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**RELIGION AND THE NIGERIAN STATE**

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**ABSTRACT**

One interesting character observed about religion in Nigeria is that it has played both the anabolic and catabolic roles in the society. It has been used as a catalyst for building up as well as instrument for demolishing peaceful coexistence of the citizens of the country.

Historical evidences attest to the fact that religious resurgence most especially in the northern part of the country led to violent riots that claimed the lives of more than 100,000 Christians and Muslims within a space of 34 years (1977 and 2011). From examination carried out on the perennial incidence of religio-political crises in Nigeria, factors responsible include the missionary spirit of the Christian faith which the Muslims could not tolerate; persistent attempts to nationalize sectional interest; the surreptitious use of religion by the government to achieve economic or political advantages and the reluctance to accept a change in certain areas.

Having considered the effects of religious crises on the psyche of the citizens, the paper recommends that Nigerians must come to terms with the religious plurality of the country and the imperatives of secularity. Harmonious coexistence demands sacrifice from various religious groups within the state while attitudinal re-engineering is recommended at all levels of religious and political leadership.



## I. INTRODUCTION

Going down the memory lanes, one is confronted with the fact that the Nigerian State has experienced series of religious violence. However, the current preponderance increase in the acts of cold-blooded terrorism, kidnapping, rampart organised violence and virulent ideological insurgency by religious fanatics in recent times has made the citizens of Nigeria as well as nationals of other countries vulnerable to attacks. Nigeria is now a country where some religious fundamentalist movements kill innocent people in the name of religion. The new nihilists shed blood persistently as long as everyone in Nigeria refuses to embrace their ideology or religious ideals. It is imperative to make a reference to the unpleasant demand of a religious sect popularly known as *Boko Haram (Yusufiyya)* who laid among other conditions for the cessation of terrorism, the conversion of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to Islam and that Nigerians must accept its own brand of Islam or else the country will continue to experience upheavals.

Besides this sect, there are other nefarious religious insurgents whose attempts to enforce their religious ideologies have sparked off crises that pose a threat to national security. What is more disturbing is the fact that the perennial incidence of religious crises emanate from adherents of monotheistic religions which preach peaceful coexistence in the society. Could it be that these fundamentalists lack sufficient understanding of their religions and the constitutional provision that Nigeria is a secular state? Micheal Ekpenyong asserts that Islam is etymologically and doctrinally a

religion of peace and that this is conveyed in the 99 names of Allah.<sup>1</sup> A similar vein Jesus Christ and his Jewish followers were fond of saluting people with the expression *shalom leka*. The word “Shalom” and the Arabic cognate *YSHLAM* both mean peace. But that peace is eluding Nigerian society because of the activities of adherents of both Christianity and Islam which is unimaginable and contradictory.

Therefore, it is pertinent to make some clarifications of the concepts, Religion and Nigerian State.

### (a) Religion

According to Dada Adelowo,<sup>2</sup> religion has no specific definition because any attempt to do so leads to further argumentation. Although this view was shared by other scholars, yet some basic truths are inherent in the concept. The concept religion is a relative word or personal experiential phenomenon. More importantly, religion deals with the issue of Ultimate Reality which is beyond complete human understanding. Some common features of religions should be identified. S. Awoniyi asserts that there are beliefs, supernatural beliefs, a supernatural life, secular world-views, the destiny of man, the meaning of history, sacredness, worship, and ethics.<sup>3</sup> Nigeria is playing host to

<sup>1</sup> M.O. Ekpenyong, 2005. *Beware of gods: Economics, Ethics and Politics for National Development*. Ibadan: Daily Graphics Nigerian Ltd., p93.

<sup>2</sup> E.D. Adelowo, 2001. *Methods and Theories of Religion*. Ado Ekiti: Olugbenro Press and Publishers, p.2

<sup>3</sup> S. Awoniyi, 2003. *Religion and Society in Nigeria since Independence in Essays in Contemporary Nigeria History*. Akungba-Akoko: First Academic Publishers, p351.



Christianity and Islam alongside the indigenous religion. It should be noted that it is from the mission-oriented religions that conflicts always emanate. There are other belief systems such as Asian-oriented belief systems, secular ideologies or world-views in the country. Odumuyiwa in his own perspective affirms that:

There is no society that is devoid of religion and religious activities. Even in an atheistic society, it is presumed that such society recognizes the place of religion believing that there is no God is a kind of belief.<sup>4</sup>

This assertion implies that religion is an inescapable phenomenon in human society because religion exists and it is practised in society, and every society has a religion as a moral sustainer with the view to building a well-ordered society. Scharf establishes that, religion has a pervading, continuing and universal power in all societies.<sup>5</sup> It is in this sense that Durkheim once said that “the voice of man is the void God” (vox populi vox dei).

Lending credence to the discussion, Ehianu says that by the time of Nigeria’s independence in 1960, the country was drawn more or less along religious zones of influence, namely, the largely Muslim north and the Christian south.<sup>6</sup> The latter was

subdivided into the predominantly catholic east and the west, with an almost equal number of Muslims and Christians. The traditional religion has the rare quality of accommodation and tolerance to other religions. It is not a proselytizing religion in the sense that it does not go forth seeing converts neither does it pick offence when deserted by its adherents nor assume that its object of worship is superior. For its docility, the religion has remained the recruiting ground for other religious groups.

This is not the case with Islam and Christianity, both of which not only arrogate themselves the status of being the sole dispensers of salvation but enjoin their adherents to canvas for followership. For the Christians, the catalyst for missionary zeal is derived from Mathew 28:19 (NIV): “Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations...” In Islam, you find such passages as:

Fight against such as those who have been given the scriptures and believe no in Allah, nor the last day, who do not forbid what Allah and His apostles have forbidden, and do not embrace the true faith, until they pay tribute out of hand and are utterly subdued.

Quran 9:29

Another passage admonishes Muslims thus:

It is he who has sent forth His messenger with guidance and the true faith to make it triumphant over all

<sup>4</sup> E.A.Odumuyiwa, 2001. “A Religious but Criminal Society – Any Remedy? 19<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture Olabisi Onabanjo University Ago-Iwoye Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2001 p.3.

<sup>5</sup> B.R.Scharf, 1970. *The Sociological Study of Religion*, London: Hutchinson Publishers Company Ltd. pp. 82-87. See also Dzurgha, A God and Ceasar pp. 42-43.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson Ehianu, 2012. *Religious Crises in Nigeria and their Implications for Good Governance and*

*Development*. Ibadan: Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan. p 127.



religions, however much the idolaters may dislike it.

Quran 9:33

In carrying out these mandates, adherents of these religions have in their frenzied zeal employed such means as politics of exclusion, intimidation, blackmail, manipulation of ethnic sentiments and violence in an attempt to out-do each other and gain the ascendancy. Thus, conflicts of varying magnitude continually ensue, due to the teaching of these religions on the one hand, and human foibles on the other. Islam, for instance, is theocentric in its doctrine. This means that it does not draw any line between religion and state, spiritual and mundane affairs. Both are fused and entrusted in the hand of one man who is believed to be Allah's representative. Besides, in Quran 4:59 Muslims are enjoined to aspire to rule themselves wherever they may be according to Allah's laid down laws.

The challenges of political domination by adherents necessitated the birth of the Christian Social Movement (CSMN), an organ described by Asemota as the socio-political wing of the Christian Association of Nigeria. This organ is saddled with the responsibilities of mobilizing and conscientizing Christians on their religious and political rights. It is to complement CAN on social issues and to act as its think tank on political matters.

From the foregoing, it appears obvious that the two major religious groups in Nigeria-Muslims and Christians have pursued parochial interests. There has been desperation to win converts not just because it is a religious duty, but more as a result of

the advantages which numerical superiority confers in the field of politics as religion and politics have become somewhat of a Siemens twins. The aftermath of the cut throat competition between Christians and Muslims is the emergence of monstrous religious crises.

## (b) **The Nigerian State**

The setting up of the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) in 1976 was part of the efforts of the Murtala regime to pursue the programme of the return to civil rule by the military administration. A draft constitution was ready on the 20th August, 1976 and the government threw it for debates and comments around the country. Then, at this juncture, the Sharia debate at the Constituent Assembly (CA) in 1977/78 marked an important landmark in ushering religion into Nigerian politics till today.<sup>7</sup> It was evident that the debate on Sharia continued to dominate the political landscape beyond the political programme of 1979.

In consonance with the second Vatican Council Declaration on religious freedom, the Nigeria's 1979 and the suspended 1989 constitutions enshrined the protection of freedom of thought, conscience and religion thus:

- a. Prohibition of a state religion, that is, a particular religion should not be taken as an official religion in the country;
- b. Everyone has the freedom to practice their religion according to their conviction;

<sup>7</sup> M.H. KuKah, 1993. *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, pp. 115-120.



- c. While teaching of religion is allowed in schools, there should be no compulsion in matters of religious education.

However, the secular formulation of the religion vis-à-vis state relationship has been the subject of controversy particularly between Christians and Muslims. While Christians interpret the constitution to mean that Nigeria is a secular state and consider this appropriate given the country's heterogeneity, Muslims see church/state separation as Judaeo-Christian Western doctrine. The Grand Khadi of Abuja declared in 1994 that church/state separation is not acceptable in Islam, and that one provision of the constitution does not make Nigeria a secular state. The Muslims often refer to the preamble to the constitution which invokes the guiding image of a harmonious state "under God". Also, the Muslims regard common law as laden with Christian ideals and doctrines. They further argue that Sunday is a work-free day of rest in contrast to Muslim Friday prayer day. Again, they submit that the cross is used as a symbol of medical and health services; why not the Islamic crescent?<sup>8</sup>

The Nigerian State is a pluralistic society with diverse religious traditions and a secular constitution that prohibits a State religion as contained in section 10 of the 1999 constitution, which states that 'the Government of the Federation or of a State

shall not adopt any religion as a State Religion.<sup>9</sup>

In the light of the above, it is pertinent to reiterate that Nigeria as a nation state is essentially pluralistic with three major religious traditions (African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity) apart from several other faiths such as Baha'I Faith, Hare Krishna, Sat Guru Maharaji among others competing for relevance and recognition. So for a particular religious sect to be advocating a State religion is something that baffles any rational mind. It is absolutely necessary to note that religious Pluralism is not the enemy of the stability of the Nigeria state, because religious pluralism is the normal state of affairs.

## II. RELIGIOUS CRISES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Historically, the interplay between religious pluralism, security and development in Nigeria has been a sour one in the sense that there have been escalations of conflicts in the nation since the 80s. The conflicts have been ethno-religious in nature. As Muhammed notes that since 1977/78 Sharia controversies at the Constituent Assembly (CA), the issue of religion has increasingly plays significant role in both domestic and foreign affairs of the nation. A historical analysis of ethno-religious violence in the nation by Oden reveals that religious pluralism breeds religious conflicts and this has had grave consequences on the nation security and development. The following are the historical overview of

<sup>8</sup> K. Boyl, et al *Freedom of Religion* p. 53 See also the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979 p.16.

<sup>9</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999. *The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Abuja: Government Printers.



major religious conflicts that have taken place:

1. Kano religious riots: 18th -24th December, 1980 led by one Maitatsine group. Both Muslims and Christians, numbering about 4,177 persons were killed and there was wanton destruction of private and public properties.
2. Maiduguri religious riots: 2nd-3rd October, 1982; led by Maitatsine. Christians, non-indigenes and law enforcement agents were victims. Places of worship were destroyed and about 450 persons were killed.
3. Kaduna religious riots sequel to Kafanchan riots: 8th-11th March 1987; Christians and law enforcement agents were victims; casualties were estimated at over 200 persons with burning of churches and other buildings.
4. Zaira religious riots: 10th March, 1987; Christians, non-indigenes and law enforcement agents were victims; casualties at more than 200 persons in addition to burning of churches, hotels and dwelling houses.
5. Bauchi religious riots: 1st April, 1991; launched by Muslim youths. Christians, non-indigenes and police were victims, between 50 and 100 were recorded as casualties, places of worship and properties were destroyed.
6. Kano religious riots of 14th October, 1991; launched by Muslim youth fundamentalists. About 500 persons were killed; churches, mosques and public places were destroyed.
7. Ethno-religious conflict of Zango-Kataf: 6th February and 15th-17th May, 1992. These were community clashes with religious under-tones. Christians, Muslims, six policemen and two inspectors of police were victims; casualties were put at 300 persons by government source while independent sources recorded more than 1,000 persons.
8. Kaduna (Sharia) riots: February and May, 2000 where thousand of lives were lost; five manufacturing firms were closed down, properties worth hundreds of millions of naira were lost generally.
9. Jos ethno-religious riot of 8th-9th September 2000; many lives were lost and properties worth millions of Naira were destroyed and the Plateau government imposed a dawn to dusk curfew.
10. Muslim youths' demonstrations against a crusade in Ilorin in 2003 resulted in burning of churches.
11. Jos ethno-religious riots of 28th -29th November, 2008: thousand of lives and property worth millions of Naira were lost and the government once again had to impose a dusk to dawn curfew in Jos.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> L.E. Odeh 2008. *Historical Analysis of Ethno-Religious Violence in Nigeria in the Relevance of Religion in Contemporary Society* (Eds.) R.A. Raji et al. A Publication of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions.



Although, there is lack of accurate records it has been estimated that from 2009 to February 2012 nearly a thousand lives (935) have been lost in some 164 attacks from the Boko Haram sect alone. The report also estimates that 550 people were killed in attacks by Boko Haram, often targeting police officers and government officials.<sup>11</sup>

Gwamna went further to document recent religious conflicts in Nigeria where he referred specifically to the Shariah crisis of 2000 in Kaduna, Miss World Pageant protest, Bin Laden's riots and the "Cartoon riots"<sup>12</sup> in Nigeria. He posited that the exit of the military and the subsequent transition into a civilian democracy in 1999 provided the platform for the re-introduction of Shariah in some Northern parts of Nigeria. Again, this opened the floodgates for opposition and renewed debates characteristic of the past years. While Christians expressed familiar arguments in defence of Nigeria's secular status as enshrined in Nigeria's constitution, and fears of Shariah likely to affect non-Muslims, Muslims argued on the contrary, that Shariah was part and parcel of Islam and was meant for Muslims only.

Zamfara State launched Shariah amidst foreign Islamic admirers. But the attempt to introduce same in Kaduna state created crisis of tremendous consequences. Several people were killed and property destroyed. The crisis spread to some Eastern

states in reprisal attacks. Nigeria once again, almost came into a brink of collapse.

Chief Olusegun Obasanjo aptly stated in the aftermath of the Shariah Crisis in Kaduna thus:

Any adherent of either religion would thus be failing in his faith if He or she would resort to violence, destruction of life and property. It is foolishness to trust in promoting our faith or religion by violence or in protesting against other people's faith or religion by violence.<sup>13</sup>

Gwamna added the effect that Osama Bin Laden's attack on the United States of America have on Nigeria whereby he posited that in the aftermath of the 9/11, United States of America under George W. Bush embarked on aerial bombardment of Afghanistan to flush out the Taliban regime. Some Muslims in some parts of the North demonstrated in solidarity with Bin Laden, in Kano, Gusau and Kaduna. Some minority Muslims in the North had openly commended the 9/11 attacks.<sup>14</sup> In February, 2002, a suspected Al-Qa'ida member was arrested in Gamboru, Ngala, Borno State, just as seven Pakistanis were arrested in Ifo, Ogun State suspected to be AlQa'ida members. It is believed that Bin Laden and Al-Qa'ida have many sympathizers in Nigeria and remains a hero among a sizeable number of Nigerian Muslims. Apart from this, protests greeted the Miss World Pageant Contest scheduled to take place in Nigeria on 7th December, 2002, organized by Silverbird Productions because some Muslims associated the event with bikinis and other

<sup>11</sup> Oluwaseun Bamidele 2012. "Boko Haram Catastrophic Terrorism – An Albatross to National Peace, Security and Sustainable Development" in *Nigeria Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* Volume 14, No. 1, 2012, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Tell, No. 22, June 2, 2005, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Newswatch, March 6, 2000, p.19.

<sup>14</sup> *The News*, 03, March 2003, p. 21.



forms of blatant sex, something that was considered offensive to them.<sup>15</sup> Boer notes that to Muslims, it was clearly seen as part of the ongoing alleged Christian campaign to undermine and destroy Islam.<sup>16</sup> The final blow is captured by Boer thus:

And then came the real blow—probably one of the most famous gaffes in history of Christian-Muslim relations from Isioma Daniel, an innocent young female reporter for *Thisday*, who had little understanding of Nigerian Muslim dynamics. A Christian from the far south who had spent time in England as a reporter, she could hardly be expected to have her pulse on the situation. In defence of the pageant, she light-heartedly suggested that prophet Muhammad would not have objected to the event. He probably would have married one of the beauties! That was more than Muslims could take.<sup>17</sup>

Gwamna stated that Daniel's write-up sparked up reactions from Council of Imams and of Ulamas in Kaduna, Dr. Ibrahim Datti, President of the Supreme Council for Shariah in Nigeria, and others. The Deputy Governor of Zamfara State, Mamuda Aliyu Shinkafi (then acting as Governor), pronounced a *fatwa* on Isioma Daniel and *Thisday* was to be boycotted by Muslims. Riots broke out in Kaduna and Abuja, leaving a trail of deaths and destruction of property. The event itself was

cancelled and moved to London, and eventually, in a very ironic twist, Miss Turkey of the Islamic Republic of Turkey, eventually won the 2002 Miss World Contest.

The question that readily comes to mind is, is the Miss World beauty Contest a Christian thing with Muslims participating? Or was the crisis a combination of religion and politics?

Finally, the religious riots of February, 2006 in Nigeria, were sparked off as a result of a blasphemous cartoon on Prophet Muhammad published by a Dutch newspaper, *Tylands Posten*, in September 2005. Similar protests had occurred in Afghanistan, Libya, Pakistan, Indonesia, Somalia, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran, with minimal fatalities. Nigeria therefore recorded the highest casualties. In what started as a peaceful demonstration, Maiduguri, Katsina and Bauchi got engulfed into a near conflagration, leading to the deaths of many people and destruction of property. An estimate of 43 churches, five hotels, several homes, shops and vehicles were set ablaze, while over 58 people were killed, including a Catholic priest of the St. Rita's Catholic Church.<sup>18</sup> Reprisal attacks took place in Onitsha and Nnewi where mosques were burn and unspecified number of people was killed.

In Bauchi, what started at the government Day Secondary School at the Army Barracks, between a female teacher who allegedly seized a copy of the Holy Qu'ran from a female student, snowballed into a religious crisis. The incident at the

<sup>15</sup> Jan H. Boer, "Nigeria Muslims and the Miss World Pageant," *TCNN Research Bulletin*, No. 39, March, 2003, Bukuru, Jos, pp.38-39.

<sup>16</sup> Jan H. Boer. pp.38-39.

<sup>17</sup> Jan H. Boer. p.39.

<sup>18</sup> *Sunday Sun*, February 26, 2006, p.6.





school was only a spark of what had been bottled up waiting to explode.

### III. INTERNAL POLITICS AND EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS IN \RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

Nigeria's leaders have long perfected the art of using religion to play politics because religion seems to be Nigeria's biggest industry, and the second biggest export industry after oil, ahead even of Nollywood. Almost everyone in the country will openly and fervently identify with either of Christianity or Islam (a good number will expertly combine this with a traditional belief system).

Right there at the seat of power in Abuja, the power of religion can be clearly seen because conspicuously positioned near the presidential residences are a Chapel and a Mosque.

In April 2010, weeks after an ailing President Yar'Adua was smuggled back into Nigeria, the 'cabal' running Nigeria in his name arranged an excursion to the Presidential Villa for two groups of people: Christian and Islamic clerics. Their assignment was to come and bear witness to the resurrection of a man whom we had all presumed permanently incapacitated. They went in and came out, but we could tell from their muted enthusiasm that all was not well. But it was a brilliant move on the part of the then First Lady and her clique. They knew that if anyone was going to help convince Nigerians that the president was doing well, it would be religious leaders. They know that Nigerians don't query their religious leaders.

Nigeria must also be one of the few secular countries that devote substantial amounts of state funds to sponsoring

religious pilgrimages. Every year the federal and state governments allocate tens of millions of naira to their Christian and Muslim Pilgrimage Commissions. Since travelling to Mecca or Jerusalem on pilgrimage is a personal demonstration of faith, it should be funded by the individual seeking to fulfill that responsibility. The government has no business subsidizing religious enterprise.

Nigerian Presidents and Governors were often seen in religious camps and function whereby trying to paint the perfect picture of humility and submission to God, whereas their calculation was aimed at putting a seal on their presumed control of votes of gullible citizens.

Somehow it appears as if the incumbent President of Nigeria has started to be overzealous with his religion. In recent months he has made it a point of duty to be photographed in churches. Every week there's a photo of him in a church, or a gathering of Bishops, accompanied by a news headline and story quoting him speaking religione; thanking God for giving him wisdom or thanking the Church for their ceaseless prayers, without which Nigeria would not be what it is today. In October 2013 he travelled to Jerusalem, and his media team bombarded us with photos of him praying and being prayed for.

And then in February, 2014, the News Agency of Nigeria quoted him as saying, at the Dunamis Gospel Church in Garki, Abuja:

This year, we have decided that from now onward, until I leave the State House, every last Sunday of the



month I will go to different churches. The reasons are very obvious, not because if I worship in the State House I am not worshipping God... But I feel that it is good for me to go round and continue to appreciate what our brothers and sisters have been doing.<sup>19</sup>

Each one of these actions, by itself, doesn't mean much. But put them all together and you get the picture of a president who seems to be trying to 'work' religion for 2015

During the Presidential election campaign in 2002, Muhammadu Buhari was quoted in a news headlines as saying that Muslims should only vote for Muslims. That expectedly drew a backlas. But Buhari denied ever saying that, and Hassan Matthew Kukah, today the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto came out staunchly in his defence.

As the elections approach we will see intense scrambling for photo-ops in churches and mosques, by politicians who know that the quickest way to a Nigerian's heart is through his or her religious leaders. They will invade the religious houses looking pious and saying all the right things, and asking for prayers. But we all know the truth. This has nothing to do with piety. If they were half as pious as they pretend to be Nigeria would be a better place to live in than where it is today.

There is no gainsaying the fact that there are external connections to growing religious intolerance in Nigeria. As we had noted earlier, external factors underlie some religious crises in Nigeria, contributing to

growing religious intolerance that we have witnessed over the years. Several explanations have been offered in respect of the forms and levels of external influence to this growing trend. The so-called "clash of civilizations" today, has divided the world into the "West and the Rest". Samuel P. Huntington had predicted rightly when he stated that, "the dangerous clashes of the future are likely to arise from the interaction of Western arrogance, Islam intolerance and Sinic assertiveness."<sup>20</sup>

Today, words such as *Islamophobia*, *Westophobia*, and *Christophobia*, characterize global Christian-Muslim relations, with dire consequences for Christian-Muslim co-existence in Nigeria. Peter Riddell defines Westophobia as entrenched and endemically hostile attitudes to the west and to perceived cultural traits of the west, while *Islamophobia* is the fear of hatred of Muslims and Islam.<sup>21</sup> *Christophobia* is hatred or fear of Christianity and Christ.

Vinoth Ramachandra put this tension thus:

If there is an Islamic threat, many Arabs and Muslims believed there has also been a western threat of political, economic, and religio-cultural imperialism, a political occupation accompanied by cultural invasion. As a result, many in the Muslim world, like their counterparts in the West, opt for easy anti-imperialist slogans and demonization.

<sup>19</sup> The Punch. March 24, 2014 p.23.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, p. 183.

<sup>21</sup> Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell, 2003. *Islam in Conflict: Past Present and Future*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, p.172



At its worst, both sides have engaged in a process of “mutual satanization”.<sup>22</sup>

Muslim’s distaste and source of *Westophobia* arises from several factors, to include among others; United States’ support for Israel’s stance towards the Palestinians, United States’ contemptuous occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, and Western condemnation of Shariah. Sanusi Lamido Sanusi puts it right, that, “the West speaks of Islam from a position of arrogance demanding not a dialogue but capitulation to its values.”<sup>23</sup> He continues thus:

The first problem with Western criticism of Shariah, in my view is that it fails to take into account the wider global context of the perceived confrontation between the West and the Muslim world. The dominance of the US as the sole remaining power and its ideologically-inspired promotion of the process of globalization have led to a perception among Muslims that every criticism of the Muslim world from the West is in fact, American-inspired. The truth, to be blunt, is that Muslims detest America because they believe, America detests Islam and Muslims.<sup>24</sup>

Riddell on the other hand, recognizes two other factors of Muslim detest for the West in globalization and the conspiracy theory. On globalization, he states:

It could be argued that Muslim opposition to globalization is driven by a dissatisfaction with the particular forms it takes, rather than opposition to globalization per se. Islamic globalization is desirable, Western globalization is not.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, Islam is opposed to globalization because they see in it, western values, which they hardly separate between them. On conspiracy theory, Riddell notes:

Another more intangible yet powerful factor in causing Muslim antipathy to the West is the prevalence of conspiracy theorizing in much of the Muslim world. This is closely linked with issues of power and disempowerment. Up to 70 percent of the world’s refugees are Muslims and some of the poorest countries in the world are predominantly Muslim. Hence, the Muslim world has developed a tendency to attribute responsibility for economic, social, political problem to the world’s rich and powerful nations and societies. In today’s world, wealth and power lie predominantly in the West.<sup>26</sup>

From the foregoing therefore, it could be understood why Islam had responded to the West in diverse forms. Some of these reactions have led to worldwide radicalization of Islamic groups such as: The

<sup>22</sup> Vinoth Ramachandra, 1999. *Faiths in Conflict?* Leicester:Inter-Varsity Press, p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, 2005. “The West and the Rest: Reflections on the Intercultural Dialogue About Shariah”, Philip Ostien, *et al*, *Comparative Perspectives on Shariah in Nigeria*, Spectrum Books Limited Ibadan, p. 201.

<sup>24</sup> Sanusi Lamido Sanusi. p.201

<sup>25</sup> Peter G. Riddell, *et al*. p.159.

<sup>26</sup> Peter G. Riddell, *et al*. p.160.



Taliban, Al-Qa'ida Network, Hamas, Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic Organization, National Salvation Party, Islamic Salvation Front, Mujahid, Hizballah, Islamic Jihad, among others.<sup>27</sup>

Gwamna observed that the OIC had similarly been opposed by Christians in 1986. It is within this same context that the Bin Laden, Miss World Pageant and the Cartoon Controversy, easily generated into crisis in Nigeria, because of the western attributes attached to them, which made it easy to mobilize Muslim support and solidarity.

Christians also see external connections to Muslim push for Shariah despite Muslims' repeated assurances that Shariah will not affect non-Muslims in anyway. But Christians see "misplaced aggression" on them by Muslims in most crises, than to the West, their perceived "enemy".

Some other scholars rather see the "manipulation" of religion by the elite for their political and economic interests. The so-called "misplaced aggression" was exemplified in Bin Laden, Miss World Pageant and Cartoon crisis, none, which originated from Nigerian Christians.

A very major negative influence that has emerged as a strong voice in fuelling religious intolerance in Nigeria is the foreign media. Added to some local media voices that have become notorious in creating tension and thereby exacerbating intolerance between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria,

such as the New Nigerian, and Radio Kaduna are the Hausa service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA), and Deutsche Welle. These Media outfits have particularly played negative roles during and after conflict situations in Nigeria with very serious consequences to inter-religious harmony in Nigeria.

#### IV. EFFECTS ON THE PSYCHE OF NIGERIAN SOCIETY

There is no controverting the fact that religious crises have negative implications on governance, security and development of Nigeria. A number of economists in the country have observed that whereas the bureaucracy in Nigeria should be concerned with development matters, it has since independence in 1960 been saddled with issues of stability of the state which is continually threatened by religious and ethnic conflicts. The consequences of this situation on the nation's bureaucracy are manifold. In the first place, concentration on stability issues will lead to further rigidity and ossification of administrative procedures.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, turbulent times have resulted in the exodus of experienced hands. Thirdly, as the political class uses their positions to further the interest of their religion, there is the tendency for the bureaucracy to be hijacked and manipulated along religious lines through appointments and promotions. For instance, between 1978–1999, but for the two years of justice Irikefe's tenure, all the chief Justices of

<sup>27</sup> Ann Cooper and Elsie A. Mawwell (eds.), 2003. *Ismael: My Brother*. Kaduna: Evangel Publishers Ltd, p. 300

<sup>28</sup> A.O. Oronsaye, 1986. "Is the Nigerian Bureaucracy Developmental? Political Considerations in Development Administration" in *Benin Journal of Social Sciences* Vol. No. 2. p110.



Nigeria were Muslims. Similarly, the Court of Appeal since its creation in 1976, 32 years ago, has always had Muslims as President. The High Court of the Federal Capital territory, Abuja, created in 1989, has always had the Chief Judge as a Muslim.<sup>29</sup> In this scenario, even a genuine effort to mitigate violence could be scuttled by bureaucrats and politicians who profit from the status quo. In fact, merit is played down while sectional or parochial interest is put over and above national goals and aspirations. After a careful look at the bureaucracy in Nigeria, Oronsaye concluded that “it is the political questions of instability, largely propped up by religious acrimony, which has become institutionalized, that has accounted for the seeming inability of the public bureaucracy to perform its proper role as agent of development, where development is seen as nation building and improvement in the socio-economic welfare of the people”.<sup>30</sup>

## V. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

This article has examined the crises that religion has brought to the Nigerian state due to lack of understanding of tenets of faith by some religious sects, politicization of religion and of course external influence on adherents of both sensitive religions in Nigeria – Christianity and Islam.

The paper hereby recommends that given the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian society, there is the need to abhor forceful attempt by religious fundamentalists to impose an ideology on a constitutionally

recognized secular society. Franz corroborates this plea when he says that “Absolutism leads to fundamentalism i.e. the conviction that one has the total truth with absolute certainty and that one can only accept it or be an unbeliever”.<sup>31</sup> Akanbi, in support of this view states that if managed properly “religious pluralism could serve as platform for peaceful coexistence and steady development in Nigeria”.<sup>32</sup> Adherents of religions can imbibe great religious truth from other religions that could result into the development of the state. For instance, if the government had accepted the introduction/institution of Islamic banking in Nigeria, the Nigerian society would have benefitted immensely from it.

The statement of Sir Ahmadu Bello when he reacted to Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe’s suggestion for oneness is that there is unity in diversity if religious pluralism can be harnessed correctly.

No let us understand our differences. I am a Muslim and a Northerner. You are a Christian and an Easterner, by understanding our differences we can build unity in our country.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, the political leaders should note that governance is about delivering high quality leadership to all

<sup>29</sup> S. Asemota, 2002. *Winner All... No Loser*, Benin City: Christian Social Movement of Nigeria, p.8.

<sup>30</sup> A.O. Oronsaye, 1986. p.110.

<sup>31</sup> M.S. Franz, 2008. “Persecuted Minority Sects: What is Happening”? In *Oasis International Studies*. Roberto Fontolan (ed.), No. 8, p.62.

<sup>32</sup> J.O. Akannbi, 2013. “Religious Pluralism, Security and National Development in Nigeria: Toward A Better Future”. A paper presented at Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan. p.7.

<sup>33</sup> L.E. Odeh 2008. “Historical Analysis of Ethno-Religious Violence in Nigeria in the Relevance of Religion in Contemporary Society” (Eds.) R.A. Raji et al. A Publication of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions.



citizens regardless of their religious inclination. Nigerian leaders will do the country good if they keep their religious personal because the rots and ruins that envelop the nation are caused by adherents of all religions. The truth remains that a person's religion or lack of it has nothing to do with the quality of his or her leadership. Therefore, the hypocrisy of politicizing religion should stop.

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