

The Skirmishes (Conflicts) Between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria

Mark Ayeye Giwa

(Ph.D. Candidate, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria)

Abstract

The skirmishes between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria represent a persistent and complex challenge that has shaped the nation's socio-political landscape for decades. Rooted in historical, ethnic, economic, and political factors, these conflicts transcend mere religious differences. This study explores the nature, causes, and implications of Christian-Muslim skirmishes with particular attention to flashpoint regions such as the Middle Belt, Kaduna, Plateau, and parts of North-East. The work examines how colonial legacies, competition for land and political power, and mutual suspicion have contributed to recurring tensions between the two religious groups. It also highlights how extremist ideologies, economic marginalization, and the manipulation of religion by political actors escalate minor disagreement into violent confrontations.

Furthermore, the research assesses the impact of these conflicts on national cohesion, economic development, intergroup relations, and the safety of lives and property. The displacement of communities, destruction of infrastructure, and erosion of trust between religious adherents are presented as significant consequences. The study also evaluates government responses, peacebuilding initiatives, and the role of religious leaders in promoting reconciliation. It argues that sustainable peace requires inclusive dialogue, equitable distribution of resources, and deliberate efforts to address structural injustices.

Key Words: Skirmishes, Religion, Politics, and Nigeria

Introduction

Humans are social beings and have at all times sought for ways of interacting with one another.

This interaction occurs via tribal, ethnic, religious and other means of grouping, and their associations through the above means have always influenced individuals or group's behavioural pattern. And "as social beings, people are naturally linked with certain groups, objects, beliefs, and ideologies. This affiliation sometimes occurs on a conscious basis, in conjunction with the individual's personal choices, likes, and dislikes. It may also happen semi-consciously, so to speak, out of socialization and learning processes that are beyond the pure control of the person" (Muzaffer ErcanYilmaz, "Religious Fundamentalism and Conflict," 1). And hinging on the claim above, it is not farfetched to assert that, society and religion play vital role in the life-course charted by individuals or a group and by extension in affiliations or interactions that occurs among members of the society.

However, despite the role of religion in the society as suggested by Emile Durkheim, it is not the same as saying that religion has the potency of completely exterminating conflict in any given society. Suffice it to say then that, conflict is an inevitable part of human interaction in the society, and that is not unconnected with the fact that there exist among members of the society competing and sometimes conflicting interests; it is in light of the above that S. A. Awoniyi in "A Discourse on Religious Conflict and Tolerance in Multi-Faith Nigeria" has lent his voice to this stark reality when he postulates that:

Conflict is the inevitable paradox of human existence and civilizations. While dynamism, a geometric matrix in human existence usually creates complexity in human society thereby entangled in a web of men with different tastes and needs which is insatiable. Men, therefore,

become antagonistic as they organize towards satisfaction of needs in society Conflict can be described as a stubborn ubiquitous fact of social life. The nature of human interaction is that, if every interaction among men is a sociation, conflict then is one of the most vivid interactions . . . (128).

Correct as the author's position may be, it should be noted that, not every form of interaction among people always result into conflict despite differing interests among people of varying interests; nonetheless, the crux of the matter is that, conflict is an inevitable part of human existence, but when conflict (s) assume a disturbing dimension with potentials of threatening the cooperate existence of a society then such situation becomes a matter deserving serious attention.

It is noteworthy that, Christianity and Islam have been described by scholars as Abrahamic religions due to the fact that the duo ascribe their origin to Abraham and in some ways holds similar or near resembling views about God: the two religions believe in the existence of one Supreme Being-which is God.

Paradoxically, it has been reported over the centuries that these two religions have experienced or encountered the most numbered conflicts that have occurred along religious lines; one seems to be left with many raging questions seeking answers as to why there is such historical antecedents among the two groups or religions.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, Nigerian society which was once known for its relative peace and tranquillity has become synonymous with violence, owing to the fact that the country has experienced religious disturbances that have taken violent dimension of one degree to the next. It has become a matter of utmost concern considering the fact that, as a result of these religious unrests that have assumed violent nature, the country has had to grapple with grievous effects or impacts in all ramifications. The condition of the country as mentioned above has left the researcher confounded as to what might have led Nigeria to bear such marks. It is undeniable that Nigeria is

a pluralistic society (religiously and ethnically), and as a society akin with such pluralities just like other modern societies, Nigerian society has experienced conflicts generated from the aforementioned pluralities which has had certain impacts on all facets of the society. And as a modern society the inhabitants of the country are not free from conflict since that is considered a part of human interaction and society.

However, what has become worrisome is the fact that human interactions have taken different dimension; this is against the status quo that was once akin with pre-modern Nigerian society—where religion permeated and controlled every fabric of the society. In other words, religion in the pre-modern society served several purposes including integrating people and ordering the behavioural patterns of those living in such societies.

Nevertheless, from observable phenomena, it appears that religious skirmishes experienced in the society have resulted in unimaginable impacts or effects. This is evident in the fact that, the integrative role of religion in the pre-modern society has since taken a flight as it stands today. It has also been clearly shown in the radical nature that (some) religions and religious adherents have embraced lately in Nigeria. It is obvious that the problem has been exacerbated by the mutual suspicion that is now glaring among people of different faiths, and the height of these effects have pointed to the segregated habitations of members of the society. That is, residential as well as business premises are now occupied based on ethnic and religious affiliations, and to that end, it can said that such development poses grave implications for the society. It is in view of the above, that the researcher is examining what led the Nigerian society to have taken such shape and (in) particular to investigate events that have brought the country to the state of religious unrest that has almost become a norm or a near permanent feature in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

There are terms/concepts that may not be used or understood here as they are used in everyday communication, it is for that reason that such

terms need to be clarified in order to aid the reader's understanding; they are religion and religious skirmishes/conflict. The crux of the matter is ascertaining what these concepts stand for and how they are to be understood in this study.

Religion

Different views have been expressed from different schools of thought on what qualifies as religion, while some may conceptualize religion in relation to the veneration of a divine deity, others may not. It is however pertinent to seek clarity of this concept from an informed perspective, hence, the need to adopt a more scholarly definition. Peripherally, religion could be said to be the belief in a deity. But such superficial definition becomes problematic, because, there are religious groups that do not have any form of affinity with any deity.

In view of the above, Bryan S. Turner bails the situation when he admitted that the task of defining religion has remained problematic for sociologists; he rightly submitted that: "the definition of religion has for a long time confounded the sociology of religion. The basic issue is common to sociology as a whole and it concerns the problem of the cultural specificity of our basic concepts. Our understanding of religion may have only small relevance to other societies" (3).

Turner opined that:

. . . That the word 'religion' (religio) has two distinctive roots. Firstly, *relegere* means to bring together or to harvest. Secondly, *religare* means to tie or to bind together. The first meaning indicates the religious foundations of any social group that is gathered together, while the second points to the disciplines that are necessary for controlling human beings and creating a regulated and disciplined life. The first meaning indicates the role of the cult in forming human membership, while the second meaning points to the regulatory practices of religion as the discipline of passions (4).

Going by the root meanings as provided above by Turner certain functions of religion are implied: the author suggests that religion is a means of integrating people, and secondly it

forms some sort of control in human activities; this view shares certain variables present in Durkheim's theory of religion.

Conflict

Conflict on the other hand, just like religion, has had different connotations from different schools of thought as well. On the surface however, conflict can be viewed as any disagreement among people of same or opposing group (s) that ranges from verbal altercation to life threatening attack on a person or any destructive impact made on properties. It is of essence to define the term briefly in order to help guide the discourse, hence, the submission of World Health Organization states that: "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (World Health Organization 6).

This definition has listed variables that qualify any disagreement to be termed as conflict; few among them are: involvement of the use of physical force or power, aimed at oneself or another, whose resultant effect (s) is not to bring good but harm to whoever is the target. The author has introduced a term worth mentioning "intentional," that is the actor's action is planned or deliberately aimed at achieving a set goal (i.e. to cause harm to another, bring about death or any form of displeasure). Similarly, the meaning of violence envisaged in this study is any act that is deliberately done in the name of religion aimed at registering the displeasure of the actor to the victim.

Methodology

This research employed descriptive research method which the researcher considered suitable for this study; because it enables the researcher to systematically describe, analyze, and interpret the patterns, causes, and effects of Christian-Muslim skirmishes in Nigeria as they currently exist. This method does not involve manipulation of variables; instead, it focuses on situation as they occur naturally. The descriptive research method is utilized in order to present an accurate nature, frequency, causes, and consequences of conflicts between Christian and

Muslims across various regions of Nigeria. It seeks to answer what, who, where and how the conflict occur, providing a factual and objective picture of the phenomenon. Using this method allows the researcher to provide a clear, comprehensive picture of Christian-Muslim skirmishes by presenting factual descriptions of events, perceptions, and experiences. It helps in identifying trends, understanding community attitudes, and suggesting practical interventions for peacebuilding.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is a necessary tool in defining the point that an argument or study is hinged on, and it is in that light that this research has adopted the use of three theories in sociology, namely: the functionalist perspective (or theory) of religion, conflict theory and manipulation thesis.

The functionalist perspective of religion largely concerns itself with studying or analysing religion from the function it performs in the life of the society or individuals. Haralambos and Holborn elucidating this view postulated that: “the functionalist perspective examines religion in terms of society's needs. Functionalist analysis is primarily concerned with the contribution religion makes in meeting those needs. From this perspective society requires a certain degree of social solidarity, value consensus, and harmony and integration between its parts” (431). Stating this more explicitly, the theoretical position of this research is specifically taken from Emile Durkheim's theory of the integrative role that religion is supposed to play among individuals and the society.

In his postulation, Durkheim evinced that religion goes beyond the division that most societies make of it (i.e. distinction between profane and sacred), but that religion has the potency to create social integration and cohesion—the creation and perpetuation of a group, and in that light he advanced that:

This is accomplished in two ways. The first is the establishment of a moral community—a group of people who share common norms, values and morals. . . . Religion not only tells you what to worship and how to make it rain but what kind of person to be and what the correct

behaviours are in a group. By recognizing common rules and authorities, individuals become a community. The second means of achieving group cohesion is through the effective ritual. This communal activity not only gives members ideas and beliefs in common, but it operates at a lower and more instinctive level as well through a psychological power he called “effervescence” (Quoted in Jack David Eller. *Introducing Anthropology of Religion: Culture to the Ultimate*. 21).

For Durkheim, religion serves or has more function than merely attracting man to the veneration of that which is consider sacred, he contended that religion commands mutuality among members of the same social group and how such individuals should act or behave towards one another—so that the group remain indivisible.

The above theory has been conceived by the research as a gauge, (that is) to measure the role that religion has played or is still playing in Nigerian society; the postulation (or theory) will check whether the assumed or proposed roles as insinuated by functionalists has held true or not in Nigerian society. In other words, the adoption of this theory is to serve as magnifying—lenses to the research—adjudging whether or not religion has met the envisaged needs of the society as proposed by Durkheim and others who holds the functional view of religion.

On the other hand, conflict theory holds that, human conflict is inevitable in human interaction and that happens due to constant competition among individuals or groups in their bid to utilise scarce resources. Ashley Crossman has highlighted that:

Conflict theory states that tension and conflicts arise when resources, status, and power are unevenly distributed between groups in society. . . . In this context power can be understood as control of material resources and accumulated wealth, control of politics and institutions that make up the society, and one's social status relative to others (determined not just by class, but by race, gender, sexuality, culture, and religion, among other things) (1).

It is worth stressing that “Conflict would arise mainly during the process of adjustment to forced change, when consensus is imperfect, or among people who were inadequately socialised

so that they do not fully share the consensus of the majority. . . . More generally, conflict theorists argue that the pressures for change in society are ubiquitous as various interest groups struggle for power and resources” (Peil 342-344). As captured in the theory of conflict above, it is slightly agreeing with earlier insinuation of the pluralistic nature of the Nigerian society where diverse interests exist among different groups who in turn are struggling to take hold of control of resources be it in form of power or otherwise. The significance of this theory to the study is hinged on the researcher's desire to measure through the components of the theory the extent to which conflict is acceptable or otherwise in a society.

The third theory is the manipulation thesis, the theory explains the interface of religion and politics in Nigeria; proponent of this theory argues that: “political actors often amplify differences and provoke confessional conflicts as part of a wider strategy for the acquisition of political power and/or enhancing the political assets of groups involved in the process of power brokerage” (316). This theory is employed as hermeneutical lenses to help the researcher ascertain the level of interfacing or interference between religion and politics, and to see how such activity has aided or contributed to growing religious skirmishes in Nigeria, the theory is used in light of the fact some forms of meddling occurs between those institutions of the society (i.e. religion and politics).

Causes of Religious Skirmishes in Nigeria

Religious conflicts all over the world have been said to have different causative reasons, ranging from immediate and more remote ones among others. Simply put, various factors account for religious violence globally; John Ryder and Gert-Rüdiger Wegmarshaus in “*Education for a Democratic Society*” capture the state of peace around the globe well when they argued that:

It is by now increasingly apparent that life in the 21st century will be lived without the comfort of old certitudes. The austere convenience of . . . peaceful co-existence . . . has been succeeded by the growth of violent conflicts too numerous to count, waged along lines that are ethnic, religious, territorial, and more. A world of autonomous nation states, at one time a bulwark

against agents of terrorism, carriers of lethal viral strains, and the influx of conflicting cultural values, has morphed into a new global village in which intercontinental travel is routine and national borders are increasingly porous (ix).

Though the issue of religious skirmishes is not a matter to be associated with the current dispensation, however, it is undeniable that the height that religious disturbances have attained in this era is unprecedented. Because, one would have thought that human society would have become better and even more peaceful with the world attaining postmodernism, but the situation has rather deteriorated to a worrisome state which calls for serious concern. In line the authors’ opinion, a salient issue has been mentioned, which is the porosity of borders. Porous borders have over time made the influx of foreigners who are believed to be assailants to gain access to other societies—with Nigeria as an example.

Furthermore, Silberman, Higgins, and Dweck in “Religion and World Change: Violence and Terrorism versus Peace” have also contended that, the list of causes of religious unrest bothers on both implicit and explicit reasons, that is, factors could exist within and around individuals or their surrounding; in their cataloguing they began by saying that:

Religion, when internalized as an individual or collective system of meaning, can facilitate violent activism in a variety of ways. First, religions often contain values and ideas that may facilitate prejudice, discrimination, and violence by encouraging the consciousness of belonging to a select and privileged community, and by emphasizing the “otherness” of those who do not follow the tenets of the religion. . . . Religion includes the following three basic invitations to bigotry: (1) the belief that one’s religion teaches absolute and exclusive truth may lead to derogating the teachings of other religions and philosophical formulations as if those teachings are wrong and are a threat to human salvation; (2) the doctrine of election (e.g., the concepts of God’s chosen people or God’s country), which may imply the inferiority of others as rejected by God; and (3) theocracy (i.e., the view that a monarch rules by Divine right, that the Church is a legitimate guide for civil government or that

the legal code, being divinely ordained, is inviolable on the pain of severe punishment). In addition, some religious teachings seem to explicitly or implicitly tolerate or even encourage prejudice against certain targets such as gay men and lesbians, Jews, or women (775). The authors' assertion aligns with what the researcher had earlier insinuated, that causes of religious conflict could result from the value system that an individual holds or has internalized over a period of time, that is, an individual or group may become violent when certain actions do not agree with his/their (religious) value system, such discrepancy may become the cause of religious violence. On the other hand, the submission above indicts many religions; in the sense that, some religious groups stands and preaches on exclusivity of man finding the path of paradise or heaven against another, and in that thinking such position encourages religious discrimination and extremism among adherents of differing religious groups. Nigeria stands as a typical example of exclusivity and absoluteness being preached or promoted by one religious group over the other. Some adherents in the long run despises others and their religion which breeds radicalism of one form or the other among religious adherent.

In addition, Silberman et al also holds the position that the desecration of any religious article could help fuel religious disturbance. They maintained that:

Any object, belief, goal, or action that is perceived as sacred can be desecrated by being lost, destroyed, or violated. Since a perception of desecration has unique adverse effects, such as intense negative affect (e.g., feeling distressed, nervous, scared, and upset), it may facilitate intensive political or violent activism against those who are believed to have caused the desecration. For example, the Middle East conflict seems to be fuelled to a certain extent by a sense of desecration of both Jewish and Muslim Holy sites. A sense of desecration of Saudi Arabia (which is the Muslim Holy Land par excellence), especially of its two holy sites, Mecca and Medina, by the American presence has been mentioned as one of the main sources of Bin Laden's anger toward the United States (775-776).

Consenting with the authors on the factor mentioned above, it is no news that religious objects to most adherents are held in high esteem, that is, an object could be venerated or revered in a similar way that the divine being which such thing (s) represents are treated with high regard and in such instance followers of any given faith tradition might even avail themselves to go haywire in defence or protest of any perceived defamation of such items (Ali-Fauzi et al 8).

Following from above view is the fact that:

. . . Religion as a unique meaning system that can give meaning to every aspect of human life is often at the core of individual and group identity. Accordingly, religious beliefs that seem to threaten one's religious meaning system or other ideological threats to one's religion are often perceived as particularly dangerous attacks on both personal and communal identity. Such perceived threats often provoke violent reactions among the adherents of the challenged religions, who perceive themselves as defending not only their religion but also their most important personal and collective identities. . . . The rules and standards of behaviours that religions as meaning systems usually provide often result in behaviour that is likely to provoke conflicts. This can happen in two ways: First, the prescribed action might be inherently conflictive as in the case of religious calls for "holy wars." Second, the required actions may be perceived as threatening by another group, forcing the members of the second group to defend their beliefs. Evangelism, which suggests that there is "either an obligation unfulfilled or spiritual reality unfulfilled as long as the whole world does not profess the tenets of a particular religion", is a good example of the two ways in which religious rules can increase violent conflicts. (Silberman et al 776).

Deducing from the assertion made above, the authors are advancing that defence of one's religious identity or ideology could be enough reason to make religious skirmishes to ensue. That is not farfetched from the experience of Nigeria, being that most reactions that have often resulted into religious conflicts arises from such background. These and many more factors can be fingered as reasons or causes of religious

conflicts from one society to the other, however, some communities may not entirely share in all the factors enumerated but do have a trace of some causes articulated above. Going by the list above, it is appropriate to assert here that a dismissible reason or factor could be held accountable for bringing conflict among religious individuals or groups at one point or the other.

The situation does not appear to be different in Nigeria since various factors have been fingered to be responsible for one conflict or the other in Nigeria. Nigerian society have in fact experienced some of the goriest kinds of conflicts shortly from the post-independent era to the present, a situation where human minds are debased to the point of treating fellow humans (citizens) even worse than pets or animals: these conflicts have no doubt manifested in the guise of ethno-religious, socio-economic and political crises.

In an attempt to trace the root cause of the skirmishes existent between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria Olufemi Vaughan in his work *Religion and the Making of Nigeria* argued that Christian-Muslim relationship nosedive since pre-colonial days but the manifestation became more obvious during the colonial rule. He contended that, with the British colonial administration finding the Hausa-kingdoms (North) as suitable ground to test-run their indirect rule system, the colonial system of administration favoured the politico-religious leaders of the aforementioned region over other people of different religious inclinations (48).

In other words, colonial rule placed higher premium on the North over other regions of the country. This advantaged position automatically placed Hausa/Fulani Muslims above all others thereby indirectly making non-Muslims subjects to Muslims (i.e. a kind of second-class citizenship status). That actions held grave consequences on the relationship of Muslims and non-Muslims (especially Christians); that was more evident or obvious in allowing the North to practice side by side Sharia legal system with English legal jurisprudence (i.e. customary law). With these and many more moves, conflicts were brewing (Vaughan, 49).

The actions of colonial rulers pointed above (i.e. by allowing one region of the country to practice double standard legal system) had and still have implications or consequences on other parts or members of the country; what that implied is that, those in Northern Nigeria had special place and treatment and were invariably assumed or made to believe that they were or are above others. This mentality has continued even to present time. I believe such preferential treatment induced the current worldview popularly held by Hausa-Fulani Muslims of the North that they are born to rule or occupying leadership positions above every other tribe and religion is their birth right. In addition, it is not farfetched to state that the struggle for survival among differing groups whether ethnic or religious has helped in fueling the incessant religious skirmishes in Nigeria.

In view of the foregoing, it is unarguable to say that, these crises have had negative impact on individuals, communities and the larger society; consequent upon this thinking J. Dogara Gwamna in *Religion and Politics in Nigeria* highlighted that:

The past three decades in Nigeria have witnessed diverse conflicts, some, of the very violent type. From political to economic conflicts, Nigeria has been characterized by communal conflicts, oftentimes, with ethnic and religious under-pinning. While politically motivated or even economic crisis could easily be understood and explained, religion and ethnicity have emerged as the constantly used elements in fuelling crisis in Nigeria (1).

The Nigerian situation presented above appears embroiled with many issues, in the sense that the author enumerated many factors with religion being viewed as a lace behind violence that the society has witnessed. From Gwamna's point of view, the need for resource (s) equity or control which often have political motivation is a reason for soaring religious unrest. But added to that is that religion is accused of being the vehicle to which such differences are conveyed. It is an established fact that touching anything or anyone that attempt to contend or ridicule one religion or the other in Nigeria indirectly invites war.

Sunday Bobai Agang in *The Impact of Ethnic, Political and Religious Violence on Northern Nigeria and a Theological Reflection on Its Healing* validates the above claim when he evinced that: “the trouble with Nigeria . . . is that ethnicity and politics are ingrained in the religious stance. So whatever impacts one, impacts the rest even more profoundly. . . . Over the last two decades Nigeria have witnessed a paradigm shift in the issues at stake from regionalism and ethnicity and politics” (38-40).

Probing Agang's submission, it can be inferred that, Nigerian state revolves on a triad circle (i.e. ethnicity, politics and religion), these three variables are obviously interwoven; such that one affects the other (directly or otherwise). Because, carefully dissecting these elements leaves one to reach the conclusion that, these factors are 'conjoined triplets' which cannot be separated when considering the underlying factors responsible for incessant religious skirmishes. Furthermore, other factors that have been identified as elements responsible for the exacerbation of the situation of religious conflicts in Nigeria, are politicization of religion and/or religionization of politics.

Having been technically freed from the grip of military rule that had been (shortly) after Nigeria's independence, one would have assumed that with Nigeria's return to a democratic era in 1999, the State was set to experience development in all facets of the society and which should have included the enshrinement of such values akin with a democratic society anywhere in the world. Among these anticipations are the secularity of the state, of which embedded in its tenets, are freedom of association, freedom of thought and right to belong and practice any religion of choice, neutrality of the state on religious matters or affairs among many others (Simeon O. Ilesanmi, “Recent Theories of Religion and Politics in Nigeria,” 316-318).

However, these dreams appears to have been shattered or marred, in the sense that, religious freedom appears blurred or worst still, the neutrality of political leaders remain questionable; for at one point or the other political leaders in various quarters have not been able to feign as to using their leadership apparatus vested on them to favour a particular

religion that they pay allegiance or are sympathetic to. In other words, political leaders have not hidden their support for the religion that they profess using their positions and state's resources to advance the course of their religion. This and other factors have exacerbated the radical change in religion as well as the society, since, it appears now that having a political position gives an edge over others, most religious faithful do not only seek political leadership in their bid to advance the state but to advance the course of their religions. It is in light of the above that religion has been politicized and politics have been laced with religion in Nigeria (John. M. Yinger, *Religion, Society, and the Individual*, 230-324).

Enunciating the above assertion, Ilesanmi has propounded a theory which he called “the manipulation thesis” as a way of explaining the intricacy of the relationship between politics and religion; he evinced (citing Jibrin Ibrahim) that: “political actors often amplify differences and provoke confessional conflicts as part of a wider strategy for the acquisition of political power and/or enhancing the political assets of groups involved in the process of power brokerage” (316). Taking a keen look at the postulation above suggest that, the author is of the opinion that religion is a ploy used by politicians as a bait to attract the masses to doing their bid, in other words, though religion is used as a gloss-coat, the real substance underneath is political interest—politics is the face behind the mask of religion; there is no point denying the reality of Ilesanmi's notion as far as Nigerian society is concerned, because, from the grassroots to the federal level (which is the apex of leadership structure), religious sympathisers continue rely on religious affiliations to promote their political aspirations.

Expatriating further, Ilesanmi added a twist to the matter when he argued that: “the petro-dollar economy exacerbated all forms of struggle for political power and consequently for economic resources. Religion, commonly regarded as an effective weapon for social mobilization, came to play an important role in the distribution of the national pie” (316). It is a known fact that Nigeria ranks among world oil-producing nation nations and with oil comes abundant state-owned resources, each group and members of

different religions seek means and ways to clinch to various portfolios of power in their bid for resource control—thereby leaving groups and individuals at loggerhead with one another.

Effects of Religious Skirmishes in Nigeria

With the rise of religious violent behaviours in the world, there is no doubt that, the world as a global village has lost her innocence and its relative peace that was sometimes enjoyed in the past. Scholars have continue to point to the twenty first (21st) century as one of the bloodiest century, this is not unconnected with the picture earlier paint above, in his contention with effects of such violent human actions done in the name of religion, Okoro Kingsley in “Religion and Terrorism: A Socio-Historical Reconsideration” has stated that: . . . the experience of violence affects humanity adversely by creating a sense of insecurity in the life of all peoples and nations within the global village arrangement. All spheres of human existence become threatened and threatening too, hence human beings in the 21st century are at threshold of obliteration (551).

An elaboration of Kingsley's claim may be obviously seen in the strained relationship among many nations—especially those that have been associated at one time or the other with radical or violent religious groups or activities, hence, relations in the table of nations have gone south with other socio-economic effects or impacts accompanying such relationships.

Furthermore, it has been reported that, loss of human dignity and capital in the 21st century is nearly unquantifiable due to religious skirmishes. In view of the above Henry S. Wilson in “Terrorism and Religion” provides vivid but worrisome account of the degree of danger that the contemporary age is facing as he writes that:

... Terrorist attacks have taken a heavy toll on humanity, especially innocent civilians. According to UNICEF, 80% of victims of such oppression in the recent years have been civilians, mainly women and children. Looking back at the last century, despite all its valuable accomplishments, the 20th century has turned out the bloodiest century in human history. It is estimated that more than 60 million people were killed by fellow human, more than all the

previous centuries of human history, the century ended with about 21 million refugees around the globe, including about 6 million internally displaced people and more than 300,000 child soldiers . . . (58).

It is no news of how people all over the world have become refugees in their home countries due violence that is perpetuated in the name of religion—including the continent of Africa, indeed it will not be an exaggeration to posit that peace has taken its flight due to violent religious conflicts and behaviours among adherents of different faith traditions.

In line with the above postulations, Nigeria as a nation is not an exception in suffering the effects of religious conflicts; it has been observed that, with the growing trends of religious violence that has greeted the Nigerian society that insecurity has heightened. That is because, some members of the society have devalued human life and have taken to the destruction of same at any time they feel their religious ideology, identity or position is threatened. In other words, as an effect of religious disturbance which has characterized the country, human lives and properties are no longer valued or safe. This is evident in the wanton destruction of lives and properties worth billions of naira in recent years. This has become akin with the society, and members of the society no longer enjoy security that is due to law abiding citizens of a given society. In light of the foregoing, it is important to add that, even though many organizations have attempted cataloguing the data of lives and properties that have been lost due to the activities of Boko Haram religious sect for instance, their figures of properties and human lives still fall short of actual impact or loss in reality.

Consequent upon the effect stated above, is the fact that, the social cooperate existence of the state has also been threatened or even collapsed. This has been made obvious in the growing tensions among members of the society which has manifested in people's desire for secession. It is no news that many groups (ethnic and religious) in Nigeria have been clamouring for some sort of independence (or better stated secession) because of the feeling that with the religious bigotry evident in some sections of the

country and even in governance, they prefer to cede off their existence from the Nigerian state. On the other hand, people of different religious affiliations have become suspicious of one another, so much so that people treat one another with utmost distrust to the point that they no longer want to cohabit in the same environment. It has been postulated that:

. . . With some forms of contextual discrimination, relationships between people may be characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear as it is the case among ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. In fact, this mutual suspicion and lack of cordiality among the various ethnic components explains why ethno-religious conflicts have become a near permanent feature of Nigeria as a nation since the 1980s to date (Salawu 346).

Consenting with Salawu's assertion, it is worth mentioning that the situation has been exacerbated with some communities in Nigeria practically cohabiting along religious line. For instance, in Anguwan Rogo a community in Jos metropolis (of Plateau State, Nigeria) people have become uncomfortable in accommodating Christians and vice versa, that is, those communities where Muslims and Christians once lived together prior to religious disturbances have had to relocate to a community that is dominantly that of their faith. Similarly, the researcher also observed a similar scenario playing out in some parts of Kaduna metropolis (another flashpoint of religious conflicts in Nigeria), a situation where Christians who had lived in Muslim dominated areas had to relocate or vice versa. With this happening in the society, the gulf between ethnic and religious groups have continued to widen in the sense that, fear and mutual suspicion have dominated the hearts of individuals; it is in that light that social relations have gradually dissipated—trust among individuals and groups have become a scarce commodity.

On the other hand, because of the growing sense of exclusion felt by some religious groups from leaders of the society who chose to align with a particular religious tradition to the disadvantage of others, some members of the society that constitute the population of other religions have grown apathetic towards such leadership. In other words, people from such groups as

described above have over time lost confidence in the leadership of the society and therefore consider it illegitimate—that is not unconnected with the fact that these people do not feel the sense of belonging and by extension are not sure of the needed protection from government against any kind of harm that may befall them. In view of the above that, Ibrahim Jibrin avouches in “Ethno-Religious Mobilisation and Sapping of Democracy in Nigeria” that:

The legitimacy of the modern state is linked to its capacity to present itself as a provider of public goods and, more important, a neutral arbiter that guarantees the security of all sections of the society. When the state is generally perceived as serving the particularistic interest of one group, it starts losing its legitimacy and indeed, its authority. As state capacity declines, fear of the other rises and people resort to other levels of solidarity-religious, ethnic and regional-in search of security (94).

Alluding to Ibrahim's view it can be said that, his postulation has no doubt stepped up the researcher's argument, in the sense that, his postulation captures the thought that the researcher attempted to convey earlier that government loses its legitimacy when it fails to provide “equitable public good” for all inhabitants of the society. He further expatiated that, because of the failure of the state to provide public good, neutrality in arbitrating matters between discording parties, and also guaranteeing security of lives and properties, individuals or groups have assumed the role that government is supposed to play thereby heating the polity.

These lists of effects of religious skirmishes in the society (whether global or local), is in no way exhaustive, for there are many other effects that the global as well as local communities have suffered and are still suffering, the few that have been named are a tip of an iceberg—the list is inexhaustible.

Ways to Curbing Religious Skirmishes/ Conflicts in Nigeria

With the exacerbation of religious conflicts in different forms and magnitude that have engulfed the Nigerian society and leaving traceable marks or effects, it is expedient that certain steps be taken to keep such occurrence

on check. In light of the above, it is essential to mention that the starting point of finding lasting solution is turning attention to one of the formative agent in the society; it is critical that educational curricular be tailored towards raising individuals that will treat fellow humans as human first before adjudging their religion.

Ushe Mike Ushe in his work, "Religious Conflicts and Education in Nigeria: Implications for National Security" advanced that: "The religious education at this . . . should stop preaching only violence and disunity, which are common features of most religious groups today. Rather, religious education, whether Christian, Muslim or traditional should go on teaching honesty, fair play, justice, love, unity and contentment which are all actual virtues of peace and security" (125). This call is against the backdrop that, education is a means of enlightening the mind—and religious education when taught in the right frame can mould individual's character which can help in reducing or better still extinguishing religious skirmishes among people of different religious affiliations.

It is quite unfortunate that most times when religious conflicts occur in Nigeria, the presence of government authority is only felt in their effort to quell the situation but may later become reluctant in dealing with the issues at their roots or even the perpetrators. Most conflict management approaches have either been ineffective or have not been followed to the latter and such attitude easily creates room for reoccurrence. It has become necessary for an effective conflict management approach to be utilized, in view of the above Oluwaseun Olawale Afolabi has advocated that:

. . . The first step in conflict resolution and mediation is to analyze the nature and dynamics of the grassroots conflicts, then to assess the human resources available for the conflict mitigation, including the capacity of traditional civic cultures to adapt to new conflict challenges. This is an important mechanism of bringing peace in religious violence due to the fact that conflict is fuelled with resources which can be used to bring sustainable peace and development in the society. However, it is important to note that strategies used in curtailing conflict differ from one culture to the other (29).

Concurring with the author, the researcher would add that, it is no longer acceptable to sweep critical issues such as religious conflicts under the carpet, for such treatment of conflicts has helped in the build-up of discordance that has matured into full blown religious violent behaviours among some militant religious adherents in Nigeria.

Furthermore, it is of essence for government at all levels to come to terms with the fact that other means of conflict resolution that have proved helpful should be applied in the Nigerian context, it is in that thought that in "Ethno-Religious Identities In Nigeria: Implications For Governance In Nigeria" Adeline Idike and Eme Innocent are suggesting that: "there is a need for governments, ethno-regional and religious groups to adopt preventive diplomacy and early warning system as mechanisms for attaining peace. To attain this objective, courses pertaining to conflict, and conflict management should be included in all the tiers of education where Nigeria diversities should be emphasized" (84).

This suggestion still points to educational angle of the solution with a different touch, the authors are not only calling for educating of young minds but also to the leaders of the society on measures that can be taken to prevent the occurrence of conflict. In addition, their call for emphasis on diversity is worth appraising as imbibing such virtue or culture would help check superiority/inferiority tendencies promoted among different ethnic or religious groups in the country.

Another step that can help in curtailing the continuous disturbances associated with religion is a combination of variables which ranges from: Promotion and fostering awareness about critical thinking . . . religious freedom and tolerance . . . and . . . the institution of programming in public schools that will aids in the prevention of radicalization and promotes religious freedom and tolerance. . . The consistent promotion of secularity status of Nigeria to education and public awareness. . . Government at all levels should not be involved in the funding of any religious activities. Liberalism should be promoted in all sphere of our national life (Samuel Ekanem and Ekeng Ekefre, "Education and Religious Intolerance in Nigeria," 309).

Assessing the assertion above, worthy of particular mentioning is the authors' reference to the importance of promoting the secularity of the state, in line with their views, it can be said that government has for long meddled in religious affairs whether directly or indirectly and by so doing has undermined the secularity of the Nigerian state as enshrined in section 10 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended); the position of the Nigerian constitution on religion should not be treated with levity as that has given room for excesses.

In line with the views of Ekanem and Ekefre, it has been observed with great dismay that, government at all levels has failed in delivering on its mandate of providing for and protecting its citizenry, it is in that fashion that some authors have called for effective governance, his concept of effectiveness of governance is that, there should be:

. . . The running of the affairs of government in positive and progressive manner beneficial to the governed and which delivers the public goods. Its attributes include: due process, transparency, responsiveness on the part of government, power sharing, rule of law, competence, separation and devolution of powers, a free press and a free virile civil society. There are several dictatorial democracies in Africa. Such regimes do not promote and practice good governance. These are the conflict generators of the African continent (Uhunmwuango and Epelle, 120).

In the authors' view, failures in actualizing those tenets that they have been itemized have engendered religious unrest not only in Nigeria alone but in Africa at large. However, should government step up in meeting those requirements then conflicts will be brought to barest minimum. Adjudging the list above, their call serves as an intensifier to the call that Nigeria as it stands today need to tow the path of abiding by tenets of democracy and good governance if religious tension or violence is to be tackled.

Furthermore, religious leaders should pioneer the de-radicalization of adherents of their faiths, because, religious leaders occupy key place in the life of the society and individuals who are adherents of various religions. Worthy to add, is the fact that religion has the potency that is

beyond comprehension, and religious leaders can harp on that since they are key people in shaping the lives of individuals who are expected to turn out in the society as morally upright persons. And because of the special role conferred on religious leaders the teachings from the sacred texts can go a long way in demythologizing the minds of those who are religious radicals.

By implication, religious leaders need to do more than just preach morals to the various adherents; there is the need for them (i.e. religious leaders) to deliberately see it as a clarion call to deemphasize hate for other religions. In other words, it is consequent upon religious leaders to view this responsibility of teaching and preaching messages of love and unity as sacrosanct.

Inter-faith dialogue should be used as a panacea to religious unrest; people of different religious traditions in Nigeria should have platforms that allow for dialoguing about the religious difference and the need for respect and tolerance of one another as a means of eliminating the high rate of ignorance that exist among believers of different faiths in Nigeria. It is a known fact that most religious adherents have taken little things out of proportion because of ignorance but I believe that with the right education coming in form of dialogue certain grey areas can be highlighted. Also as a matter of importance, inter-faith discussions can be a medium of educating religious groups with knowledge that can help in pacifying their adherents in matters of religious difference.

Conclusion

It is obvious that religion has remained a sensitive commodity to the lives of Nigerians, and in same vein it is almost a norm that hardly can any issue be treated without lacing it with either religion or ethnicity. These two variables influence motives and actions of most if not all Nigerians. And because of the above reasons, the country has experienced one form of conflict or the other manifesting in different dimensions. However, it is important that individuals or groups come to terms with the fact that, there is the need to respect as well as tolerate the existing differences of various religious groups, and that can be engendered through conscious

religious education that teaches the importance of coexistence among different religious adherents in Nigeria. In addition, having a government and people in leadership positions that adhere to the democratic tenets as enshrined in various documents that preaches neutrality of a leader towards people of differing religious groups will also go a long way in putting to rest some of the causes of conflicts associated with religion and ethnicity. Specifically, until concrete steps are taken in saving the country from falling off the cliff, rhetorical solutions to religious skirmishes may someday lead to running Nigeria aground.

Works Cited

Jacob, Ray Ikechukwu. "Ethnic Conflict between the Muslims and Christians in Nigeria: The Dilemma of Decision-Making of the Political Elites" *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*. Volume 1, Issue 1 December, 2014 Pages: 1-11.

Salawu, B. "Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for New Management Strategies." *European Journal of Social Sciences* – Volume 13, Number 3 (2010) pp. 345-350.

Taiye, Adamolekun. "A Historical Perspective in the Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria since 1914". *Journal of Arts and Humanities (JAH)*, Volume -2, No.-5, (June, 2013), pp. 59-66

Vaughan, Olufemi. *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

Awoniyi, S. A. "A Discourse On Religious Conflict And Tolerance In Multi-Faith Nigeria." *European Scientific Journal* vol.9, No.20 (2013): 124-143.

Crossman, Ashley. *Studying the Relationship between Religion and Society*, 2014. <https://www.thoughtco.com/sociology-of-religion-3026286> Accessed on the 24th April, 2017.

Crossman, Ashley. *Understanding Conflict Theory*. 2017, <https://www.thoughtco.com> April, 2017. Accessed on the 24th April, 2017.

Haralambos, Michael et al. *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* (8th edition). Hammersmith, London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013.

Peil, Margaret. *Consensus and Conflict in African Societies: An Introduction to Sociology*. London: Longman Group Ltd, 1977.

Ryder, John and Gert-Rüdiger Wegmarshaus ed., *Education for a Democratic Society*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007.

Silberman, Israel E., et al. "Religion and World Change: Violence and Terrorism versus Peace." *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 61, No. 4, (2005): 761-784.

Gwamna, J. Dogara. *Religion and Politics in Nigeria*. Bukuru, Jos: African Christian TextBooks (ACTS), 2014.

Agang, Sunday Bobai. *The Impact of ethnic, Political and Religious Violence on Northern Nigeria, and a Theological Reflection on Its Healing*. Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2011.

Ilesanmi, Simeon O. "Recent Theories of Religion and Politics in Nigeria." *Journal of Church and State*. Edited by Derek H. Davis, 37, 2, 1995.

Yinger, J. M. *Religion, Society, and the Individual: An Introduction to Sociology of Religion*. Michigan: Macmillan, 1957.

Wilson, Henry S 'Terrorism and Religion' *Theological Forum*. Vol. 34, no.1 (2002): 58-78.

Ibrahim, Jibrin. "Ethno-Religious Mobilisation and Sapping of Democracy in Nigeria" in Hyslop, J. (ed.) *African Democracy in the Age of Globalisation*. Wit water-rand University Press, 1999.

Ushe, Ushe Mike "Religious Conflicts and Education in Nigeria: Implications for National Security." *Journal of Education and Practice* Vol.6, No.2, (2015): 117-129.

Afolabi, Oluwaseun Olawale "Religious Violence and National Security in Nigeria, 1999 – 2011" *International Affairs and Global Strategy*. Vol. 42, (2016): 23-31.

Idike, Adeline A., and Innocent, Eme Okechukwu. "Ethno-Religious Identities in Nigeria: Implications For Governance In Nigeria." *Journal of Policy and Development Studies* Vol. 9, No. 5, (2015): 72-82.

Ekanem, Samuel Asuquo and Ekefre, Ekenyong. "Education and Religious Intolerance in Nigeria: The Need for Essencism as a Philosophy." *Journal of Educational and Social Research* Vol. 3 (2) (2013): 303-310.

Idike, Adeline A., and Innocent, Eme Okechukwu. "Ethno-Religious Identities in Nigeria: Implications For Governance In Nigeria." *Journal of Policy and Development Studies* Vol. 9, No. 5, (2015): 72-82.