haram and Al Sunna Wal Jamma) abound in Nigeria. The major reason for this could be because, ab initio, the history of Islam was very violent as indicated by the "JIHAD" fought by the founder of the religion and other later adherents to proselytize the society. This killing of "unbelievers" at that time has transmuted into terroristic activities today. This coupled with the activities of some unscrupulous Islamic religious leaders preaching violent messages of intolerance has made militancy an avenue for some religious entities to vent their frustration on the society. In particular, political mobilisations along ethno-religious lines increasingly put ethno-religious groups at daggers drawn. This has not only triggered conflicts that have claimed thousands of lives and properties, but

ultimately precluded the emergence of a true national identity. Individually and (or) collectively, the disparate and often warring groups in Nigeria subscribe to a model of conduct that elevates religion over and above the broader interests of the national state. This could be seen in the case of the Shiite and Boko Haram groups which is on-going, unfortunately unabated, in Nigeria. Indeed, since Nigeria's return to civil rule in 1999, religious identity politics and attendant violence have assumed historically unprecedented proportions. In Nigeria today, religion is politicised, politics is religionised and religious groups tend toward becoming political formations whose struggles with each other and competing interests may be more conflictual due to the exclusivity of religious group membership. But in all, it is the politics of religion that has brought upon Nigerians the trouble of religious militancy.

It is a cinch that in Nigeria today, religion is at the front banner of ethnic differentiation. In this clime, religion is increasingly identified with ethnicity and conflicts are given religious undertones. Religion is often fused with power acquisition. Thus, groups who feel discriminated against reclus back to their religion as the force for mobilisation of their dissent and protest.

Among the followers of the two religions in Nigeria, there has been a rise in influence of religious fundamentalism and leaders mobilising their believers in the name of religion. Currently, apprehensions existed as to what direction each of the religion is focused on and the possible consequences it might have on the inter-group and inter-religious relations. Noting this apprehension, Kadala averred, "...as much as the Sharia code may be desirable to help curb moral decadence in our society, Christians in northern Nigeria are worried because of their experience even with limited establishment of Sharia code and the outcome of the establishment in some States and locations in Nigeria and elsewhere.³²

This worry stemmed from the status of Christians in an Islamic state. Under the Islamic state, non-Muslims are treated as second class citizens without mandate to hold political offices.³³ In this guise the non-Muslim has a subject status (dilmī) and to be exploited by the former. Thus, the Muslim-Muslim political power calculation has become popular among many Islamic clerics in Nigeria. This portend serious disaffection and possible cracking of the nerve that held Nigeria together. The Plateau people for instance, noting the experiences of non-Muslims in States that have declared Sharia were rightly gripped with apprehension and fear of possible Islamic domination not only on the Plateau area, but the entire nation. Joseph Kenny has also noted in Sharia States how Sharia-induced fundamentalism has led to the razing of Churches and denial or ban on teaching Christian religious knowledge in schools, and how many Christians have lost their jobs and businesses and have to relocate to either their States of origin or some relatively

religious tolerant States such as Plateau, Nasarawa and Benue.³⁴ Thus, the gust of Plateau people therefore was for this Sharia related acts being replicated in the State.

It is also worthy of note that these apprehensions are not restricted to the Christians alone. The Muslims are also worried about the tremendous inroads Christianity is making into the hitherto dominant Muslim abodes. This monopolistic religious control of Islamic religion is gradually being eroded and encroached by activities of Christian missionaries. Islam had enjoyed a high level of monopoly in most parts of northern Nigeria since the jihad of Usman Dan Fodio. However, there is now noticeable breakthrough in this monopoly by Christianity. This breakthrough informed the vitriolic arguments on the merits and demerits of the Islamic system in the 1978 Constituent Assembly constitutional debate. It is a known fact that the Middle Belt has received Christianity and has served as springboard in spreading Christianity into Muslim dominated areas in the north. Thus, Plateau is viewed as the headquarters of this Christian identity which has helped in eroding the hold of Islam on the north. Some of the violence on the Plateau is therefore efforts by the Hausa/Fulani to destabilise and checkmate the spread of Christianity in the north. Thus, since the early 1980s, there has been violence targeted at Christians across the country.³⁵ Karl Maier was forthright when he notes that "Since independence, the Middle Belt has been the scene of frequent flare ups, rooted in minority attempts to free themselves from Hausa-Fulani establishment."³⁶ In fact, the volatility of religious crises is endemic in the Middle Belt region.³⁷

It is therefore obvious that the on-going religious militancy in Nigeria, especially in Northern Nigeria has religious, ethnic and political undertones, but with religion taking the centre stage. Pointing at Plateau State, Mvendiga Jibo noted that, "The violent clashes in Plateau may be infrequent, but they are very dangerous because any conflict involving the predominantly Hausa/Fulani with the non-Hausa-Fulani Christians has both ethnic and religious component."³⁸ Islamic religious connotations are for instance given strong vehemence in predominantly Muslim States like Kano. The above assertion is strengthened by Strategic Conflict Assessment Report in Nigeria. The Report notes that,

There is a definite feeling especially among Muslim Clerics in Kano, that the zone's identity is mainly religious, particularly Islamic, and such identity should be protected at all costs. The options are for the acceptance of such identity or division of the country.³⁹

This confirmed the apprehension of Christians of possible Islamic domination of Nigeria and the enforcement of Islamic Sharia code on the entire citizenry. The interplay of religion and ethnicity in Nigeria found expression more in Kano and Kaduna, and now Plateau States. In a situation of ethnic conflicts in these States an Igbo Muslim may not be saved simply because he or she

is Muslim. Here, the ethnic component may become paramount. The Yoruba or Igbo Muslim is separated and identified and he or she does not have the same Muslim status as his or her Hausa neighbour or local community members. Gwamna noting this scenario in the States mentioned, noted that,

In these instances, Muslims singled out both the Igbo and the Yoruba Muslims and other Muslims of the minority ethnic groups, for killing. The ethnic mark became the major identity and not religion. In fact, at this point, Hausa-Fulani identity now emerged as the Muslim identity, while “others” were grouped as aliens and unbelievers, and *arna* (in Hausa). In other words, religion was only used for expedience particularly by Muslims, when it comes to numerical arguments to assert superiority over others and not at critical moments in religious crisis.⁴⁰

Viewed from all perspectives, religion has occupied and enmeshed other factors, in the increasingly cancerous militancy in Nigeria. For every riot with a religious undertone that has ever occurred in Nigeria, it must be noted, have ended up retarding the progress of such people/areas by half or a decade.

Professor Sa’ad Abubakar noted in his dream for Nigeria in 2002, during the 46th Annual Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria:

I sincerely pray for a country that would be at peace with itself and, with all things being equal, a country of equal opportunities, and a nation that respects basic human rights under the rule of law with social justice, freedom and equity occupying a central position. As a black and African country, the Nigeria of my dream has always been one that would welcome, with open arms, people of its kind from across the universe.⁴¹

Based on the analysis above, it was safely deduced that one of the intractable problems of contemporary Nigeria is how government responds to such ‘sub-nationalities’ quests for a measure of autonomy.

CONCLUSION

The greatest challenge to the world community in this century is how to promote peaceful co-existence between people of different histories, languages, and religions, who find themselves intertwined in a single State. Religion which Karl Max once described as “the opium of the masses” has left many nations with rising tension. For almost two decades now, Nigeria is suffering from violence and killings from extremist Islamic group called Boko Haram. This group’s activities have claimed many lives and forced millions fleeing their normal home of abodes and the country for safety and survival. The numerous religious conflicts in Nigeria have left adverse effects on the social, political and economic life of the

nation. It is in this regard that this conclusion is drawn in the quest to diminish religious conflicts/militancy and enhance a peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Major findings of the study reveal that the causes of religious conflicts in Nigeria include failure to move with change, conflicting doctrines, methods of conversion, utterances of religious leaders, and clothing of political objectives with religion, among others. The implications of religious militancy as reveal by the study include creation of mistrust among federating units, low productivity, job insecurity, migration, over population, among others. Based on the foregoing, it is proposed in this study that the issue of religious conflicting doctrines should be addressed by religious bodies who should meet on regular bases. Also, government should respond quickly to curtail conflicts and should not ignore any act that might cause conflict. One way of reducing the violence is to starve it of foot soldiers. Creating more jobs to absorb the teeming millions of idle youths, many of them secondary school and college graduates will help the cause of peace. Besides, in combating violence in the Nigerian state, the Nigerian government should use a mixture of carrot and stick in its fight and reduce the use of military force against the aggrieved combatants and listen more to their complaints. Community frustrations, perceived and real, that are disregarded by the national government may lead to short tempers and spill over into outright conflict.

The Christian and Muslim leaders in Nigeria, on the other hand, must continue to reach out and sustain the dialogue processes, spearhead inter-religious education and seek every opportunity to educate its followers and others on the ills of violence. Nigerians should observe the red light of religious intolerance from Sudan, which has been balkanised by religious war. It also behoves the Christian and Muslim communities to reject the manipulative acts of some political leaders, who constantly seek ways to flame the nation with violence under the guise of religious patriotism, for their selfish political interests. It is only sustained efforts in these directions that will build the Nigerian nation despite the different religious ideologies espoused by its people. Christian and Muslim leaders should endeavour to impress on their followers the teaching on the solidarity of humankind. This solidarity is couched in the common teachings of the two religions that all humanity, our religious and political ideologies notwithstanding, have one source of existence-the creative act of God. This study has therefore advocated the need for harmonious relations among inter-groups and inter-religious groups in Nigeria with a view to understanding its implication for the entire Nigerian society.

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