

Beyond the Other in (Dis) order: A Perception of Unhealthy Religious Relations in Nigeria

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Abstract. Religious dissonance has been a recurring decimal in Nigeria which has brought about avalanche of disorder manifesting in loss of lives and properties, retardation of development, political gridlock as well as threat to unity. The scenario is no doubt an aberration given the religious policy in the country which suggests secularism arising from plurality. In the face of disorder occasioned by religious conflict and violence, the ‘Other’ is seen as the cause. Thus to the Christian, Muslims should be blamed and vice versa. However, beyond the ‘Other’ as a factor in religious cacophony, it has been discovered that the ‘Self’ is also not immune from the blame. Existing studies on the subject have focused on the antics of the adherents of other religions. In this paper, a holistic approach is presented with emphasis on both inter and intra-religious relations as a major factor in religious disorder. It is posited that cordial religious relations is achievable if both the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ adhere to the constitution and see religion as a sensitive matter that must be handled with caution and mutual respect.

Keywords: Other and (dis)order, Unhealthy religious relations, Nigeria

1. Introduction

One of the major problems confronting Nigeria as a nation is the unhealthy religious relations manifesting in various ways of which its devastating effects are obvious and fatal. Solutions so far proffered have not yielded the expected results; hence, the country is caught in the web of religious crises characterized by mistrust, suspicion, and destruction of lives and properties. Besides, it has been observed that religious disharmony is both inter and intra. Thus, the expected unity among those who profess the same religion is largely a mirage. All these have continued to impact negatively on individuals and collective well being. The consensus opinion of scholars who had worked on this phenomenon is that religious disharmony is not in any way beneficial to mankind as evident in its history. In this attempt, the unhealthy religious relations in Nigeria with particular references to inter and intra religious relations will be fully discussed and attention shall be paid to how it has affected Nigeria in the areas of politics, economy and corporate existence.

2. Understanding Religious Policy and Situation in Nigeria

Nigeria as a country is religiously pluralistic. Apart from the three major religions: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion, there are several others competing for

relevance and recognition. In spite of this reality, in theory, Nigeria is a secular state. This has been indicated in the constitution since independence. Secularism is taken to mean ‘of or relating to worldly as opposed to sacred things or having no particular religious affinities’. It rejects religion and maintains that religion should have no place in civil affairs and civil rulers should have no interest in religion. The condition of being secular is understood to mean secularity (Nwolize 1989:76).

As stated in the 1999 constitution, “The government of the federation shall not adopt any religion as state religion”. Therefore, in the process of policy formulation, religion should not be an issue of concern in governance and other governmental activities. By implication, every citizen has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Section 38 stated categorical that:

- (i) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching practice and observance.
- (ii) No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own or a religion not approved by his parents or guardian.
- (iii) No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instructions for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination.

It also states that:

...accordingly, national integration shall actively

*be encouraged, whilst discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, **religion**, status, ethnic, linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited. While National Ethics shall be Discipline, Integrity, Dignity of Labour, Social Justice, **Religious Tolerance**, Self-reliance and Patriotism. Also, membership of political parties is open to every citizen irrespective of his place of origin, circumstances of birth, sex, **religion** or ethnic group (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999). (Emphasis is mine)*

The foregoing legal provisions are made in order to ensure that citizens enjoy religious freedom. Therefore, the state or government must not affiliate itself or show preference for one religion. (Nwolize 1989:78) The dictum ‘live and let live’ is held and the contributions that religion can make to the lives of citizens are recognized, hence, the belief in religious tolerance. (Awolalu 1988:8)

3. Manifestation of Religious Dissonance in Nigeria

What can be deduced from the religious policy in Nigeria is that religious freedom is expected. Therefore, anything contrary to this is an aberration. However, what seems to be aberrant is a reality that religious harmony is to a great extent non-existent. In other words, there is no love among the adherents of various religions in Nigeria and in some cases including those who profess the same religion. According to Ojuade 2010:179, “Since the 1970s, religion has become as destructive as ethnicity. Consequently, there have been several religious riots, each claiming many lives and wreaking mass destruction of properties including places of worship”.

The list of religious crises in Nigeria is long; however, an attempt shall be taken to discuss some of them. It should be noted that Nigeria has witnessed several cases of both inter and intra-religious conflict. Hence, religious plurality is not the only factor responsible for religious disharmony. For this reason, the focus of this paper shall be on the unhealthy intra and inter religious relations so as to understand the nature of the problem with a view to knowing appropriate solutions to proffer. The

international community is not in the dark in respect of this; reason for the organized symposium with the theme **“Inter-and Intra-Religious Encounter and Entanglement of Christians, Muslims and Traditionalists in African Urban Spaces”** by the Utrecht University in The Netherlands on 30th October, 2017 during which related papers were presented (www.religiosmatters). The concern about intra-religious relations becomes crucial because people may be tempted to be biased while discussing the issue, in which case, Christians may want to blame Muslims for religious crises and vice-versa.

A notable case of religious violence is the Maitasine riot which started in Kano in December 1980. This event led to the killing of more than five thousand (5,000) people and many people were rendered homeless. This group of people, though somewhat Islamic in nature, is believed not to be Islamic because they condemn the main principles of Islam as contained in Qur’an and the Sunni. They surfaced again in 1982 in Bulunkutu, Maiduguri and Kaduna leaving several people dead and homeless. There was also a recurrence of this in Jimeta, Yola now in Adamawa State on 27th February 1984. Apart from the loss of lives recorded, property worth millions of naira as at that time got destroyed. (Mala 1988:135-138).

The city of Kafanchan became a theatre of religious riot in 1987 during a programme organized by Federation of Christian Students. This was sequel to the report that a guest preacher, who was once a Muslim made offensive statements about the Qur’an and a Muslim lady obviously present, grabbed the microphone from him. This episode developed into a major confrontation between Muslim and Christian students of the college and people in the town joined them leaving twelve (mainly Muslims) people dead and their belongings destroyed. The news got to Zaria and violence ensued afterward, targeting Christian populace and their properties. The crisis did not stop there as towns such as Kaduna and Katsina were also thrown into anarchy which culminated in the declaration of State of Emergency in Kaduna State. (Alli 1993:121)

In 1992, the Zango–Kataf area of Kaduna State witnessed a bloody religious violence which cannot be easily forgotten by Nigerians especially those who were affected. The Miss World beauty contest scheduled to hold in Nigeria in 2002 was aborted owing to the violence that emanated from a publication, which was considered an insult to the personality of Prophet Mohammed (S.A.W). Prior to the publication, Muslims had expressed reservation about the timing of the event as it coincided with the period of Ramadan fast which led to the acrimony between Christians and Muslims (Bolarinwa 2010:70). This must have prompted the writer to say that the Prophet would have been favorably disposed to marrying one of the contestants if the programme had taken place during His life time.

What can be said about the Sharia controversy that has continued to generate conflict and violence of dangerous magnitude? According to Atubi 2007:259, in 1978, the Sharia became the bone of contention in Nigerian politics as the debate during the Constituent Assembly revolved a lot around the issue of Sharia Court of Appeal, which was believed by many non-Muslims as the first step towards the establishment of an Islamic state in the country. However, before this time, as noted by Ngwa 2002:174; there was an attempt to introduce the Sharia law into Nigeria’s legal system in 1960 following the Abu Ramat Penal report on the Northern regional judiciary. Sharia became a more serious issue in 1999 when some Northern states, beginning with Zamfara on October 27th, 1999 and including Sokoto, Kano, and Niger, passed into law the criminal law sections of the Islamic Sharia code of conduct. The states concerned advanced with varying speed toward application and included as part of the Sharia criminal code are the penalties for specific violations. For example, flogging for imbibing alcohol, removal of hands and feet for recidivist thieves, and stoning in cases of proven adultery (the standard of proof for the last type of behavior is very high). Many Northern politicians supported the Sharia movement through personal conviction, political opportunism, political realism, or a sense that they should represent the wishes of those who

elected them. (*Nigeria Muslim/Christian Conflict* <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/nigeria>) Its adoption led to a demonstration by Christians on February 21st, 2000 in Kaduna, which culminated in the massive killing of Christians and Muslims, also the destruction of Churches and Mosques as well as public and private properties. Many Igbo from the South-Eastern part of Nigeria residing in the North were affected and in reaction to this, there were retaliatory killings and burning of Mosques in Abia and Imo States, Northerners being major victims. Later in the year, the problem resurfaced with several casualties also recorded.

Another area that has experienced (and is still experiencing) excruciating effects of religious crises is Jos in Plateau State. Jos, which used to be a place many people loved to live because of the serenity and favorable climate however changed to an unpeaceful environment as the place now experience religious violence at regular interval and at an alarming rate. In the words of Gwamna and Amango, 2010:4), the first violence experienced in Jos was a violent ethno-religious crisis on September 7th, 2001 which broke its innocence as a religiously tolerant state. Since then, Jos has lost its acclaim as the city of 'Peace and Tourism'. Today, it is sarcastically referred to by public observers and commentators as a city of 'Pieces and Terrorism'. Most of the clashes in Plateau State have been portrayed as being between Christian and Muslim communities, but such have often assumed an ethnic dimension.

In April 2004, at least twenty (20) people were killed in three days of clashes between rival ethnic militias in Central Plateau State. The fighting caused by a dispute over use of an area of land designated for cultivation by the agrarian Tarok and for grazing by the nomadic Fulani was intense which led to the burning of churches and nearly a hundred (100) people were killed in a Tarok village by Hausa fighters. In early May 2004, Nigerian security forces restored order in remote areas of Central Plateau State where sectarian violence had left scores of people dead. Calmness returned to the highlands town of Yelwa as hundreds of police reinforcements

arrived to quash revenge attacks by Christian ethnic-Tarok fighters against the mainly Muslim-ethnic Hausa community.

According to police reports, the death toll of eighty (80) announced on 4th May, 2004 underestimated the number of casualties. While Muslim Nigerian leaders believe that more than two hundred (200) people were killed in the violence on 1st - 2nd May, 2004, and more than a hundred (100) others were missing. They called it mass murder and accused local authorities for organizing militia fighters, while withdrawing police from the area before they stormed the town. On the record of the Red Cross Society, as many as six hundred (600) people were estimated to have been killed on attacks in the town of Yelwa by Christian tribe militias in the first week of May 2004. Following the Christian massacre of Muslims that in turn led to reprisal killings of Christians in the Northern city of Kano, former President Olusegun Obasanjo declared a State of Emergency in Plateau State in Central Nigeria on 18th May 2004. Governor Joshua Dariye was accused of failing to find solution to the recurring violence between the Plateau State's Muslim and Christian communities. The President also dissolved the Plateau State legislature and appointed a retired Army General, Chris Ali, as interim administrator for six months. (*Nigeria Muslim/Christian Conflict* <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/nigeria>)

There were divergent views on the November 2008 violence; while some read political factors to it, others see it as having religious and even economic reasons. The crisis began shortly after state-wide local government council elections which were considered by some as "peaceful, free and fair". The crisis which claimed several lives and properties lasted four days. The exact number of casualties became another source of problem between Christians and Muslims as claims and counterclaims beclouded the actual number of victims. Sunday, 17th January 2010 witnessed another ethno-religious conflict in Jos which was attributed to three factors:

- One Alhaji Kabir Mohammed had gone to Nasarawa Gwon to commence the reconstruction of his house demolished during the 2008 crisis. As the work began, some youths (not identified) came and stoned the site workers in order to stop work.
- A group of Muslim youths stormed St. Michael's Catholic Church in Nasarawa Gwon while the church service was on and unleashed terror on members of the congregation. This version was conveyed by the Police Commissioner, Mr. Greg Anyanting.
- Violence developed from a minor argument among Christian and Muslim youths in a local football match on Saturday, 16th January, 2010. The argument and name calling continued till the next day and degenerated into a major religious crisis. (Gwamna and Amango 2010:6-8).

To say the obvious, Plateau State has become notorious in religious crises as bloodshed that often has religious undertone has become a frequent occurrence to which solutions have not been found. It has been argued that there is an ethnic dimension to the situation in Plateau State owing to indigenes-settlers dichotomy. Therefore, it's always difficult to decipher whether a particular crisis is religious or ethnic or even both. Between 2001 and 2012, Oshomoh 2017:111-112 chronicles twenty recorded cases of ethno-religious violence in Jos, the State which are by no mean exhaustive.

The Boko Haram crisis of 2009 is another example of intra religious violence. Members of this group do not believe in some doctrines upheld by conventional Islam. For instance, they are opposed to western education. The riot began in Bauchi town from 24th – 28th July, 2009 and it spread to Borno, Yobe, Kano and Katsina state. *Boko Haram* is a combination of Hausa and Arabic words, which connote “western education and something that is forbidden” Haram is literally, “that which is prohibited and unlawful”, and a thing is said to be “Haram” when it is forbidden, as opposed to that which is “halal” meaning “lawful”. (This must have prompted a member of Academic

Staff Union of Universities ASUU, University of Ibadan branch to describe the Federal Government of Nigeria as *Boko Haram* in 2009 because of the prolonged strike, which as at that time, the Government did not pay serious attention to). They are equally opposed to the secular status of Nigeria. As characteristic of religious violence, the destruction of lives was monumental. The leader of the group, Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf, was arrested and killed by law enforcement agents. His killing however generated controversy as it was understood to be extra judicial. *Boko Haram* insurgency has been a major headline in the mass media as several deadly attacks and abductions has been witnessed. One cannot enumerate all cases of strained religious relations in Nigeria. As they keep occurring, not all of them are reported in the media. On abduction, over 200 secondary school girls were captured in Chibok in Borno State 2014 and many of them are still held captive five years after. Also, well over 100 girls were abducted in Dapchi in 2018, while many of them have been rescued, Liya Sharibu is yet to be released.

One must not commit an error of overgeneralization by concluding that it is only the Northern part of Nigeria that is bedeviled with religious intolerance. The only difference is that what is obtained in other parts is usually of lower magnitude. Examples abound of conflicts among Christians, Muslims and adherents of Traditional Religion in some parts of Yorubaland. Traditional festivals, which sometimes go with “stay at home order” do lead to misunderstanding between the adherents and either Muslims or Christians or both depending on the area and the influence of the two missionary religions there. For example, the *Oloolu* – a masquerade in Ibadan, Oyo State, must not be seen by women and this may lead to conflict of interest because an average Christian woman might want to claim that she is not under any obligation not to see the Masquerade. A crisis of this nature was witnessed in Imesi-Ile, Osun State, sometime in 1994. The bone of contention was that a sacrifice was to be offered and taken to a place on the outskirts of the town. As the people bearing the sacrifice were going, they met a group of Christians who refused to

disappear as the traditionalists commanded; the resultant conflict was settled at the King's palace. Also, in Ibadan according to Nabofa 1994:20;

“Between 1985 and 1987 at the University of Ibadan, the issue of the Cross standing within the vicinity of a Mosque generated heat not only within the campus but also all over Nigeria. It got to a stage where all Christians in the country rallied round the Christians community in the University campus to see that no harm was done to the Cross. In the same way, there was a corresponding support from some highly placed Muslims from all over the country who were bent on the Cross being removed from its present site so that it would not block the view of their members as they face the symbolic East”.

Early in the life of the Babangida regime, the government announced that Nigeria had become a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). It was claimed that prior to this time, a move had been made during the Gowon era which was able to keep the issue out of public knowledge. This was seen by many Christians as a ploy to Islamize a secular country. Therefore, Christians all over the country rose in opposition to the plan. (Adesogan 2006: 117) The Federal government was advised against joining because such constituted a threat to the unity of Nigeria.

4. Intra-religious Conflict

Experience has shown that intra-religious conflicts also abound. Among Christians for instance, the impact of denominationalism is evident. As the ‘church’ continues to divide, so unity continues to elude her (Quarcoopome, Ilori, Daudu and Obinna: 2005:176-177). It is not an overstatement to say that unity among Christians is a mere hypothesis and child of necessity when it becomes the only solution to a prevailing problem. This is why some Christians still believe that others are not true Christians. The only difference is that it has not reached the level of open confrontation.

That the church is growing numerically is an irrefutable fact. However, the rate of growth does not correspond with moral consciousness

and unity among Christians (Familusi 2015:69). Thus, the response to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) has been in the interest of those responding. This was once described by a preacher as “Great Omission”. Churches are found in every nooks and crannies including residential areas, thereby causing noise pollution. (Ayantayo 2006:77) Dioceses, (Adewale 2008:90) and other offices are being carved out almost on a daily basis to create duty posts, which makes for luxury of life for people especially those in the good book of the authority. Consequently, there is unhealthy rivalry among denominations as if the work of God is a competition. The spirit of ecumenism (Oyalana 1996: 36) is fast disappearing and what is now cherished is attachment to denominations. On campuses, fellowships are proliferating to the extent that any denomination established today may have branches in schools almost immediately just because Christians are not favorably disposed to fellowshiping with one another. Proliferation of churches, which has led to unhealthy competition, is apparent. Thus, it is not strange to have four churches in a building of four flats, each of them struggling to recruit members. Christians participating in the National Youth Service Corp scheme are also divided along denominations. This is why there is multiplication of Corpers’ fellowship. The Nigerian Christian Corpers Fellowship (NCCF) that used to be an umbrella body of Christian corps members has witnessed mass break away as many denominations like the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Anglican, Baptist among others now have their own fellowship. The Deeper Life Bible Church and Believers Love World Church popularly known as Christ Embassy had for a long time established their own corpers’ fellowships. Also, there is division in the attempt of the church to be united. Bodies like Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and Christian Council of Nigeria (CNN) do not have all Christian denominations as members. In fact, the last election of CAN almost tore the body apart. Such wouldn’t have happened in an atmosphere of unity (www.theeagleonline.com.ng). Are we to blame the practitioners of other religions for this? The

answer is 'NO'. On this reality, Olajubu 2003:2 has this to say:

"Intra-religious pluralism also exists in Africa. These manifest through denominationalism, fundamentalism, and sometimes schism. Instances where a group of Christians regards another group as being unchristian and seeks to encourage a change or affiliation for such group is a reality in Christendom today... Intra-religious sentiments thus fuels notions of superiority among Christians. Furthermore, some Christian groups perceive other Christians as having deviated from the original model of Christianity as enjoined by the Bible and seek to rectify this by all means. In a bid to achieve this, they inadvertently create tension at inter-personal and inter-group levels".

It will be illogical to think that all Muslims have the same ideology despite the fact that Islam is one. Hence, some element dissonance among Muslims is apparent too (Fautre:2018:1-2). This will probably explain the existence of groups such as Ahmadiyya, Tijjaniyya Sufi, Izala, Nasrul Lahi-il-Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) among others. For example, not all Muslims believe in the teaching of Sufi movement and those of others that are considered to be unorthodox (Quadri 1985:95). It must also be mentioned that though Boko Haram is linked to Islam, many Muslims have openly dissociated themselves from its activities. Besides, its attacks are often extended to Muslims who the insurgent believe are not true Muslims. This is the reason several Mosques were being attacked also. Familusi and Oshomoh 2018: 218 aver that:

The bombing of Mosque in Markudi, Yobe State, bombing of the Emir's Palace in Kano and the attack on the convoy of Alhaji Ado Bayero; killing four (4) and injuring fourteen (14) others including two (2) of his sons and the killing of twenty-one (21) members of Shiite Islamic Movement in Kano attest to the fact that the sect violence is not a target to one particular religion. Furthermore, Northern Muslims have criticized, rejected and denounced the activities of Boko Haram sect as unIslamic and heinous crime against humanity. The point of emphasis is that Boko Haram violence may have religious connotation but their activities are not solely on

Christianity and Christians but the general populace.

Given the above, it can be said that the seldom attack of Boko Haram, an Islamic sect on other Muslims suggest inter-religious rift, which is a main argument of this paper. Worthy of note is the political meaning that is sometimes read to Boko Haram insurgency as politicians use the sect to settle scores while disguising to be fighting for Allah. This according to Oshomoh 2012:56: accounts for why at any time, the (late) leader of the group, Yusuf was arrested, prominent politicians intervened on his behalf and got him bailed. And each time he was released, a heroic welcome was organized for him. In one of such heroic welcomes, his convoy caused a traffic hold up from the Airport to the town. As reported in "The Nation" on 25th January, 2012, trucks carrying arms and ammunitions were intercepted along Maiduguri/Chad border and were identified as heading for the group's headquarters in Maiduguri. However, the trucks were released after some hours. The released was insinuated to be have been facilitated by politicians who were benefiting from the activities of the group Adeyemi 2012:1-4).

At this juncture, it is suffice to remark that it is practically impossible to highlight all cases of religious crises in Nigeria in a single attempt like this. The reason is that they are innumerable and recurring.

However, what has been done so far is no doubt a confirmation of religious crises in Nigeria, a supposed secular state. We shall therefore proceed to discuss why religious harmony has continued to elude the country.

5. Factors Impelling Religious Dissension

A major factor responsible for religious intolerance is ignorance. Many religious adherents are blindly fanatical without knowing what their religion stand for or what they teach. As a result of this, they are either intolerant of other religions or they simply take to violent acts at the slightest provocation. In the words of Mala 1985:119:

“Many religious adherents are crass illiterates concerning the doctrine and practices of their religions. Unfortunately, such adherents do not readily admit their lack of knowledge about the nuances concerning the details of their faith. They either rely on the little theological education gained from Sunday school, Bible Classes and Revival meetings or what they are able to read and understand from the scripture. When they preach, the results are always unending argumentation, subtle abuses and physical violence. Many of the so-called preachers are in fact half-baked believers with little or no training but are littered all about the streets”.

As stated in the Nigerian Constitution, “every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching practice and observance.” (*Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999:39*). This suggests that the spirit of tolerance must be imbibed. In other words, people must be willing to endure different religious opinions and practices. However, this is not the case in Nigeria as some people see adherents of other religions as ‘enemies’. Unarguably, lack of tolerance has been largely responsible for violence arising from religion. How would people who profess the same religion but who do not tolerate themselves live in harmony with or develop positive attitude towards people of other faiths? What can be said without reservation is that the provision of the Constitution has been rendered ineffective. The attitudes and utterances of many religious practitioners in Nigeria (Muslims and Christians alike) can only be explained in terms of deep-seated intolerance. The following among several others are manifestations of religious intolerance in Nigeria:

- (1) Denying people the right to be employed because of religious affiliation.
- (2) Opposition to inter-religious marriage.
- (3) Bringing religious sentiment into politics by refusing to support a particular candidate because of his or her religion.
- (4) Discrimination of various kinds

- (5) Unhealthy rivalry among religious groups or organizations

Religious particularity, which can be defined as the belief that one’s own religion is a special or distinctive religion is a bane of religious harmony. Particularity is a claim that one’s own religion is the best and the only universal religion that offers salvation to man. This claim is made in a religiously pluralistic society where one of the existing and competing religions asserts and superimposes itself over the others. Religious particularity manifests in what is branded “holier than thou” attitude. It simply means ‘my religion is the only true religion and others are false’. For example, Christian religion emphasizes the uniqueness of Christ as the only way to God and eternal life. Therefore, whoever does not accept him as Lord and Saviour will enter everlasting fire. This can be established in the following verses of the Bible as pronounced by Jesus Himself; John 14:6-7, John 3:13, 16 & 36, John 4:31, John 11:25-27 & John 15:5. Islam is also portrayed as the only true religion of mankind and that Prophet Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Therefore, God’s punishment awaits those who reject Islam as found in the Qur’an as follows; 3:19, 5:3, 2:132, 4:13, 57:19, 6:66, 5:48, 33:40, 21:107 & Q.112. (Mala 1985:112-114). Going by what we have in these passages, an average Christian or Muslim will see his or her religion as the best and such a belief will promote negative attitudes towards other religions as has been our experience in Nigeria. Given the scope of this work, which emphasis is on both inter and intra religious tiffs, particularity is also noticed among those who profess the same religion. Hence, the lack of unity which exist among Christians and Muslims because they belong to different groups or denominations.

What can one say about the manipulation of religion by people for their selfish interest? Often times, religious sentiment is a tool for achieving unity when it is desirable and disunity when it can be used to accomplish a goal. That is unconnected with why contemporary politicians use religion to woo voters and technically pollute their minds against their opponents. Unfortunately, the unsuspecting supporters in

some cases do comply without knowing how religiously committed the politicians are. The attitudes of successive governments regarding religion have not in any way helped matters as none has ever pretended not to be interested in religion thereby jettisoning the secular nature of the country. The move by Nigeria to join the Organization of Islamic Conference (O.I.C) initiated by Buhari and amplified by Babangida, which also almost tore the nation apart lends credence to the foregoing claim. (Kukah 1994 :231 & Familusi 2010:160) Manipulation of religion can only fan the ember religious conflicts, which have always snowballed into violence. The activities of some religious leaders during 2019 general elections could suggest that religion has become a tool in the hands of politicians, which will always breed mistrust.

6. Effects of Unhealthy Religious Relations

Conflicts and violence arising from unhealthy religious relations have at various times threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria. An example of this is the issue of Sharia Court of Appeal that almost brought the Constituent Assembly to an abrupt end in 1978 given the walk out that was staged by some Muslim members and the antagonism of non-Muslims. Perhaps, that would have brought an end to a united Nigeria. This wouldn't have arisen in the atmosphere of tolerance which is indispensable in a pluralistic society. Religious crises have further worsened inter-ethnic acrimony; the Kaduna violence of 2000 and subsequent ones displaced many people who had settled in the northern part of the country for many years, as it became necessary for them to relocate their places of origin. That some parts of Nigeria are not safe for all citizens is divisive and this cannot guarantee a united country. Also, the adoption of Sharia law by some state governors almost terminated the National Youths Service Corps scheme, which for many years has been a major unifying factor. The reason was that many southerners, especially Christians did not want their children or relations to be posted to places where they would be forced to obey the Islamic law. The tension was doused when the general public was assured of their safety. This

however resurfaced in 2008 when some youth corps members lost their lives in Plateau State. In 2010, those who were posted there were advised to redeploy when their safety could not be guaranteed beyond any doubt. This trend of redeployment continues (Familusi and Oshomoh 2018:221) and Youth Corp members are no longer posted to some states in the North. Former President Gadaffi of Libya some years ago advised that Nigeria should be divided on religious grounds, though, he later advised again that the division should be based on ethnic factor. He could have thrown away the first advice in the interest of international relation. As a mature and rational being, he wouldn't have made the statement in error or under duress. On the question of corporate existence, an Islamic Cleric, Abubakar Ahmed Gumi is quoted to have predicted as follows:

Religion rather than the North-South divide would be the major difference between the parties contesting the election when Babangida regime returned the country to a civil rule in 1999. It was Gumi's contention then that the stage would be set for a political contest between Islam and Christianity ending possibly in the breakup of the federation. The reason he gave was that since Muslim could not on grounds of faith join a Christian led party, and if the Christian refused to join a party led by a Muslim, then, there will appear a two-party system and the two-party system will not be South against North but Islam against Christianity (Clarke 1991:219-220).

This prediction was not necessary and it could only be made in a country where religious harmony does not exist. Without any doubt, lack of unity manifesting in settler-indigene will weaken patriotism, commitment to national ideals and true nationhood, thereby giving rise to parochialism, ethnicity and other cleavages as characteristics of Nigeria.

The future of current democratic experiment hangs in the balance if cordial religious relations continue to be elusive. (Ngwa 2002:173) The reason is that politicians often manipulate religion for their selfish interests, the consequences of which may be politically

catastrophic. More so, it is believed in some quarters that most religious crises that have been witnessed in Nigeria were politically motivated. Shortly before the 2003 elections in Ibadan, Oyo State, there was a crisis when some fundamentalists wanted to enforce the wearing of Ijab by Muslim girls in all schools including the ones established by Christian Missions. One needs to ask whether Christian dress code could be enforced in public schools established by Muslim Missions. This move was seen by a group of Christians as a calculated attempt to destabilize Nigeria's nascent democracy. (Anglican Diocese of Ibadan 2003:53).

Religious crises in Nigeria can be understood as a monster that has threatened national survival in all ramifications. One cannot say with precision if any benefit is accruing from such. In the first instance, from a legal perspective, one can decipher a manifestation of illegality in the religious situation of Nigeria because everything negates what the constitution stipulates. The fact that Nigeria is a secular state is enough reason to prevent any form of crisis. However, due to manipulation, the constitution has been seriously disregarded. The result is what we are experiencing today. The point being made is that the present scenario is, legally speaking, an aberrant occurrence. Therefore, a major effect of religious disharmony is the reduction of the constitution to a mere paper work in this respect. This is worrisome as the constitution is the main instrument of governance and if it is rendered impotent, then anarchy is hovering. Perpetrators have always achieved their aims with impunity because the rules are seldom enforced coupled with the facts that leaders cannot in all cases be exonerated.

No society can grow where religious violence prevails. The economy of Nigeria and Nigerians has been badly affected by religious crises, which have become a recurring decimal. Several businesses have collapsed thereby rendering many people jobless. Also, the aborted Miss World pageant that was to be hosted by Nigeria in 2002 could have impacted positively in some ways on the economy of individuals and the country as a whole even if was for a short time. On the crises emanating from Sharia controversy

in 2000, many people in the Southern part of the country did not see the reason why taxes collected on businesses prohibited by Sharia law should be used to develop states that operate it. More importantly, foreign or local investors cannot be favorably disposed to coming to troubled areas for fear of insecurity (Atubi 2007:264). In the same vein, destruction of properties, especially public owned would always drain public treasury as such would need repair or replacement depending on the magnitude.

Apart from economic disadvantage, religious acrimony is a dent on the reputation of affected country in the international community, and this may lead to break in diplomatic relations as a responsible government has a duty to protect her citizens both at home and abroad. It follows that if a particular country is not safe for the citizens of other countries, the home government may take a step of withdrawing their envoys and advise other citizens to return home. In our opinion, this cannot guarantee international cooperation which is required for growth and development. Corroborating this, Ojuade 2010:179 says that, "since independence, religion has affected the conduct of external relations in such areas as the definition of national interest, the preference of the north for Islamic countries, the role of foreign missionaries, and relations with the West". In compendium, this is the state of affairs of religion in Nigeria in terms of both inter and intra relations; however, it must not be conceived as a problem that defies solutions in its entirety. What is required is sincerity and sense of responsibility on the part of every stakeholder in religious matters.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

A major problem in Nigeria is the non-application of rules of any kind. For this reason, many people commit religious crimes with impunity and this has always encouraged others. As a matter of necessity, law prohibiting all forms of crime must be enforced so that offenders will face the consequences of their actions and this is expected to be a deterrent to others. At this point, it is suggested that the

judiciary should be given every necessary incentive to play its role fearlessly. The issue of sacred law should not arise because the rule of law stipulates equality. Unless stringent measures are taken against those who manipulate religion to cause chaos, violence will continue to be witnessed in the religious terrain.

It needs to be stressed that conflicts emanating from religious plurality are inevitable. Therefore, to prevent emerging conflicts from snowballing into violence, there is a need to embrace dialogue. This is expected to afford all parties the opportunity to air their view for the purpose of amicable resolution. In this case, caution must be taken so as not to aggravate the problem that is on ground. The position of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is clear on religion; its supremacy must therefore be sustained. The government is as a matter of necessity advised to handle religious matters with caution in order to prevent a recurrence of violence. The statement made by former President Obasanjo in Jos in 2004 could have worsened the situation. His presence at the scene of the crisis was expected to douse the tension that had been generated. Instead, he called the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) an idiot. (*Naija Post News*: <http://www.naijapost.com/news/publish/printer>). A person occupying a sensitive post of that nature ought to have exercised restraint while making public pronouncement. It is Ayantayo's advice that:

- The government (Federal, State, and Local levels) have some roles to play in the desire to solve problems of religions and unhealthy relations. First, Government should stop financing religious activities because this often leads to sentiment, suspicion and prejudice. Government should not engage in religious affairs since the nation is still a secular state. What should concern the government is to checkmate the excesses of religious propaganda. Besides, the government must alleviate poverty and suffering which the majority of the people encounter and which often lead some

idle hands to cause religious conflict". (Ayantayo 2002:80)

- More importantly, the Constitution should be seriously adhered to, while manipulation of religion should be avoided by every party concerned. Cordial relations among various faiths is not negotiable, the effort of the government to promote this should be improved upon. Also, religious education should be promoted and made a general and compulsory subject or course at all levels so that people will know what their religions preach. This is expected to promote intra-religious understanding which is largely a mirage in present day Nigeria. Exposing students to other religions is equally important in order to guard against prejudice and ignorance. In Babalola's 2002:138, he views that:
 - "We should not scorn knowledge. Knowledge is sought anywhere and everywhere, hence, the advantage of knowing something about other people's religions. We should try to dispel all ignorance and prejudice about other people's religions by a dispassionate and objective enquiry into the truth and values of their faiths. This will afford us a great opportunity of religious harmony. This paper has attempted a holistic approach to the trend of religious relations in Nigeria, by discussing both intra and inter religious relations perspectives. This has helped us to understand that plurality is not the only reason for religious disharmony as the expected intra religious unity and oneness has never been realized. The problem is more pronounced and given prominence when intra religious squabbling occurs. Religious harmony will be experienced in Nigeria if all our recommendations are taken into consideration".
 - More importantly, since belief in God is a cardinal attribute of the major religions practiced in Nigeria, adherents must let God be God and they must know that God cannot be defended

because He is not in any way vulnerable. Christians who are divided along denominational confederacies are admonished to understand that Jesus, the founder of Christianity did not establish any church. Therefore, the spirit of ecumenism that has disappeared must be resuscitated for the church to remain an indivisible entity. The following choruses are frequently rendered by Christians with no serious impact.

*I don't care what church you belong to
For the service of God is the same
If by grace through faith you
have been saved
You are my brother, so give me your hand*

*We are heirs of the father
We are joint heirs with the son
We are children of the kingdom
We are family, we are one*

These songs are expected to eliminate any form of strained relationship among Christians. However, the messages therein are forgotten as soon they are rendered. On the other hand, the bond of unity among Muslims must be strengthened. The concept of *Ummah*, that is the community of Islamic people must be taken seriously. In other words, brotherhood in Islam must not be a mere slogan. If actually, Islamic faithfuls are brothers and sisters, there shouldn't have been any basis for division. The teaching of the Holy Qur'an is without ambiguity:

And hold fast, all together, by the rope of Allah and be not divided; and remember the favour of Allah which He bestowed upon you when you were enemies and He united your hearts in love, so that by His grace you became as brothers; and you were on the brink of a pit of the Fire and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah explain to you His commandments that you may be guided (Surah 3: Ayat 103).

Religious harmony has been confirmed as a veritable tool for socio-economic development in some parts of Nigeria (Oshomoh 2018:102-146). Therefore, the country must take a cue from such places so as to attain the expected level of development.

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