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## Review

# Towards proffering a solution to the persistent religious intolerance which is a bane of development in Nigeria

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**Nigeria is culturally pluralistic with 455 ethnic groups and three dominant religions: Christianity, Islam and the Traditional African Religion (TAR). So far, the absence of a common loyalty to one religion or culture touches the social problems of Nigeria at the very core. Religious conflicts in the country have led to the enthronement of insecurity, discouragement of foreign investors and loss of skilled manpower to the nation. The paper posits that a religion in the true and only correct sense is a bond uniting men together, not a particular set of dogmas and beliefs. Secondly, that Nigerians should consider her diverse cultures a blessing and live in peace with each other. After all, from all indications, nature thrives on diversity. It is recommended, inter alia, that Nigeria should establish an Inter-Religious Commission with branches in all states of the Federation with a mandate to work out modalities for religious tolerance among Nigerians.**

**Keywords:** Causes, Development, Effects, Religious Intolerance, Solutions.

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a cultural mosaic. The country has 455 ethnic groups (Egomo, 2011). It is the diversity of cultural patterns and the multiplicity of ethnic groups in the country that have depicted the unity of Nigerian Federation as 'unity in diversity'. Cultural diversity, however, has characterized the country with a sort of "elusive" unity. It tends to portray a conglomeration of individuals of many nationals whose first allegiance is to the ethnic group and not to the "nation". Ethnicity, language, region and religion interactively form Nigeria's matrix of cultural pluralism (Young, 1993).

Religion refers to the existence of supernatural beings that have a governing effect on life. It is an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings (Haralambos, Holborn

and Heald, 2008). In Nigeria, there are three types of religion: Christianity, Islam and the Traditional African Religion (TAR).

The God of Christianity is a Supreme Being, His word is the ultimate truth, His power is omnipotent. His followers worship Him and praise Him and live by His commandments. Islam is a religion taught by Prophet Mohammed. It has five Pillars of faith:

- a. A belief in Allah
- b. A belief in His Angels
- c. A belief in His Books
- d. A belief in His Prophet
- e. A belief in the day of judgment

Traditional religion in Africa has no founder. Religious beliefs are woven into everyday thought and action, government and social structure. A creator, god, is generally recognized. The Supreme Being is at the apex of a triangle with cults of gods and ancestors on two

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sides; magic/religious practices i.e. witchcraft and sorcery form the base. Traditional religion before the advent of Islam and Christianity was part and parcel of the people's culture and consequently, their way of life. It did not require any process of conversion or propagation. People were born into it (Fan, 2003).

Religion plays a key role in establishing social order. In fact one main objective for raising the intensity of religious activities in Nigeria has to do with believers' concern for peace and stability in the community and within the country. Hence, the organizations of open air revivals, vigils or crusades to which people from all walks of life are invited.

According to Fan, Etta and Fan (2004) today, there is a proliferation of churches in Nigeria. A survey by the researchers along five adjoining streets of Mbukpa Area in Calabar South Local Government, Cross River State, Nigeria, revealed a galaxy of churches comprising Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, Glorious Faith Family Ministry, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Qua Iboe Church Nigeria, The Apostolic Church, Mount of Revelation Zion Church, The Church of the Body of Christ, Assemblies of God, New Covenant Bible Church, Christ Holy Church Nigeria, Destiny Achievers Mission, The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, Divine Promise Ministry, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Restoration Chapel Ministry and Vision Outreach for Christ Mission. Nigerian Moslems have their own factions, though the number is nothing like what Christians might boast; but like some of their Christian sects, some Moslems sects too are or tend to be fanatically sectarian (Agi, 1998).

### **Religious Intolerance in Nigeria: Nature and Consequences**

Religion is the most universally potent instrument of peaceful co-existence, but ironically, the most abused, manipulated and subverted weapon of deceit, deception, political maneuvering, sowing seed of discord, fanning embers of hostility for putting kith and kin asunder (David, 2000). It is clear that the religion question, according to Audu (2000) has remained one of the most sensitive and volatile issues capable of consuming the country. Sometimes when it pops up it creates some level of insecurity among settler communities resulting into exodus of people from crisis areas back to their respective states of origin and other safer places. There have been high degree of intra-sectarian conflicts creating instability and large scale devastation which inhibits meaningful progress and unity in the country. The two organized religions have the tendency to delay national integration because of their negative tendency to create competing social orders and to define the most basic community thereby challenging the national community of Nigeria.

Religious intolerance, according to Fan (2004) is a situation where members of one religious group are not able to accept ways of thinking and behaving which another group may have that are different from theirs. Wherever there is more than one religious group in a place there are usually acts of intolerance, which manifest in the following ways:

- (a) Throwing verbal insults at members of a religious group who may be worshipping or walking past;
- (b) Attacking with dangerous missiles;
- (c) Physical fights;
- (d) Denying some religious groups fundamental social services like provision of land to build worship places;
- (e) Mutilation in any form of the different religious holy books.

Several theoretical presuppositions have been provided to explain ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria. They include the continuance of arbitrary colonial delineation of boundaries that did not recognise ethnic peculiarities, colonial policy of "divide and rule," elite manipulations, struggles for scarce resources, poverty, unemployment, external forces, violations of human rights, military factor, effects of the World Bank and IMF – induced economic policies such as the Structural Adjustment programme (SAP), collapse of traditional values, and effects of urbanization. In essence, understanding or explaining ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria is a complex one. One of the causal explaining ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria is the manipulation thesis popularised by Bala Usman and others which posit that it is the elite that manipulate religion to serve their personal interests. They exploit the vulnerability of the poverty-stricken and illiterate masses to whip up religious sentiments which they so cherish in order to unleash violence against their fellow citizens. This postulation also receives strengths from the Marxist idea of religion as "the sign of the oppressed, the opium of the people". Simply put, ethno-religious conflicts are artificial creations to divert masses' attention from exploitation by the elite class. There is the economic decline of the 1980s which led to the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The International monetary Fund and World Bank enunciated economic policies that created hardship, unemployment, anger and frustration. Many people suddenly turned to religion for solace as religion provided the new alternative, though not without its excesses. This, to some extent, has led to religious extremism, fanaticism and intolerance (Akinsanya, Wilson, Tanimu and Lawal, 2014)

The causes of religious intolerance, according to this paper, include:

1. Religious bigotry
2. Religious indoctrination
3. Factionalism within a religious group

4. Power tussles

5. Ignorance and misunderstanding of the central teaching and practices of the different religions.

6. Government interference in religious matters. A religious conflict can be brought about by religious intolerance. That is, when one religious group is unable to accept the beliefs, values and practices of another religious group, it breeds acts of intolerance and subsequently conflict. A religious conflict can be defined as a disagreement, quarrel or fight between two opposing religious groups or factions of a religious group.

Olu-Adeyemi (2006) reveals that about forty ethno-religious clashes happened between May 1999 and September 2000, thus signalling an average of one bloody clash per month since the return to democracy. An attempt is made below to showcase these occurrences.

- May 30-June 9, 1999: Renewed Warri communal clash in Delta State.
- July 18, 1999: Oodua People's Congress and Hausa traders clashed at Sagamu, Ogun State.
- November 25, 1999: Communal clash in Lagos between Oodua People's Congress and Hausa traders.
- January 25, 2000: Communal clash in Brass Local Government area of Bayelsa State.
- January 29, 2000: Communal Clash in Etsako Local Government Area of Edo State.
- January 30, 2000: Communal Clash at Etsako Local Government area of Edo State.
- February 2, 2000: Boundary dispute between communities in Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers State.
- February 21, 2000: Sharia riots in Kaduna
- February 28, 2000: Religious riots in Aba, Abia State, reprisal killing from the Kaduna mayhem.
- March 5, 2000: Epoch of Ife-Modakeke war of attrition.
- March 16, 2000: Renewed hostilities between the people of Eleme and Okirika in Rivers State.
- March 28, 2000: Religious riots in Damboa, Borno State.
- April 8, 2000: Communal clash in Ovia South Local Government area of Edo State.
- May 18, 2000: Local farmers and Fulani cattle rearer's clash in Saki, Oyo State.
- May 23, 2000: Renewed religious riot in Kaduna.
- June 5, 2000: Epoch of the Owo mayhem in Ondo State.
- June 12, 2000: Communal clash in Isoko North Local Government area of Edo State.
- June 23, 2000: Communal clash between the people of Ikot Offiong and Oku-Iboku of Cross River State.
- July 1, 2000: The commencement of communal clash at Ikare Akoko, Ondo State.
- July 21, 2000: Renewed hostilities between the Ijaw and Urhobos in Delta State.
- August 12, 2000: Communal clash in Bendel

Local Government area of Abia State.

- August 22, 2000: Violent clash at Agboma community in Epe Local Government area of Lagos State.
- October 16, 2000: Igbos and Hausa traders clashed at Alaba Rago market area of Lagos state.
- December 11, 2000: Renewed clashes between Ife and Modakeke.
- March 13, 2001: Renewed communal clashes at Ow, Ondo State.
- April 13, 2001: Religious riot in Kano State
- May 12, 2001: Communal clash between the Ijaws and Itsekiri of Delta State.
- July 2, 2001: Communal clash between Odimodu and Ogulagba communities of Delta State.
- July 12, 2000: Ethnic violence in Nasarawa State.
- September 7, 2001: Religious clash in Jos, Plateau State.
- September 16, 2001: Religious Riot in Kano
- January 12, 2002: Oodua People's Congress clash at Owo, Ondo State.
- February 2, 2002: Oodua People's Congress and Hausa people clashed at Idi-Araba, Lagos State.
- February 26, 2002: Communal clash between Apprapum and Osatura communities of Cross Rivers State.
- March 10, 2002: Egbira youth's revolt on Local Government creation.
- March 30-April 2, 2002: All Peoples Party Intra party clash at Ilorin, Kwara State.
- August 31, 2002: Communal clash at Ado-Ekiti
- September 3, 2002: Renewed communal clashes at Owo, Ondo State.
- November 21, 20002: Religious riots in Kaduna State and Abuja

### **Effects of Religious Conflicts on Nigeria's Development**

People see the concept "development" differently. Here the works of Rodney, Todaro and Smith, and Seers are relevant. According to Rodney (1972) in Fan and Ibiang (2010) development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Development, according to Todaro and Smith (2003) must be conceived of as a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth; the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty. The three core values of development, these authors submit, are:

- i. The ability to provide basic necessities. This entails the increase in the availability and widening the distribution of basic life-sustaining goods such as food,

**Table 1** Catalogue of Ethno-Religious Violence and its casualties in Nigeria (2000 – 2009)

Year (A)	Location (B)	Principal Source (C)	Remarks/Casualties (D)
2000	Northern Nigeria	Opposition to the introduction of Islamic Sharia Law	Thousands killed and properties destroyed
September, 2001	Jos, Plateau State	Christian – Muslim violence, flares after Muslim prayers	Over 1,000 people were killed
November, 2002	Kaduna	Articles of a newspaper considered blasphemous to the Islamic faith during the Miss World contest in Abuja	At least 216 lives were lost
May, 2004	Yelwa, Plateau State	Street battles by Muslim Fulanis and Christian militia	630 people were killed
February, 2006	Maiduguri	Muslim protest against Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed resulting in Muslim and Christian mobs	At least 157 people died in a week of rioting
November, 2008	Jos, Plateau State	Disputed local government election triggering clashes between Muslim and Christian gangs	At least 700 people died
February 21, 2009	Bauchi	Religious fanatics	At least 11 people died, churches and mosques were burnt down
July, 2009	Bauchi	Boko Haram's demand the adoption of Sharia in Northern Nigeria. The Boko Haram suicide bombing still raging on till date	More than 1000 people are killed and over 500 arrested
July 27, 2009	Maiduguri	Security forces killing of sect members	90 people were killed
July 29, 2009	Yobe state	Gun battle near the town of Potiskum by religious fanatics	At least 33 sect members were killed
December, 2009	Bauchi	Clashes between security forces and members of an Islamic sect armed with machetes	At least 40 people were killed.
January, 2010	Jos, Plateau State	Clashes between Muslim and Christian gangs	More than 400 people were killed
March, 2010	DogoNahawa, Zot and Ratsat in Southern Jos, Plateau State	Clashes between Islamic pastoralists and Christian villagers in mostly Christian villages	More than 300 people died
December 24, 2010	Jos, Plateau State	Bombing by Muslim and Christian youth	At least 80 people were killed

Source Adetoro and Omiyeya, 2012

shelter, health and protection to all members of the society.

ii. Self-esteem: to be a person. All peoples and societies seek some form of self-esteem although they may call it authenticity, identity, dignity, respect, honour or recognition.

iii. Freedom from servitude: to be able to choose. It gives man the freedom to choose greater leisure, to have more goods and services or to deny the importance of these material wants and live a life of spiritual contemplation.

Seers (1969) in Fan, Edu and Ibiang (2010) best posed the basic questions about the meaning of development by asserting that:

The questions to ask about a country's development are therefore: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have it would be

strange to call the result “development” even if per capita income doubled (Fan, Edu and Ibiang, 2010).

Indicators of development in a country according to Fan (2003) are:

1. Gross National Product (GNP) or per-capita income provided there is an even spread of the income in a country’s population.
2. Rate of employment
3. Industrialization
4. Nutritional status of the citizen
5. Average life expectancy
6. Ratio of doctors and nurses per thousand of the population.
7. Infant/child mortality rate
8. Level of literacy
9. Availability of infrastructure
10. Number of telephones, radio and television sets newspapers etc. Per thousand of the population.

Ethnicity and religious crises have been twin obstacles in Nigeria’s search for political stability. Thus, the timeline of religious and ethnic violence in Nigeria could be catalogued as shown in table 1 above:

Religious intolerance has had some negative consequences on Nigeria’s development viz:

- (a) Loss of manpower to the country. This is clearly shown in table 1 column (D) above;
- (b) Creation of general insecurity and a threat to foreign investors. No investor is interested in a place of insecurity. Development takes place only where there is peace and order;
- (c) Disruption of academic calendar in schools in the affected areas; and
- (d) Rendering some Nigerians refugees in their fatherland.

## CONCLUSION

The religious contradictions that Nigeria faces are daunting. The country is essentially a heterogeneous society, with the two monotheistic religions – Islam and Christianity – enjoying the loyalty of most Nigerians.

The paper has highlighted the persistent problem of religious fanaticism and bigotry that has become a festering sore in Nigeria’s body-politic. To extinguish it demands our ingenuity and complete commitment. All religious adherents should know that God has no religion and therefore all differences in religion are man-made. Governments, Federal, State and Local Government and their agencies should intensify their efforts towards maintaining order in the society by constantly organizing enlightenment programme on the evils of religious intolerance and hostility. The media should be encouraged to hold seminars and workshops on religious matters. Religion cannot be divorced from the people’s culture. It is the dimension of every human personality.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper considers the following recommendations apposite:

- Nigerians should consider her diverse cultures a blessing and live in peace with each other. After all, from all indications, nature thrives on diversity. Look at the permutations of weather during the day, much less a month or year. The climates differ from one part of the earth to another. The flora and fauna exhibit great variety and differ markedly from one region to another. The continents and their geographies differ. No two snowflakes are exactly alike. The stars, constellations and other heavenly bodies appear to be changing and our learned astronomers tell us that many changes are constantly taking place. It is the balance in all these patterns and forces that help nature thrive. Nigerians should adopt nature as their guiding force and draw energy from the earth.
- Nigeria needs an Inter Religious Commission with branches in all the States of the Federation. This Commission would work out modalities for religious tolerance among Nigerians.
- Adherents of Christianity and Islam should be able to come together and identify the problems of the nation so that they could jointly fight such problems. The emphasis should be on a collective and genuine religious practice that could lead to the development of the nation. Religion should lay much emphasis in the areas of alleviating human suffering, poverty, war, political and economic justice among all citizens. All religions should put into action forces that would lead to the promotion of the welfare of the people.
- Since all religious bodies preach love as a virtue, religious leaders should ensure that they emphasize this. Where love exists, there must, of necessity, be the absence of suspicion, religious discrimination, rivalry and competition, strife and tension (Kayode, 2000). Secularism should not just be concerned as the withdrawal of the Nigerian State from religious affairs but as a guarantee of religious freedom to every Nigerian.
- Strict adherence to the teaching of various religions especially as they border on the need for tolerance and love for one another will be an advantage.
- We should relate Christian mentality to our lifestyle (Fan, Ekpe and Ita, 2008). The formation of a Christian mentality means that religion must be related to life. In a Christian society the Ten Commandments lead. These principles should serve as our Code of Conduct at all times and at all places (Fan, Usoroh, Ettah and Edinyang, 2009).
- Basic tenets of various religions should be built into moral and religious instructions in secondary schools and made a core subject at this level, nation-wide.
- Ethnic militias should be prevented from determining inter-ethnic relations.

- Place of the minorities in Nigerian should be enhanced.
- There is need to shift grounds on spontaneous military approach to solving disputes to really focus on evolving a basic amicable framework of co-existence between groups in a society. Akinsanya et al., (2014) suggest that emphasis should shift from the distribution of the cake along ethnic lines to its distribution along lines of the contribution to its production.
- The agitation for an adequate revenue sharing formula should be given due consideration while culture of tolerance, trust and dialogue in inter-ethnic and inter-religious issues must be built.

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