



UNDERSTANDING
GOVERNMENT AND
POLITICS IN
NIGERIA

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

RELIGION AND NATIONHOOD

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Introduction

In all ages, religion has come to grips with the existence of all human endeavours. Religion at all times, plays significant role in shaping the thought, perception, approach, feeling and history of humankind. No doubt, religion is expressed by a group of people united by a common interest. In other words, religion is expressed by a community of people who share a common belief, ethnic origin, culture and tradition in a defined territory as couched in nationhood. Therefore, religion and nationhood are anchored on man just as religion and politics converge on man. It is worth-asserting that religion and politics meet on the same subject, man living, man acting and interacting, man behaving in organic consensus. Therefore, man is a religious and political animal. This organic consensus of man is glued together for the common interest of others. Thus, this common interest is cashed as spontaneous integration among the various institutions. This chapter is designed to take a look at the meaning and types of religion in Nigeria. Religion and inter-groups relations would be tersely explored while the history of the various religious crises would

equally be x-rayed with the several attempts and challenges at religious harmony.

Meanings of Religion

Religion as a phenomenon means different things to different people. However, the root of religion is derived from Latin word *religare* which means to 'bind', to bring together, to come together, to exist side by side, and to fuse together. Some authorities have observed that Religion is that particular phenomenon that brings people together. In other words, religion is a binding force in human society. As far as it has the capability of bringing people together, it is within the purview of religion. Religion by extension is all-encompassing and all-embracing.

In fact, religion embraces all aspects of life and it represents wholeness of all existence and as well is life itself. Apparently, religion is the keystone or cornerstone of the people's lives and cultures. Religion is far more than a believing way of life in the Nigerian context, in as much as distinction or separation is not made between religion and other areas of human existence. It serves the aim of building and maintaining human society. No doubt, with its consciousness and sensitivity, there is no known that society exists without religion. Dopamu (2005:p.1) is apposite when he states that there is no known society without the existence of religion. In line with the above position of Dopamu, Abe (2004) argues that religion is the provenance and consummation of all things. According to him, "in the beginning, it was religion; and in the end it shall be religion." (p.3). In fact, religion has explained the world and human understanding of it. Without equivocation, religion has been defined by gamut of scholars. However, the definition seems to defy the satisfactory quest for a universally acceptable definition. Yet, new definition is not offered either. It is most appreciative to examine the various definitions hereunder.

Kenny (2002:p.4) aptly describes Religion "as any system which relates men to ultimate values, whether God or something else and which embodies a creed, a code and a cult." In another development, Keqley (2002:p.4) distinguishes three basic features of religion as belief, feeling and action. It is imperative to note that what is pivotal to religion is belief in God or gods, the nature and destiny of the meaning of history and the end. On the basis of this, we come to appreciate the fact that religion does not only command loyalty but also gives its adherents something they are glad to live for and if need be, die for. In the same vein, Ejiofor (1974:p.63) also attests to the fact that:

Religion is the complex of beliefs and behaviour of men in the supernatural sphere and realities and in the dynamic linkage of supernatural with the natural... Religion is one major drive behind human behaviour. Religion has had an important disciplinary effect on the whole social order in any given civilization.

The above shows that religion is a very deep factor in the lives of men. In point of fact, religion identifies itself with the first instinct for self-

preservation. "Men take off from religion, men march along with religion and they arrive at religion with a minute-to-minute phenomenon" (p.63). Ejiofor (1974) further buttresses that religion is: 'The pride of the mind, the strength of the will, the relish of human emotions, coveted object of delicate sentimentality...In short, it is the comprehensive resume of man's spiritual, rational and corporate existence'. (p.63).

The sampled definitions reveal certain essential elements as relating to religion in Nigeria. Thus, the concept of God, gods, relationship of man to ultimate values, a creed, a code, a cult, belief, action, feeling, super sensible world, law and social order, the relish of human emotions, and the pride of the mind are indispensable to religion in Nigeria. Perhaps, in all things, Nigerians are religious (Idowu 1996:p.1). As sensitive as religion is, it is worth living for, a pride of place for people as they subsequently derive satisfaction from it as well as sense of security.

Types of Religion in Nigeria

As against the popular statement credited to Edward Smith that 'how can the untutored African conceive God'? Africans, perhaps Nigerians have the concept of God before the arrival of the socio-anthropologists. Idowu (1996:p.1) has earlier observed concludes that 'in all things we are religious'. Therefore, Nigeria is not bereft of religion or the concept of God. The history of religion is as old as Nigeria herself. In Nigeria, there is the practice of triadic religions of Indigenous Religion, Islam and Christianity. Indigenous religion is a religion that had been handed down by the forebears from the yore, and it is orally transmitted from one generation to another. It does not possess sacred scriptures, yet, it is thus written in memory of the very world we live and transmit orally as the occasion demands. This is not proselytizing religion, nor does it have a drive for membership, yet it is tolerant, it accommodates and remains autochthonous. Therefore, we are born into it, live in it and die in it (Awolalu and Dopamu, 2005:p.6). Commenting on the overview of Indigenous Religion, Dopamu (2005) has this to say:

This is clearly seen in African Religion (Afrel), which encompasses all aspects of life. Africans (Nigerians) do not know how to live without religion. They celebrate life religiously and they never embark on anything without bringing in religion. Thus at birth, marriage, death, warfare, healing, the foundation of any project, planting, harvesting, enthronement of chiefs and kings and other areas of human endeavour, Afrel plays important roles. (p.3)

This indigenous and religious communality of Nigeria gave rise to the acceptability of Islam and Christianity when they arrived in Nigeria. Nigeria creates a new environment till date for global sharing of which its tradition is 'live and let live' which enhances peaceful co-existence in the religious tradition. It is germane to state that Indigenous religion embraced, tolerated and still embraces and tolerates the proselytizing religions of Islam and Christianity. Dopamu (2006) consistently maintains that:

Afrel (Indigenous religion) has maintained a long history of co-operative interaction with Christianity and Islam in Africa. In the face of ever-troublesome and discouraging history of contact between Afrel and the imported religions, Afrel was able to exercise itself in the style of activity for which it has existed from time immemorial (p.30).

Nevertheless, this indigenous religion has suffered a setback in the hand of Christianity and Islam in the wake of their incursions. Christianity and Islam condemned African religion as devil worship, pagan worship, animism, fetishism and among others. As a result, a handful of people have boycotted the religion especially those who have access to western style of life and subsequently embraced either Islam or Christianity. However, the eclipse of the religion does not mean a total demise. Dopamu (2006:p.18) asserts that Indigenous religion has staged a comeback in this global age. As far as the religion is speaking the language of the people and as well understand the worldview of the people, it will continue to survive.

Islam and Christianity are the proselytizing religions, which had been imported into Nigeria. Thus, Islam as a religion of peace was introduced into Nigeria in the 11th century by the Timbuktu traders who had contact or encounter with the Northerners. Gbadamosi's position has been diametrically opposed that Islam penetrated Nigeria in the 9th century. However, this latter claim does not enjoy wide acceptability. Popular submission is on the 11th century Kanem-Borno empire was still formidable. In the 19th century, to be precise, 1804, a jihad was carried out in the North by Uthman Dan Fodio. Nevertheless, Islam still enjoys wide acceptability in the North than in the South-West. However, Gbadamosi (1978:p.33) asserts that it was in the 16th century that Islam spread to the South-West. Today, Islam as a religion or a way of life is enjoying popularity in the North. Here, it must be emphasized that Islam has many sects like Christianity.

While Christianity penetrated into Nigeria in the 16th century through Benin and Warri. As a matter of fact, the Catholic Holy Ghost Fathers who pioneered the missionary activities only confined themselves to the palace of the Kings. This was so because they believed that African Kings were despotic and as such they could coerce their subjects in accepting anything. Thus, this wrong notion contributed to the limitedness of their propagation to the palace. In fact, Erivwo (1978:p.97) refers to this first attempt at Christianizing Nigeria as 'palace religion'. However, this first attempt to Christianize Nigeria failed due to many factors, such as language barrier, harsh weather, the missionary's ignorance of African worldview such as honour-taking, witchcraft, sorcery, chieftaincy title and so on. Be that as it may, Christianity came to be planted permanently in the 19th century with different denominations. Thus, the planting of Christianity in Nigeria in the 19th century was further helped by the 'act of parliament' passed in 1789 in England to abolish slave trade at the source-Africa hinterland. By 1841, Niger expedition was embarked upon and Samuel Ajayi

Crowther was in the company. Though, some of the missionaries also lost their lives in the process, while some traditional rulers were asked to sign treaties on the abolition of slave trade, i.e. King Kosoko of Lagos. The free-slaves then settled in Sierra-leone and Freetown, some of which later sent foreign missionaries to come to Africa to evangelize because they believed that they are in the dark. In 1837, Ferguson, a mulatto, sent for Thomas Birch Freeman of the Methodist Church to come to Badagry. From there, they landed in Abeokuta and they were warmly embraced by King Shodeke. In 1842, Christianity had reached Abeokuta, in 1846, Henry Townsend of the Anglican Communion with David Hinderer and Samuel Ajayi Crowther penetrated Abeokuta. Thus, Abeokuta has become the gateway or sunrise within the tropics. In 1851, David Hinderer had penetrated Ibadan. In 1870, Charles Philip had reached Ilesa, by 1877, Charles Philip had penetrated Ondo. Congregationalists had reached old Calabar, while, in the East Catholic Communion had taken hold on the people. The North was later reached by some missionaries. Christianity came with multifarious denominations.

Interestingly therefore, Nigeria is a secular and pluralistic state without any particular religion being a state religion. There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria is a country of diverse cultures, traditions and beliefs. But of the entire diverse elements, religion has proved to be most sensitive agent of legality in the society. It is this fact about religion that has made it an instrument of legality, unifying factor as well as social mechanism for national development. Of a truth, the tenets of religion provide individuals with shared values, roles and incumbents, altruism and responsibilities. Religion as a way of life is aimed at transformation of individual life. This individual life is a means of microcosmic structure in the overall macrocosmic structure of the society. Apart from this, "each of the patterns of life and practice presupposes a structure of shared beliefs. When the credibility of central religious beliefs is questioned other aspects of religion are also challenged." (Dopamu 2005:p.3). Therefore, religion is recognised as a channel for human and national development as well as legal instrument. Idowu (1996) regards religion as the keynote of the people's lives:

Religion forms the foundation and all-governing principle of life for them. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity; their own part in the matter is to do as they are ordered through the priests and diviners whom they believe to be interpreters of the will of the deity. Through all the circumstances of life, through all its changing scenes, its joys and troubles, it is the Deity who is in control (p.4).

Religion has all-governing principles of life and infuses discipline and social order. Thus, religion is a cord that binds people together in order to promote social cohesion and communal well-being. As the rule of law is a machinery set in place to guide the conduct of the people likewise religion is both social and legal mechanism for harmonious living and co-existence. Besides, religion is a

divine law or mechanism that regulates human conduct and as well institutionalizes social norms in human society. Religion has the knack of bringing people together where they can experience presently what it means to live the full human life. It is also a major instrument of transforming any human society into a community that acts justly. To this end, Religion becomes the law of life, pathway to God-realization, absolute value truth, living power, justice, and morality.

Religion and Inter-groups Relations

There is no doubt that no group of humans or mammals can live in isolation. Even, the mammals move in pairs for the purpose of safety and togetherness. No region or community can completely ignore her neighbours. The group relation implies series of contacts between different peoples, usually in form of trade, diplomatic ties, management of trade routes, boundaries, war, culture, traditions, and beliefs among others. The need for such inter-group relations in the early times was to ensure good and cordial relations with one another. To ensure this, a community would have to recognize the territorial integrity of other communities in its neighbourhood. Again, it would have to promote peaceful relations through trade, inter-state tours by the rulers or their representatives, inter-marriages, exchange and the establishment of diplomatic relations (Ikime 1980:p.23).

They maintained relations with their neighbours on a religious platform. Like the Eyo festival and Osun-osogbo festival, which are said to have been introduced by settlers. The Olokun deity and the worship of Orunmila are said to have been introduced by an Ijaw man. What all these indicate is that there have been religious exchanges between peoples. By and large, Dopamu (2006:p.21) observes that inter-group relations are African credentials. He believes that African humanism is not individualistic rather it is a communal humanism. In this perspective, the Africans live, relate, and show concern for one another, help one another, share common burden and often do things together; this explicates their corporate existence and makes them real human beings. Mbiti (1990:p.47) argues that "I am because you are and since you are therefore I am." Despite the fact that this African communality is alien to foreigners, Africans still exhibit same today. It is vital to state here that African Religion embraced, tolerated and still embraces and tolerates the proselytizing religions of Islam and Christianity. Dopamu (2006: p.23) has consistently maintained that "African Religion has maintained a long history of co-operative interaction with Christianity and Islam in Africa. In the face of ever troublesome and discouraging history of contact between Afrel and the imported religions,"

However, inter-group relations in developing nations are always characterized by one form of conflict or the other. This is sparked-off occasionally by petty jealousy almost invariably over claims of precedence in settling adjacent regions. Despite the communal clashes in inter-group relations, there is the similarity in the tradition of the various communities which is a testimony to cultural homogeneity which itself is the outcome of intense

interaction over the years. Generally, the relationship between the various groups has been cordial. By extension, there is also an indication of the ability of traditional leadership to exercise democratic relationship, respect for sovereignty of one another as independent communities and a deep understanding of the concept of co-operation. The people showed evidence of having learnt the importance of combination for the common advantage of the group. To this end, it is not uncommon in history for violent battles to end and be sealed with some covenant of accommodation. That is the meaning of 'live and let live.' Dopamu (2006:p.23) is apposite when he asserts that African Religion creates a new environment for global sharing of which its tradition is "live and let live" which enhances peaceful co-existence and harmony almost certainly absent in many world religions. Similarly, President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania promoted African socialism of brotherhood through the principle of Ujamaa. There is an iota of wisdom in this epigram.

History of Religious Crisis

Contemporary Nigerian society is explicitly known for unreflective religious crises orchestrated either by religious sects or political anarchists who supposedly believe that they have been marginalized or relegated to the background. This highly presumptive and morally repugnant crisis is a manifestation of arbitrariness, insensitivity and arrogance, considering the fact that Nigeria is a pluralistic and multi-religious nation with attendant heterogeneous and diverse ethnicities, race and culture. No doubt, Nigeria is a nation of diverse cultures, traditions and faiths. But of all the diverse elements, religion has proved to be most sensitive and volatile which has often led to hatred and divisions (Alamu 2012:p.104). Islam and Christianity are the proselytizing religions which had been imported to Nigeria at various times in the history of the nation, and at the same time struggle for membership via evangelism. Thus, this membership drive at times lends credence to mutual suspicion.

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognizes its pluralistic nature, and as such, section 10 of 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria prohibits the adoption of a particular religion as state religion. The section hereinafter declares, "The government of the federation or a State shall not adopt any religion as state religion". This expresses the fact that Nigerian government should not favour or promote any particular religious group at the expense of others. Similarly, section 38 of 1999 constitution as amended states that every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to manifest and propagate his/her religion or belief in worship. Apparently, the constitution forms the nucleus of pluralistic nature of the Nigerian state.

Despite the pluralistic and secular nature of the Nigerian state, religious violence has claimed thousands of lives and property worth millions of dollars in the last three decades. There are various causes of these religious crises in contemporary Nigerian society. Some of which are sins of omission and

commission, religious particularity, religious exclusivity, religious fanaticism and religious fundamentalism among others. What also caused sins of omission and commission is superiority and absolutism. Apparently, "Christianity and Islam claim to have absolute superiority and exclusive right of attaining God's salvation. In making claims of the monopoly of religious truth and salvation, they even exclude each other" (Osasona 1998:p.47). However, Ayande (1978:p.45) has rightly noted that "Christians have been more guilty than Islam and AFREL(African Religion) by being the most articulated in denigrating the others, adopting a negative and therefore unrewarding attitude towards the other religious communities, religion they little understand till today". Truly speaking, this finds expression in their "outside the church, no salvation" "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*". The Muslims on the other hand cannot be spared both because "shirk" unbelief is not associated with them and partner with Allah. There is the clear understanding by the Muslims that the doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity makes it a polytheistic religion contrary to its claim which they frown at. Therefore, such claims of superiority and monopoly of salvation subsequently lead to hot debate, ill-feeling and open confrontation, mutual mistrust and distrust capable of causing an irreparable harm to both parties.

Religious particularity is also one of the causes of the sins of omission and commission. Religious particularity "is the belief that one's religion is THE only religion that is ordained by and acceptable to God to the total exclusion of others" (Olukunle 1980:p.79). Osasona (1998:p.73) therefore argues that the claim to particularity of a religion is for selfish interest of those promoting the course not for the defence of God. This historical particularity promotes open hostility, mutual suspicion, mistrust or fear of surprise attack.

Fanaticism cannot be ignored in this regard. It is a common knowledge that adherents of the different faiths especially Islam and Christianity in Nigeria have absolutely condemned and sought to destroy other religions as a result of their own culture and historical background. This attempt is regarded as fanaticism which Babs Mala (1985:p.115) describes as a "naughty child of a difficult mother". It is sad to note that from the Nigerian experience, fanaticism has often led to hatred, anarchy, lawlessness, senseless killings and anti-religious activities in the name of religion and in the defence of God. It is certain that there is no parameter or calculus to gauge or measure the best religion.

Evidently, Alamu (2009:p.89) has observed earlier that sheer sentiment, passion and emotion attached to religion makes Islam and Christianity to be a prey in the hand of religious fundamentalists and political anarchists, considering the fact that the exclusivist, particularistic, absolute, monopolistic and superior interest can protect only their bigoted position, which result in wanton destructions of lives and properties.

Interestingly, religious violence was sparked off in the 70s, of which Kano and Jos have assumed a symbol and norm of religious fundamentalism capable of tearing the nation apart if not curbed. Hardly does a year pass by without some zealots unleashing religious mayhem and terror in these flash points. Obasanjo comments that "Kano has rapidly acquired a reputation for

intolerance, murder, violence and political rascality". To this end, Alamu (2010:p.90) has catalogued the various religious crises that have greeted the Nigerian state so far. Close observance of the arson and bestial killings in the name of religion since late 1970 has revealed the level of irreligious activities. They include the Maitatsine disturbance in Kano (1977, 1979, and 1980); Zaria 1981, Maiduguri 1982, Kaduna 1982, Kano 1982, Yola and Gombe 1988, Bauchi 1999; Kaduna 2001, Jos 2001, Kano and Abuja 2003, Sagamu 1996, Lagos 1999, Owerri 1996, Shagamu 2001, Aba 2001, Wase 2002, Yeldam and Shendam 2002; Jos 2008, Bauchi 2009. The Boko Haram religious crisis of July 2009 is the most recent one. This crisis started in Bauchi and subsequently extended to Yobe and Borno states. Eventually, Muhammed Yusuf, the leader of the sect was arrested and killed. Consequently, thousands of people have been sent to their unprecedented grave of which today, it is either Maiduguri or Jos that the Boko Haram's activities are being noticed every time with explosives. Jos which was known as state of harmony has become state of cemetery for the innocent people.

Again, religion has become a scapegoat in the ethno-political crises in contemporary Nigerian society. Nigeria as an evolving nation has many political paradoxes. Osaghae (1995:p.20) asserts that violence whether religious or political in the Nigerian polity is a means of identifying the imperfections of a plural society and of suggesting remedies to remove or solve the problems of inequality, marginalization, exploitation, internal colonialism and the misuse of majoritarian democracy and national government in a prejudicial manner. As a result, some political anarchists or demons hide under the foregoing to stoke the various conflagrations, because they have been relegated or made irrelevant. Actually, the indices of the severe crises show the mixture of ethnicity and political grievances to interpret such disagreements as the genie of religious violence. Ethnicity at the initial stage has been described as a propelling force at least in the early history of Nigeria. Today, ethnicity seems to be given a bad name and castigated as being responsible for the decline of democracy in Nigeria now (Kukah 2007:p.101). Also, the generality of the people have demonstrated over the years, a resilient and longsuffering lot. The phenomenon of violence, either ethnic or religious in Nigeria seems to have sprung up out of frustration in some quarters with an authority system that gives no room for the opposition and recognizes no need for true dialogue on some issues. This dangerous dimension appears to have resulted from the anger of unchecked resentment and disillusionment of certain victims of injustice, or of members of the opposition who have been denied the privilege to express their views, and whose every attempt to get across to government has been rebuffed. Dopamu (2001) has rightly agreed with the above that

"The question of personal gain, political ambition, selfish ends, egocentricity, power of domination, ethnicity and the question of the perversion of an entirely human and reasonable process, may enter into the enthusiasm one throws in one's propaganda activity. This is fatal for religion and intention (p.45).

By virtue of the Nigerian nation, several ethnic, religious and cultural groups co-exist within one nation. This makes Nigeria a pluralistic, secular and multi-religious nation.

Attempts at Religious Harmony

In spite of the multifarious religious crises in contemporary Nigerian society, several attempts have been made by governments to set-up panels of enquiry into the remote and immediate causes of the crises. Apparently, these various bodies have at one time or the other brought out their recommendations to the governments, which to the best of our knowledge have not seen the light of the day. As a matter of fact, it is because of the failure of the government to implement the blueprint of the panels that has left the crises unabated. However, some scholars like Balogun, Dopamu, Bidmos, Ohaeyekan, Isiramen, and Alamu and among others have made attempts on their own to proffer possible and pragmatic solution to the ever-with-us crisis. To this end, it would be appropriate to discuss some of the approaches adopted by Bidmos (1993:p.64) for religious harmony.

The advisory Approach adopted by him is that the religious groups together should play advisory roles to the governments of Nigeria (Federal and State). Leaders of the two religious groups should speak with one voice in advising the government on any national issue. They should by virtue of their behaviour command the government respect instead of demanding it in word. As they offer such advice they should be transparently honest. The relationship between Muslims and Christians in Niger State is a good reference point. Secondly, the pragmatic way to establish the role of religion in the Nigerian community is for the religious groups to allow orderliness to permeate their micro communities. What is the use of the message of love which is central in Christianity and the message of peace which is cardinal in Islam if the utterances and activities of the known religious leaders are indications of hatred and can lead to unrest? (Bidmos 1993:p.65).

Again, inter-dialogue should be allowed in contemporary Nigerian society, because it has offered itself an appropriate tool to deal with all instances of the so-called disturbances. At least, through inter-religious dialogue those who are genuinely interested and practically involved in religious practice on both sides will interact and take appropriate measures to expose and deal with the religious touts (p.66).

Bidmos (2012:p.65) recently observes the Nigeria Project in one of his public lectures. The Nigeria Project is an activity that is designed to divert the attention of Muslims and Christians from unhealthy rivalry and conflicts to a common goal. It is to move the faithful from the realm of theory to that of the practical. Maintenance of the earth is a divine duty bestowed on Muslims and Christians. In the same token, the act of nation building which is another term for earth maintenance is a civic responsibility on every Nigerian, irrespective of religious persuasion. It is credited to Jesus as having said thus: not everybody

who called me Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom but those who do the will of my father who is in heaven (Matt.7:21). The key variable here is doing the will of the father. Doing the will of God as recommended by Jesus is to embark on programmes and projects that will bring forth peace and harmony that the two revealed religions stand for. It is not a matter of coincidence that the will of God which is emphasized in the statement of Jesus is equally the key variable in the definition of Islam which is the absolute surrender to the will of God. From the Qu'ran, we learn that man as Allah's vice-gerent on earth is mandated to keep the earth in order, maintain it to sustain its beauty and harmony (Q11:61). The preservation of the earth's beauty is inherent in the prevention of wars and avoidance of actions capable of causing agony and disorder. The situation in Nigeria today places a huge responsibility of sanitization on adherents of Islam and Christianity by means of intervention for the enthronement of orderliness which has remained elusive since the nation's independence in 1960 (Bidmos, 2012:p.26).

Isiramen (2010:p.339) asserts that the search for peace and tranquility cannot be left for the leaders alone. Everyone must be involved and consciously rise against these festering problems of religious pursuits. On the level of the government, Isiramen (2010:p.340) suggests that the Government should constitute a regulatory body, which would be saddled with the responsibility to monitor and maintain peace at all times. Furthermore, Government should constitutionally address the issues of Sharia so as to ensure the rights of all Nigerians. Moreso, the Government should disband all private groups who for political reasons or otherwise have become apostles of the ambiguous sharia law, and the Government should arrest and charge for assault all those who attack their fellow citizens in the name of religion. On the part of the citizens, the following should be taken into consideration. Both Christians and Muslims should close ranks by entering into cordial dialogue and strive to understand each other. They should pre-occupy their minds with means of eliminating unethical behaviour such as corruption, embezzlement, assassination, forgery, cheating and among others (Isiramen 2010:p.341). Apart from the foregoing, Alamu(2010) has also discussed way out of the religious doldrums. According to him,

- Nigerians are not hopeless and helpless in the face of despondency. That is why Nigerians must set in motion the process of rejuvenation to calm the tide of terror which has turned religion to arm race. Sufficient courage should be summed up to open the Pandora box in our socio-political systems that harbour the ghosts of destruction. Perhaps, this is the first step towards sanity; a critical assessment of our individual and social consciousness (p.89).
- We must rediscover the sense of corporate personality, communal responsibility and human solidarity. Truly, a critical social conscience must be evolved in order to know that the injustice suffered by one Nigerian have a destabilizing potential for the entire nation as injury for one is injury for all (p.89).

- In Nigeria, the leadership and followership must be fully committed to the process of repentance and reconciliation. Thus, the politics of exclusion and isolation will not get Nigeria anywhere. It is not by greater repression of perceived enemies to the government that Nigeria will move forward. For peace to emerge Nigerians must be ready to face the truth squarely, however, bitter and in whatever manner, it challenges the *status quo*. The leadership must begin to give rapt attention to the faint voices of the oppressed poor, the aggrieved politicians and the deprived minority groups. This is the only way to break the backbone of violence. In all, Nigerians of all classes, ethnic affiliations and religious persuasions must usher in the place of truth, justice and righteousness in the evolution of a peaceful society we call ours (p.90).
- Poverty is pervasive and engulfing in the sense that it is the rule than the exception in Nigeria. The people who are not pre-occupied with jobs are vulnerable so much that at any slightest provocation, they are easily and helplessly mobilized for combat, so as to vent their spleen on imaginary and real enemies. Hardly can a man fully engage in a job being used as a stooge to wreck havoc on his environment. Poverty can drive people to various crimes, banditry, street touts among other vicious crimes in humanity. Nigerian leaders should as a matter of urgency create enabling framework that would create opportunities for the poor, the weak vis-a-vis the powerful and the rich (p.90).
- Violence in the name of religion is central to political issue in Nigeria. Therefore, it is appropriate to implore the adherents to be religiously nationalists in their various professions than taking undue advantage over the other. Constructive actions that promote peace should be pursued to recognize that political matters should be dealt with politically through the process of examining, re-claiming and re-forming their political slogans. The same should also apply to religion than allowing politicians to use religion as the last resort for destructive venture.
- There should be rigorous education by religious leaders and theologians of the various faiths on the essence of religions and the beauty for living together to promote cohesion and social solidarity in the country, coupled with the effort at inter-religious co-operation as people from various religious traditions. This inter-religious co-operation will enhance religious communities to perceive themselves in relations with a view to providing models to one another that weave bonds and build bridges rather than create conflict and cause bloodshed.(p.90).
- Since religious violence does not constitute primary violence, Christians and Muslims can work together for national unity. After all, people had been living together in harmony, exchanging ideals, even engaging in communal work, celebration of festivals,

communal age-group meetings among others before the incursion of Islam and Christianity. Even in actual fact, these communal lives and colleagueship are still extant with these adherents of various faiths. The words of Pope John Paul II, on the common grounds with Christians and Muslims in 1982 in Kaduna will suffice here. According to him,

All of us, Christians and Muslims, live under the sun of the one merciful God, who is the creator of man. We acclaim God's sovereignty and we defend man's dignity as God's servants. We adore God and profess total submission to him.
(cited from Alamu, 2010:p.90).

Challenges to Religious Harmony

Despite the pluralistic, secular and multi-religious nature of the Nigerian state, religion has been manipulated by religious zealots' overtime. Bala Usman (1987:p.72) has vividly argued that the systematic manipulation of religion has already reached its climax in its opposition to the unity of people of Nigeria. Even those who are stakeholders in the nation's religions are religious fanatics and actors in this direction. Olaniyi (2001) captures holistically the position of the religious stakeholders. According to him:

They are dishonest because they call for peace on the pages of newspapers and other media but plant seeds of discord in their place of worship, inciting their followers to defend their faiths with their blood. During crisis, they run into hiding and leave their unsuspecting followers to die (p.16).

Admittedly, religious laws are rarely adopted in a civil and democratic environment. In which case, under a civil and a democratic setting, the constitution takes precedence over any religious law. But in Nigeria, religious laws are promoted at the peril of the Nigerian constitution. This informs while Islamic legal practice, Shariah has been politicised. Leo Igwe (2012:p.67) supports this when he writes that religious laws

...are imposed, and foisted on the people by force and sometimes by violence and bloodshed. In my country, the tree of sharia law has been watered with the blood of too many Nigerians as well as non-Nigerian.

In Nigeria, the bloody campaign for the implementation of Sharia is still going on at the moment. Shortly after Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, Islamic theocrats in the Muslim majority states imposed Sharia law. Many Nigerians lost their lives in the riots, protests and clashes over the implementation of Sharia. Today, the Islamic sect, Boko Haram is the latest face of this bloody campaign in Nigeria.

Islamic militants agitating for a government under sharia law kill at the slightest provocation or offence: if it is not the publication of cartoons of Mohammed in Denmark it is the invasion of Afghanistan by American forces or the staging of

the beauty pageant or the burning of the Koran, or the coming of an American preacher to the city of Kano (p.67).

The fact remains that under the civil society and democratic settings, religious laws are not compatible with civil law. Religious laws cannot override the constitution. However, in this case, that is under religious laws, there is no place for equal or universal human rights such as the right to freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief, there is no assurance of the basic right to life. Religious laws are incompatible with the values of democracy and human rights. And those who peddle them will always see themselves swimming against the conceits of human progress, hope, civilization and enlightenment. Of course, a handful of Nigerians and government agencies are aware of this truth. Obasanjo may have been informed by this when he expressed with chagrin political Sharia in contemporary Nigeria. He avers: 'What we have is essentially a political Sharia. That is why it worries me. It does not augur well for this country... we must do something about the legal practice' (Sunday Punch, 2001:p.1).

There is something fundamentally wrong and undemocratic about religious laws: that is the alleged source or sources as the case maybe. But as long as religious laws continue to hinder the ability of the people to reclaim, revise or discard these archaic, outdated and Dark Age norms, religious laws will remain social and political liabilities to democracies and human right across the world. Religious laws are supposedly divine, not man-made, crafted by a Supreme Being, not mere mortals. Religious laws are not meant to protect the interest of the people but those of a god or particular gods, or Allah at the expense of human beings. "Under religious laws, the will of the people is superseded by the supposed will of a god believed to be greater than the human being. There is no place for the voice of the people. Instead there is only the voice of the god or Allah which is appropriated, patented and employed by few males to tyrannize over the lives of others.

Furthermore, our committed schools, now referred to as the practitioners of religions such as Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA), Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) etc should always make statement on the religious and political state of the nation. No doubt, Umejesi and Igboin (2010: p.130) observe succinctly that members of these groups belong to different religions under the tutelage of committed Pastor/Imam whose views spiritually are believed to supersede the one of the committed/detached school. As a result, their bearing is wrongly footed because their religious reaction at any given time has overlapping effect or it stands independently. Thus, Nigerian religious groups lack the moral and will power as a result of their foundation to implement their stand. Over times, the agitation is to acknowledge one's belief, and Christians for instance find it difficult to condemn the Muslim zealots or the *Ulama* and vice-versa. Even, NIREC which is the umbrella body finds it also subtle to condemn any erring group during any religious conflict in contemporary Nigeria. In fact, no one has been brought to

book because the existing law has been bottled up in the archive. Umejesi and Igboin (2010: p.131) again agree that "yet we forget that Nigeria adopts Sharia and even sets up Shariah courts in accordance with the constitution against well-known secular states of the world." All these are counter-productive to the space of religious pluralism in Nigeria. To this end, all these ambiguities in the Nigerian constitution should be urgently addressed by the government in order to clarity and refocus Nigerian legal system.

Conclusion

Religious harmony which is a pristine state of peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society such as Nigeria is taken as the *sine qua non* for sustainable development granted the fact that the prospective participants in the act of nation-building can succeed in the atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. The dynamics of inter-religious dialogue should be embraced in order to bring about mutuality and cordiality. Kunzman (2005:p.101) opines that religious educators should increase students' understanding of diverse religious perspectives which will have positive social outcomes. This would help students to better understand the increasing diversity including religions, which they will be better prepared to live in a peaceful, productive manner with those differing cultural and religious values. Specifically, this pedagogical understanding will encourage students to appreciate other religions. A case where Christian students are enjoined to visit a Mosque and Muslim students are also implored to visit a church will enhance religious harmony and mutual understanding. This religious education should not only be aired in the media but taking to the doorstep of the religious faithful.

The emphasis on the nature of the constitution of the land and right attitude and respect for the practitioners of other faiths become instances for a healthy and peaceful co-existence. To this end, various stakeholders should get rid of exclusivist, extremist and fanatical persuasions, as well as violence so as to embrace genuine dialogue. This seems the best way to address religious pluralism in contemporary Nigerian society where peace is conspicuously elusive to our beleaguered human race.

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