

**COMMON RELIGIOUS VALUES IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM AS
BASES FOR UNITY IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Muslims and Christians have been living together in Nigeria as citizens for many years, especially after the independence. However, over the years their relationship has been fraught with mistrust and occasional violence. This hostile relationship persists despite the fact that both religions are of Abrahamic origin with virtually same moral values. Additionally, the recent anti-gay law passed by the National Assembly has helped in unveiling one of the common grounds of both religions, which is the 'immoral nature of homosexuality'. This paper discusses the positive reactions of some religious bodies in Nigeria to the anti-gay law which is symptomatic of the agreement of both religions (Islam and Christianity) on some common moral values. To achieve the objective of this paper, comparative and historical methods are employed. The paper finds that the positive reactions of Muslims and Christians in Nigeria to the antigay law (same-sex marriage) passed by the Nigerian government, though accidental, are hinged on the fact that homosexuality is considered an abominable act in Christianity and Islam. It concludes by recommending that both Muslims and Christians should explore more of such common moral values in their respective religions with a view to leveraging on the same goal to jointly fight social vices, such as corruption in the country. This way, religion will be performing its fundamental role as an agent of moralization and stabilization in the society.

Keywords: Christianity, Islam, Nigeria, Moral Values, Antigay Law, Same-sex Marriage

Introduction

Islam and Christianity are two dominant religions that are professed by Nigerians. There is also a belief system considered to be indigenous, the African Traditional religion albeit with a marginal number of adherents compared to that of Christianity and Islam. So till date, Nigeria has been a multi-religious country given the huge population of Muslims and Christians with gigantic places of worship and extraordinary commitment on the part of the adherents of both religions. The actual

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population of adherents of each religion in Nigeria is often contentious especially in the south-western region. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Muslim population is 50% while that of Christian stands at 40% with other religions sharing the remaining percentage, (CIA website, Accessed on 9th March 2017). In the northern and south-eastern parts of the country, it is a settled fact that Muslims and Christians are in the majority respectively. But while it is true that Muslims are in the majority in the north, this does not imply that the region does not have some Christians living as indigenes. This is also true as regards the presence of the Muslim community in the south, precisely south-east and south-south. Given this fact, the classification of Muslim and Christian groups into north and south divides in some quarters does not reflect the reality on the ground. Just as there is a Christian community in the north, there are also a lot of Muslims residing in the south both as indigenes and non-indigenes.

Despite the above fact, it is disheartening that the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria is always characterized with mistrust and even violence some times. In states where a particular religious group is in the majority, hostility has been the defining term of the relationship between the Muslims and Christians. As a consequence, the country is frequently susceptible to religious intolerance resulting in wanton loss of life and property.

In view of consequences of this hostile relationship, there is no doubt that mutual understanding and respect is highly required to achieve peaceful co-existence among Christians and Muslims. The necessity for this arises from the fact that both Muslims and Christians appear to be faithful to their religious beliefs, and none is ready to make any compromise that could undermine the foundation of their faith. In addition to this, Muslims and Christians are conditioned to live together as neighbours in most places, and colleagues in educational and business institutions.

The hostile relationship between Muslims and Christians refuses to wane despite the fact that both Islam and Christianity are of Abrahamic origin, sharing almost the same fundamental moral values. This factor ought to serve as a basis for mutual understanding and religious tolerance. Yet, efforts being made to achieve religious tolerance among them remain a futile exercise. Obviously, there seems to be less interest among adherents of the two religions to articulate some common moral values to promote peace and harmony. However, the recent anti-gay law passed by the Nigerian government has unveiled an aspect of moral values shared by both religions, which should stimulate good relationship. Perhaps for the first time in recent time, both Muslims and Christians inadvertently agree on the same term; the umbrella bodies of both religions in a coincident manner commended the government on a national issue, 'the passage of the anti-gay law'. It is instructive to note that both religious groups see homosexuality as a social vice mainly because of its outright condemnation in their scriptures, the Bible and the Qur'an. Hence, their positive reactions to the anti-gay law which outlaws same-sex marriage.

Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to highlight uniform, but accidental, reactions to the said law by Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. The main purpose is

to show that both religions share common moral values - as shall be highlighted in the present work - which should rather be promoted by their adherents in order to achieve fruitful harmony as against the harmful acrimony that has characterized their relationship over the years. The paper starts with a brief historical background of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria. This is followed by discussion on homosexuality as narrated in the Bible and the Qur'an. Then, Muslims and Christians' reactions to the anti-gay law shall be highlighted, concluding with some recommendations that could propel the adherents of the two major religions to a better mutual understanding for peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Muslim-Christian Relations in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective

Available historical accounts are unanimous on the fact that Islam spread to the areas which were later known as Nigeria as far back as the ninth century, before the colonial period (Suleiman Jamiu: 2012,137); Christianity however was introduced into Nigeria in the middle of the 15th century (Galadima and Turaki, 2001: 91). While traders from the Northern part of Africa played a pivotal role in the spread of Islam to Nigeria, missionaries were largely credited for introducing and entrenching Christianity in the country.

Over the years, the nature of the relationship between Muslims and Christians has always been the one of mutual suspicion and crisis at times. More often, Christians accuse Muslims of scheming to Islamize the country each time the latter seek to live in line with the principles and dictates of their religion. An instance was the membership of the Organization of Islamic Corporation (OIC) which Nigeria obtained in the 1980s. (Yusuf, 1999). This development elicited a negative reaction from Christian bodies as they vehemently objected the move despite the fact that the country had earlier on established a diplomatic tie with the Vatican, which is a strong Christian entity. Another instance is the implementation of Shari'ah which some northern states with Muslim majority, led by Zamfara State in 1999, sought to activate as enshrined in the nation's constitution. Although the constitution provides for it, the move was rejected by the Christian bodies and the issue, as well as its accompanying controversy transcended the shores of the country to become a global issue.

On the other hand, Muslims also accuse Christians of being selfish for always questioning Muslims any time they (Muslims) intend to enjoy their constitutional right such as the implementation of the Shari'ah. They feel that Christians should allow them to utilize their legitimate rights, since they are already enjoying certain national recognitions such as Sunday as a work-free day, whereas Friday remains a working day for Muslims. Many Muslims also think that the constitution of the country, which is a heritage from colonialism, is derived from the Christian belief, since the colonialists were majorly Christians. In essence, there seems to be more apprehension at the instance of Christians about Muslims' agitation for their legitimate rights. This fact has led to the Islamophobia, which has taken political, social, and economic dimensions.

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In the last few decades, the unhealthy rivalry between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria has taken a violent dimension leaving scores of lives and property destroyed. Perhaps, the first major inter-religious violence between Muslims and Christians was the one that broke out in Kafanchan on the 6th of March 1986. The violence spread to Zaria and Funtua leaving behind loss of lives and property of Muslims and Christians with the former recording more casualties, (Imam, 2004).

This cold relationship has made it impossible for both groups to come together and fight corruption which is a common enemy of both Muslims and Christians. Nevertheless, there are some instances of cordial relationship between adherents of both religions, as many interreligious bodies and organizations have been established with a view to promoting inter-faith dialogue for mutual understanding between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. In fact, some individuals have been making commendable initiative towards achieving peaceful co-existence among Christians and Muslims in the country.¹

While discussing violence or rivalry between Muslims and Christians, which is inter-religious violence, the intra-religious violence should also be acknowledged. This is a kind of violence that breaks out within a particular religion as a result of theological differences. Both Muslims and Christians have had their fair share of intra-religious violence in Nigeria. Yet, there is another type of religion-motivated violence which is fundamentally ideological and indiscriminate. This type of violence is usually orchestrated by disgruntled and religious bigots in the society as a practical way of challenging socio-political inequalities and injustices in the country. Violence of this type is religion blind in the sense that the victims are Christians and Muslims, though the perpetrators always claim to be Muslims. A typical example is the Boko

¹ Two cases can be highlighted in this regard. This first one is a case of an Imam and a Reverend who used to be staunch enemies as a result of a religious riot that broke out in the northern part of the country in the eighties. But by providence, both are now working together as co-directors of a religious organisation to promote religious tolerance among Muslims and Christians (the Nation Newspaper, 30 November 2013). The second case is about a heroic story of an Imam in Plateau state who displayed a high level of sense of tolerance by saving the lives of more than 200 fleeing Christians; he hid women in his house, while he put men inside the mosque to protect them against the attacks by over 300 well armed men of the underworld who had attacked their village, Barikin Ladi local government area in Plateau. When the assailants asked the Imam to identify Christians among his 'guests', he was reported to have lied that they were all Muslims. He had to beg the hoodlums, while lying on the floor, before they eventually left his place. The man thus risked his life to save Christians (The Sun Online, How Muslim Cleric 'hid Christians inside Mosque during Plateau Attack, 29th June 2018, Accessed on 13th December 2018, <https://sunnewsonline.com/muslim-cleric-hid-christians-mosque-plateau-attack/>). This kind of mature understanding and tolerance are required from religious leaders of both religions to enlighten the adherents of Islam and Christians on the need to espouse religious tolerance.

Haram which has been carrying out indiscriminate attacks on both Muslims and Christians.

Whether it is inter, intra or indiscriminate, religious violence in Nigeria is antithetical to peace and harmony which the nation needs dearly for its socio-political development. This much cherished wish can only be achieved if both Christians and Muslims look inwards and explore the common values shared in their religions, and take full advantage of it to achieve peace and stability in the society.

However, recently in 2014, what seemed to be a turning point in this regard happened; that was the common, though accidental, reactions of the Muslims and Christians to an anti-gay law which proscribes homosexuality and outlaws same sex marriage in Nigeria. Needless to say, their positive reaction was not unconnected with the fact that homosexuality is an immoral act according to their respective scriptures, the Bible and the Qur'an.

The Concept of Homosexuality

Before highlighting the position of both the Bible and the Qur'an on homosexuality, it is apposite to briefly discuss the concept of homosexuality. Homosexuality is the practice of having "sexual relations with a person or persons of the same sex. As such, a homosexual refers to a person who engages in sexual relations with a person of the same sex. A male that is sexually attracted to a fellow male is called gay, while a female that is sexually attracted to a fellow female is referred to as lesbian", (Sprigg, 2011).

Ab intio, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) had considered homosexuality to be a result of some mental disorders. During this period, homosexuals were stigmatized until 1975 when it became an acceptable phenomenon and referred to as a "good" status. This was as a result of the campaign by the American Psychological Association (APA) calling on psychologists to take a lead in removing the stigma of mental illness that has long been associated with lesbians, gays, and bisexual orientations. This development ensured that homosexuality gained wider sympathy and support of many activist groups. This consequently leads to the promotion of homosexuality and adoption of what has been considered a "gay identity" paradigm by many social institutions such as academia and the news media. This emerging identity espouses certain beliefs about homosexuality, chief among which are the beliefs that sexual orientation is an innate personality; that like race people are born gay; that gay people can never become heterosexual, etc. (APA, 2018).

However, social conservatives have argued against the claims of the homosexuality activists highlighted above. They state, for instance, that a claim that homosexuality is biologically oriented lacks empirical proof. This is because, in the early 1990s, attempts at finding a "gay gene" ended in futility. In actual fact, the American Psychological Association which is in the forefront of promoting and protecting homosexuality has tacitly debunked the claim that sexual orientation is determined by biological factor. It submits thus:

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Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by a particular factor or factors. (Sprigg, 2011, p1)

Nevertheless, the APA also acknowledged that “most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation” (APA, 2008). This submission seems to consider the feelings of homosexuality as a natural experience, since man cannot determine his sexual orientation. Even if this proposition were accepted for the sake of argument, it should also be true that man can decide whether or not to engage in homosexual conduct. This line of argument is advanced by social conservatives to the effect that “people who experience same-sex attractions should choose to abstain from engaging in homosexual conduct, because of the harms associated with that conduct”, (Sprigg, 2011, p3). They should be able to do this just as people should refrain from alcoholism, robbery, and other social vices, because of their negative consequences.

More so, Homosexuality has been linked with many diseases which should discourage one from engaging in it. It has been proven medically that there is a highly elevated risk of HIV infection and AIDS among men who have sex with men (MSM). According to some empirical researches, many Americans who died of AIDS since its emergence several decades ago were men who used to have sex with other men, (Sprigg, 2011). In addition to AIDS, homosexuality can also lead to other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, syphilis, gonorrhea, and Chlamydia, (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV Surveillance Report, 2009).

Despite the above dangerous consequences of homosexuality, the act continues to gain popularity especially in the West, under the guise of human rights and freedom, actively promoted by Western activists, (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “Viral Hepatitis and Men Who Have Sex with Men). This huge support for homosexuality in the West has also gained ground in Africa. In recent time, a certain group in Nigeria openly agitated for the legalization of same sex marriage. Obviously, this group did not take note of the fact that Nigeria, unlike America and Europe is not a secular state. Rather it is a multi-religious state where adherents of Islam and Christianity hold sway with the propensity to follow the moral ethos of their religions which are fundamentally identical, and which abhor homosexuality. This fact will be appreciated if one considers the reactions of Muslims and Christians to the decision of the National Assembly to reject the proposal. Although, these reactions from Christian and Muslim leaders took place at different forum, it is obvious that they were all inspired by the fact that their respective scriptures condemn homosexuality as an immoral act.

Homosexuality in the two Holy Scriptures

The Bible and the Qur'an consider the act of homosexuality as an unethical and unnatural conjugal relationship. In Christianity and Islam, the marriage institution is considered a natural medium designed for men and women to establish sexual relations for the purpose of procreation. As such, the act of homosexuality contravenes the divine code for sexual relations. In Christianity, God's design for human sexuality is encapsulated in Genesis 1:27 thus:

So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; Male and female he created them.

The above passage makes it clear that humanity is composed of male and female in relationship with one another. This constitutes a foundational basis for human sexuality which should take place between a male and a female. Both sexes are to complement each other. For when Adam was created he was incomplete until Eve was created from his rib (Strauss, Online material accessed in 2017).

In the same vein, the Quran emphasizes the fact that sexual relationship is an affair between a man and a woman. This is well articulated in the Chapter of the Light, [Q24: 32-33]. It also says in another chapter that Allah created mankind from two persons (Adam and Hawwa), [Q4:1]

While procreation is one of the objectives of marriage as earlier stated, it should be noted that it is not always achieved by every couple. Some could be made barren because Allah considers procreation a gift; some couple He grants offspring, while He makes others barren based on the divine wisdom. This fact is well articulated in a verse in the Glorious Qur'an, [Q42: 49-50]. Yet, contrary to the institution of marriage, homosexuality inhibits the procreation goal of marriage and therefore leads to the reduction in the number of mankind that are expected to come to life through the conjugal union of man and woman. This makes homosexuality a fruitless sexual experience with both spiritual and medical negative consequences.

The absurdity of homosexuality is so great that it is the cause of the wrath of the Supreme Creator. It was the reason for the outright destruction of the people of Gomorrah to whom Prophet Lūt was sent. The story is told in both the Bible and the Qur'an.

The Old and New Testaments give accounts of the act of homosexuality in connection with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah who disobeyed their Prophet, Lūt. Genesis 19 explains how the people of Sodom and Gomorrah incurred the divine wrath through their wicked and unrighteous sexual habit. Previously, Genesis 18 had given a background to the story. According to the passage, Prophet Abraham received and entertained three angels who visited him in the form of human beings. While departing Abraham's home, one of the angels, called Lord, informed the Prophet that they were heading for the city of Sodom and Gomorrah to punish them for committing a grievous sin, the act of homosexuality. Thus, the angels proceeded to the city of Prophet Lut. Prophet Lut's effort at giving his guests a befitting reception was frustrated by his people, as they even attempted to commit the immoral act of homosexuality with his guest-angels whilst in his house. To calm down his

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people, Prophet Lut offered them his daughters in marriage. But they rejected the offer and remained obstinate. As a recompense for their crude way of life, God punished them ultimately (Musawa, The Nations, Saturday, January 25, 2014 and Olanisebe, 2013). The scenario is clearly narrated in Leviticus 20:18 thus:

... Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom – both young and old – surrounded the house. They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.” Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.”... With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.”... By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. Then the LORD rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah – from the LORD out of the heavens. Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities – and also the vegetation in the land. But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

Moreover, the Biblical caveat against same sex marriage is unequivocally stern. For instance, Chapter 20:13 of the Bible read:

If a man also lies with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

Just like the Bible, the Glorious Qur’an also narrates this immoral sexual behavior of the people of Prophet Lut. As narrated in the Bible, the angels that were sent by God to destroy the people of Gomorrah and Sodom had first visited Prophet Ibrahim. After they had given Ibrahim glad tidings (that his wife would be able to give birth after many years of infertility), the Angels informed him of their next point of call, which is to visit Prophet Lut and punish his people because of their involvement in the immoral act of homosexuality. Prophet Ibrahim pleaded with the angels for clemency but his plea was turned down due to the absurd nature of the act. Though their Prophet, Lut, had tried his utmost best to dissuade them from the sinful act, they would not heed his advice. Instead, they met his advice with mockery and conspiracy. This following Qur’anic passage gives a detailed account of Prophet Lut’s ordeal with his people and the eventual punishment meted out on them by God as recompense for their abominable act:

..and (remember) Lut (Lot), when he said to his people: "Do you commit the worst sin such as none preceding you has committed in the 'Alamîn (mankind and jinns)?" Verily, you practise your lusts on men instead of women. Nay, but you are a people transgressing

beyond bounds (by committing great sins)."And the answer of his people was only that they said: "Drive them out of your town; these are indeed men who want to be pure (from sins)!"Then we saved him and his family, except his wife; she was of those who remained behind (in the torment). And We rained down on them a rain (of stones). Then, see what the end of the Mujrimûn (criminals, polytheists, sinners, etc.) was. (Q7:80-84)

The act of homosexuality as an unnatural sexual relation interrupts the smooth running of natural life pattern. It also makes those who practice it slaves to their lusts, thereby depriving them of decent taste and morals and proper way of life (Qaradawi, 1993). As clearly narrated in the Bible and the Qur'an, the punishment meted out on the homosexual community of Prophet Lut evidently underscores the gravity of the act of homosexuality. It shows that homosexuality is a grievous sin in Christianity and Islam and it attracts divine punishment.

In addition to the divine punishment against homosexuals, there is a corporeal punishment against the act. For instance, in the Islamic law, capital punishment has been prescribed against whoever engages in the homosexual act. According to Ibn 'Abbas, the Prophet was reported to have said: "if you see anyone perpetrating the crime of the people of Lut, kill the initiator and his partner" (Sunan Abu Daud vol.4 p.296). The majority of scholars agreed on the capital punishment against the perpetrators, though they were divided into three groups as regards the mode of execution. The first group of scholars consisting of Abubakr and Ali opined that the perpetrator should be burnt alive, the second group including Ibn 'Abass, submitted that he should be thrown from the top of the mountain and be followed with a big rock after throwing him. The third group submitted that he should be stoned to death. This is also the position of 'Ali and Ibn 'Abbas. Some of these scholars did not make any distinction as to whether the culprit is married or not, while others did make such a distinction (Ibn Qayyim, 1985). It must be noted that the view of Abu Hanifa is different from the majority view; he was of the opinion that the mode of punishment is left to the discretion of the judge who decides as he deems fit. Another important point is that, the capital punishment as explained above is only applicable to sodomy. As for lesbians, their punishment is lesser (*ta'zir*) as the crime does not exceed masturbation (Ahmad Murtala, 2012, 215 & 216). The cruelty of either of the punishments is informed by the absurd nature of the act and seems necessary also in order to sanitize the society (Qaradawi, 1993).

The Passage of Anti-Gay Law in Nigeria

The anti-gay sentiment in Nigeria is understandable, given the fact that the act is inconsistent with the cultures and religions of most ethnic groups in the country. The aversion for the act at the individual level culminated into the agitation for legislation against it, making it a criminal act with appropriate punishment. The first legislative attempt against same-sex marriage was made in 2016, sequel to a protest by a certain group clamoring for same-sex marriage in Nigeria during the

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International Conference on HIV/AIDS in 2005. The Federal Executive Council proposed a same-sex prohibition bill to the National Assembly for approval. This and subsequent attempts in 2008/2009 were not successful. However, in 2011, another legislative move was made to criminalize same-sex marriage in Nigeria. Unlike the previous futile attempts, the bill prohibiting same-sex marriage was passed by the National Assembly and approved by the former President Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (Nigeria-US Diplomatic Relations, 2015).

The bill prohibiting same-sex marriage declares that “only a marriage contracted between a man and a woman shall be recognized as valid in Nigeria”. It also warns that same-sex marriage “shall not be solemnized in a Church or a mosque or in any other place of worship in Nigeria”([http://www.placng.org/new/laws/Same%20Sex%20Marriage%20\(Prohibition\)%20Act,%202013.pdf](http://www.placng.org/new/laws/Same%20Sex%20Marriage%20(Prohibition)%20Act,%202013.pdf)).

The bill spells out certain punishments against whoever engages in same-sex marriage, which is 14 years imprisonment thus:

A person who enters into a same-sex marriage contract or civil union commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a jail term of 14 years imprisonment ([http://www.placng.org/new/laws/Same%20Sex%20Marriage%20\(Prohibition\)%20Act,%202013.pdf](http://www.placng.org/new/laws/Same%20Sex%20Marriage%20(Prohibition)%20Act,%202013.pdf)).

In addition, it also prescribes jail term of 10 years against whoever administers or witnesses such an unnatural union. The similar penalty is prescribed for any person who registers and supports gay clubs in the country.

A person or group of persons who administers, witnesses, abets, or aids the solemnization of a same-sex or civil union, supports the registration, operation and sustenance, of gay clubs, societies and organizations, or processions or meetings in Nigeria commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a term of 10 years imprisonment ([http://www.placng.org/new/laws/Same%20Sex%20Marriage%20\(Prohibition\)%20Act,%202013.pdf](http://www.placng.org/new/laws/Same%20Sex%20Marriage%20(Prohibition)%20Act,%202013.pdf)).

Muslim-Christian Reactions to Anti-Gay Law in Nigeria

The passage of the anti-gay law in Nigeria elicited many reactions, both for and against, from religious and human rights groups. It also generated diplomatic tensions between Nigeria and some of her allies in the West. However, the concern of this paper is about the reactions generated by the bill from the Christian and Muslim communities in Nigeria. But before that, it is important to observe that the rejection of the bill by some group of people is not unconnected with an illusion that Nigeria is a secular state where the citizens should enjoy freedom; this claim lacks empirical evidence. Most defenders of same-sex marriage have also invoked this secularity status to consider the anti-gay law in Nigeria as unconstitutional. What might give rise to this claim is misinterpretation of a constitutional declaration that the country

shall not adopt a particular religion as state religion. The claim becomes more confusing given the relative connotation of the term ‘secular’. To some people, a secular state is a godless political entity. But to some other people, a state is considered secular when it is run, not on the basis of religious norms and doctrines but rather purely on the democratic will of the people (Onaiyekan, 2010). Whichever way the term is interpreted, it does not apply to Nigeria as a state. On one hand, Nigeria is not a godless state as shall be seen presently in the constitution. On the other hand, religious norms and doctrines are reflected in its policies, albeit in an implicit manner. As such, the claim that Nigeria is a secular state is not supported by documented evidences and life experiences. Moreover, in the preamble of the constitution, there is a reference to terms that are closely related to religious beliefs. The following constitutional statement is relevant in this regard:

We, the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, have firmly and solemnly resolved to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God, (Constitution of Nigeria, 1999).

In the same vein, not only does the constitution enshrine freedom of religion, it also provides for Religious Education in our learning institutions at all levels (Constitution of Nigeria, 1999 & Bidmos, 1993). Also, the government at state and federal levels supports religious activities in many ways. For instance, the Federal Government was partially responsible for the construction of the National Mosque and Anglican Church of Nigeria- both located in Abuja- through donations made to the two religious communities. It also oversees the National Pilgrimage Commissions for Muslims and Christians to facilitate their journeys to the holy cities of Makkah and Jerusalem respectively. Finally, the government declares public holidays in commemoration of religious events such as Christmas, Boxing Day, New Year, for Christians, and *Mawlid*, *Eid al-Fitr*, and *Eid al-Adha* for Muslims (Shittu, 2013).

Thus, the claim that Nigeria is a secular state lacks documentary and experiential supports. Although, the country does not adopt a particular religion as a state religion, it has been involved in religious activities as highlighted above, whereas the concept of secularism is antithetical to religion, and a state designated as secular should not have anything to do with religion. This is because, the concept of secularism is seen as “a belief that religion should not be involved in the organization of society, education etc” (Gove, 1993 & Shittu, 2013). Core secular states such as US, UK, and France are indifferent to religious principles in formulating their political, social, and economic policies. As a consequence, their indifference to moral teachings of religion has plunged their societies into many social vices, including same sex marriage (Shittu, 2013). Given this, it is better for Nigeria to be regarded and remain a multi-religious state rather than to be considered as a secular state, for any civilization that ignores the guidance of the All-Wise Creator, which religion is all about, is bound to collapse eventually (Bidmos, 1993).

In recent times, the most striking evidence that further shows that the people of Nigeria are not indifferent to religious ethos is the reactions of Muslims and

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Christians to the anti-gay law. Individuals and organizations belonging to Islam and Christianity applauded the government for outlawing same-sex marriage. Although, both religions released commendation statements at different and separate forum, and not in a joint press conference, it is obvious that the driving force was moral principles common to both religions which are unfavourable to homosexuality as explained above. It is also understandable that in passing the law, the government took into consideration the religious and cultural sentiments of the people of Nigeria. In spite of the likely negative reactions of some western powers to the development, both the legislative and the executive arms of the government ensured the passage of the anti-gay law in the country.

On different occasions, both the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) issued unequivocal statements in support of the law. For instance, the General Secretary of CAN Rev. Musa Asake retorted that:

The thing that bothers me is that, none of them in the US that is promoting this thing have (sic) gays in their family. We are solidly behind our president for doing the right thing. Can they allow their sons and daughters to marry each other like that or why are they bothered to meddle into our own affairs? I congratulate our president, our legislature; this is the right thing we are doing. We don't have to drift into a situation where we don't have moral values, because somebody is helping you with a little money. Let them hold on to their money, we will still survive by the grace of God (Vanguard Newspaper, 2014).

At a different forum, the Jama'at Nasril Islam under the leadership of Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'd Abubakar III issued a statement through its Secretary General, Dr. Khalid Abubakar Aliyu to the effect that:

We urge Muslim brothers and sisters to pray fervently especially for the Ummah against all manners of conspiracies in the name of gay marriage, and early or under age marriage as now being touted with seeming impunity in the country (Vanguard Newspaper, 2014).

In addition to that, the Secretary General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Prof. Ish-aq Oloyede stated that:

We congratulate the president for endorsing the Anti-Gay Bill; we also want to assure him that Nigerians are solidly behind him with the signing of the law. He has put the interest of the nation above the interest of some people who have perverted their own system and wanted to pervert the interest of others. (Vanguard Newspaper, 2014)

Equally, the Public Relations Officer of the Northern Christian Association of Nigeria asserted that not only Christians, but, Muslims, were very happy that same-sex marriage is outlawed in Nigeria. The Muslim Students Society of Nigeria

(MSSN) also applauded the government for passing the anti-gay law despite pressure from western countries (Musawa, 2015).

It may be observed that the religious leaders quoted above did not make express reference to religious moral values as a basis for their rejection of same-sex marriage. Nevertheless, it is obvious that, their position was informed by their religious teachings which condemn the act. Above all, the barbaric nature of same-sex marriage is self-evident.

The illicit nature of homosexuality is not only affirmed by the religion, it is also regarded as a barbaric act by most world cultures. For instance, some African countries have outlawed homosexuality mainly because it is against the African culture. It is seen as 'a western disease' transported into the soil of Africa through the means of colonization. This explains why the Ugandan government is averse to homosexuality (Daily Trust, 19 January 2014). Given this, one may safely believe that the act of homosexuality, is not only rejected in Christianity and Islam, but also abhorred in the African Traditional Religion which is indigenous to Africans.

Based on the above, the reactions of both Christians and Muslims to anti-gay law go to expose a sacrosanct fact, that both Christianity and Islam share some common moral values. The prohibition of homosexuality is but an example in that regard; many other common areas abound. It is therefore essential for both religious communities to appreciate those common moral values and leverage on same as a basis for achieving peaceful co-existence which is necessary for security and national development.

Common Moral Values as a Basis for Peaceful Co-existence among the Nigerian Christians and Muslims

As asserted above, Muslims and Christians share some common moral values; hence, their unanimous support for the prohibition of homosexuality. But the prohibition of homosexuality is but one of many moral values shared by the two major world religions. A cursory look at ethical teachings in the Old Testament and the Qur'an where the adherents of Christianity and Islam are enjoined to abide by certain codes of conduct attest to this. In Christianity, these moral precepts are embedded in the Ten Commandments, while they are scattered in various passages of the Qur'an as illustrated in the table below.

Common Religious Values in Christianity and Islam as Bases for Unity in Nigeria

Moral Teaching	Ten Commandments	The Glorious Qur'an
Worship of One God	Thou shalt have no other gods beside me. No. 1	Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him.. Q17: 23
Respect for Parents	Honour thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long on the good land, which the Lord thy God gives to thee. No. 5	..and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them In terms of honour. Q17:23
Prohibition of Adultery	Thou shalt not commit adultery. No. 6	..nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils). Q17:32
Prohibition of Killing	Thou shalt not kill. No. 8	...nor take life - which Allah has made sacred - except for just cause. and if anyone is slain wrongfully, we have given His heir authority (to demand <i>qisas</i> or to forgive): but let Him not exceed bounds in the matter of taking life; for He is helped (by the Law). Q17:33
Prohibition of False Witness	Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. No. 9	Those who witness no falsehood, And, if they pass by futility, they pass by it with honourable (avoidance); Q25:72
Good Neighborliness	Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife; thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house; nor his field, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any of his cattle, nor whatever belongs to thy neighbour. No. 10	Serve Allah, and join not any partners with him; and do good- to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those In need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers. Q4:36

The implication of the above precepts is that the mere difference in religious affiliation does not necessarily suggest contradiction as far as moral values are concerned, neither does it serve as a basis for hostility and mistrust among adherents of Islam and Christianity. As a matter of fact, a study of the Glorious Qur'an as well the Prophetic Traditions will reveal that Islam encourages harmonious relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims especially Christians. Similarly, history also bears witness to scintillating moments of extraordinary tolerance exhibited by Muslims towards their Christian counterparts and vice-versa. In a verse, Allah declares that the Christians are closer to the Muslims than the Jews:

Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, "We are Christians": because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant [Q5:82]

In the same vein, Islam permits Muslims to establish social relationship with the Christians and Jews. It allows Muslims to eat from the food of Christians and Jews (the People of the Book) so long it does not fall within the prohibited categories (i.e. swine, carrion, alcohol, pork). Also, Muslim is permitted to marry a Christian or a Jew lady who is chaste:

This Day, are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the people of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. (Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the people of the Book, revealed before your time, when ye give them their due dowers, and desire chastity, not lewdness, nor secret intrigues if any one rejects faith, fruitless is his work, and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (All spiritual good). [Q5:5]

However, the Christian lady thus married by a Muslim, should not be coerced into embracing Islam. She is free to practice her religion. In Islam, the religion is a matter of choice and not by force.

Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth stands out clear from error. Whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things. [Q2:256]

Moreover, in Q60:8, Allah allows Muslims to relate with non-Muslims who do not declare war against Muslims and permits kindness towards them, even though they may not be allies (Ibn al-Qayyim nd., and Al-Alwani, 2003 cited by IET, 2009). In addition, it is a cardinal pillar of faith, in Islam, to accept and respect all messengers of Allah such as Moses and Jesus. History has recorded that the Prophet (SAW) had a cordial relation with non-Muslims in Madinah (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1964 and Al-Bahnasawy, 2014).

In the same token, the Bible preaches good neighborliness irrespective of race, religion, and language. High level of hospitality accorded the first set of

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Muslim migrants to Abyssinia by King Negus, a Christian, is instructive in this regard. Based on humanitarian ground, the King protected the Muslims from the persecutions of the Quraysh, even though he was a Christian at that time. Centuries later, this magnanimity by the Christian king towards Muslims was reciprocated by the Muslims in the golden era of Islamic social and political order in Muslim Spain. Fleeing from persecution in different parts of the world, Christians were received warmly by the Muslims at that particular time. This was when the Muslims were a very strong entity in Andalusia after which they became weak and inferior. (Smith, <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-11?print=pdf>, accessed on 15th July 2016)

Recommendations and Conclusion

From the foregoing, it should be clear that the violence and enmity that characterize the Muslim-Christian relation in Nigeria are borne out of ignorance of the scriptural teachings of each religion. This can be viewed from two perspectives: first, most adherents of either Christianity or Islam seem to know nothing about their religious teachings. Secondly, most do not care to know anything about teachings of the other religion (Imam, 2004 and Shittu, 2011). Therefore, it goes without saying that, no well-informed Muslim or Christian would harbor ill feelings towards his religious counterpart. Armed with correct understanding, Muslims and Christians would always see each other as neighbors who deserve respect and courtesy. In a multi-religious state like Nigeria, sincere mutual cooperation and religious tolerance between Muslims and Christians would indeed help stabilize the country to a larger extent. The spate of corruption that permeates socio-political aspects of the country can be curbed, if religious bodies belonging to Islam and Christianity could stand firm and preach against immoral acts and corrupt practices. The two leading religious organizations (i.e. Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should organize occasional joint conferences or seminars to highlight those common moral values as taught in the Qur'an and the Bible. This would go a long way in enhancing religious tolerance among Muslims and Christians in the place of work, in the neighborhood, and any place where Muslims and Christians co-exist as citizens of Nigeria. All this would complement the efforts of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) at promoting religious understanding and harmony between Christians and Muslims in the country.

To achieve the above, the role of the government is very essential. Government should provide an enabling environment by creating a Ministry of Religious Affairs to serve as a platform for the promotion of religious tolerance (Adamolekun, 2013). In order to forestall any form of undue influence, government should be impartial and assume an advisory status. The ministry should be headed by the President, Federal Republic of Nigeria as a ceremonial principal officer, and there should be two deputies, one each from among the Muslim and Christian communities. The two deputies should be given power to oversee the religious affairs of their respective communities with the full support of the President as an impartial

head. In all, the Ministry should be guided by certain principles such as mutual respect. Terms of reference and deliberations should preclude areas of disagreement i.e. the fundamental belief, object, and manner of worship in each religion due to sensitivity of such areas. Instead, focus should be on areas of agreement such as common moral values shared by Christianity and Islam some of which have been discussed above. The creation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs becomes necessary in view of the instability and underdevelopment bedeviling Nigeria. No doubt, adherence to common religious teachings by Muslims and Christians who constitute the largest percentage, put together, in the religious space would provide much needed solutions to some of Nigeria's critical challenges. It is with these religious values that public office holders should be re-orientated to be more committed to peaceful co-existence and nation building. Just as they stood against same-sex marriage, religious leaders are also expected to keep engaging the government at all levels on the need to espouse social justice and eschew social vices such as corruption.

Electronic and print media are also required to contribute positively towards the achievement of harmonious relationship between Muslims and Christians. It is true that print media use sensational headlines for commercial purpose. But sensational information as regards religious issues has the ability of causing tension among adherents of Islam and Christianity. Therefore, sensational headlines should be avoided in order to forestall violent consequences which could lead to destruction of innocent lives and property.

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