PERSISTING POLITICAL INFLUENCE ON RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN NIGERIA

E. CHIJIOKE OGBONNA (PhD)
Director, Centre for Remedial and Continuing Education (CRCE),
Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State.

&

ELEAZAR ENYIOMA UFOMBA
Religious Studies Department,
Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State.

Abstract
One of the deadly perils that bedevil the contemporary Nigerian state is the phenomenological interface between politics and religion as co-principalities for the insinuation and perpetration of conflicts in the society. Standing on the functionalist view point, this paper argues that being a very popular religious country, Nigerian political system has not utilized such wealth of religious experience of both the politicians and the citizenry to advance a worthy paradigm for fair and peaceful democracy. Positing that the negligence of the use of moral sanity of religion results to poor governance in the country, the study maintains that religious crisis, insurgence, poverty and social crimes are traceable to poor performance in governance from the political office holders in the country. Consequently, religion seems to have been politicized, stripped of the didactic capabilities and converted to weapon of political tension, trauma, extra-judicial killing, oppression and insecurity in Nigeria. The objective relationship between religion and politics must be addressed in order to curb religious crisis which has dwindled the socio- economic boom and thorough governance of the country. Therefore, this study recommends that politicians should begin to respect awe of religion and the positive moral functions it stands for in the society; knowing that religion should be an essential ingredient and positive instrument to achieve good governance in the society and therefore not for mayhem.

Keywords: **Politics, Religion, Crisis, Good Governance, Nigerian Society**.

Introduction
Politics and religion are two phenomena in human society that seem to be facing a mistaken identity which arises from the dynamics of conflict. The idea of religion being used politically is a factor in igniting conflict; while at the same time, religion when considered as a critical factor in conflict resolution draws a lot of issues for discussion (Fox, 2018). The position of politics as medium and necessary means in curbing conflict rather than aggravating it at different levels have become a major concern in the recent time (Arikan & Pazit, 2019).. Talks are coming from local levels, regional and global levels on the encouragement of how politicians will avoid the use of religion to foment social unrest. Many scholars and leaders of

various faiths believe that the world may still be far from peace unless political leaders resign from the use of religions as tool in achieving their selfish political pursuits. Hence, the world should seek ways to address political issues that ensure that religious conflicts are minimized since the peace of the religions means the peace of the world. It has been observed that wrong political influence on religion is the key factor that produces all kinds of malice and hatred among the adherents of the religions. Therefore this study is conceived as thoughtful investigation of how better politics can be used to enhance religious peaceful co-existence and good governance.

Historical Reflection of Politically Induced Religious Crisis

Conflict cannot be isolated from the political history of mankind. Conflicts are contrived to be an inevitable aspect of humanity (Ogbonna, 2017). It is in human society that conflict frequently runs as the order of the day, and solutions are pursued at all cost to re-establish peace where violence had made same elusive. No human society is insulated from conflict as all are vulnerable to same. Some scholars sees conflict as an on-going process in the way humans relate with each other (Nwaomah 2011). Conflict is as old as the world. In the same vein, the history of religious crisis dates back in history and was occurring in almost every society of the antiquity. Religious conflict arises from the response of the masses to an experienced or perceived political injustice either against their religion, faith or belief. The abuse of major or minor ethnical values results to crisis (Udemagwuna 2017). Audu (2008), asserts that "the history of religion is perhaps a history of violence". The fact in this assertion is evident in the history of the crusades and jihad.

The Crusades

On a global level, when one digs the historical examples of how politics rides on the back of religion to inflame the society, the Crusades and Jihads which tore the world poles apart, especially, between Christianity and Islam comes to the front burner. The crusades were series of military violence and attacks carried out by European Christians as it was sanctioned and approved by the papacy (Throop, 2018). The crusades were direct response to the Muslim conquests between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries A.D. The original intentions of the crusades were to recapture the Holy land of Israel, especially Jerusalem from the Muslims (Audu, 2008). It arose from the papal effort to support the besieged Byzantine Christians Empire against the Muslim Seljug expansion into Asia Minor and Europe proper. Tyerman, (2005) observes that those who partook in the crusades as they were referred to as those "who fought in the name of God" actually received coronation 'knights of Christ'. The experience in the crusades was very sorrowful as both Christians and Muslims suffered and lost members in hundreds of folds. Lives were lost as even the crusaders killed Christians from the East mistaking them for Muslims. This crusades picture the rate of pride people take in using religion as a means of carrying out crimes even though they seemed not to be fully conversant with the gravity of same. Those who fought in the crusades from the Christian side believed that their victory was granted through divine intervention or direct help from God. In their victory, the church and the state cast great admiration on the warriors and they were highly celebrated (Tyerman 1998). Today, many Christians and historians see the crusades as the origin of religious violence on the side of Christianity. The beginning of a continuous crisis of religion especially, between Christians and Muslims is understood by some from this

perspective. However others have different viewpoints on the subject matter. Some scholars believe that the crusades had been one of the most destructive episodes on earth.

In reality, the so called holy war is a heinous crime, a sacrilege and sin against the Holy Spirit (Molloy & Hilgers 2013). Infact, the beginning of religious intolerance. The crusades caused an endless harm on Christianity, directly opposite to the teachings of Jesus the originator of Christian religion. It brought about one of the most confusing phenomena in Christendom and displayed to the adherents of other world religions a religion that is hostile than a religion that came to save the people. In the process of history Muslims and Islamic scholars had developed a more darkening perception of the time of the crusades. They perceive the crusades as the earliest episodes of the rivalry between Christianity and Islam. Every other fallout between Islam and Christianity or Western world and East is referred to as a continuation of the holy war. Even in the Osama Bin Laden saga, America's military effort in Iraq, Syria and Islamic stronghold are tagged as the new dimensions of the crusade (Kibble, 2002). Holy wars are the evils of men clothed in the garment of religion to destroy the society. Since the medieval period that the crusades were fought, the deadly impacts and historical references are still raging. History repeating itself, new responses to old occurrences. The more people hear about them, the angrier they become and the more they question the functions of religion in the society whether the roles of religion are in nation building or in nation destruction. Constable (2016) argues that the real reason for the holy wars was annihilation of people. The crusades used the powers of weapon to force people to convert to Christianity.

The Jihad

The term 'Jihad' is popularly understood to be holy war' carried out in Islam in order to forcefully make people to convert to Islam at a strong death threat. However, scholars who dwell much on the rendering of the real interpretation from the etymology suggest that the term does not necessarily and solely referred to Islamic war to kill those who refuse to become Muslims. Esposito (2003), argues that the true meaning of Jihad in Arabic is 'struggle' or 'to strive' with the aim to achieve or pursue a praiseworthy course. It is either the struggle by oneself to vanquish evil tendencies or the urge to convert unbelievers. Rudolph et al (2014), posit that in the classical perception of the Islamic law, Jihad has no less interpretation than the armed struggle carried out against the unbelievers. Like the crusade which is used in most Christian new religious movement to connote spiritual effort, public campaign or open air religious teachings to condemn evil and convert souls, Jihad is said to be of majorly into two contexts 'greater Jihad' to get oneself rid of evil practices and stand right with Allah, and 'lesser Jihad' viewed as the effort to convert unbelievers. This dual view on Jihad could be discussed at the level of inner Jihad and external Jihad, military Jihad and non-military Jihad (Hallaq, 2009). In the understanding of the society, especially non- Muslims, the Jihad no matter how it is classified connotes religious terrorism in Islam, a show of how religion destroys the society instead of saving it. Lewis (2008) likens crusade (by Christians) and Jihad (by Muslims) as similar in consequences as such, two great expressions of how religion exists as the source of trouble than the source of harmonious coexistence of man in the society. In the history of humanity, the official and accepted function of religion has been debated on the premise of the deadly example of Jihad and crusade. Objectively, most Islamic scholars seem to defend the use of the word 'Jihad' in more palatable auspices than the general perspective

of violence and destruction (Kemper, 2007). In similar view, some facets of Islamic movement, like the Ahmadiyya present more of the last option defensive function of Jihad in protection of the religion rather than the offensive onslaught to destroy human beings (Valentine, 2018). Thus violence is regarded as the last effort to be exhibited in defending one's own life and protect his faith in the face of persecution.

However, most historians believe that from the usage and activities of the prophet, Muhammad himself, Jihad primarily implied, armed action, warfare and was displayed in nothing else than in military sense and understanding (Lewis, 1998). Historically, the editors of most popular encyclopedia, like the 'Encyclopedia Britannica (1993) defined Jihad "as a religious duty imposed on Muslims to spread Islam by waging war". This understanding is the position taken by most western writers and theologians, therefore the most English interpretation of Jihad is "holy war", the same view according to the crusades. Firestone (1999) maintains that the true origin of Jihad began during the time of Prophet Muhammad. Beginning from the record of the first expedition in March 623 C.E, the raid which Prophet Muhammad ordered, which had to do with the interception of the Quraysh caravan, at which the prophet raised the flag of Islam.

Historical Evaluation of Politically Instigated Religious Crisis in Nigeria
One of the deadliest misfortunes of a state is how the political actors in it use other agencies of the society to destroy the society. Similarly, the greatest factor that militates against religion is the way it is carried out. Many people have lost interest in religion and discarded its theories on the ground that the tenets of the doctrines of such religion are neglected by the crimes and activities perpetrated by the adherents. The Nigerian experience of religious violence also poses such question of the exact relevant of religion if it can produced strife rather than peace and peaceful coexistence. "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction" (Cuppit, 1980). The Nigerian religious experience is marred so much and characterized by violence that the true function of religion as a social paste and moral agent is bearing a whole lot of unanswered questions. As it stands now, to many people, religion may better be seen as the culprit for every form of violent uprising, rather than a purveyor of peaceful co-existence. It is surprising that to such people they would rather look elsewhere for enthronement of peace in human habitation than on religion. It has been taken for granted that Religion is expected to promote peace. But has it always been so? Recent events indicate that Religion even in this country has not helped matters much in this direction. Regrettably today, religious bodies and many of their members are engaged in fanning the embers of discord and religious bigotry. It can even be argued that the first impediment to peace is religion since the practitioners of religion are using it to foment trouble rather than bringing about peaceful co-existence (Wotogbe-Weneka, 2012).It could be traced to a reasonable extent that most of the contents of the origin and political history of major religions are characterized by violence. Takaya (1991) argues that even in the Nigerian state, the political history of the two major immigrant religions (Christianity and Islam) is an experience of conflict and bloodshed in reference to the crusades and Jihads. These implies that most of the inter-religious crisis that occur in Nigeria from time to time seem to echo the events of the past and the evil men carried out in history in the name of religion or religious activities. While religion functions in various ways in Nigeria, and command greater number of followership, the experience and resultant effect harvested do

not bring forth the level of justice, peace, love and maintenance of the core human values which is domicile in virtually every revealed doctrine of every religion. Wotogbe –Weneka (2012) portrays the violent experience in Nigeria as the sign of a failed political sanity. The outcome manifests in violence in all its forms, religious bigotry and intolerance orchestrated by religious institutions which have unfortunately become the lot of this nation of recent cannot continue while we justify the existence of Religion. Religious emblems and symbols characterized the public life of the Nigerian nation. Yet the people do not live according to the dictates of their faith. The level of religiosity in Nigeria is so fascinating that those who play less interest in religious life are regarded as one of the major problems in the society. Virtually, everything done in Nigeria is wearing one religious garment, mentality and displayed in one form or the other. The shout of hallelujah that thrills the air of the Christian dominated region seems to present a people of religion who have nothing left in the teachings of their founder and leader Jesus Christ. Similarly, in Muslim saturated places in Nigeria hardly do men and women and the youths of the Islam faith miss their times of prayer. The building dedicated for church services and the mosques of various sizes are always busy throughout the week. No Muslim wants to skip any time of prayer and ablution, no Christian in like manner plays down on church services and programmes. Prayers are constantly said in commercial transits, market places and elsewhere, yet the life setting in the society is characterized by diverse crimes and corruption and bloody violence that should not emanate from such religious society as the Nigerian. Nduka in Wotogbe-Weneka (2012), elucidates the ways churches and mosques are bombarded with religious activities, with heavy promises of miracles, extraordinary events that would change the lives of the people. These are coupled with assurances of deliverance, security, success, solution to problems and the transformation of lives, yet the greater numbers of the citizens are beneath the care of illiteracy, poverty, ignorance and overwhelming superstition. Wotogbe –Weneka (2012), attributes the following bloody riots in Nigeria to have been orchestrated by religious fundamentalism having political undertone;

(i) The riots against the Igbo living in the northern part of Nigeria in 1953 and in the 1960 in which many lives were lost and properties destroyed. This conflict was fueled by religious bigotry.

(ii) The killing of the Igbos in the north in 1966 was said to have been caused by a radio broadcast reporting the mistreatment of the Muslims in the south.

(iii) The religious killings in Kano in 1983 and religious crisis in Kafanchan southern Kaduna years ago were examples of deadly religious conflicts in Nigeria in the past. It is believed that the leaders and adherents of such religions discard the core tenets of their religious teachings and pursue personal glories in the name of religion and took it upon themselves to raise a particular religion above the other and try to institute in the name of God a religion that will engulf other ones not minding the secular status of the Nigerian state.

Similarly, Ehusani (2004) unveils that the 2002 (November) Kaduna massacre which extended to Abuja came to occur because religious fundamentalists and extremists fanned the burning coal and used it to achieve their personal avarice and disregard the implication in whichever way. In a wider instance, Falaye (2011)argues that the 1994 Rwanda genocide in which

members of Hutu ethnic majority in the east-central murdered about 800,000 (eight hundred thousand) people belonging to the Tutsi minor tribe, was traced not just to ethnic distrust and rancor, but also to religious undertone. As hate speeches and acrimonious sermons were heard as being preached by religious leaders who should have helped in preaching peace and love rather than killings and destruction.

There are major causative factors that bring religious conflicts in Nigeria. Instance includes the enforcement of Sharia law as the main content of civil and criminal laws as being seriously advanced in Muslim majority states in Nigeria as governors of such states press for establishment of Sharia law to be operative at the state levels (Holman 1986). In the 1980s report from the death of Muhammad Marwa (Maitatsine), the affront exhibited by the erstwhile military president Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, who in the 1980s registered Nigeria as a member of the organization of Islamic Conference (Organization of Islamic Cooperation), a development which Christians in Nigeria till the present perceive as an insult or embarrassment to their own religion and a negation with impunity to the secular state status Nigeria is constitutionally known for.

Implications Of Religious Crisis On National Development

It appears lives and properties have become expendable and can be continually used to fuel the terrible fire of religious ethnic, political, economic and social intolerance, bigotry, fear and animosity. Wariboko and Olawale refer some obvious causes of religious crisis in Nigeria. These include and not restricted to; poverty. This according to him is cardinal cause of religious violence which results from improper education as the educated ones seem to use the uneducated and uninformed youths to actualize their self-centered biddings. Those who are not educated believe in doctrines of crime and violence and are hired to wreak havoc at the expense of their own lives which they place less value on and are made to believe that those who die in crisis will go straight to heaven, the haven of enjoyment that seems to elude them here. Mass unemployment result into religious crisis and ethnic conflict as the educated but idle youths find employment in conflicts. The assurance of employment should they carry out one silly action in the advantage of a greedy economic fundamentalist who hides and uses religious fundamentalism to obtain their scheme, triggers the young people to take such risk. Some are bribed heavily as the sight and holding of money blind them from seeing the horror in their actions. The fear of domination, which religion should possess the location is another causative factor in the incessant religious bloodshed in the Nigerian state. The middle belt has been a typical instance of this menace. Jos and Benue have seen this over and over in the recent times. The spectrum of public support for religious crisis and extremism such as in the case of Boko Haram is representative of both active and passive elements of Nigerian society. Passive supporters may not make personal sacrifices in the form of suicide attacks. However, their sympathy with the activities of insurgents, as well as refusal to betray them, is a key factor that undermines the government's efforts and cripples development (Akinola. 2013). People are tempted to place their religious priorities and convictions over others no matter how detrimental they are to the unity of the society. Religious conflict sounds so familiar in Nigeria that it does not give concern as much to hearers and political class. The burning of worship places, killing of worshipers and worship leaders are crimes perpetrated in Nigeria without recourse to human right respect. Fundamentalists of religion use speeches and persuasiveness to woo their ignorant followers to carry out attacks and destruction in the

name of religious zealousness. In the case of Boko Haram, it is assumed that their main goal was to purify Islam in northern Nigeria. However, the sect became deadly violent and has terribly tormented Nigerian government and citizens, their activities have led to the loss of many lives and properties as they have no second thought in destroying governmental facilities, killing tens of thousands and displaced over 2.3 million from their homes (Katie & Hume, 2015).

Nigeria military has lost many officers as well as the innocent citizens of the state losing their lives. Religious crisis in Nigeria seems to be wearing diverse out looks and appear in diverse operation in the course of history. Even the young ones who are drawn to be used give no heed to the course of life and justice. Churches and Mosques seem to be at the death threat of each other in some northern parts of Nigeria. The 1982 Kano crisis could be traced to the disagreement emanated between Muslim zealots and Anglican Church. Since the 1990s, violence in Kano has been predominantly perceived and described as religious, with the implication that religious beliefs or differences are deemed to be the root cause of the violence. Haldun and Opeyemi argue that religious intolerance is on the increase in Nigeria in the recent times, with one of the root causes being the tendency to spread into other areas after an early stage in one area, ethno-religious conflicts have gained notoriety as the most violent crises in Nigeria (Ehrhardt 2016).The sharia law which has been adopted in twelve states in the northern part of Nigeria (Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Kaduna, Kano, Kebbi, Katsina, Jigawa, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe as well as Zamfara) is one of the factors that trigger religious tension and lead to outbreak of violence every now and then.

Conclusion

It clearly shows that state of insecurity in the polity has assumed a frightening dimension. As a matter of fact, the ugly history of religious wars, political violence and terrorism in Nigeria is becoming next to none, being a phenomenon that keeps increasing in magnitude and intensity by the day. From the foregoing, the experience in Nigeria suggests the appearance of lives and properties as having become expendable and can be continually used to fuel the terrible fire of religious ethnic, political, economic and social intolerance, bigotry, fear and animosity. From internal and external observations, the state of alarm in Nigeria is rapidly ascending the altitude. The acceleration signals stupendous crisis that needs to be nipped at the level on the present before it escalates in wider scope and extended horizon. It could be obviously assumed that the country, based on overwhelming omens has become a prepared state for religious conflict, ethnic, economic, political and social violence where each displays its power without caution to the respect of the dignity of human life and consequence of bloody violence to the society.

In Nigeria religion is seen as not necessarily about God or the society, but it has become and strongly regarded as the first call point of identity. This leads to contention and rivalry. Each religion and its adherents want to take pre-eminence over the other. Thus the competition over hegemony stands to be a continuous struggle.

Recommendations

Politicians should be agents of peace and unity beginning from the local settings to regional,

state and global. Understanding that most religious related crisis are insinuated politically from local settings before they escalate to regional, national or even global levels. Therefore there is high level of need for political re-engineering at the grass root, involving leaders of such religions and their members.

The true meaning of politics which is governance must be made categorically explicit, as religious leaders should intensify efforts in tracing their adherents to appreciate and encourage and help in promoting the positive elements of their religious tenets and beliefs and do well to discourage those religious understanding and misconceptions that become causative factors and objects of discord and bring forth violence at the long run every atom of misinformation should be discouraged.

Politicians should seek for working action of inter-religious dialogue and ensure that there is proper understanding of how interfaith relationship can advance development, social welfare and mutual co-existence.

Politicians should not take advantage of different faith traditions to allow it to serve as means of destroying their opponents or the religion they hate or to gain economic advantage.

Religious leaders should reconsider their selfish attachment to politicians. Rather than serving as supporters and promoters of political acrimony, they have the work of directing and calling the attention of political leaders to the right way of doing things and emphasize on the moral factors.

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