

**RELIGIOUS CONFLICT AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
Issues, Challenges and the Way out.**

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Abstract

The literature on religious conflicts in Nigeria largely implicates socio-economic, political and governance deficits as the major causes of such conflicts. This paper departing from the underlying causes approach, undertook an analytical inquiry into the immediate and visible factors that trigger religious conflicts in the country. It also evaluated the nature of state management of religious conflicts in Nigeria. Findings from the research revealed that government's haphazard approach to these conflicts as well as the absence of a long-term strategy for its management account for their persistent manifestation. The paper recommended among other things that the government and religious leaders should employ a meaningful ways such as inter-faith dialogue to enhance peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Equally, a long term strategy such as education of citizenry on ethical principles on common solidarity of humanity by origin, forgiveness and tolerance that could engender cordiality and understanding rather than sustained hostility among different religions in Nigeria was recommended as a possible way out to these religious conflicts.

Key words:

Religion, Conflict, Religious conflict and national development.

Introduction

Religion could serve, and has indeed served as an instrument of social harmony in many civilizations. Paradoxically, it has also served as a motivation for conflict, hence its indication in some literatures as a 'double-edged sword' (Maregere 2011:17–23; Obasi 2009). From time immemorial, religious bigots have attempted to legitimize violence in the name of God. Contemporary acts of extreme violence such as terrorist attacks are often justified as 'holy warfare'. In the past two decades, religion has been at the centre of most violent conflicts around the world, thereby gaining notoriety as one of the prime security challenges confronting the world today (Juergensmeyer 2000:6; Abu-Nimer 2000). A study conducted in Spain has found that societies that are divided along religious lines are more prone to intense and

prolonged conflict than those divided by political, territorial and ethnic differences (Reynal-Querol 2002). Perhaps this reality explains the prime position that religious conflict occupies on Nigeria's security pyramid. As we shall see in this paper, religiously motivated conflict has plagued the country more than any other security challenge.

There are several causal diagnoses of religious conflicts in Nigeria, but much of the literature in this area pay premium attention to the underlying socio-political, economic and governance factors that precipitate, not only religious, but violent conflicts generally. This paper presents, as a point of departure, an analytical inquiry into the immediate and visible factors that have triggered religious conflicts in the country. Primarily, this paper identifies the immediate and visible causes of religious conflict in Nigeria and evaluates the management strategies that the Nigerian state had adopted for its containment over the years. It concludes by making recommendations to the various religious communities in Nigeria as well as the Nigerian state on appropriate strategies for managing religious conflict. As noted earlier, religion sometimes plays significant roles in communal harmony; yet it is often used as an instrument for political and other established interests to the detriment of peace and social harmony. This paper is therefore intent on objectively critiquing the negative deployment of religion as an instrument for social disharmony. Attempt is therefore made to dispassionately analyze these conflict-inducing elements of religious practice by both religious communities, without any intent to undermine the integrity of their principles or create a sense of bias.

Conceptual clarification

Religion

Scholars have not been able to reach a consensus definition of religion. Little wonder Egwu (2001) argued that religion is a difficult subject of inquiry including attempts at its definition and conceptualization. That notwithstanding, it is the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto. According to Adeniyi (1993), religion is a body of truths, laws and rites by which man is subordinated to the transcendent being. This implies that religion deals with norms and rules, a behavior, process or structure whose orientation is supernatural. In a different perspective, Ejizu (1993) opines that religion is man's intuition of the sacred and ultimate reality and his expression of that awareness in concrete life. In a similar vein, Connelly (1946) asserts that Religion originates in an attempt to represent and order beliefs, feelings, imaginings and actions that arise in response to direct experience of the sacred and the spiritual. As

this attempt expands in its formulation and elaboration, it becomes a process that creates meaning for itself on a sustaining basis, in terms of both its originating experiences and its own continuing responses. Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz, 1996; Peter 1998; Ayinla, 2003). Religion is seen as one of the systems of faith that are based on the beliefs in the existence of a particular God or gods. The concept has also been defined as a particular interest or influence that is very important in one's life. According to Egwu (2001), it can be understood in two ways. First, in a material sense, it refers to religious establishments (that is institutions and officials) as well as to social groups and movement whose primary interests are found within religious concerns. There is also the spiritual sense which deals with models of social and individual behavior that helps believers to organize their everyday lives. In this sense religion has to do with the idea of supreme, supernatural realities and the sacred; as a system of language and practice that organizes the world in terms of what is deemed holy and the ultimate conditions of existence.

From the foregoing discussion, we can define religion as a system of relation which linked man to an ultimate being or ultimate value epitomized in God. A less contentious meaning of religion might be the sum total of answer to problem of our relationship with the universe. Religion can be likened to the word ligament. Ligaments connect muscles and bones. So, the root word means 'to connect, to bind, to tie together. Religion literally means, continuously tying it all together. It is not therefore, an obvious deduction that that which is supposed to help us tie us together should not be used to tear us apart especially when we understand that unity is strength.

Conflict

According to online dictionary.com, conflict can be defined as a struggle or clash between opposing forces; a state of opposition between ideas, interests, etc; disagreement or controversy. **Conflict** therefore refers to some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group.

Religious Conflict

Religious Conflict according to Hornby (2006) is a situation in which religious adherents are involved in a serious disagreement or argument with one religious group and another. It is a situation in which there is opposition in religious ideas, opinions, feelings and wishes. Gyuse (2006) points out that when two or more persons, groups, communities or nations seek to take possession or dominate a particular object of religious value at the exclusion of others, conflict ensues. Miall (1992) posits that religious conflict can emerge in a situation where a clear contradiction exists or is perceived to exist between the participants who view the outcome of such conflicts as extremely important. It would seem that Miall is stating the fact that suspicion fuels the religious conflict. Gotan (2004) cited a traditional definition of religious conflict as the conceived interactions in which two or more religious adherents engage in mutually opposing action and use coercive behaviour to destroy, injure, thwart or otherwise control their opponents. Aliyu (2004) sees religious conflict as “a process of social interaction involving a struggle over claim in resources, power and status, beliefs and other preferences and desire”. For Oyeshola (2006) religious conflict is the disagreement, dispute or controversy in religious ideas or viewpoints held by two or more individuals, communities or religious groups. A religious conflict becomes violent if physical or emotional force is used to hurt or kill people (Sa'id, 2004).

It goes without saying therefore that Conflict whether religious or political or any other forms it appears, in most cases if not in all cases, causes more harm than good including undermining development; hence it is something that should not be allowed to exist in any human society.

Development

Development as a concept is a victim of definitional pluralism. However, attempts have been made by erudite scholars to conceptualize it. Gboyega (2003) captures development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material well being of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, in a sustainable way such that today's consumption does not imperil the future, it also demands that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life be removed or drastically reduced. Metaphysically, development could mean continuous increase in the consciousness of a people about the ontological factors that either inhibit or promote their well being and their ability to control those factors so as to increase the standard of living (Nwube, 2017). It seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods and expansion of life chances. Naomi (1995) believes that development is usually taken

to involve not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life. Chrisman (1984) views development as a process of societal advancement, where improvement in the well being of people are generated through strong partnerships between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society.

It is reasonable to know that development is not only an economic exercise, but also involves both socio - economic and political issues and pervades all aspects of societal life. It is reasonable too to understand that development hardly thrive in the atmosphere of violence or conflict whether religious or political. That is why the topic under discussion in this paper is said to be imperative as it tries among other things, to proffer some measures to forestall the rampant cases of religious conflict in Nigeria.

National development

National, according to Longman dictionary of contemporary English, refers to a phenomenon that embraces a whole nation. National development can therefore be described as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. This is best achieved through development planning, which can be described as the country's collection of strategies mapped out by the government. And our stance in this paper remains that no nation can develop in the atmosphere of conflict since it will be difficult for it to map out any developmental plan, or to implement it effectively if it manages to map it out at all. Hence, anything that could bring in religious conflict should be prevented at all cost.

National development plans in Nigeria

We have had series of development plan policies in Nigeria. For instance, the National Development Plan policy of 1962 and 1968, with the objectives of development opportunities in health, education and employment (Ogwumike, 1995); the National Development plan policy of 1970 to 1974, whose priorities were in agriculture, industry, transport, manpower, defence, electricity, communication and water supply and provision of social services (Ogwumike, 1995); the National Development Plan policy of 1975 to 1980, with emphasis on rural development and efforts to revamp agricultural sector; the National Development Plan policy of 1981 to 1985, with emphasis on social services and health services (Ogwumike, 1995); the Green Revolution Programme; Operation Feed the Nation; Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP); Vision 2010; National Economic Empowerment and

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Development Strategy (NEEDS), creation of development centres; Seven Point Agenda of Umaru Yaradua administration with vision 2020, just to mention but a few. Yet Nigeria is still marking time in terms of development. This seems the only country where virtually all notions and models of development have been experimented (Aremu, 2003), yet only little have been achieved. This paper however, believes that the major reason why Nigeria has recorded abysmal failure in her developmental plans is because of poor governance and religious conflict among other factors. It therefore behooves on us to proffer solutions to these problems so as to fast track the developmental race of our country.

Background to religious conflict in Nigeria

The incidence of religious conflict has grown exponentially since the return to democratic rule in 1999 (Salawu 2010:345). Available statistics on religious conflict across the country show that at least 95 per cent of them occurred in the northern part of the country (Ezeanokwasa 2009).

In view of the perennial religious tensions between the two dominant religious groups in Nigeria, that is, Christianity and Muslim, there is a sustained culture of mutual suspicion and unhealthy rivalry between them. The introduction of sections 38(1) and 10 into the Nigerian Constitution, which have guaranteed freedom of religion and prohibited the declaration of state religion respectively, has done little to attenuate the frequency of religious conflicts, as state patronage and veneration of these two dominant religious groups has helped in heightening the underlying tensions and rivalry. Thus conflicts between Nigerian Christians and Muslims have often manifested in violent inter-religious crisis. And this has undermined greatly the development process of Nigeria.

The visible causes of religious conflict in Nigeria

Several causes of religious conflict in Nigeria have been identified in the literatures (Agwu 2009; Gofwen 2004; Salawu 2010; Iwara 2006; Kwaja 2009; Omotosho 2003; Sanusi 2009). Whereas most of these causes conflate, emphasis in these literatures is on the underlying socio-political, economic and governance factors that gestate not only religious conflicts, but violent conflicts in Nigeria generally. In this paper, the focus is on the immediate and visible factors that generate religious violence rather than the remote precipitating and other social factors that animate it.

A cursory perusal of extant literature on the remote socio-political, economic and governance factors that drive religious conflict in Nigeria does show, that government neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and bigotry are some of the predisposing

factors (Salawu 2010:348). In his treatise, Kwaja (2009:107) also identifies fragility of the institutions of the state in terms of their ability and capacity to manage diversity, corruption, rising inequality between the rich and poor, gross violation of human rights, environmental degradation, contestations over land, among others, as the underlying causes of violent conflicts in Nigeria since the enthronement of democratic rule in 1999. Omotosho (2003) recognizes disparaging literature/publications by both Christian and Muslim elites as the major cause of religious crisis in the country. Contributing to the debate, Achunike (2008: 287) opined that the wrong perception of other people's religion or faith, wrong religious orientation, the low literacy level of religious adherents, selfishness on the part of religious personalities, pervasive poverty, government interference in religious matters, among others, are responsible for inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

It suffices to state that poverty, corruption, non-implementation of previous probe panel reports, impunity of past perpetrators of the violence, proliferation of preachers and worship centres, provocative and inciting utterances, sensational journalism, political manipulation of religion, incitement in the social media and mobile telephony, are some of the key causes of religious conflicts in Nigeria. However, this paper takes a step further to demonstrate how some of these issues generate religious crisis and further suggest an approach to state management.

Disparaging preaching and stereotyping

Disparaging preaching is one of the most common causes of religious conflict in Nigeria. First, both Christianity and Islam claim monopoly of religious truths as well as the absolute prerogative to eternity in heaven. This religious cliché is contemptuously imbued in the public preaching of both religious groups, as religious sermons are often laden with messages signifying the monopoly of salvation and truth. In extreme cases, the messages transcend the traditional monopolization of essence, thereby delving into the arena of judgmental and scornful delegitimation of opposing religions and their prophetic symbols. The March 1987 religious violence in Kafanchan, Kaduna state was allegedly caused by a Christian preacher, who allegedly used verses from the Qur'an to delegitimise Islam, while justifying the exclusive existence of salvation within the ambience of Christianity (Gofwen 2004:101). Muslims in Kaduna had also alleged that one Revd. Abubakar Bako, publicly sought to interpret the Qur'an in a manner that disparaged Islam, in addition to making some uncomplimentary comments about Prophet Mohammad (Omotosho 2003). The proliferation of Churches and Mosques in the country and the pervasive electronic media coverage of religious preaching have helped in reinforcing these disparaging sermons. With little or no censorship of the critical content of these

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sermons, some religious fundamentalists have used these media opportunities to cause serious religious disharmony and subsequent violence. The use of audio and video preaching in public places is not less provocative. The two religious groups often use audio-taped preaching even in conflict-prone areas like Jos city, in defiance of the standing security embargo placed on them. These acts have helped to intensify the disrecreation from both sides, Christian and Muslim, and sustain the cycle of violence.

Proselytising

One of the major causes of religious violence in Nigeria is the methods of proselytising used by the two dominant religions. Although Islam and Christianity deprecate the use of threat and coercion as a means of proselytising (Omosho 2003),⁷ their approaches to preaching have remained mentally and sometimes physically coercive. Unfortunately, the most visible approach to Islamic conversion campaigns, particularly in northern Nigeria, is that of Jihad. This is epitomised by the Boko Haram declaration that Western culture, as represented by Christianity, is polluting and worthy of spiritual purging. Muslim fundamentalists view adherents of other faiths, and sometimes moderate Muslims, as corrupted stock worthy of Islamic conversion or regeneration as the case may be. Thus the extremist disposition to enlisting conformity by brute force has created serious religious tensions in Nigeria.

Government patronage, religious preferentialism and marginalisation

In spite of the constitutional prohibition of disqualifications or disabilities inflicted on persons on account of their religious leanings, religious patronage has been entrenched in the public realm, depending on the predominance of particular religious adherents in positions of authority. Thus at the federal and state government levels, public officials manifestly patronize particular religions at the expense of others. In many states of northern Nigeria, public funds are used in the purchase and distribution of food items and other valuables for Muslim faithful during the Ramadan fast; however, government does not extend the same gesture to Christians during Christmas or traditional religious worshippers during their traditional ceremonies. This attitude is reversed in some Christian dominated states. Furthermore, whereas the federal government has established both Christian and Muslim Pilgrims Commissions with state funding, some states, especially in the north, have single pilgrims' commissions for particular religions at the exclusion of others.

Depending on which religious group has the superior numerical strength in a state, the clergy is given prominent roles and privileges at state functions, while

marginalizing the others. In most states, the dominant religion denies the other religious groups access to certain privileges like land for locating worship houses or air time for transmitting religious messages. This attitude translates into political and economic preferentialism towards the favoured religious group(s), while marginalizing the others. Registering his complaint over this discriminatory practice, Yusuf (1995:84) argued that:

Christians have been denied access to electronic media in 16 Northern states, while Islam monopolizes 24 hours for its broadcast in the same area. ... Every hour the Muslims broadcast provocative statements about Christianity. It means nothing, they proclaim, that people attend church on Sunday only to dance and to listen to songs. Authorities merely wink....

It is, therefore, not out of place to hear religious groups complain marginalization in respect of political and economic privileges, public employment and political benefits. These attitudes do not only cause inter-religious upheavals, they precipitate religious sentiments in political and economic policy making. The recent debacle over the institutionalization of Islamic banking in the country is based on this apprehension that the religious affiliation of the product could be used as an instrument for the exclusion of Christians.

Sensationalism in media reportage

The media's penchant for exaggerating details of religious violence and thereby fuelling their intensity is well known and documented (Kukah 1993; Kukah 1996). This media character constituted the gravamen in the 1987 Kafanchan religious disturbances. News reports monitored on Radio Kaduna, immediately after the commencement of the violence, alleged that Christians were killing Muslims indiscriminately, burning their Mosques and copies of the Holy Qur'an, and banishing them from the town. The broadcast further alleged that an itinerant preacher had misquoted the Qur'an and blasphemed the name of Prophet Mohammed, urging Christians to kill Muslims and burn their Mosques (Newswatch 1987:10). These reports ignited reprisal attacks by Muslims all over Kaduna state, causing an invaluable loss of lives and property (Gofwen 2004:91–93). Most religious leaders in the country have therefore, accused the media of fanning the embers of religious violence by their provocative and emotive reports (Kukah 1993; Spero 2010; Etaghene 2010). News headlines such as 'Islamic Assailants Kill Hundreds of Christians near Jos', 'Muslims slaughter Christians in central Nigeria', 'Muslims slaughter 400–500 Christians in latest Jos crisis' (Creeping Sharia 2010)

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are very common during religious disturbances. Such alarming headlines, coupled with gory images of victims often trigger reprisal attacks.

The proliferation of media technology has made it easy for some of these emotive reports and images of slain persons to be transported far and wide, generating intense hatred between belligerents and reprisal attacks in a cycle of violence. The ethno-religious violence that has engulfed Jos, central Nigeria, in recent years has generated an unimaginable level of hatred between the locals and the alleged settlers (who are generally divided along religious lines) as a result of the dissemination of gory images of victims on the internet. This has helped to sustain recrimination and reprisal attacks from both groups.

Religious intolerance, fundamentalism and extremism

Religious intolerance has been defined as 'hostility towards other religions, as well as the inability of religious adherents to harmonize between the theories and the practical aspect of religion' (Balogun 1988:166). It encompasses bigotry, which is the obstinate and intolerant devotion to one's opinions and prejudices, especially the exhibition of intolerance and animosity toward persons of differing beliefs (Baird and Rosenbaum 1999). Religious intolerance has been identified as the major source of religious conflict all societies existing as long as the history of mankind, and permeating all forms of human civilizations, with attendant destructive tendencies (Gofwen 2004:50).

Religious fundamentalism and extremism are similar to, and indeed, manifestations of religious intolerance. Komonchak, Collins and Lane (1996:411) view religious fundamentalism from three perspectives: from a cognitive understanding where the word is associated with a closed personality type that expresses exclusivity, particularity, literality and moral rigour; from a cultural theological viewpoint, where the word expresses opposition to religious and cultural liberalism in defense of orthodoxy and religious traditions; and from a social movement perspective, where it denotes organizational and ideological uniqueness from other types of religious movements. Ultimately, religious fundamentalism is a religious movement that promotes the literal interpretation of, and strict adherence to religious doctrine, especially as a return to orthodox scriptural prescriptions and doctrinal originality. It seeks strict adherence to the orthodox principles of particular faiths – in the case of Nigeria, Christianity and Islam – and abhors modernism with its propensity to adulterating or diminishing original doctrinal principles. Religious fundamentalists, therefore, place great emphasis 'on right doctrine and the necessity of organized warfare against the forces of modernism' (Komonchak, Collins and Lane 1996:411). Religious intolerance and fundamentalism may not necessarily entail violence;

however, it is the extreme manifestation of intolerance and fundamentalist ideals that embraces violence. Religious extremists are therefore religious fundamentalists, who take religious conservatism and intolerance to an unreasonable extent, by manifesting violence against those who hold contrary religious views. Religious extremists take the position that if others do not follow their ways, they will be damned (Religious extremism 2011). They abhor the preaching of other faiths and resort to violence to stop it. They insist that their religious doctrines must be universally entrenched by brute force, while the political, social and economic systems must conform to their religious tenets. Religious extremism does not admit of any compromise with social change, particularly that which contradicts religious orthodoxy. In terms of hierarchy, therefore, religious extremism is the farthest and most lethal form of religious intolerance.

State management of religious violence

Since the early 80's to date, the Nigerian state has taken a number of constitutional, legislative and policy measures to manage the incidence of religious conflict and violence. These measures include: (i) the exclusion of religion as an index in the design, conduct and reporting of national population census; (ii) the promotion of inter-faith cooperation and dialogue through the establishment of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in 2000; (iii) the constitutional establishment of the Federal Character Commission (FCC) to prevent the predominance of one religious group in all government institutions; (iv) the political application of the principle of power sharing between the north and south as well as Christians and Muslims; (v) non-registration of political parties with ethnic or religious colourations (Kwaja 2009:112); and (vi) prohibition of registration of banks with religious appellations.

In spite of these measures, religious conflict has remained a critical security challenge to the Nigerian state. This is due to a marked absence of a long-term strategy that is targeted at addressing the remote and immediate causes of religious conflicts in a comprehensive manner, and a long-term strategic solution to their management. Consequently, the management responses outlined above have essentially been reactive; hence they have remained inchoate, incomprehensive, uncoordinated and ultimately ineffective. This is because government seems to favour short-term reactive measures aimed at repressing violent religious tendencies as opposed to a comprehensive conflict management approach. Since the 1980 Maitatsine riots till now, the Nigerian state approach to the management of religious violence had privileged the deployment of retaliatory violence and occasional setting up of judicial panels of inquiry which often lack the requisite political will to implement the recommendations (Onuoha 2010). These approaches characterized

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the Maitatsine state response; as government relaxed with some air of accomplishment and conquest, after quelling the riots in the 1980s. Consequently, the complete absence of a post-Maitatsine engagement, such as the rehabilitation of combatants or de-radicalization programmes for the remnants of its cadres, led to the gradual but sustained incubation of its trace elements into more organized radical mass groups. The current Boko Haram movement could therefore be said to be connected with the leftovers of the Maitatsine sectarian tendency that was violently repressed in the 80s by the Nigerian state.

The constitution of commissions of enquiry to investigate causes of religious and other forms of violence has become a cliché in Nigeria. Oftentimes, the white papers are produced but never acted upon. Although some commentators have argued that the inherent reticence of the Nigerian state to implement the recommendations is a result of the politicization of religion and lack of political will (Onuoha 2010), the situation is not that simplistic. Like transitional justice, the state is often in a dilemma of choosing between the prosecution of perpetrators of religious violence and the exacerbation, or even perpetuation of the violence. This is because culpability in such circumstances transcends the visible foot-soldiers overtly engaged in the mayhem. In most cases, the logistics and strategic planning behind these religious disturbances are provided by high profile individuals and groups, who may be state functionaries in the public service, the armed forces, the intelligentsia or the business community. A decision to prosecute such individuals may, therefore, end up reinforcing the entire conflict; hence no white paper on religious violence has ever been acted upon by government. On the other hand, retaliatory violence only breeds further violence. The counter-violence that trailed the repressive state responses to the recent Jos and Maiduguri religious disturbances justifies this assertion. This state of affairs, therefore, requires a long-term comprehensive strategy that will address the causes of religious conflict and evolve a consensual approach to its implementation.

Recommendations

Economic development and societal wellbeing can only be achieved in an environment where multi-culturalism and multi-religiosity are guaranteed; since these create opportunity for better cooperation among citizens of a given society. The significant growth in human development in USA, Great Britain among others, eloquently testifies to this assertion. To ensure that religious diversity does not constitute a barrier to human relations and development, but instead, be a tool or resource for national development; this paper submits the following recommendations:

1. Every religious practice must be done with commensurate or reciprocal respect for the rights of other faithful to practise their own religious traditions. To this effect, government should put in full force the constitutional provisions that give individual citizens freedom of worship and respect of human rights.
2. Government should establish and sustain a neo-religious educational praxis that would generate a culture and orientation of multi-religiosity in our children and youth, as well as a commensurate programme of re-orientation of the adult population. Hitherto, the dominant model of religious education in Nigeria has been faith-oriented and overwhelmed by religious indoctrination and dogma. But it is the assumption of this paper that this new educational praxis would build in comparative religious studies, and expose students and pupils to basic principles of Christianity, Islam and traditional religion – religious harmony and moral instructions.
3. All religious communities should embrace inter-faith dialogue, as there can never be a universal religion or an exclusive society for adherents of a particular religion, in order to prevent future manifestations of religious conflict. Here, the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), together with relevant Faith-Based Organizations and Civil Society Organizations should constantly engage in dialogue with the various religious communities, while also serving as a platform for conflict analysis and early warning on religious conflict.
4. All religious communities should educate their clergy on the need for religious harmony and the toleration of other faiths, while also educating their clergy and laity on the need to keep their sermons within the realm of moderation and modesty.
5. Government should develop a long-term strategy for the management of religious conflict/violence. In doing this, government can convene an ad hoc 'National Summit on Religion' with the primary mandate of developing a National Policy/Strategy on Religion and the State (NPSRS). This summit should be drawn from major stakeholders, i.e. the three religious groups in the country (Christians, Muslims and Traditional Religious Practitioners) as well as state representatives. The summit could work on preliminary issues and subsequently recommend the establishment of a standing 'National Commission on Religion' (NCR) to continue a dialogue that would crystallize into the development of a National Policy/Strategy on Religion and the State (NPSRS). The NPSRS would, among other things, discuss issues of secularity, thereby delineating the role of religion in state affairs

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, we tried to examine education as an agent of resolving the religious conflicts in Nigeria. We pointed out that religious conflicts do not augur well for national sustainable development of any nation. We also said that religious conflicts occur when there is opposing idea, opinion, feeling and wishes between two or more religious groups. This tends to undermine social and political stability of the nation, leading to underdevelopment. The experiences of religious conflicts in Nigeria have shown just as we earlier on pointed in this paper, that disparaging literature/publications by both Christian and Muslim elites (Omotosho, 2003); wrong perception of other people's religion or faith; wrong religious orientation; the low literacy level of religious adherents; selfishness on the part of religious personalities; pervasive poverty; government interference in religious matters, (Achunike, 2008: 287); among others, are responsible for inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

The wanton destruction of lives and property, which the government in some instances has to provide relief materials, running to millions of naira that could be used for national development are humiliating stories to be told. Such atrocious amount of money could have been used for the provision of infrastructures and education of youths in Nigeria. Nigerian citizens should be made to realize that religious conflicts only deprive people of the needed education, peaceful relationship, national security and sustainable development. Religion and all religious activities should serve the welfare of man holistically; and this is assured only when religious practices are done in the atmosphere devoid of conflict, which in the long run paves way for development.

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