

8.**ACTIVITIES OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS AS A FACTOR
IN NATIONAL SECURITY DISCOURSE****Olusegun Oke**Department of Religious Studies
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Insecurity has become a hydra headed monster which security agents in Nigeria and other nations in Africa appear incapable of handling. Insecurity is a state of being subject to danger or threat. It has also been defined as a threat to the state which often accounted for the race for arms and nuclear weapons to defend the state. Insecurity has taken a centre stage in Nigeria and many other countries in Africa in the recent time. No day passes, without the news of one form of violence or the other, and this has turned the countries in Africa to almost a pariah state. After the country gained its independence from the colonial masters' overs six decades ago, many Nigerians believed that the country would be ushered into the promised land. Rather, the country has been experiencing a plethora of conflicts ranging from the threat of secession, civil wars, regional conflicts, and internal crises (ethnic, religious etc.) which continue to affect the country's nascent democratic structure and development. The various conflicts have destabilized the country and their costs in terms of loss of human life and property are so enormous. Religion is being used by religious actors as tool to fan the embers of insecurity in Nigeria. The spate of insecurity that has engulfed Nigeria has forced many to flee their homes to more peaceful neighbouring countries. Existing scholarly studies on insecurity in Nigeria and other African countries like Achumba, 2013, Ede, 2014 and Awoniyi, 2019 have focused mainly on the traditional approach to security which is state-centric with little attention paid to how religious fundamentalism, fanaticism, blasphemy, extremism and hate speech have over the years been deployed by religious actors to grease the wheel of insecurity in Nigeria and Africa in general. The aim of this paper therefore, is to examine the activities of religious actors in relation to insecurity in Nigeria. This is the gap in study the researcher intends to fill.

Introduction

The security challenge in Nigeria has assumed a daunting dimension in recent time, forcing people of the most populous black nation in the world to count the loss of their loved ones, investments and absence of safety on a daily

basis in most parts of the country¹. Religion which ought to be an instrument for social cohesion, well-being of adherents and to address threats to national and all class of insecurity in Nigeria has become an instrument deployed to spread the ember of disunity, discord and hatred². A country may have the best armed forces in terms of training and equipment, the most efficient police force, the most effective custom men, the most active secret service agents, and best quality prisons, but yet, be the most insecure nation in the world due to the activities of many religious actors who use every available opportunity to spread messages of violence and dissonance³. On many occasions, religious actors make claim that their religion is most authentic and the one that promises heaven. With this mind set, they go to any length to coerce, force, and discredit other religion to their advantage⁴. This is common most especially, between Christians and Muslims. This ugly development has over the years generated bloodbaths, carnages and violence of unimaginable dimension leading to scores of deaths of innocent civilians, foreigners, security personnel, elected officials and many government workers⁵. Religious actors use derogatory statements and terms against other religious adherents which has led to religious dissonance and insecurity in the country⁶. Without any fear contradiction, Nigeria is one of the most endowed nations in the world with abundant human and natural resources. There is practically every vital mineral deposit in all the states of the federation. Yet, it remains under-developed because of the menace of insecurity⁷. Money that ought to have been spent for the overall development of the country, is diverted to secure the nation from multifarious conflicts that have engulfed the country in the recent time.

¹ A. Adegbam (2023) Insecurity: A Threat to human Existence and Economic Development in Nigeria. In *Public Policy and Administrative Research*. Vol.3 No.6.

² D.O. Egbefo (2014) Religion: An instrument for Enhancing National Security and Harmonious existence in Nigeria. *SAPHA: A Journal of Historical Studies*. Vol. 3, No.1.

³ A.E.Orhero.(2020) Human Security: The Key to Enduring National Security in Nigeria. In *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law*. Issue. 17.

⁴ R.H.Kituase and H.C. Achunike (2013) Religion in Nigeria from 1900-2013. In *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 3, No.18.

⁵ C. Kwaja (2011) Nigeria's Pernicious Drivers of Ethno-Religious Conflict. In *AFRICA CENTER for STRATEGIC STUDIES. AFRICA SECURITY BRIEF*. NO.14.

⁶ 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: US Development of State. Office of International Religious Freedom 2022.

⁷ O.P. Oke (2011) Abating Corruption for Good Governance: The Role of Religious Leaders. In (Ed A.B. Sunday.) *Corruption, Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria*. Ibadan. Real Success Consult.

Religious Actors

In the context of this paper, religious actors are religious leaders, or any organization that overtly and systematically operating under religious principles, that takes an active role in the public debate⁸. Religion is a sensitive phenomenon which has to be handled with great caution. It is therefore important for religious actors to have a deep understanding of religious principles and precepts, since their messages are taken as messages from the divine. They are to imbibe the spirit of unity, open-mindedness, fairness and justice in the discharge of their divine assignment to members. But, it is most unfortunate that religious actors colour their messages with offensive utterances that creates instability and remained a constant threat to peaceful co-existence in the Nigeria society. The hatred between the religious groups that make up Nigeria has intensified as the use of unguarded statements continue unregulated. The way and manner words are used determines the perception of people to which such is directed.

National Security

National security are the activities involved in protecting a country against attack and danger. It involves the defense of the territorial integrity of a country from both internal and external aggression⁹. Therefore, national security as used in this paper is the situation whereby the lives and property of all citizens in Nigeria are protected from any kind of harm, danger and loss irrespective of ethnic learning, political and religious affiliation and social status¹⁰.

How religious actors propel insecurity in Nigeria

It is important at this section of the work to examine the various factors that are responsible for the spate of insecurity in the country. Though, there is no way one can exhaust such factors. But, effort will be made to look into few of such factors for a better understanding of the subject matter under discussion.

Hate Speech

Hate speech refers to offensive discourse targeting a group or an individual. It is a speech that expresses hate or encourages violence towards a person or group based on issues relating to race, religion, sex and so on. It is considered as all forms of expression which spread, incite and promote social, ethnic or religious

⁸. M. Kunkler and J. Leininger (2009) The Multi-faceted Roles of Religious Actors in Democratisation Process: Empirical Evidence from Five Young Democracies. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1726664>.

⁹. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. 8TH Edition.

<https://www.amazon.com-oxford-advanced-learners-dictionary>.

¹⁰. National Security. <https://collinsdictionary.com>. Assessed 17/9/2023.

conflict¹¹. Hate speech is both a symptom and cause of deeper societal challenges. Hateful expression, particularly incitement to violence, online and offline, has negative effects on society as a whole and not just on those who are targeted, impacting relationships between individuals, communities and governing institutions¹². For instance, when a religious actor refer to another person as a man from an ungodly religion, you have invariably expressed hatred against the religious belief of such an individual. Also, when a Christian call a Muslim sister *Abori ma bo Iwa*. (Meaning using hijab to cover the body and not her character), it is an expression of hatred. We have seen cases too, when a Muslim calls a Christian *Kiriyo*. That is, those who go about begging for what to eat. Hence, when a language is used negatively to address people, it is considered to be impolite and can be referred to as hate speech. According to Council of European, hate speech is a form of discrimination that is communicated to the victim(s) intolerable hatred that involves ethnicity, minority and religious sentiments.¹³

Religious actors who use language in a manner and purpose that undermine religious unity are considered to be linguistically impolite and their messages are capable of creating tension.¹⁴ Since 1960, when Nigeria became a sovereign nation, ethno-religious violence has hindered the various developmental efforts of successive administrations. Religious intolerance, hate speech, mutual distrust have undermined Nigeria's quest for peace, unity and progress which are the fundamental fulcrum that any nation that desires a holistic development must uphold¹⁵. Many religious leaders use their positions to spread messages of hatred and hostility that have inflamed interreligious violence. The way religious hate speech and insecurity intertwine is complex, when it is considered from the perspective of the perpetrator of hate speech and the victim(s). Hate speech is usually directed at religious actors and practitioners

¹¹ P.T. Benki et.al. (2022)Interreligious hate speech as a source of insecurity in Nigeria. In *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies*.(JLLLS), Vol.2, No. 1.

¹² M.Bergsmo and K.Manocha (2023) Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence. Torkel Opsahi Academic EPublisher.(TOAEP) Brussels. No.41.

¹³ Council of Europe. Relevant Council of Europe Standards and Policies in the Prohibition and Prevention of Hate Speech 2011. By the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs (DGHL) Council of Europe. [https:// www ohchr.org/ ICCPR>others](https://www.ohchr.org/ICCPR/others).

¹⁴ P.T. Benki et.al. (2022)Interreligious hate speech as a source of insecurity in Nigeria. In *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies*.(JLLLS), Vol.2, No. 1.

O.A.Bolanle (2017) Religious Intolerance in Nigeria: An Abuse on Human Rights. In *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church*. <https://catholicethics.com/forum/religious-intolerance-in-nigeria-an-abuse-of-human-rights/>.Assessed 12/9/2023.

where derogatory languages and messages are made against members of other religion, while they claim that their speeches are not derogatory but they are exercising their fundamental human right of religious freedom¹⁶. Claims and counter claims by religious actors and religious adherents are contributory factor to ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. They are fond of exchanging provocative statements and sermons, unguarded utterances, which most of the times, provoke various religious adherents against each other and can fuel ethno – religious crisis¹⁷. Religious violence occurs as a result of the difference in the interpretation of doctrine, aggressive evangelism, insulting publications and so on¹⁸. The continued state of insecurity in Nigeria orchestrated by religious actors has further threatened the very slender fabric of national integration in the country and created palpable fear, disquiet and anxiety in a nation that is on a daily basis striving for political relevance, stability and economic greatness among the comity of nations¹⁹. No monumental greatness can be achieved in a nation threatened by insecurity. All efforts of government at dousing the tension in the land through the inauguration of interreligious and inter-faith initiatives geared towards bringing about peaceful co-existence have not yielded any concrete and meaningful result. In actual fact, to know the exact figure of property destroyed at the instance of any violence is a mission impossible. In parts of the country where conflicts and violence rages, businesses have come to a standstill and many foreign investors have relocated their businesses to a more peaceful neighbouring country²⁰.

Religious Extremism

Religious extremism occurs when a religious adherent (Christian or Muslim) manifests intolerance tendency towards people of other faith²¹. We

¹⁶ Understanding Hate Speech. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/hate-speech-and-real-harm>

¹⁷ O.P. Oke and Elizabeth Okoh John (2022). The Socio-Economic Implications of Ethno- Religious Conflict in Nigeria. In *Ibadan Journal of Educational Studies. (IJES)*. Vol.19, Nos. 1&2.

¹⁸ P. Nmah (2012). Religious Fanaticism. A Threat to National Security. <https://www.ajoi.info.view>.

¹⁹ R.A.Abdulfattah (2020). *Boko Haram* Insurgency in Nigeria and the Challenge of National Integration: Issues and Perspectives. In *Journal of Agricultural, Economic, Environment and Social Sciences*. Vol.6 (2)16.

²⁰ M.Newiak. The Economic Consequences of Conflict. Regional Economic Outlook. Sub- Saharan Africa. International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org>AFR>.Assessed 15/9/2023>.

²¹ A.Bature (2020) Religious Freedom in Nigeria-Extremism and Government. US Commission on International Religious Freedom (gov) <https://www.usclrf.gov.>sits>default> files. Assessed on 2/11/2023>

have intra-religious extremism and inter-religious extremism²². That is, intolerance towards people of the same religious beliefs or the religious belief of others and acts towards them in ways that threaten the peace, unity, oneness and stability of such individual or group. The sentiments by religious actors seem to have been responsible for insecurity which has a huge effect on social cohesion among the various religious groups in Nigeria²³. Some of the manifestations of extremism among religious actors in both Christianity and Islam include disparaging publications, ignorance and wrong perception of other peoples' religion, poverty, illiteracy, loss of cultural cum value system, corruption, manipulation by elites and so on²⁴

Religious Fanaticism

The word fanaticism is derived from the Latin adjective, *fanaticus* (meaning pertaining to a temple; inspired by a divinity; enthusiastic)²⁵. Therefore, a religious fanatic is one who is inspired by a divinity to indulge in unreasoning religious claims, or one enthusiastic concerning any matter, religious or not.²⁶ In a simple language, a fanatic can be described as an over-enthusiastic person²⁷. In other words, a fanatic is a person who is so engrossed and personate about his religious views, beliefs and position to the extent of being blinded to the religious view, belief and position of others. Fanaticism can therefore be defined as over-enthusiasm and over zealousness which may cross all bounds of reason and may tend to become wild and dangerous²⁸. Religious fanaticism is the manipulation of religion and religious beliefs by religious actors to satisfy their selfish interest.²⁹ They are regarded as fanatics because of the zeal, passion and enthusiasm they pursue their goals and aspirations. Most of the times, they go to any diabolical and the use of violence to promote their religious views and to

²² S.Wibisono (2019) A Multidimensional Analysis of Religious Extremism. <https://www.frontiers.org>fpstp.2019.02560>.

²³ U.E. Williams (2015) Insecurity in Nigeria. Political, Religious and Cultural Implications. In *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. Vol.5.

²⁴ M.Bergsmo and K.Manocha (2023) Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence. Torkel Opsahi Academic EPublisher. (TOAEP) Brussels. No.41.

²⁵ K.Marimaa (2012) The Many Faces of Fanaticism. Kaiterae. Akadeemia. <https://www.ksk.edu.ee/uploads>.

²⁶ K.O.Sulaiman (2016) Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria. SciELO SA. <http://www.scielo.org.za>scielo>.

²⁷ S.Awonyi (2019) Moral Reflections on Religion and Security Issues in Nigeria. In *Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences*. Vol.7.No.4.

²⁸ A.E.Asgar (1997) Religious fanaticism and Communalism. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32(14),701-704. In V.I. Ede. Religious Fanaticism and Security Challenges in Nigeria: Issues, Trends and Implications.

²⁹ A.I.Odo (2020) Religious Manipulation: A Threat to Societal Development in Nigeria. *Prestinasi*. Vol.13, No. 2.

make sure that their views and beliefs are accepted unchallenged³⁰. Fanaticism as a religious behaviour is not limited to a particular religion, as it cuts across all religions.

Various religious actors in Nigeria claim the supremacy of their religions over the others. This always degenerate to violent security challenges³¹. Therefore, violence is usually perpetrated by religious actors who are head-bent on the imposition of their religious beliefs and who engage in irrational practice of their faith. It is then apt to say that religious fanaticism orchestrated by fanatics brings about religious conflict.³² It is to be noted, that religion itself does not fuel crisis. Crisis is championed by those who are ignorant of the content, context and the intent of their religion, who use utterances and provocative publications to promote their religious beliefs at all cost at the detriment of other religious adherents³³.

Activities of Religious Actors

Before 1980, there existed cases of conflict and tension as a result of the activities of religious actors. The dangerous re-awakening of this menace assumed a crisis dimension where weapons were freely used. Most importantly, inter-religious conflict assumed an ethnic and regional character. Inter-religious crisis and insecurity are more prominent in many parts of Northern Nigeria than the South³⁴. Though, this is not to say that other parts of the country are totally free from the claw of insecurity. In 1982 for example, Muslim fanatics protested against the location of Christ Anglican Church, Fagge, Kano metropolis. The protesters destroyed the church which had been there since around 1930. The claim of the rioters was that the church was too close to the Mosque that was built in 1968 and 1970³⁵. The Police authorities were alerted by the Church to avert danger. But, protesters went on rampage destroying churches which led to loss of lives and property. Also, on the 6th of March, 1978, what was considered as a minor misunderstanding snowballed into a

³⁰ E. Brahm. (2005) Religion and Conflict.

https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/religion_and_conflict%20

³¹ J.O. Raphael (2002) Religious Contestations within and between Religions in Nigeria. *LWATI-Journal of Contemporary Research*.

³² B. Mgbachu and O.J.Okechukwu (2014) Religious Violence: Implications for Nation Building. *African Journal Online*.<https://www.ajol.info/jrhr/article>

³³ P. O. Oritsemuwa Ottuh and J.A. Onimhawo (2020) A Critical Assessment of the Role of Religion towards peaceful Co-existence in Nigeria. *Pinisi Discretion Review*. Vol.4, Issue 1.

³⁴ U.M.Ushe (2015) Religious Conflicts and Education in Nigeria: Implications for National Security. In *Journal of Education and Practice*. Vol.6, No.2.

³⁵ Nigeria: Ten Christians Killed in Muslim Rampage in Kano 2007. International Christian Concern. <https://www.persecution.org/2007>.

major crisis among the Muslim and Christian students' of College of Education, Kafanchan, Kaduna State.

The immediate cause of the crisis, was a week-long programme organized by the Christian Students Fellowship (FCS) of the College. The fellowship adopted a high-profile approach which the Muslims claimed was a clear departure from its usual style. The Fellowship hoisted a banner in front of the College which read: "WELCOME TO JESUS CAMPUS". This inscription did not go down well with Muslim fundamentalists on campus who considered it an affront to them. They asked the Christian Students Fellowship (FCS) members to remove the banner which they did immediately. As if that was not enough, the Christian Fellowship invited a guest lecturer in person of Rev. Abubakar Bako, a Muslim who converted to Christianity into the event. It was in the course of his lecture, that he made certain references to the holy Quran to illustrate a point. This sparked off reactions and hot arguments among members of the Muslim Students' Society. The crisis went beyond the campus, as many people were killed and churches burnt down in Kaduna and its environs³⁶.

In 1991, there was a violent reactions by the Muslim youth fundamentalists against the government on its decision to give permission to the Pentecostal Movement in Kano to organize a crusade, where a renowned German Evangelist, Reinhard Bonke and other American Ministers of God were invited to minister. The event was widely publicized in and around Kano metropolis. Adverts were carried out in both print and electronic media. The publicity attracted the attention of the Muslim youths who felt that the event must not hold in Kano. They were against most of the messages like "the deaf will hear", "the blind will see" and "Jesus for all by year 2000". Muslim extremists protested and began to burn churches, looting shops, burning cars, hotels, beer parlours and night clubs³⁷. The beheading, on December 26, 1994, of Gideon Akaluka, an Igbo trader by Muslim fundamentalists in Kano generated reactions for most of 1995 and beyond, as Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) leaders insisted that the zealots be made to "atone for their sins". Four members of the Muslim sect *Tajdidi Islamiya*, while testifying before the Ambassador Bashir Wali panel set up to probe the murder of Akaluka admitted their involvement in the incident³⁸. On January 24, 1995 in Sokoto, religious

³⁶A.Musa. The Role of Political, Socio-economic factor and the Media in Nigeria inter-religious Conflict. University of Liverpool. <https://liverpository.liverpool.ac.uk>.

³⁷ Planned Christian Revival sparks off Riot in Kano in 1991. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/10/20/planned-christian-revival-sparks-riots-in-nigeria/c5023a4a-08c9-45d2-bfcf-667bfaec89cb/>. Assessed on 23/10/2023.

³⁸ Before Another Deborah is lynched. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/05/15/before-another-deborah-is-lynched>.

extremists beat an Igbo trader to a state of coma at the central market. This followed an argument between the victim and a beggar, who raised an alarm, accusing the Igbo man of blasphemy. Large crowd led by young Muslim fanatics had gathered, they beat the Igbo man with sticks, clubs and stones leaving the man in a state of comatose³⁹. The Oyo State Police Command on February 25, 1995 placed an indefinite ban on public preaching in the state following a clash on February 21, 1995 between Christians and Muslims in Oyo town. The measure was taken according to the police commissioner, Abubakar Tsav to forestall religious riots which could arise from the circulation of inciting document to cause mayhem in the town.

Muslim fundamentalists in Ibadan on March 19, 1995 in a hand written leaflet called for the removal of Oyo State Military Administrator, Colonel Ike Nwosu and GOC, 2 Mechanized Division of the Nigerian Army, Brigadier General Patrick Aziza for allegedly campaigning against Islam. They also threatened to burn down the offices of the Nigerian Tribune if its editor failed to publish their messages. The leaflets read in part: "Folu Olamiti (*Nigerian Tribune* editor) Warning: Publish these holy words or else we shall burn down your media house, Allahu Akbar!". "Jihad! "Nwosu against Islam", "Aziza against Muslim". "Jihad now"! "Death to infidels", "Death to unbelievers", "Be prepared to die for Islam", "fight for Islam"⁴⁰. In June 1995, Kano again neared boiling point as threat letters written by Islamic fundamentalists warning non-Muslims and non-indigenes to leave Kano were circulated in the city. In a complaint sent to the state military administrator and signed by Rev. Father Joseph Bagobiri, the Vice Chairman of Kano state Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), said that "reports have confirmed that many Christians have been ejected from their homes and shops around Gorondutse and Kabuga areas. For a group of religious enthusiasts to arrogate to itself the power to deny Nigerians their constitutional rights, to move freely and settle in any part of the country they chose, is a serious breach of the law.

Another religious crisis erupted in May, 2002 in Plateau state (Langtang-Wase area) between Christians and Muslims where many lives were lost and many families were displaced⁴¹. In May, 2004, there was another eruption in Jos between Christian and Muslim fanatics which spilled over to

³⁹ A.Sanusi Alleged blasphemy: Sokoto Police confirm butcher's murder by religious extremists. <https://punchng.com/alleged-blasphemy-sokoto-police-confirm-butchers-murder-by-extremists/>

⁴⁰ B.Olugbodi (1996) Human Rights Practices in Nigeria January 1985-June 1996. *Constitutional Rights Project*.

⁴¹ J.Krause (2011) A Deadly Cycle: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. Working Paper. Geneva Declaration. ETH.Zurich. [https://www.files.ethz.ch>is>GD.WP-jos](https://www.files.ethz.ch/is>GD.WP-jos)

Kano and claimed the lives and property of many⁴². It is still fresh in our minds, the recent criminal attacks in Churches, Mosques and other public places like the incidence of Kuje correctional facility by religious fanatics⁴³. In Okene, Kogi state, fundamentalists alleged to be sympathetic to the cause of Islam rebels in Mali ambushed and opened fire on Nigerian soldiers on their way to be deployed to Mali by a faceless new group known as Vanguard for the protection of Moslems in Black Africa⁴⁴. These conflicts have continued to erupt in many states in the Northern part of the country till date. Some religious leaders are the architects and agents of disunity and tensions in Nigeria through their actions and inactions. Religion that is meant to be an agent of social cohesion has rather become a catalyst for insecurity and unrest⁴⁵. It is to be stated clearly at this juncture, that inter-religious crises are not common in the Southern part of the country. The reason for this is not far-fetched. The two most prominent religions have co-existed for a very long time. It is either you find a blood relation in either religion (Islam or Christianity) who have a sister, brother, uncle, aunt or even friends from other religion. This makes it difficult for religious crises to occur. At any slight provocation, elders in the two religions come together to resolve the crisis to allow peace to reign. This does not mean that the religious crisis that mostly occur in the Northern part of the country, does not lead to a reprisal effect on the region.

The Bible and Quran are full of passages that exemplify unity, togetherness, we-feeling, brotherliness, peace, love and oneness and condemn violence in its entirety. These passages as we have them are clear indications of the fact that religion is not the cause of crisis. Violence, conflicts that lead to insecurity are the handwork of religious actors who see their own religion as the best and go to any length to protect it⁴⁶. Christianity and Islam most especially claim to be the sole dispenser of salvation. Nigeria as many nations is presently plunged into a state of religious related crises not because religion is conflicting in nature but, because religious actors have imbibed a corrosive ideologies that

⁴² A. Higazi (2011) The Jos crisis: A Recurrent Nigerian Tragedy. Discussion Paper. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

⁴³ M.N. Nwoko (2023) Religion, Insecurity and Social Cohesion in Nigeria. In *Scholarly Journal of Social Sciences Research*. Vol.2, Issue 4.

⁴⁴ R.U.Okeke (2014) Religious Ideologies as a Factor of Insecurity in Nigeria: An Ethical Perspective. In *International Journal of Theology and Reformed Tradition*. Vol.6.

⁴⁵ M.N. Nwoko (2023) Religion, Insecurity and Social Cohesion in Nigeria. In *Scholarly Journal of Social Sciences Research*. Vol.2, Issue 4.

⁴⁶ S. Nwaomah (2011) Religious Crises in Nigeria: Manifestation, Effect and the way forward. In *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology in practice: International Perspective*. Vol.3, No.2.

are not consistent with the primordial tenet of their faiths⁴⁷. For example, Prophet Muhammed (SWT) said “He who hurts a non-Muslim, hurts me and one who hurts me, hurts Allah. It is apt to say here therefore, that killing of anyone because he does not practice his faith is unacceptable. We also have in Hebrews 12:14 that “Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the lord”. The two passages above encourage us to live in peace with our fellow men. That means, every provocative statement and message that can generate religious dissonance, arguments and misunderstanding should be avoided by religious actors. They should toll the path of peace and promote those virtues that unite us, rather than those that divide us. Prophet Muhammed (SWAT) admonished his followers that: A kind word is charity, every step taken towards prayer is charity, and removing harmful things from the road is charity. This is also found in Proverbs 15:1 where we have: A soft word turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Religious leaders must exercise caution in whatever they say, write or do.

The state of insecurity in Nigeria, gives an impression that religion is the culprit in the entire discourse⁴⁸. Although, there is no doubt denying the fact that religion has played a pivotal role in the socio-political development of the country⁴⁹. It is suffice to say unequivocally that religion is tagged evil by the way, manner and extent to which it is practiced by its adherents. Religion is seen as evil when the religious actors practice religion without a deep understanding of the religion they practice or they practice religion for selfish reason.⁵⁰ Many a times, religious actors hold tenaciously to an ideology characterized by a mixture of doctrinal statements and excessive enthusiastic stance by religious actors of a particular religion in order to assert and superimpose their religious beliefs on others. Religious fundamentalism has made religious harmony to be a mirage in a pluralistic society as Nigeria. The present state of insecurity in Nigeria, especially the religious crises have found religion as a ready “bride” to exploit, due to the bad practice of religion. With the high rate of insecurity that has engulfed the nation as a result of the selfish use of religion, the possibility of achieving peace, unity, lasting security will be an illusion, if religious

⁴⁷ R.U.Okeke (2014) Religious Ideologies as a Factor of Insecurity in Nigeria: An Ethical Perspective. In *International Journal of Theology and Reformed Tradition*. Vol.6.

⁴⁸ P.Nmah (2012) Religious Fanaticism, a threat to National Security: The Case of Boko Haram sect. *UJAH: UNIZIK Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol 13, No.1.

⁴⁹ L. .Miller (2009) Religion’s Role in Creating National Unity. International Relations Department. In *International Journal on World Peace*. Vol.XXXVI, No.1.

⁵⁰ U.P.Obiora (2009) Ethics, Religion and Humanity. *African Journal online*. <https://www.ajol.info/gjh/article>.

fanaticism, extremism, fundamentalism and hate speech are not eschewed among the various religious actors⁵¹.

Religious actors sometimes for selfish reason, overstretch some Biblical and Quranic passages without being mindful of what will be the resultant effect of such action on the sustainability of a nation like Nigeria. For instance, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except through me" (John 14:6). "Whoever believes in the son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the son will not see life, for God's wrath remain on him" (John 3:36). Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under the heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4: 12). Surely, the true religion with God is Islam (Quran 3:19). Today, I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed my blessing upon you and I have approved Islam for your religion. (Quran 5:3). The way and manner religious actors interpret and overstretch these scriptural messages without an in-depth knowledge of its intent, content and context has endangered volatile social structure of the nation. This over-emphasised ideological differences has degenerated to making adherents of religions to resort to pejorative name calling. Christians accuse Moslems of being unforgiving, immoral, hard-hearted, hypocritical and legalistic. While Moslems on the other hand accuse Christians of being idolatrous, arrogant, hypocritical, gluttonous (eating pork and drinking alcohol and domineering).

Effects of insecurity on Nigeria

There is no doubt that the activities of religious actors have adversely affected the country in a number of ways. One of such is loss of lives. To arrive at the exact figure of people who have lost their lives is a mission impossible. The rope of unity that tied the country together as a united nation, has become so weak to a breaking point as a result of insecurity that has taken the centre page of our national live⁵². It is also very apt to say at this point that the state of insecurity in Nigeria has affected the country economically as no investor will invest in a country where lives and properties are not secured. It is sad to note, that many companies that have been well established for many years have relocated to neighbouring countries that are safer for their staff and business enterprise. Insecurity has also caused high rate of unemployment. Those who have been gainfully employed by multi-national companies are retrenched, while fresh graduates have nowhere to put the knowledge acquired into use. Money meant for the development of the country in every sector is diverted to

⁵¹ E.W. Udoh. (2015) Insecurity in Nigeria Political, Cultural Implications *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. Vol.5.

⁵² O.O.Familusi and O.P.Oke (2013) Revival of Religious Moral Values as a Panacea for Insecurity in Nigeria. In *Insights: Journal of Religious Studies*. A Publication of Babcock University Religious Studies Department.

secure the citizens⁵³. International recognition is lost. Foreign countries on daily a basis send warning to their nationals to avoid parts of the country where conflict holds sway.

Conclusion

The state of insecurity in the country is a daunting one. Lives are being lost on a daily basis. The country is under a serious security challenge and this has affected every effort of government to better the living standard of the citizenry. Tolerance, understanding, love, brotherliness, we-feeling, unity, peace and oneness are to be advocated by religious actors rather than messages of disunity, dissonance, hatred and violence that has not helped the country in any way. If all the recommendations are followed by all stakeholders on religious matters, Nigeria, Africa and the whole world at large, will be a better place to live in. We therefore recommend the following.

Recommendations.

To give room for a lasting peace among the adherents of various religions in the country, there should be a clear separation of the state and religion. This invariably implies equal recognition and respect for all religions. Failure to do this, will continuously lead to the politicization of religion and the religionisation of politics. It will also lead to the manipulation of religion by religious actors to gain and retain political, leadership and economic relevance. It is also important for government at every level to give consideration to the provision of employment to the teeming youths. An idle hand is a devil's workshop goes a saying. The unemployed youths are ready made tools to foment trouble. Due to the comatose economic situation in the country, youths are ready to make ends meet through either legitimate or illegitimate means.

Dialogue is also very important. There is need for sincere dialogue among religious actors. There have been cases of dialogue in the past. But, have we been faithful and have an open mind in such meeting. What we need to put first, we have decided to put last. According to the former governor of Lagos State, Mr. Babatunde Raji Fashola at a symposium organised by the then Vice President, Namadi Sambo and well attended by the then President of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor and Sultan of Sokoto and the President General of the Nigeria Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, Alhaji Muhammadu Sa'ad Abubakar 111. Mr. Fashola said" I do not know of any conflict that does not end on the table. Since it is coming back to the table, why not start from the table."

There should be a law prohibiting the use of inflammatory statements or provocative words. This will go a long way in curbing the excesses of some

⁵³ O.P.Oke and E.O John.(2022) The Socio economic Implication of Ethno religious Conflict in Nigeria. In *Ibadan Journal of Educational Studies. (IJES)*. Vol.19, No.2.

religious actors who want to be famous by making and publishing inciting statements to cause religious crisis.

Both religious actors and religious adherents are advised to keep to the ethics of their religions. It is instructive to say that most religions preach peace and unity. If religious actors follow the dictate of their religions, the world will be a better place to live in. Cases of violence in the country is an indication that religious actors are not following the ethics of their religions.

There is the need for government to march words with action. There should not be a sacred cow on the issue of security. They should hold the bull by the horn to ensure that peace is returned to any conflict torn area. Anyone who is found guilty of fomenting trouble should be made to face the music. The huge sum of money spent on security by successive administrations are not yielding any reasonable result. Are the perpetrators of insecurity known? If they are known, what legal action has been taken so far to nail the menace in the head? This require urgent action in order for there to be peace for all and sundry in the country.

More importantly, integrity must not be sacrificed at the altar of materialism. Many religious actors are guilty of this. They incite members of their group for their own selfish reason. Fanatics extremists, fundamentalists must put on the garment of patriotism as a matter of fact, as lack of it is also an issue in insecurity.

Virtue of tolerance must be demonstrated by both religious actors, religious leaders and their followers. To be tolerant is to endure hardship and recognise the inevitability of conflicts. Provocation will come but retaliation is not always the answer. Lending credence to this is an aphorism:” An eye for an eye leaves everybody blind.” With tolerance, and perseverance, violence will be avoided; and dialogue will be applied. Virtue according to Aristotle lies between two extremes. In this case, it will be wise to imbibe the virtue of moderation while agitating even in the face of provocation. It follows that as reasonable as some of the activities of religious actors are consequent upon violation of rights and other grievances, tolerance could have been a veritable tool. Jesus’ advice in Mathew 5 is a compendium as well as summary of every sermon on tolerance. Also in Surah 41:34-35. Muslims are enjoined to tolerate everybody, non – Muslims inclusive.

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