

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA'S QUEST FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

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Abstract

Over the years, Nigerians of different ethnic background have co-existed harmoniously. However, things began to change gradually in the buildup of the 1966 coup. Since then, there seems to have been no peace. Religious and ethnic sentiments now dominate the country's daily activities. Some individuals are of the view that the nation be divided into at least three nations. Could it then be concluded that these groups in Nigeria cannot co-exist? Is it possible for Nigeria to exist as an entity? What role can Christianity play to ensure peaceful co-existence? The paper adopted a descriptive and analytical research approach. The research revealed that the three main religions in the country all preach peace and oneness as it offers a deep sense of understanding, reconciliation and human fellowship. The paper concludes that Christianity is an indispensable tool in peacebuilding in Nigeria since it came with social reforms. This paper recommends that Christianity should educate Nigerians about the significance of peaceful co-existence. However, effective teaching of religious studies and uplifting of moral and spiritual values by the religious leaders will go a long way to bring about peace in Nigeria.

Keywords: Peacebuilding, Christianity, peace, co-existence.

Introduction

Nigeria is made up of about two hundred and fifty ethnic groups. She is rich in diverse cultures (Ejikeme, 2016). The dominant religions include Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. Due to differences in tribes and religious beliefs, there are numerous incidences of hostilities, resulting in destruction of lives and properties. Hostilities are recorded along the line of tribes and religions. The element that underline conflict according to Higazi, (2011) include "ethnicity, politics and religion". The hostilities have become so pronounced that unity of the nation is under threat. Some of these threats are political crisis, militancy, land disputes, trade disputes, and religious crisis among others. It has become very difficult for an individual to live in a different culture or religion in Nigeria without being afraid of being killed. This is probably why Olawale, (2013) tagged Nigeria a "security risk nation" to which many international communities have warned their nations not to live or even travel to Nigeria. Nigeria has been experiencing a number of crises, social vices, and lack of cordial relationship among her citizens since independence. The various political crisis that led to the 1967-1970 civil war have had devastating effects on unity and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. However, the intensity

and frequency and rapid spread of crisis in recent times is an issue of intense public concern. In most states of the federation, one hears stories of violent conflict involving individuals or groups. For instance, Odi Massacre in Bayelsa state, Urhobo - Iteskiri crisis in Warri, Jimeta clash in Jos (Egwu, 2001 and Alanamu, 2004), Boko haram uprising in the northern states, among others. In these conflicts, “people are displaced, properties are destroyed and lives are lost” (Orude, 2009).

Obuseh (2016) is of the view that Nigeria cannot live in peace because “of selfishness”. Supporting this view on why Nigerians would not co-exist peacefully is Oluwaseun (2014) who sees religion as a threat to Nigeria’s peaceful co-existence. According to him, “it is easy for a Yoruba to marry an Efik than for a Muslim to marry a Christian” and vice versa. This also shows religious intolerance as a threat to unity. And the questions, what ought to be the relationship between Christianity and peacebuilding? The question here is, what role can Christianity play to ensuring peace in Nigeria? Some scholars are of the view that Christianity cannot play any role towards peacebuilding because “religion is arguably one of the single most significant cause of war and turmoil in human history (Abu-Nimer 2001, Gopin 1997 & Diez de Velasco 2007). So much malevolence have been done in the name of religion (Ayer 1976, Cited in Collins et al. 2006). However, so much good has also been done in the name of religion.

The successful expansion of the Christian missions in Nigeria “began in the 19th century through the activities of freed slaves from Sierra Leone” (Anene, 1991). Missionaries’ activities carried with it the building of schools, churches, roads, hospitals and of course other institutions of government. It should be borne in mind that social reforms came with Christianity-commitment to national, moral and political advancement. Christianity featured prominently in the “series of events that led to the development of Nigerian nation, and were able to bring about certain political, economic and technological changes in the region” (Ajayi, 1991). Their activities helped to break down ethnic prejudices and to bring their converts in loyalty transcending ethnicities. Hence, patriotic Nigerians came to believe that by practicing Christianity they were paving the way for the creation of the Nigerian nation. The Nigeria state of their dream was one in which Christianity would flourish, inter-tribal wars would cease and the industrial, technological and intellectual revolutions which had occurred in Europe would repeat themselves in Nigeria. By encouraging a common consciousness, Christianity would reduce to a minimum all other sectional loyalties such as the many incipient tribal/crisis groups that divided Nigeria.

It becomes very necessary to ask if Christianity, being a major religion in Nigeria, has no capacity to contribute to Nigeria’s peaceful co-existence. Peaceful co-existence in Nigeria means Christians, Muslims and African Traditional religionists engaging in ecumenical discourse and working together in different contexts to engage with and proffer solutions to social, political, economic and cultural problems instead of the hate-filled antagonistic discourse of superiority and dominance. Whether Islam or Christian, what is common to both sides is that adherents of both faiths are human beings and faith also binds them together as Nigerians. Adherents of both religions love their country and God. However, it has been observed in recent times that some of the potent tools used by mischief-makers to cause dissatisfaction, hatred, disunity and tribal war are ethnicity and religion. Rupisinghl (1991) defines co-existence as “to exist together (in time or place) and

to exist in mutual tolerance”. Peaceful co-existence in Nigeria implies recognizing our differences and appreciating them. Importantly, Nigerians should focus on areas where they concur and work together to strengthen the common ties and design a mechanism that will enable them to actually appreciate their areas of disagreement with mutual respect for one another. It is the responsibility of Nigerians to work collectively to protect and safeguard our co-existence. In doing so, Nigerians must avoid extremism, exercise caution by recognizing the religious differences, show high level of understanding and respect for one another such that all and sundry are given equal opportunity so that Nigerians can live in peace with one another irrespective of their tribal and religious affiliations.

What practical ways and potential responsibilities can be explored by Christianity so as to sustain peaceful co-existence? These are the problems that this research resolves. The research adopted historical phenomenological in view of need to draw conclusions from the historical setting of problems associated with the quest for peaceful co-existence. The goal of this paper is to examine roles Christianity ought to play in pursuit of peace.

The Crisis of Peace in Nigeria

Conflict brings about all manner of outcomes such as poverty, death, destruction, food shortage and disease, etc. The first major sign of conflict which brought tension among Nigerians came on the 15th January 1966. As a result of coup, the Eastern Region made up of majority of Igbo people declared a republic known as Biafra. The rest of Nigerians led by Northern Nigeria declared war on the Igbo in July 1967. However, the war ended in January 1970. Since then, peace has eluded the regions. Between 1999 till date, Nigeria experienced critical events that undermined her co-existence. The crisis reached its peak according to Okwueze (2003) during the military regime especially “under Babangida and Abacha as Nigeria was already facing serious economic and political problems”.

Sharia Crisis:

According to Iduh (2007), “in November 1999, the introduction of Sharia law (Islamic civil and criminal code) in the twelve Northern States of Nigeria met aggressive resistance that caused the religious crisis of February 2000”. The implementation of Sharia has often in the opinion of Harnischfeger (2008) “sparked national controversies since the days of its proposal in 1999 by Zamfara governor, Sani Ahmad Yerima”. The government of the Federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as “a State of Religion” and should also make her position known on Sharia law in the constitution.

Niger Delta Crisis (Militancy)

According to Human Rights Watch (1999) “12 policemen were murdered in Odi, Bayelsa State in the oil rich Niger Delta in Nigeria, the military invaded the community and committed mass murder”. In Choba community in Rivers State, “soldiers killed four people and raped a large number of women when they were deployed to disperse protests outside the gates of Willbros Nigeria Limited, the subsidiary of an American pipeline Construction Company” Human Rights Watch (1999). In the 2005 World Report of the Human Rights Watch, they identified on Nigerian prisons and other detention centers

across the country practices like “flogging with whips, beating with batons and machetes, and denying suspect’s foods, water and medical treatment”. They observed that it was a widespread practice in the police custody, prevalent in the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

Restiveness of the Niger Delta region where youths of the region unable to reconcile the wealth the region gives the nation with the extremely poor condition which the region lives with has taken to actions which create anxiety, tension and conflict. According to Iduh (2007) “this has necessitated the formation of ethnic militia whose goal appears to be to effect violent changes where peaceful changes are impossible. Since then, ethnic militants have taken over the Niger Delta region making it a peace less and unpeaceable environment”. In June 2009, BBC News revisited the Niger Delta crisis. The government announced that it would grant amnesty and unconditional pardon to militants in the Niger Delta which would last for 60 days beginning on 6th August 2009 and ending 4th October 2009. The amnesty office has worked to make them productive, primarily by placing and sponsoring them in vocational and higher education courses in Nigeria and abroad. With Nigeria President Goodluck Jonathan’s defeat in March 2015 elections, the amnesty programs likely end in December 2015 and patronage to former militant leaders terminated, local discontent is deeping (BBC News2015). From Iri news (2009), thousands of Nigerians have fled from their villages and hundreds of people may have been feared dead because of the offense.

Kidnapping

The crisis in Nigeria has been variously reported by various scholars like Whitney Young (2001) who opines that “armed youths occupied shell oil company buildings in Lagos and held hostage 30 Nigerian employees and four guards of the Anglo-Dutch-owned Company. The Nigerian army overcame the group releasing 34 hostages. According to Bassey (2006), 2000 armed militant’s kidnapped 40 persons- 15 being Britons, 15 French, and 10 Korean citizens from residences belonging to EIF Oil Company in Port Harcourt according. The 40 hostages were released unharmed several hours later. It was later suspected that the kidnapping was carried out by disgusted men.

Agbuegba, (2006) reported how the Niger Delta armed militants kidnapped 22 Nigerian citizens and two unidentified foreign nationals working for Chevron, a U.S Oil Company. The militants later released all of them. Whitney Young (2001) stated that armed youths stormed Oil drilling rigs, taking 165 persons hostage. The hostages include 145 Nigerians, 7 U.S citizens, 5 Britons, 8 Australian, and Lebanese nationals. All were employed by service contractors of Shell Oil Company. However, all the hostages were later released unharmed. The problem of ethnic militia and their activities has brought numerous crises in Nigeria. The groups like the Odua People’s Congress, Bakassi Boys, Egbesu movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Arewa People’s Congress, etc., is on the increase. The above is just few cases of the crisis in Nigeria. This data gives us an idea about the crisis in Nigeria in particular and the world in general. Nigeria is gradually degenerating into a state of terror and fear and the crisis today is damaging the country’s international image.

Political Crisis

In Benue state, central Nigeria in 2001 experienced another military assault as affirmed by Terwase ((2012) “a planned military operation was carried out in revenge for the killing of 19 soldiers, over 200 unarmed civilians were killed”. The government failed to condemn any of the attacks. The nation is not confronted with external aggression, yet Nigeria is losing more lives and prominent citizens alike. There were series of assassinations in Nigeria, like on the 23rd of December 2001, according to Edemodu (2002) “the former Attorney-general of the federation Chief Bola Igwe was assassinated in his residence, and the killers are still at large”. Nwokocha (2005) reported that on March 5 2003, Marshall Harry-the national vice chairman for the south-south zone of the All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP) was murdered at home, when the police was alerted, they said they had no fuel in their vehicle. Barnabas Igwe the chairman of the Nigeria Bar Association Onitsha Branch and his wife were assassinated on September 1, 2002 according to Ikelegbe (2004). Alliance for Democracy (2005) states that on November 1, 2000 Prophet Eddie Okeke was murdered, and in February 2001, Chief Ezechumegwu Okonkwo a chairman of a local government was also killed. In 2006, Engineer Funsho Williams and Dr. Ayodeji Daramola suffered similar fates was reported by Offiong (2007). The two men were governorship aspirants of Lagos state and Ekiti state respectively. It is so disheartening and painful, if security of lives and properties cannot be guaranteed in a democratic state.

Religious Crisis

According to Human Rights Watch (2003), in November 2002, Nigeria witnessed another religious crisis motivated by Miss World Pageant. Because Nigeria won the 2001 miss world contest by Agbani Darego, it was to host the 2002 miss world in Nigeria but the timing coincided with the Muslim Ramadan Festival and it met stumbling block from the Islamic clerics”. The massive public protest and riots that followed caused loss of lives, many injured and properties worth millions of naira damaged. There is also the problem of sectarian religious killings perpetuated by Boko haram in many parts of the Northern Nigeria.

According to Brianna Burt (2016), Boko Haram was founded in Maiduguri, northern Nigeria in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf and has its political goal to create an Islamic state. The organization sees Western style education as a sin. Adam (2011) affirmed that Boko Haram carried out “series of attack on police stations and other state buildings in Maiduguri, Yola, Kano, Kaduna, etc. The federal government and Boko Haram members has been at war since. Also during Shagari government, there was an attempt to take the country into the organization of Islamic conference (OIC)”. In April 2014, Amnesty International published a briefing expressing concern over actions by both “Boko Haram, the Nigerian militant Islamist group, and the Nigerian state security forces that may constitute “war crimes” and “crimes against humanity”, urging the immediate investigation of violations of International humanitarian law. The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P) also warned of the gravity of such acts stating, “Indiscriminate violence heightens the risk of further mass atrocities, including possible crimes against humanity”.

In May 2014, one month after Boko Haram's abduction and continued detention of 276 Chibok school girls, the Internal Criminal Prosecutor, Fatou (2014) said that crimes committed by Boko Haram fell within the jurisdiction of the court, which has authority, over cases of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Religious intolerance has over the years be the major causes of conflicts in Nigeria. According to Nehi Igbinjesu (2013), Muslim Christian tensions turned violent in Jos, with at least 400 people killed and 18,000 displaced before the military restored order. Korb (2011) stated that "Muslims are engaging in Jihad in the state in order to Islamize Nigeria". This belief of a religiously-based conflict, combined prejudicial attitudes of the "other religion" results in considerable fear and plays a major role in ongoing conflict (Higazi, 2011). Nigeria Civil Society on the crisis stated that "the incident has escalated into mass violence in which residents from different communities in the city attacked one another". In response, Human Rights Watch (2005) stated "this is not the first outbreak of deadly violence in Jos, but the government has failed to hold anyone accountable. Reports by HRW also maintained accusing the Nigeria military and police units of responding to the violence with excessive force against civilians. Adam (2010), reported "a massacre south of Jos that left at least 200 villagers dead". The International Crisis Group recorded the two other attacks on villages by Muslim Fulani gangs the same day that was in "apparent retaliation for January violence, raising the day's death count to 500, mostly Christian women and children. Such events led to the Global Centre for the Responsibility to protect (GCR2P) to suggest that these atrocities may rise to the level of crimes against humanity? HRW'S wrote Report 2013 addressed further episodes of Intercommunal violence in the Plateau and Kaduna state of the middle belt. Over 300 people were killed in 2012 in these locations with victims "hacked to death, shot, and buried alive-in many cases simply based on their ethnic or religious identity". The report also mentioned discriminatory state and local policies towards "non-indigenes" people, which "continue to aggravate inter-communal tensions and perpetuate ethnic based divisions. The country has also witnessed "the rise of radical groups like the Maitatsine, Darul Islam", Alli (1993). Many splinter groups have been known to emerge from minor doctrinal disputes that led to several denominations. However, Kraemer (1938) described the age in which Nigeria is 'an age of perpetual conflict and turmoil'. To this end, many countries of the world, Nigeria in particular have not known peace over the years. It is this reason that necessitated the formation of many international organizations whose objectives were and still the maintenance of world peace and security.

Land Disputes

There are also land disputes which have caused conflicts across the country. Examples according to Mustafa (2010) are: "the communities of Aguleri and Umuleri in Anambra state, the Brass and Nembe communities of Bayelsa and Rivers states are typical examples of conflicts emanating from prolonged boundary disputes". Even the Bakassi Peninsula internal boundary dispute between Nigeria and Cameroun almost evolved into war when Camerounian soldiers opened fire and killed Nigerian soldiers patrolling the river Apka Yafi on 16h May 1981. Cameroun apologized and later won the dispute at the International court of Justice at Hague in 2001, Nehi Igbinjesu (2013). Currently, Nigeria is

facing ethnic diversity conflicts involving the farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Nasarawa, Abia and Enugu. The herdsmen attacked these states, killing thousands of people and properties worth millions of Naira were destroyed.

Trade Disputes

Trade related disputes is another area of conflict in Nigeria. Another crises that occurred in Nigeria was the removal of fuel subsidy Nigeria is a country where the majority of the population live below poverty level. Removal of subsidy on fuel will no doubt worsen an already existing difficult situation for the people. The government has failed to provide amenities for the people, education is not well funded, the roads are delapidated, railways have packed up and healthcare deteriorated. There is the issue of tribalism as a crises situation in Nigeria whereby people favor their wards when it comes to appointments and contracts. Favoritism is the order of the day and the game of jungle justice exists.

During the crises situation, lives were lost, properties worth millions of naira are destroyed, economic activities are grounded to a halt, some people even become refugees in their own land, foreign investors are afraid to come in, government attention will be diverted to providing security rather than focusing on sustainable development. All these do not ensure peaceful co-existence.

Images showing crises situation in Nigeria.



Photo Above: Baby killed by Boko Haram during their 2011

Photo

Above: Fuel Protesters Burn Tyres in Lagos

Christmas Day bombing of churches.

Pictures gotten from Nigeria Masterweb Citizen News.

<http://nigeriamasterweb.com/blog/index.php/2012/01/18/nigeria-a-country-in-crisis>

List of massacres in Nigeria

ISAAC TERWASE SAMPSON, "[Religious violence in Nigeria: Causal diagnoses and strategic recommendations to the state and religious communities](#)", *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* (2012) p. 107-112.

The following is a list of [massacres](#) that have occurred in [Nigeria](#) (numbers may be approximate):

Name	Date	Location	Deaths	Notes
Asaba massacre	7 October 1967	Asaba, Delta	Up to 500 men	Occurred during Biafran Civil War ^{[2][3]}
Odi massacre	20 November 1999	Odi, Bayelsa State	43	Nigerian military attacked the village of Odi, as part of the Conflict in the Niger Delta .
2000 Kaduna riots	21 February-23 May 2000	Kaduna	2,000-5,000	Religious riots between Christians and Muslims over the introduction of sharia law in Kaduna State, start of the religious riots phase of the Sharia conflict in Nigeria.
2001 Jos riots	7–17 September 2001	Jos	500–5000	Religious riots between Christians and Muslims.
Miss World riots	November 22, 2002	Kaduna	200+	Inter-religious riots that started on 22 November in Kaduna, along with many houses of worship being burned by religious zealots. Cause: article in Thisday about the 2002 Miss World beauty contest (to be held in Abuja), in which Muslims took offence.
Yelwa massacre	February–May 2004	Yelwa , Shendam and Kano	975	Religiously motivated killings between Christians and Muslims.
Muhammad cartoons crisis	18 February 2006	Maiduguri	50+	The international crisis reached the Nigerian city of Maiduguri, in which over 50 people were killed and many buildings destroyed or damaged by rioting Muslims, outraged because of cartoons about Muhammad in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten .
2008 Jos riots	28–29 November 2008	Jos	381	Religious riots between Christians and Muslims over the result of a local election.
2009 Boko Haram Uprising	July 2009	Maiduguri , Bauchi , Potiskum , Wudil	1,000+	Islamic militants killed over a thousand people between 26 and 29 July; during the violence, Christians were killed for refusing to convert to Islam ^[15]

Name	Date	Location	Deaths	Notes
2010 Jos massacre	2010	Jos	992	Religious rioting; victims were mostly Christians killed by Muslims ^[16]
2011 Abuja United Nations bombing	26 August 2011	Abuja	21	73 injured; Boko Haram attacked a United Nations compound ^[17]
2011 Damaturu attacks	4 November 2011	Damaturu	100-150	Islamic militants associated with Boko Haram attacked police stations, churches, and banks
December 2011 Nigeria clashes	December 2011	Maiduguri and Damaturu	68+	Islamic militants associated with Boko Haram clashed with security forces between 22 and 23 December
December 2011 Nigeria bombings	25 December 2011	Madalla	41+	73 injured; Muslim militants bombed a Catholic church during Christmas mass
January 5-6, 2012 Nigeria attacks	January 2012	Mubi , Yola , Gombi , and Maiduguri	37+	Islamic terrorists attacked churches and Christian businesses; Boko Haram claimed responsibility
January 20, 2012 Nigeria attacks	20 January 2012	Kano	185	Islamic terrorists attacked churches and Christian businesses; Boko Haram claimed responsibility
April 2012 Kaduna massacre	8 April 2012	Kaduna	38	Islamic terrorists bombed a church on Easter ^[23]
June 2012 Kaduna church bombings	17 June 2012	Kaduna , Wusasa , and Sabon Gari	12-19	80 injured; Islamic terrorists bombed three churches
Deeper Life Church shooting	7 August 2012	Okene	19	Islamic militants attacked a church; the pastor was among the dead

ADOPTED FROM: ISAAC TERWASE SAMPSON, "[Religious violence in Nigeria: Causal diagnoses and strategic recommendations to the state and religious communities](#)", *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* (2012) p. 107-112.

The Role of Christianity in the Search for Peace

Before peace can be said to exist anywhere, the citizens must be free from all forms of violence, be it political, economic, social, or religion. Gaiya (2011), is of the opinion that religion infuse every aspect of Nigerian life, from fundamental greetings (we thank God) to

name of businesses (God's favor restaurant). Engaging it in conflict settings can provide unique opportunities to intervene in ongoing conflicts or to reduce the risk that violence will erupt. Christian teachings can provide values, norms, and motivations that support non-violent approaches to raising and confronting differences. It can also provide empathy and compassion that can sustain reconciliation and problem solving across divisions.

One of the ways Christianity has helped in securing peace in Nigeria is by appealing to the conscience of the people through ethical teachings. Conscience is a judge or guide. According to Abogurin (1986) it is seen as "the science of moral conduct". The Church in the course of her humanitarian activities has brought relief to the oppressed by improving their living standards. In many places, the church has been in the vanguard against crises and injustice. Using Nigeria as a case study, the church's peace and humanitarian initiatives has been demonstrated as follows: Since the start of Nigeria civil war which lasted from 1967 to 1970, apart from public declaration in condemnation of the civil war, the church made several efforts to bring assistance to the Biafran people. The church embarked upon campaigns making several trips abroad to appeal to international humanitarian agencies to come to the rescue of the Biafran's. However, food, clothing and drugs were donated in large quantity by such humanitarian bodies as UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO, WCC and the Red Cross Society. Long before the outbreak of the war, Christian leaders campaigned vigorously to stop the war hostilities. On March 21, 1967, according to Okwueze (2003), a delegation of church leaders made up of representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion, the Methodist, the Presbyterian Church and the Salvation Army called on the Military Head of State, Col Yakubu Gowon (as he then was), the aim of this visit was to appeal to the head of the military faction to see reason and vote for peace.

To alleviate the sufferings of the helpless civilians on the Biafra side, the church got Caritas International, a humanitarian organization, who supplied food and medication in abundance. Among the Biafran's, the name Caritas became synonymous with charity. While the war was on, the church was helping to fight hunger and disease and this was possible by the assistance which they got from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican.

Religious organizations did not keep quiet in all these crises. The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), issued a statement aimed at achieving peace. The statement as signed by its president, Dr. Mike Okonkwo read:

The spate of ethnic and religious violence and the kid gloves with which the federal government is handling the matter is fast sending dangerous signals to this nascent democracy. PFN noted that the federal government is quick to take very hard decisions on helpless civilians whenever there is social unrest in areas that are predominantly inhabited by Christians.

The statement went further to add: we are therefore, calling on the federal government to do everything possible to call these Jihadists to order, so as to avoid a looming crisis. The Christian Association of Nigerian (CAN) have risen in condemnation of the crises. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) made headlines statements about Boko Haram. Oritsejafor (2012) "I will now make a final call to the Nigerian government to use all

resources available to it to clearly define and neutralize the problem as other nations have done”, Ayo Oritsejafor, head of the Christian Association of Nigeria, told reporters. He further stated that “the church leadership has hitherto put great restraint on the restive and aggrieved millions of Nigerians, but can no longer guarantee such cooperation if the trend of terror is not halted immediately”.

The Kaduna State Chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has said that the continued attacks of the Boko Haram sect on Christians and churches across the Northern States, is a deliberate attempt to wipe Christians from the region. Chairman of CAN in the state, Reverend Sam Kraakevik Keyiyat, in a statement said the attacks and killings of Christians in Bayero University, Kano were barbaric”. (Daily Trust\2016). This shows that there are reasonable people in CAN, who are working as hard as they can for peace. However, religious group laments increased killings by Boko Haram. The North-Central CAN Chairman, Yakubu Pam, according to Vanguard November 16, 2014), led other Christian leaders to visit the state police commissioner, noting that latest statistics revealed over 264 deaths had been recorded in Riyom and Barkari Ladi local government areas of Zaria after the 2015 elections. The president of CAN, Pastor Oritsejafor urged the federal government not to negotiate with Boko Haram. It’s a waste of time, energy and effort because people are being killed on a daily basis. Rather he suggested four way solutions:

Christians must not relent in their prayers. There have to be a divine input into what is happening. Christian leaders to address the Christian politicians regularly and to monitor how they sustain peaceful co-existence.

Secondly, the military must not relent. They must buckle up. Though there is a serious problem in our security agency, the problem of sabotage. They leak information every day to the Boko Haram themselves and reporters even get the stories. The saboteurs are using the equipment against government in the sense that they are handling them over to the insurgents.

Thirdly, Muslim clerics, Muslim political leaders and traditional rulers should come together and use their doctrines in Wahhabi and Salafi to engage them probably through some of these their Quranic Studies and Scholars, they may be able to get to a point where they can discourage some of their activities and gradually get them to become mentally healthy again.

Fourthly, for these same religious clerics to help us go to the grassroots and start convincing the average person on the streets or in the Mosques that Boko Haram is not fighting for them or for their good. And lastly, the government should play their part by arming the military.

Furthermore, the Ecumenical center at Abuja is not left out. They are aimed at bringing about peace in a crisis nation. Recently, the Lagos Diocese of the Catholic Church organized a get together for Christians and Non-Christians alike. This type of coming together help to bring about peace. The inter religions conflicts that are ravaging different parts of our country Nigeria can be stemmed down through dialogue and interfaith workshops and conferences. During the General Sani Abacha years, the different religions in Nigeria, namely Christianity and Islam held series of meetings together aimed at bringing sanity, stability and peace in Nigeria. In one of such meetings, Emmanuel Gbonigi,

Anglican Bishop of Akwa insisted that the military must go to pave way for peace. Revd. Father Mathew Kukah of the Catholic Secretariat, Lagos asked for the release of all the detainees and a restructuring of the military in order to achieve the much desired peace. Lateef Adegbite, secretary of the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, (SCIA) was among those who called for a government of National unity to ensure that peace reigned.

Christians always pray for peace in our country Nigeria whenever adherents gathers to worship. In the Anglican Church, there is a collect for “peace”, which must be prayed at least in every Sunday service. There is also a special prayer for peace in Nigeria, which is said every mass celebrated by a Catholic priest. For peace in Nigeria, at Kaduna, there are the following:

- Christian and Muslim women pray for Nigeria, CAN offers praying ground for Muslims in Kaduna, and Christian-Muslim youth embark on peace (2012). In fact, the church prays that the world and Nigeria in particular should be blessed with peace.
- In November, 1999, according to Uzuegbunam (2002), a five day conference of all religions of the world opened in Jordan. The theme of the conference is “Religion for peace”. Representatives from all the major religious denominations were there. Representatives from the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, in addition to delegates from Islam, Hindu and Sikh religions. King Abdullah, King of Jordan remarked that the time has come for the religions of the world to forge a united co-operative front towards the promotion of peace in the world. He further explained that only in a congenial atmosphere can genuine progress be made in a world of increasing complicated temperament”.
- The world conference on Religion and peace is a non-governmental organization begun in 1970 by Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and others to promote peace. It has helped to promote peace and harmony in the Balkans, in Sierra Leone and in the Middle East (Okwueze, 2003).

This is an attempt at taking a critical look at the efforts made so far by many Christian bodies in Nigeria so that peace reigns in spite of the hostile tendencies of man.

However, some scholars have raised many criticisms within the processes of religious peacebuilding, that the greatest challenge to religious peacebuilding is the ambivalence of religion. Appleby (2008:272) stated that “some religious peacebuilding situations require additional skills and knowledge of contemporary peacebuilding theory and practice. In some locations, religious actors may join the field without the benefit of professional training and experience”. According to Shenk (1993) opines that “some individuals and groups will be against working with actors of a different religion or categorically opposed to intersection of religion and peacebuilding”. However its success, at times religious actors will simply be unwelcome or inappropriate. In addition, sometimes religious actors will find it difficult to work with their co-religionists.

Despite this opposition or criticisms of using religion for peaceful co-existence of the various tribes and religious groups in Nigeria, there are practical contributions that the

church has made towards peaceful co-existence in Nigeria apart from praying and preaching. Some of those practical contributions are:

The church has set up indigenous churches everywhere in Nigeria. According to Hanks (1998), in the 20th century different mission bodies seriously evangelized and “founded schools and colleges and opened clinics and hospitals, introduced more advanced methods of farming, reduced the native language to writing and began translating the Bible”. Going through the country, one sees these institutions all over Nigeria. In the opinion of (McCain, 1999), there equally seems to be increasing numbers of Junior and Higher Islamic schools and colleges in Nigeria. “There are over 400 Seminaries/Bible Colleges, and Christian universities established by the Catholic, Protestant and the Pentecostals in the present Nigeria. There are also numerous shrines, covens and prayer houses where apprentices are being taught the traditions of the Africans. These institutions have produced more clerics, Priests, Bishops, priest healers, Imams and the likes. More Nigerians are becoming lecturers in the colleges and universities. The church has greatly assisted in wiping out illiteracy (Ugwu 2002, Ayadele 1966). The church have played significant roles in the evolution of a literature culture in Nigeria. This was through the establishments of various missionary and quoraic schools in Nigeria (Lemu, 2002). Christianity according to Mbachirin (2011) has made great achievements in the areas of healthcare and rural development since its inception in Nigeria. The church encourages people to live moral lives by providing them with the virtues of humility. Omoregbe (1996), states that one of the virtues taught by the church is the virtues of humility. This provides man with a new dimension to the concept of leadership and greatness. The church has over the years produced great leaders in Nigeria who has championed the cause of leadership (Dike, 1957). Beginning from the 18th century, Nigeria started witnessing the emergence of nationalities with seasoned leadership qualities like Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Chief Olusegu Obasanjo, General Muhammed Buhari, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan , among others. Though some of them perceived leadership not as a responsibility, but as a revenue to amass wealth for themselves, but majority of them did creditably and improved the lot of the people tremendously. Therefore, the church has fostered national growth and development which enhances co-existence. The church has achieved some measures of incarnation in Nigeria by borrowing some cultural elements, by adopting local drums, singing in local languages, hand clapping and dancing with African rhyme and the likes. There were obviously signs for the recovery of Nigerian cultural values which further aided more development of Nigerian indigenous languages and the peaceful co-existence.

Another area of the churches contribution towards peaceful co-existence in Nigeria is in the ordinations of women clerics in the Presbyterian ordained Bishops in 1900s and 2000s. The ordination of Mrs. Marguret Idahosa of the church of God Mission, Benin, is a case in point (McCain, 1999). The Roman Catholic Church resist ordination of women as Priests. Equally, more and more Pentecostals are being elected into the leadership positions of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) at the Local, State and National levels which had not been the case before. From all these indications, Nigeria is a very fertile soil for religion the church has done a lot to bring about peaceful co-existence of the various tribes and religious groups.

What should the church do to ensure peaceful co-existence among different tribes and religions?

- The church leaders should together with schools encourage students to engage in meaningful activities such as dramatization, miming, poetry, singing, projects. According to Adejobi (2009), “the more children are exposed to reading materials that promote images of other people’s culture, religion, uniqueness, social identity, among others, the less likely they are to find faults with one another and the more they are able to live among and work together for the benefit of mankind and for the good of the society”. The church leaders should re-orientate the members of the society towards peace and tolerance rather than towards violence. Adams (2000) affirms that “church leaders should liaise with curriculum planners, to ensure that the tenets of promoting peaceful co-existence such as kindness, loyalty, honesty, love, optimism, compassion, etc. are included in reading comprehension passages of the English language curriculum.
- The non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) should redouble their efforts as facilitator of dialogues and mediators of conflicts between conflicting parties. In addition, they should “setup their advocacy by sensitizing and conscientizing the people about their rights and the rights of others especially on peaceful co-existence, civic and religious rights”, among others (E nukora, 2005).
- Church leaders should approach politicians and teach them the importance of good governance and encourage them to avoid discrimination and marginalization of the people when dealing with developmental projects and religious matters in the country (Salawu, 2010). Politicians should not mingle region with politics.
- Church leaders should preach and promote ethno-religious tolerance and accommodation of opposing views as part of deepening peaceful co-existence and harmony in the country. In Nigeria, “intolerance of opposing views by adherents of the major religions has heated the polity and caused tension”. (Salamu, 2010).
- Church leaders should monitor Christian politicians to sponsor bills of peaceful co-existence.
- Inter-faith training of the youths should be encouraged by the church leaders so as to enlighten them about the faith of others.
- Church leaders should ensure the protection of religious freedom of the citizens. This is necessary as one observes that the constitutional provisions for freedom of worship, religious expression and obligation as entrenched in section 38(1) and (2) of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria are weak. There is need to promote a human rights based approach to the protection of religious freedom in Nigeria (US Department of States Report, 2014). Most of the tensions and conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is because of the flagrant abuse of the fundamental individual and group rights in the country.

Conclusion

Relevant studies have shown that Nigeria has been tagged a ‘security risk nation’, because of the incessant crises, social vices, and lack of cordial relationship among its ethnic and

religious groups. The paper also showed the implication of conflicts as it affects peaceful co-existence in Nigeria and the roles of Christianity in solving the violence or conflicts in the nation. However, so much good has been done in the name of religion. Tasi (2002) reiterates that religion per se does not create problems, particularly the three main religions of Nigeria- African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. To this thinking, each of these religions teaches love in its own way and may not discourage peaceful co-existence, mutual respect and tolerance. It is obvious that religious organizations have played mediatory and humanitarian roles towards peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. These roles includes religious tolerance, honesty and impartiality among others. The findings also reveal that there is an inter-relationship between Christianity and peace. Indeed, in the traditional African setting, religion did influence the chiefs who were the leaders to protect the people and promote peace and harmony. Seeking solutions to these problems through government means alone will not address the question holistically, it simply begins with us. Values, including forgiveness and reconciliation in religious texts and teachings can inspire communities to change attitudes and actions and transform their world views so as to understand others. Christian leaders and institutions have attributes that are considered trustworthy and credible by the local population to their established roles in their respective communities and as such should be used in conflict situations. Nigerians should be reoriented to see themselves as brethren no matter their religious differences. In order to do this in a satisfactory manner, one needs to be concerned with the relationship between peace and Christianity, that is, the spiritual dimensions of human life. Also, our political, social Christian leaders must make concrete efforts to see that peace reigns supreme throughout the country. However, religious bigotry should be curbed out and proper tenets of Christian teachings be taught and practiced. What needs to be undertaken is the integration of Christianity into peace. "It is only through this integration that Nigerians would be motivated to be selfless rather than protecting their self-interest and sacrificing the interest of others" (Cristni, 2007). Thus, when Christianity is rightly handled, it could be the solution to the incessant violence, confrontation and conflicts in Nigeria. Christianity is therefore an indispensable tool in peace building in Nigeria.

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