

Religious and Political Crises in Nigeria: A Historical Exploration

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Abstract: Nigeria is constitutionally a secular state but underneath, religion plays a fundamental role in the socio-political governance of the people. The integration of religion and politics in Nigerian political history by her founding fathers is believed to be one major problem behind the current religious violence and political instability bedeviling the country today. The aim of this paper is to understand why the political history of Nigeria is shrouded in religious bigotry by providing the historical overview of the background that has influenced the socio-religious and political activism in Nigeria. The paper also examined the passivism or activism of the two major religions: Christianity and Islam in seeking socio-political justice and control in the political activities of Nigeria and the aftermath of this power play in the affairs of governance. Lastly, the paper critiqued the effect of religious involvement in either promoting or reducing socio-religious and political crises in contemporary Nigerian society. The paper adopted the historical and descriptive research methods and argues that the present religious violence and political instability, is predicated by the “divide and rule” and the pretentious “amalgamation” policy of the Colonial Administrators that favoured the North against the South. The seed planted by the Colonial Administrators before Independence is what has gradually grown into a monster that is threatening the peaceful co-existence of the Nigerian State. The paper concludes that to restore peaceful co-existence in a heterogeneous State like Nigeria, there is need for a realistic constitutional amendment that will truly reflect the heterogeneous secular nature of Nigeria and consider the wishes of the Federating units and by addressing the political, religious and other social-economic issues that are threatening the peaceful co-existence of Nigeria society and guarantee every religious group equality before the law.

Keywords: Religion and Politics in Nigeria; violence, insecurity

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I. INTRODUCTION

The name and the geo-political region called Nigeria today was the creation of the British Colonialists through the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorate in 1914. Prior to this, Nigeria was a heterogeneous and pluralistic society with many autonomous states within the nation existing independently, hence the multi-cultural and multi-religious nature of the country. The polarization of religion as an instrumentality for administrative convenience in Nigeria began with the Colonial Administrations. Regrettably the seed planted 103years (1914-2017) ago has gradually grown into a monster that is becoming impossible to subdue. The historical root of this tragic development is traceable to constitutional regionalism and the divide and rule policy of the Colonial Administration. The policy rather than unite the heterogeneous nation like Nigeria, promoted political and religious ideologies that encouraged ethnicity and regional biases. Political parties, political participation, appointments, employments and culprits of coup d'état were viewed and handled with ethnic, religious or political biases. Nigeria as multi-cultural and multi-religious country has two major religions: Christianity and Islam each competing and claiming superiority and dominance over each other in number and in might. This claim of superiority as well as dominance has served as the foundation for religious intolerance and several socio-political crises that have bedevilled Nigeria since Independence in 1960.

Religion is not supposed to be a harbinger of violence but paradoxically, the character of religious beliefs is in most cases puzzling and fascinating to scholars in humanities. The record of human history has shown that most noble acts of love; self-sacrificing and pious services to humanity are often associated with religion; yet it is also evident that religion has generated more violence and killed more people than any other institutional force in human history. In the words of Lefebure (2000):

Many of the violent conflicts in the world today involve religious animosities. Indeed, the history of the encounters among the world's religions is filled with distrust and hatred, violence and vengeance. The deepest tragedy of the history of religions is that the very movements that should bring human beings closer to each other and to their ultimate source and goal have time and time again become forces of division. In one

conflict after another around the world, religious convictions and interpretations of revelation have been used and abused as justifications for violence [and war] (7-8).

Olukunle writing on *Social Uses and Abuses of Religion in Developing Countries* opines that just as Alfred Nobel invented dynamite to help miners in blasting hardrocks to ease their job even though dynamites have been misused and abused, so is religion. According to him, religion was meant to create a unique link between God and humanity and between human beings. It was to remind man of the existence of the infinite to help in regulating the relationship between men and in promoting peace. However, religion has been used and abused to promote wars, violence and hatred among humans. The argument here is that men can use good things for negative ends if they desire. Religion is no exception. In this case, one can say that religion which is essentially good and serves a good and positive purpose has been abused by men, hence the constant conflicts, violence and war among religious groups.

An inventory of the religious violence and insecurity in Nigeria for the past three or four decades leaves a lot to be desired. One wonders what the founders of these religions would say to their adherents if they were to return today and see the mayhem done in their names. Why would one use “God” to kill or maim another? Why would religion be linked with violence and terrorism? Could it be ignorance on the part of their adherents or lack of hermeneutical understanding of the Holy Books? In attempt to answer some of these questions, some scholars have alluded ignorance, prejudice and stereotyping as a major factor behind most of the religious violence we experience today in Nigeria. It is on this note that Okon calls for sensitivity in dealing with religious issues when he said:

In analysing religious practices, we must be sensitive to ideals that inspire profound conviction in believers, yet at the same time take a balance view of them. We must confront ideas that seek eternal, while recognising that religious groups also promote quite mundane goals such as acquiring money or followers. We need to recognise the diversity of religious beliefs and modes of conduct, but also probe into the nature of religion as a general phenomenon (2).

Religion from the beginning has played a very important role in shaping the socio-political thoughts of many nations. In fact, most nations of the world were patterned and influenced by the sacred nature of government. Religion supported and regulated the royalty that existed between the state and the people. The idea of Divine right of Kings which derived its origin from the theocratic concept of governance; vested absolute power and authority to the King or Monarch who was seen as a direct representative of God. The Monarch was superior and answerable only to God. Ancient history is replete with examples of this idea. For example, in Christianity, the Pope was seen for centuries as the Vicar of Christ on earth and by virtue of his divine right had the ultimate authority over the Church, and indirectly over the State.

Islam, on the other hand, believed in the concept of divine right of Caliph (direct descendants and successors of Prophet Muhammad) as the supreme leaders of the Muslim community. Under Muhammad the Muslim State was theocratic, with Shari ‘a as the religious and moral principles of Islam, and the law of the land. The Caliphs were seen as secular and religious leaders. They were not empowered to promulgate dogma, because it was believed that the revelation of the faith had been completed by Muhammad (Dallal, Encarta). However, as representatives of Allah and direct successors of Muhammad, Caliphs were to enforce Shari ‘a as the religious and moral principles of the land. Their powers were not limited to secular issues only but divine since they were representing Allah. It was on this note that Muhammad advocated that the Muslim community should choose a successor or a Caliph by consensus to lead the theocratic process of leadership to exemplify the earthly kingdom under divine rule. It is also on this note that Islamic States seek to apply in every detail the Islamic laws in any society they find themselves in order to create an Islamic culture, as evident throughout the Middle East.

Africans were not left behind in this concept of divine right. In a typical African society, the rulers were also seen as gods or agents of the gods. Traditionally they were believed to have possessed both divine and secular powers to do and undo as the gods please. They were traditional priests, custodians and Supreme judges in all traditional matters. In African cosmology, there is no clear distinction between the material and the spiritual things. Religion embraces the totality of human endeavours. The social, economic, political and spiritual lives of the people are all embodied in one holistic life. Man, though mortal, can only have meaning in its social order through divine legislation. It is religion that translates our socio-cultural or socio-political order into reality. According to Okon, religion sacralises the socio-political values to give it a divine sanction or meaning (33). It is these religious beliefs that bind the people together, regulate their lifestyle, and give meaning to their values whether social or political. Again, it is this mental picture of African worldview that enables Africans to understand, express, communicate and govern themselves.

Today, even though democracy has replaced the idea of divine right, religion still plays a major role in the socio-political affairs of most nations of the world. In Nigeria, for example, the introduction of democracy as a form of government did not go well with the Northern Muslims because of its attachment to Western civilization. The influence of Western education was speedily penetrating the fabric of some Islamic values and

system that did not go well with some Islamic Clerics. To counter this, some Islamic sects began to emerge with the aim of reforming their State along the Islamic laws, promoting Islamic education. Their objective was to prevent western secularization through education. According to Kofi Johnson in his article *What Accounts for the Rise of Islam: A case Study of Nigeria and Senegal*

Between the 70s and 80s many Muslims became frustrated as a result of pressures coming from the secularized world. Many sought to reject the waves of western cultural imperialism and return to their Islamic roots. The situation became exacerbated due to constant confrontations between the West and the Arab world over the issues of Palestine and Arab nationalism. These crises reached their crescendo with the Iranian revolution in 1979 (1).

Historical Review of the Causes of Socio-Religious and Political Instability in Nigeria:

In every structure, whether physical, human or in nation building, foundations are very important. Some scholars like Emele Mba Uka, argue that the foundation for socio-religious and political instability in Nigeria was to a large extent the work of the colonial Masters. They argue that right from the formative stage of Nigeria until independence, the various governments of Nigeria at the Federal level had persistently and openly favoured the Northern Muslims in appointments, in employments, in education, in national distribution of resources and in promulgation of religious policies that were favourable to the northern Muslims. The distortion of the rightful meaning of “secularism” as defined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is a further attempt by previous military Heads of State to consolidate the dominance of Muslim rule in Nigeria.

Uka (2015) in his article, *Perspective on Religion, Terrorism and Development*, alludes that the effect of the unfriendly and unfavourable socio-religious and political situation in Nigeria was master minded by the British Colonial Masters. The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 was a ploy to deliberately enable the South serve the North. According to him, “Lugard gave the North the wrong impression that they were born to rule and sternly warned the European Christians missionaries not to preach the gospel to the Hausa-Fulani, nor try to change their culture”(11). Harold Smith, a one-time British Colonial administrator in Nigeria, regretting the atrocity and the part he played in the formative years of Nigeria is quoted as saying: I am in my 80s now...but now I don't want to go to my grave without telling the truth about the atrocities perpetuated in Africa by the colonialists...Nigeria was my duty post, when we assessed Nigeria, this was what we found in the Southern region: strength, intelligence, determination to succeed, well established history, complex but focused lifestyle, great hope and aspirations...the East was good in business and technology, the West was good in administration and commerce, law and medicine but it was a pity we planned our agenda to give power at all cost to the Northerners (11).

To achieve the above assertion, population figures were blurred in favour of the Northerners in order to perpetually keep them in power, knowing that politics is a game of number. According to Harold Smith: Census results were announced before they were counted. Despite seeing the vast land with no human but cattle in the North, we still gave the North 55 million instead of 33 million. This was to be used in maintaining their majority votes and future power bid...the West without Lagos was the most populous in Nigeria at that time but we ignored that. The North was seriously encouraged to go into the military. Everything was to work against the South. We truncated their good plan for their future. We planned to destroy Awolowo and Azikwe, (the West and East) and sowed a seed of discord among them. We tricked Azikwe into accepting to be President (honourary), having known that Belewa will be the main man with power. Awolowo had to go to jail to cripple his genius plans for greater Nigeria...I am sorry for the above evil done to Nigeria, I can't say sorry enough (Uka 11-12).

To further place the Northerners at advantage position, Uka pointed out that virtually all headquarters of the military formations were cited in the north to consolidate their political and military strength and control over the South and the West. According to him:

Right from the pre-independence constitution to the 1960 and post independent Republican constitutions of 1963, 1979 and 1999 were all crafted in favour of the northerners which gave them leadership advantage over the East and the West...when one British official was asked how they were going to keep the amalgamation going if the South should discover she has been cheated and would like to pull out, the reply was that they (the British) had made it possible for the military institutions to be concentrated in the north and the northerners were encouraged to join the military so as to be able to prevent such development. For instance, Air Force Headquarter is in Kano, Army Headquarter in Kaduna and Navy Headquarter in Badder, Lokoja (12)

In consolidating the above claim the list of heads of state of Nigeria, from independence in 1960 to the present day evidently portrays and supports the above assertion. Nigeria became independence in 1960 and a Republic in 1963. Prior to independence the Queen who was the monarch of the United Kingdom represented in Nigeria by a Governor-General who directed the affairs of governance in Nigeria. Under the 1963 Constitution, the first constitution of the Republic of Nigeria, the President replaced the monarch as ceremonial head of state.

Elizabeth II	1952–1961	Queen of Nigeria
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Nnamdi Azikwe	1 st October, 1963 - 16 th January 1966	Ceremonial President
Yakubu Gowon	1 st September 1966 - 29 th July, 1975	Military ruler (North Central)
MurallaRamatMohammed	13 th February 1976 - 14 th February 1976	Military ruler (North)
Olusegun Obasanjo	14 th February 1976 - 1 st October, 1979	Military ruler (West)
Shehu Shagari	1 st October, 1979– 31 st December 1983	President of Nigeria (North)
Muhammadu Buhari	31 st December 1983 - 27 th August, 1985	Military ruler (North)
Ibrahim Babangida	27 th August 1985- August 23 rd 1993	Military ruler (North)
Ernest Shonekan	26 th August 1993 to 17 th November 1993	President of Nigeria (West)
Abdulsalami Abubakar	9 th June 1998 - 29 th May, 1999	Military ruler (North)
Olusegun Obasanjo	29 th May 1999 to 29 th May, 2007.	Elected President of Nigeria (West)
Umaru Yaradua	29 th May 2007 to 5 th May 2010.	Elected President of Nigeria (North)
Goodluck Jonathan	5 th May, 2010 to 29 th May, 2015	Elected President of Nigeria (South)
Mohammed Buhari	29 th May 2015 - till date.	Elected President of Nigeria (North)

From the above, it is obvious that the disparity between the North and the South and the continuous display of superiority and dominance of the north base on the colonial agenda is the root cause of resistance, violence and political instability in Nigeria today. The constitutions that are operative today in Nigeria were drafted during the Military regime and since most Military Heads of States were from the North, it favoured the Northern Muslims. It is these, socio-political injustice, inequitable distribution of wealth, tribalism and ethnicity, evil manipulation of religion and intolerance, bad and corrupt leadership that constitutes some of the growing instability and violence in Nigeria. The glaring disparity both in political and economic distribution of the country's wealth and deprivation of religious freedom is the reason why people choose militancy, violence or terrorism to register their discontentment and dissatisfaction.

The responsibility of the government is to protect and guarantee the rights of her citizens as entrenched in the constitution. Conflict arises when leaders are biased and indifferent to the right and plight of the people. In justifying the right of violence on the part of the citizens when government is not living up to expectations, Locke argues that:

The sovereignty resides with the people and that by transferring their legislative and executive power to their leaders does not mean that they have equally transferred their sense of reasoning or judgment between good and bad, justice and injustice to them. Hence should their representatives in power violate their rights and dignity through tyrannical disposition or indifference, they can still invoke their right which they hold by nature through rebellion. (As qtd by Nwankwor Page 120 Perspectives)

It is the failure to address the imbalance in the socio-political system of Nigeria by the past leaders that is the root cause of instability, violence, militancy and insecurity in Nigeria. The gross inequality in the distribution of natural resources, the monopoly of power by the Northerners, the claim of majority number in the country's population are some of the socio-religious problems that are plaguing the Nigerian State. This claim of superiority and dominance is the foundation for religious intolerance and several other socio-religious and political crises and violence in Nigeria since Independence in 1960. Today some of the homogeneous states and sub-nationalist who were hitherto silent in the case of distribution of natural resources are rising up in agitation against the equality in the management of the natural resources. When human beings feel threaten, whether it is intellectual, emotional, religious, ethical, linguistic, political or personal, they tend to be aggressive and sometimes resort to violence as a reaction to defend their heritage or belief.

Christian Perspective of Religion and Politics:

Christians are divided on the issue, resulting into two schools of thought; one in favour and one against. Those against argue that there are no Biblical examples to support today's Christian activism or involvement. For them, Christ "suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). For this group, even though Christ sternly and repeatedly rebuked Israel's false religious leaders, yet He never encouraged activism against the injustices of the Romans civil authority, nor did He advocate, organise, or engage in any public protests to put pressure on Rome into changing its corrupt system. He submitted himself even to the unjust authorities. When he was reviled, he reviled not; when he suffered, he threatened not; rather He rejected worldly honour and power in favour of the Kingdom of God and would withdraw whenever they crowd wanted to make him a king (John 6:15).

For Him, they argue, His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). He taught his disciples to give to Caesar the things that are of Caesar and to GOs the things that are God's (Matt. 22:21). Again, it is argued that the reason for the death of Jesus on the cross was partly because of His rejection of worldly power (John 12:12-36). If Jesus, the apostles and the early church were not involved in Christian activism why should His followers do?

Furthermore, Conservative Christian opponents of social activism argue that if "Christian activism" were really God's will, Paul would have been in the forefront of it. Yet according to the, rather than protest, Paul advised that Christians should obey their rulers and pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

The liberal Christians speaking in favour of social activism argue that it may not totally be correct to say that there was or is no Biblical example to support Christian activism. Recalling some events from the Old Testament and New Testament, they argue that Judo-Christian religion played a very important role in determining the political leadership in Israel. In many respects, religion was a prerequisite for a significant socio-political change. Using the Old Testament example of Joseph, Nehemiah, and Daniel to justify their reason for political activism, they argued that these men were all pleased by God in prominent positions in civil government to fulfil God's purpose and, therefore, the laissez faire attitude of today's Christians ill no help. Social activism is therefore not a new phenomenon in Israel. Groups, individuals and Prophets actd as watchdogs for the people. Kings were judged by their loyalty to God and their strict adherence to the principles of justice as entrenched in the Bible, while internal revolts against ungodly kings were common to oust a king out of power f they neglected such principles.

For instance, in Exodus chapters three and four, Moses confronted Pharoah to lead the children of Israel out of the house of bondage to the Promised Land. In 2 Kings 12:1-24, Jerobaom and Judah revolted against Rehoboam's ungodly policy and seceded from Israel. Elijah singlehandedly challenged King Ahab for leading Israel into idolatry and apostasy (1 Kings 18). It is further argued that Joseph, Daniel and Nehemiah were all political office holders who used their position to influence government policies in their own generation and that if they did, why would Christians be aloof. John the Baptist opposed and publicly spoke against the ungodly marriage of Herod to Herodias his brother's wife (Matt. 14:1-12). Even Jesus towards the end of His ministry became an activist by publicly speaking against the activities of the Pharisee, by entering the temple and driving those who were trading in the temple, and by triumphantly riding into Jerusalem. It was this religious activism that ignited his arrest, trial, judgement and crucifixion. With the above examples, they conclude that there is nothing wrong for a Christian to be a socio-political activist.

Bosch understanding the inherent controversy in the subject asserts that: Christianity, which loses its vertical dimension, has lost its salt. It is not only insipid in itself, but useless to the world. on the other hand, Christianity which uses the vertical preoccupation as a means to escape from reasonability for and in common life of human beings is in denial of the incarnation. The paradigm shift in theological mission enterprises must also emphasize on the mission as a quest for justice. In this sense, mission also grapples with the tension between justice and love as a way of embodying the conveyance of theological convictions as a hope or the moral ecology of Church and society (As quoted by Ndukwe 164).

It is this quest for justice that led religious leaders like Martin Luther King, Reverend Jesse Jackson; Reverend Andrew Young; Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and so on, in being vocal against social ills like racial discrimination, and apartheid that eventually brought the socio-political and religious changes that were not only to their immediate environment but to the entire world. Today certain privileges are enjoyed because of their involvement in socio-political activism. In the recent past, Nigeria is witnessing an influx of religious leaders into the political arena with the hope of creating a social or political change in the country. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in attempt to encourage Christian participation in politic brought in the era of Pastor Chris Okotie of the Household of God, Rev. Jolly Nyame of the United Methodist Church of Africa (U.M.C.A), a three-time governor of Taraba State, Professor Yusuf Obaje, former Chaplain of the Aso Rock Chapel, Reverend Father Moses Adasu of blessed memory, a Catholic Priest who became Governor of Benue State, and Governor David Jonah Jang, who was ordained Pastor before his election in 2007 and Pastor Tunde Bakare. Public opinion could be very amazing. For some Christians, the involvement of Men of God in politics for the purpose of bringing social change in the political system is a sign of the end time where Jesus predicted that the love of many will wax cold (Matt. 24:12). Yet for others like Pastor Bakare, it is only when they are in, that they can effect a change, therefore joining politics is for the purpose of creating the desired social change that Nigerians are crying for. Pastor Tunde Bakare, the Convener of the Save Nigeria Group (SNG); a coalition of pro-democracy group in a recent statement, has spoken on the state of the nation, saying, He does not have faith in the present government". According to him:

The present administration is not competent enough to make the changes Nigerians are looking for and as such citizens should take action for themselves. Nigerians should know how to take their destiny in their hands, we can no longer agree to be pushed, to expect development, to expect transformation, the government is not competent enough to make that happen (Abbah, *Sunday Trust Newspaper* 14 Feb, 2011).

For Pastor Tunde Bakare, his mandate was to:

Promote political knowledge and participation of the Nigerian citizens through strategic activities, after decades of speaking truth to power and standing on the side of the oppressed..... I have extended the frontiers of my political activism in a bid to Save Nigeria, to Change Nigeria and to Make Nigeria Great again” (*Trust Newspaper* 14 Feb, 2011).

From Christian perspective, it is obvious that the laissez faire attitude that hitherto characterised Christianity is gradually changing as more Christians are getting involved and participating more and more in the affairs of governance and socio-political activism, even though the percentage of Christians in politics is still small.

Islamic Perspective of Religion and Politics:

From the Muslim point of view, Islam is regarded as the final revealed religion, fulfilling and superseding all earlier religions. For the Muslims, Judaism is one-sided, because of its preoccupation with this world. Christianity is one-sided, because of its emphasis on spiritual matters. Islam, in contrast, is the perfect, harmonious religion of the middle way (Qur’an 5:3) (Troll: 89).

From the beginning, Islam was concerned about the total man and did not separate the earthly man from the spiritual man as the case with Christianity. Islam sees the body and soul, social, political and religious life as one, there is no dichotomy. It rejects the rejection of the spiritual and the worldly. Prosperity is in this world and hereafter. Troll confirms this assertion when he says that “the Qur’anic revelation during the 10 years in Medina (622 – 632) was concerned not only with the prescriptions of spiritual life (prayer, fasting, virtues and vices), but also with life in the society....the regulation of political life including instructions for the conduct of war and the division of booty...” (91).

Gabriel pointed out that power to govern in Islam is restricted in many ways, because according to him, “Allah is recognised as the one who ultimately holds all political authority. Religion and politics are bound together. ...Non-Muslims are not limited to have enough power in the government to affect the law “suitable to all human needs; those of the body and the soul; those of individual and society and of politics...Islam is both religion and the state” (91). According to Azumah:

The presence of non-Muslim was only to be tolerated...they are not allowed to keep weapons, nor take part in war or jihad, because they cannot be trusted. Nor can they hold positions in which they have authority over Muslims. They may not preach to Muslims, let alone convert them and must not say anything that may seem disrespectful of Islam in general and of Muhammad in particular. Muslims man cannot marry non-Muslim women but a non-Muslim man cannot marry a Muslim woman. Marriage or sex between a Muslim women and a non-Muslim man is punishable by death. While a non-Muslim can be executed for merely raising a hand against a Muslim, a Muslim who kills a non-Muslim faces no more than a fine (92-93).

It should be noted that this traditional thought about the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim was formulated in societies or environment where Muslims were politically dominant over non-Muslims. But surprisingly Azumah concludes that this “traditional and legal opinions formulated during this time have been canonised” (94). It is based on the legacy that some Muslim leaders in Nigeria have tried to enforce these rules in their State even though their actions have inspired some sporadic outburst of violence. Increase in violence, bombing and insecurity in the last two decades and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism is in line with mainstream Muslim teaching, that continue to use the term ‘Kufr’ (unbelief) to refer to everything that is non-Islamic. They regarded non-Muslims as ‘infidels’ of God (96). To this end, every Muslim is exhorted to ‘fight the infidels nearest to him; we should become one hand against the enemies of Allah, our enemies – the enemies of our ancestors (Azumah 43).

However, as the wave of colonialism and secularization began to recede in the sub-Saharan Africa in the 60s and 70s, a new phenomenon began to merge as Western influence began to penetrate the fabric of traditional Islamic society. The separation of state and religion was totally alien in Islam and so it was regarded as Western and Christian idea to suppress Islam. To counteract this Western influence, Islamic sects began to emerge with the aim of reforming their society along Islamic line in order to prevent secularization through education. To such groups the only conceivable relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is Jihad which is manifesting in different forms and shapes.

Inventory of Religious Violence in Nigeria:

Soon after independence in 1960, the political space in Nigeria was characterised by violence and bloodshed. The struggle for power among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria led to several political violence and unrest and gradually degenerated into a civil war that lasted for three years. The struggle to occupy the number one position in the country’s governance among the three ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, the Yorubas and the Igbos), has always generated serious problem from the inception. In this struggle, other smaller or minority groups were not left behind, in attempt to also gain power, influence and control of the natural resources. These pockets of resistance and opposition gave birth to the emergence of illegal armed groups,

ethnic militia, religious fanatics and fundamentalist, demanding for their inalienable fundamental human right. It is this mustard seed that was planted during and after independence that has eventually graduated into the current insurgence of violence and terrorism bedevilling Nigeria today.

Lefebure writing on religion and violence observed that:

Many of the violent conflicts in the world today involve religious animosities. Indeed, the history of the encounters among the world's religions is filled with distrust and hatred, violence and vengeance. The deepest tragedy of the history of religions is that the very movements that should bring human beings closer to each other and to their ultimate source and goal have time again become forces of division. In one conflict after; another around the world, religious convictions and interpretations of revelation have been and abused as justification for violence (Azumah 1-2).

Chris Shu'aibu and Ayuba Jalaba Ulea decrying the level of intolerance and lack of understanding among religious groups and leaders took an inventory of the various religious riots in the country for the past three decades. They lamented over the wonton destructions of human lives and properties in the name of religious riots. In the same vein, Jan H. Boer, a social theologian and a missionary who has worked in Nigeria for over thirty years in various capacities in the northern part of Nigeria, narrating the ordeal of religious riots in his book, *Nigeria's Decades of Blood* gives a chronological inventory of all the religious riots that has taken place in Nigeria from 1970 to date, narrating the remote and the immediate causes for each riot. According to him the emphasis will be on detailed facts and not to create sensationalism but in order to show the depth of hatred and anger these facts display (34).

Although there had been series of religious tensions and skirmishes across the country, one of which was the cries witnessed in May 1980 in Zaria during which property belonging to Christians were destroyed by some Muslims, few people could have imagined the differences in religion could lead to such wanton destruction of lives and property as was witnessed in December 1980. From then on, the increasing rate of violence, killing, bombing and insecurity in Nigeria seems unstoppable. According to Boer, from 1980 to 2010 Nigeria has witnessed about 40 major religious crises that has claimed well over a million life and properties worth over a billion naira (91).

Neutrality is expected in any multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious nation like Nigeria. But rather than government playing the role of an umpire, they had often time supported a particular religion depending on who is on seat. According to a publication of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Zaria, Kaduna State, *And it Came to Pass*, government will turn blind eye to the blocking of public highways and roads during Jummat prayers but will demand that permission be obtained for same purpose for Christians especially in the Northern States.

Again, while the 40 days Christian fasting period (Lenten season) is treated by government as purely private affair for the Christians, Muslims are allowed to close early from work during the Ramadan season. Government will see nothing wrong in Muslims erecting mosques on the walkways of the streets on the well-laid out landscapes of government institutions, ostensibly without the approval of the town planning authorities, yet government will refuse to give land or Certificate of Occupancy for Christians desiring to build a Church. Whenever there are riots especially in the North, tribunals will be set up and at the end government will come out with findings on the crisis. Rather than punish those involve in the riot, destroying Christian churches, government will usually come out with a blanket statement that bans all Muslims and Christian associations, under the pretence that they are in full control of the situation. Fair trials are hardly given to prevent subsequent occurrence of violence. These are common grounds that bred conflict and violence between Christians and Muslim in the north.

CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE RESPONSES:

Azumah quoting late Ayatullah Morteza Mutahhari of Iran notes that:

...there is a gulf between Islam and Christianity. If we look closely, we see that in Christianity there is no Jihad because it has nothing at all. By which I mean that there is no Christian structure of society, no Christian legal system, and no Christian rules as to how a society is to be formed... There is no substance in Christianity; it contains no more than a few moral teachings...Islam however is a religion that sees its duty and commitment to form an Islamic state. Islam came to reform society, form nations and governments. Its mandate is to reform the whole world. Such religion cannot be indifferent (42).

From the historical and doctrinal point of view, it is obvious that Islamic response to socio-religious and socio-political issues are inherently embedded in Islamic religion while Christianity is one-sided and preoccupied with spiritual matters. Again, while Christianity deals more with the hereafter, relegating the material world and emphasizing the spiritual, Islam is quite at home with the duality of power and spirit.

Again, it is obvious that the spiritual worldview of a person determine his action and behaviour and generally affects is not so much interested about wealth and poverty in terms of people's physical condition of accumulation of material possession or the lack of it, rather, God is concerned about the relationship between

the rich and the poor. God is interested about the attitude of the rich to the poor. God condemns the rich oppressing the poor or maltreating the poor because wealth is a gift from God.

The Old Testament saints like Abraham, David, Solomon and Job, were men of great wealth and influence but they were not to set their minds on it. Job's attitude to the totality of life portrays the mind-set and the attitude he had about wealth. "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return; the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). The Psalmist on the other hand, wisely advised, "If riches increase, set not your heart on them" (Ps. 62:10). This advice became pertinent because wealth often times became a source of temptation for oppression and injustice. Even though the prosperity preachers may differ from the mainline Churches, Jesus summarised the issue by saying, "you cannot serve God and mammon, for where your treasure is, there your heart will also be" (Luke 12:34, Matt. 6:24).

This worldview tends to place a lower value on the material aspect of life than in Islam and feel uncomfortable when non-Muslim is in power. It is this basic concept that naturally shapes the political activity of the Muslims. For a Muslim, Islam is both religion and the state. It is on this note, that Islam is described as a religion of "militant individuals who are committed to truth and justice. ...religion of those who desire freedom and independence.... The school of those who struggle against imperialism" (Hoffman, "Terrorism").

Historically, Christianity and Islam are similar in some ways. Initially, they both proclaimed a spiritual message which raised questions about unjust political and social structures. In both cases, the very success of the religious message they proclaimed gave them dominating positions in society and led to both becoming a state religion. But gradually this dominating position began to be challenged around the seventeenth century. The instrument used in dismantling this notion of sacral government was the Western notions of representative government. This notion though discredited the idea of the traditional sacred governance and legitimised the representative governance on one hand, has equally exposed the masses to different types of social activism in pressing home their socio-political or socio-religious demands.

For an observer, Islam is a complex religion. This is so because of its paradoxical nature. For example, Islam claims to be a religion of peace and yet encourages war. It preaches love and yet cannot co-exist with an infidel or people of other faiths. Christianity on the other hand is so spiritually conscious that their members are almost becoming earthly useless. The recurrent themes of "vengeance is mine, says the Lord" and the idea of "if your enemy slaps you on one cheek, turn the other side for him too" is making Christians vulnerable to every kind of attack and molestation. It is probably in this, that Christians are beginning to be politically and socially involved in all forms of activism.

II. CONCLUSION

In the words of Mother Theresa, "peace is not something you wish for it, it is something you make, something you do, something you are, something you give away" (Azumah 2). Also quoting a prominent Swiss theologian Hans Kung, Azumah states: "No world peace without peace among religions; and no dialogue between the religions; without accurate knowledge of one another" (2). Every religious belief has a social responsibility to its adherent. There is therefore an urgent need for accurate knowledge of the teaching and beliefs of religions other than our own. Ignorance accounts for much of the fear, suspicion and hatred that leads to violence and opened confrontation between Christians and Muslims. Knowledge will therefore dispel this fear and clear the misunderstanding that tends to divide us rather than strengthen us.

Socio-politically, Islam poses a challenge to Christian doctrine and values. This is so because according to Azumah, while:

Christians regard religion as a matter of personal faith and view the Church's past involvement in and use of temporal power as a serious aberration. Muslims, reject any attempt to relegate religion to private sphere as a violation of Islam principle. For Muslims, Islam is a complete way of life and there can be no separation between private and public, the make every effort to lay claim of the public space from Christians tend to retreat. Hence, while very few Christians in leadership positions will unashamedly exploit their position to advance their religion, very few Muslims would hesitate to do so (7).

It is this perception of the spiritual and the physical that determines the political behaviour of the Muslims. Political participation and involvement is based on religious worldview. For example, Christianity tends to place a lower emphasis on the material aspect of life than any other religion. Christianity sees poverty as a conducive condition for the realization of spiritual values in life and the idea of living peaceably with all men without which no man shall see the Lord or even the idea of loving your enemy and if your enemy compels you to go one mile, go with him two are some of the major recurrent themes that reduces the zeal and vigour of socio-political or socio-religious activism among Christians.

For Muslims, religion and politics are bound together. It is on this note, that Muslims feel uncomfortable when non-Muslims are in power or authority. Islam sees the body and soul, social, political and religious life as one; there is no dichotomy. It rejects the separation of the spiritual and the worldly; prosperity is

in this world and hereafter. This religious worldview is what regulates the political life of an average Muslim and makes them politically and socially more active than their Christians counterparts are.

While Christians regard religion as a personal faith and view the Church's involvement in or use of social activism as a serious aberration, Muslims reject any attempt to relegate religion to private sphere as a violation of Islam principle. For Muslims, Islam is a complete way of life and there can be no separation between private and public, spiritual and temporal, religion and politics. For this reason they make every effort whether through peace or violence to lay claim of the public space from which Christians tend to retreat. Hence, the slow non-partisan of Christians in socio-political activism compared to their Muslim counterpart.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To restore peaceful co-existence in a heterogeneous State like Nigeria there is need for a realistic constitutional amendment that will truly reflect the secular nature of the Nigerian State and the wishes of the Federating units.
2. Nigeria should be restructured. In the restructuring, power should not only rotate among the major ethnic groups but opportunity should be given to minority groups. This will address the political, religious and other social-economic issues that are threatening the peaceful co-existence of Nigeria society and guarantee every religious groups equality before the law and a sense of belonging.
3. As part of the restructuring, the issue of resource control should be redefined. The south feels neglected and marginalized as the golden goose that lays the golden egg; they believe that since the country's wealth is from their area, preference should be given to them in terms of development, appointments and employment, Restructuring and redefining the issue of resource control could minimize militancy in the area.
4. Neutrality is expected in any multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious nation like Nigeria. Political and religious leaders should play the role of an umpire rather than fan, support and incite their adherents to action by their utterances.
5. As a secular and heterogeneous State, the cultural diversity of all the federating unit should be respected, guarded and protected. The use of religion and cultural differences to divide Nigeria should be discouraged in its totality.
6. Godfatherism in Nigerian politics should be discouraged while equality before the law should be encouraged. When laws are violated and appropriate sanctions meted on culprits, it acts as a deterrent to others but when law breakers have their way as a result of their godfatherism, it encourages lawlessness and anarchy in the society. People arrested for abetting or involved in religious violence, terrorism and militancy should be publicly tried and if found guilty should be imprisoned without option of fine.
7. There can be no world peace without peace among religions; and no dialogue between the religions; without accurate knowledge of one another. Every religious belief has a social responsibility to its adherent. There is therefore an urgent need for accurate knowledge of the teaching and beliefs of religions other than our own. Ignorance accounts for much of the fear, suspicion and hatred that leads to violence and opened confrontation between Christians and Muslims. Knowledge of the various religions will therefore dispel this fear and clear the misunderstanding that tends to divide us rather than strengthen us.

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