

Religious violence in Nigeria: Causal diagnoses and strategic recommendations to the state and religious communities

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Abstract

The literature on religious violence in Nigeria largely implicates socio-economic, political and governance deficits as the major causes of such violence. This article, however, departing from the underlying causes approach, undertakes an analytical inquiry into the immediate and visible factors that trigger religious conflicts in the country. It also evaluates the nature of state management of religious conflicts in Nigeria and posits 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. Drawing from the findings made, recommendations on the appropriate approach to curbing religious violence in the country are proffered.

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Introduction

Religion could serve, and has indeed served as an instrument of social harmony in many civilisations. Paradoxically, however, it has also served as a motivation for violence, hence its indication in some literature as a ‘double-edged sword’ (Maregere 2011:17–23; Obasi 2009). From time immemorial, religious bigots have attempted to legitimise 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 in the wake of the Cold War (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 violence occupies on Nigeria’s security pyramid. As we shall see in this article, religiously motivated violence 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 article 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 article identifies the immediate and visible drivers of religious violence 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 violence. As noted earlier, religion sometimes plays significant roles in communal harmony; yet it is often instrumentalised for political and other established interests to the detriment of peace and social harmony. This article is therefore intent on objectively critiquing the negative deployment of religion as an instrument for social disharmony. Attempt is therefore made to

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dispassionately analyse 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.

Background to religious violence in Nigeria: 1999–2011

With a population of over 150 million inhabitants, the major religious groups in Nigeria are Christianity and Islam. There is neither a scientific representation of the numerical strength of these religious groups nor of their geographical distribution.¹ None the less, the Islamic faith preponderates in the northwestern and northeastern parts of the country (comprising Sokoto, Zamfara, Borno, Yobe, Katsina, Kano, Kebbi, Jigawa, Bauchi, Taraba,² Gombe and Adamawa states). On the other hand, Christianity is more prominent in the South-East and South-South geographical zones (comprising Imo, Enugu, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Delta, Edo,³ Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross River and Akwa Ibom states).

The South-West and North-Central zones (comprising Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun, Kaduna, Niger, Plateau, Nassarawa, Benue, Kogi states and the Federal Capital Territory respectively) have a reasonably balanced number of Muslims and Christians. Although often marginalised, traditional religion has a fair degree of followership and is not by any means insulated from religious violence. For instance, in parts of Kogi, Kwara, and Nassarawa states, masquerade activities associated with traditional religion have been a major source of conflicts (Osaghae and Suberu 2005:11). As seen in table 1 below, the foremost incidence of religious violence since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 was

1 Most claims about Nigeria's Christian-Muslim population distribution are anecdotal and based on assumptions, since 'religious distribution' is not an index in Nigeria's National Population Commission's population head-counts. Some Western-based population resource services like Index Mundi.com, CIA World Fact Sheet, Population Resource Centre – which are commonly relied upon – put Nigeria's population ratio at 50% Muslims, 40% Christians and 10% indigenous believers. For evidence of this presumptive population distribution, see Nigeria Demographics Profile 2011; CIA World Population Factsheet 2011. These approximations are not based on Nigeria's official estimates and therefore lack statistical integrity.

2 Taraba state, however, having an almost equal distribution of Christians and Muslims.

3 Edo state arguably having an equal distribution of Muslims and Christians.

triggered by an alleged violation of a traditional religious rite. Although lack of adequate statistical data has made it extremely difficult to estimate the exact number of religious conflicts in Nigeria and their resultant fatalities (Salawu 2010:345), the general assumption is that the incidence of religious violence has grown exponentially since the return to democratic rule in 1999.⁴ Statistics on religious crises across the country however 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, 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 the 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 violence.

4 Though not exhaustive, Table 1 below is a demonstration of the persistence of religious violence in Nigeria and its consequences.

Table 1: Some cases of religious violence in Nigeria, 1999–2012

No	Date	State(s)	Nature	Remarks
1	1 Jul. 1999	Ogun	Violent clashes between Yoruba traditional worshippers and Hausa groups in Sagamu, Ondo state.	The crisis originated from the killing of a Hausa woman by the Oro Masqueraders for violating traditional rites.
2	22 Jul. 1999	Kano	Reprisal to the Sagamu crisis above.	The casualty figure was not reported.
3	20 Dec. 1999	Kwara	Muslim fundamentalists attacked and destroyed over 14 churches in Ilorin.	Properties worth several millions of naira were destroyed and an unspecified casualty reported.
4	21–22 Feb. 2000	Kaduna	Riots over the introduction of Sharia.	An estimated 3 000 people died.
5	28 Feb. 2000	Abia	Religious riots in Aba, and minor disturbances in Umuahia.	Over 450 persons killed in Aba, Abia state, as reprisal for the Kaduna crisis.
6	8 Sept. 2000	Gombe	The Kaltungo religious crisis.	The crisis erupted over the implementation of Sharia in the state.
7	12 Oct. 2001	Kano	Religious riot in Kano.	In protest to US invasion of Afghanistan over Osama bin Laden. Over 150 persons were killed.

No	Date	State(s)	Nature	Remarks
8	7–17 Sept. 2001	Jos	A religious riot between Muslims and Christians in Jos. Mosques, churches and several properties were damaged or torched. The clashes started on September 7 and lasted nearly two weeks, ending on September 17.	The riot broke out when the Islamic Brigade attacked a Christian woman who attempted to cross a public high-way barricaded by Muslim worshippers on Friday. Over 300 people were killed.
9	16 Nov. 2002	Kaduna	The <i>Miss World</i> crisis in which Muslims attacked Christians and churches.	The crisis was triggered by an article authored by Isioma Daniel in <i>This Day</i> newspaper, alleging that Prophet Mohammed would have loved to have the girls. Over 250 people were killed and several churches destroyed.
10	8 Jun. 2004	Adamawa	Religious conflict between Christians and Muslims in Numan town.	Caused by the location of the town's Central Mosque close to Bachama paramount ruler's palace. Over 17 persons killed.
11	18 Feb. 2006	Borno	Religious conflict between Christians and Muslims in Maiduguri.	The riot was caused by the Danish cartoon on Prophet Mohammed, in <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> newspaper. Over 50 persons killed and 30 churches destroyed; over 200 shops, 50 houses and 100 vehicles vandalised.

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No	Date	State(s)	Nature	Remarks
12	22 Mar. 2007	Gombe	Muslim pupils killed their Christian teacher, Mrs Oluwatoyin Olusesan.	The pupils claimed that their teacher desecrated the Qur'an while attempting to stop a student from cheating in an examination hall.
13	28 Nov. 2008	Plateau	Religious violence between Muslims and Christians in the city of Jos.	The crisis which was triggered by the controversial results of a local election later turned religious. Over 700 people killed and thousands internally displaced.
14	21 Feb. 2009	Bauchi	Ethno-religious conflict at the Makama New Extension.	Over 11 people were killed, more than 400 houses burnt, and over 1 600 families displaced.
15	26–30 Jul. 2009	Bauchi, Borno, Kano, Yobe	Religious violence unleashed by the radical <i>Boko Haram</i> sect on Christians.	Over 700 persons killed, 3 500 persons internally displaced, 1 264 children orphaned, over 392 women widowed, and several properties destroyed.
16	29 Dec. 2009	Bauchi	Religious violence unleashed by the <i>Kala-Kato</i> sect on Christians.	Over 38 persons killed; about 20 suspected members of the sect arrested; and over 1000 people internally displaced.

No	Date	State(s)	Nature	Remarks
17	17–20 Jan. 2009	Plateau	Resurgence of religious crisis in Jos.	Police announced at least 320 killed, but aid workers and local leaders place death toll at over 550. Over 40 000 persons displaced.
18	7 Mar. 2010	Plateau	Attacks by Fulani Moslems on Christian-dominated villages of Dogo Nahawa, Shen and Fan in Jos.	Over 500 people – mainly women and children – were killed.
19	17 Mar. 2010	Plateau	Suspected Fulani militia men attacked residents of Biye and Batem in Jos.	13 persons killed.
20	11 Apr. 2010	Plateau	Attack on a Christian village of Berom stock, some 30 kilometres south of Jos, by suspected Fulani herdsmen.	The attackers targeted the homes of some officials in Kura Jenta, in reprisal to the killing of about 150 Fulani Muslims, who were allegedly killed and dumped in wells on 19 January 2010. No life was lost but 3 houses and 6 vehicles were torched. This violence was ethno-religious.
21	22 May 2010	Plateau	Murder of three (Muslim) Fulani herdsmen at Tusung Village in Barkin Ladi Local Government, Plateau state.	The attackers were alleged to be Berom Christian youths. It was ethno-religious.

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No	Date	State(s)	Nature	Remarks
22	22 May 2010	Plateau	Attack on some Christians, who were returning from their place of worship along Bauchi road in Jos.	Reprisal attack by Muslims over the killing of 3 Fulani Muslims. At least 1 person died while many were injured.
23	17 Jul. 2010	Plateau	Muslim Fulani herdsmen launched an overnight attack on a Christian village, Mazah, north of the city of Jos.	About eight people were reportedly killed, including the wife, two children and a grandson of a Pastor. Seven houses and a church were also burned during the attack.
24	29 Aug. 2011	Plateau	Clashes between Muslims and Christians at Rukuba road and Farin Gada in Jos during the Ramadan prayers.	No less than 20 persons were killed, 50 injured, over 50 motor vehicles and 100 motor cycles were torched.
25	16 Jun. 2011	Police Head-quarters, Abuja	Suicide bomb attack at the Police Headquarters, Abuja by suspected <i>Boko Haram</i> Islamists whose ideology is framed around religion (<i>Wahabism</i>).	Authorities said 6 persons were killed and 73 vehicles destroyed.
26	26 Aug. 2011	UN House, Abuja	Suicide bombing at the UN House, Abuja by suspected <i>Boko Haram</i> Islamists.	23 persons (11 UN personnel and 12 non-UN personnel) were killed.

No	Date	State(s)	Nature	Remarks
27	5 Nov. 2011	Potiskum, Damaturu and Maiduguri	Coordinated attacks on churches and police stations by suspected <i>Boko Haram</i> Islamists.	More than 90 persons were reportedly killed, several churches and police stations torched.
28	25 Dec. 2011	Madala, Niger state, near the FCT	The bombs were alleged to have been planted at the Church's parking lot.	At the last count, 45 persons were killed. Some died instantly, others from injuries sustained from the explosion. Over 80 others were receiving treatment for various degrees of injuries.
29	5–6 Jan. 2012	Gombe, Gombe state	Gunmen stormed a Deeper life church in Gombe, shooting indiscriminately at worshippers. The <i>Boko Haram</i> Islamist sect claimed responsibility for the shooting.	6 persons were reportedly killed while many others were injured.
30	5–6 Jan. 2012	Mubi, Adamawa state	Suspected <i>Boko Haram</i> militants stormed a gathering of Igbo Christians and shot sporadically, killing over a dozen and injuring others in apparent execution of an ultimatum given by the <i>Boko Haram</i> Islamist sect to Southern Christians living in the North to leave.	22 persons were reportedly killed; a dozen others were injured.

Source: Adapted from Onuoha 2010 with additions and modifications by the author. The data are by no means exhaustive.

The visible causes of religious violence in Nigeria

Several causes of religious violence in Nigeria have been identified in the literature (Agwu 2009; Gofwen 2004; Salawu 2010; Iwara 2006; Kwaja 2009; Omotosho 2003; Sanusi 2009; Sani no date). Whereas most of these causes conflate, emphasis in the literature is on the underlying socio-political, economic and governance factors that gestate not only religious conflicts, but violent conflicts in Nigeria generally. In this article however, 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 violence in Nigeria does show, however, that government neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimisation, discrimination, marginalisation, 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. In his view, Danjibo (no date:3) believes the failure of governance is responsible for the recurring sectarian violence in Nigeria; while Omotosho (2003) recognises disparaging literature/publications by both Christian and Muslim elites as the major cause of religious violence 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 involvement in religious matters, among others, are responsible for inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Sani (no date) has made a comprehensive but unelaborated list of 70 causes of religious conflicts in Nigeria. While identifying both the remote socio-political and economic drivers as well as the immediate factors that generate religious violence in Nigeria, he has failed to critically analyse how these factors

generate religious disturbances. Nonetheless, it suffices to state that he identified 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, among others, as key causes of religious violence in northern Nigeria. These causes are quite comprehensive and indeed cover most of the factors discussed in this article. However, I shall take a step further to demonstrate how some of these issues generate religious violence and further suggest an approach to state management.

1. Religious intolerance, fundamentalism and extremism

Religious intolerance, fundamentalism and extremism are deliberately chosen to kick-start discussions on the drivers of religious violence in Nigeria because they form the base (sub-structure) upon which other sources of religious violence (super-structure) rest. 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/violence in all societies existing as long as the history of mankind, and permeating all forms of human civilisations, 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 defence of orthodoxy and religious traditions; and from a social movement perspective, where it denotes organisational and

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ideological uniqueness from other types of religious movements. Ultimately therefore, 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.

How do these factors activate religious violence in Nigeria?

In order to understand why these religious ills – if one considers them as such – often precipitate violence in Nigeria, one must necessarily understand the degree to which the two major religions in the country are amenable to compromise on religious issues. To what extent would Christianity or Islam compromise or give up some religious or doctrinal rights for the sake of societal change? How liberal or dogmatic could they be? For Christianity, the basis of respect for political authority is Jesus’ directive to his followers to give to Caesar and to God what respectively belongs to them. Christian teaching on subjection to temporal

authority pervades the new testamentary dispensation of the holy Bible.⁵ The basis for executive authority is laid in Romans 13:1 and 2, where Paul said: ‘Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained by God. Whosoever therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.’ Similarly, in 1 Peter 2:13–14, Peter directed Christians to ‘Be subject to every kind of human order, whether it be to the king as the foremost, or governors as sent by him, as a vengeance on the wicked and a reward to the just’.

Liberal leaning towards authority in the Christendom will therefore cause a Christian to gain respect for the privacy of others, realising that certain aspects of other people’s lives do not fall under his jurisdiction (Doud no date). Hence he would not attempt to take over the power of the state to sanction deviant behaviour, nor would he try to abate certain conduct, which though it offends Christian doctrine, is absolutely within the regulatory purview of temporal authority. By virtue of this doctrine of compliance to temporal authority, Christianity endorses compliance with the economic, political and social order sanctioned by temporal authority, provided that does not interfere with its worship.

Islam, on the other hand, is not just a religion, but a way of life that encompasses the entire gamut of the economic, judicial, political and cultural lives of its *Umma* (faithful); hence its definition as ‘total submission to the will of Allah (God) as revealed by the prophetic message of Muhammad’ (Danjibo no date). The totality of Islamic regulation of the lives of Muslims is comprehensibly captured by Olayiwola (1988:227), who notes that:

Islam does not admit a narrow view of religion by restricting it within the limits of worship, specific rituals and spiritual beliefs. In its precise meaning, Islam is not only a religion; it is also a way of life that regulates all the aspects of life on the scale of the individual and the nation. Islam is a

5 See among others, Mathew 22:19–21; 17:25–27; 1 Peter 2:18; 1 Cor. 7:21–24; Ephesians 6:5–9; 1 Timothy 6:1–2; 1 Peter 2:13–17; Deuteronomy 17:12–13; Romans 13:1–2.

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social order, philosophy of life, a system of economic rules and government. Islam clearly establishes man's duties and rights in all relationships – a clear system of worship, civil rights, laws of marriage and divorce, inheritance, code of behaviour, laws of economy, laws of governance, laws of war and peace, of buying and selling and laws of relations and co-existence with one another, parents, children, relatives, neighbours, guests, Muslims, non-Muslims and brethren.

An apt distinction on the perception of these two religions to temporal and religious authority is captured by Abikan (2009), who posited that:

A Christian for instance may be prepared, in the notion of giving to Caesar and God what respectively belong to them, to limit his right to religious freedom to matters of faith and worship only. A person from the West may also be contented with the western compartmentalization of life into religious and temporal. ...A Muslim on the other hand would view religion as covering all the facets of life. This is because his spiritual and moral worth is tested against his daily interaction with others at the congregational prayers, in marital union, in the pursuit of his legitimate livelihood and in the holding of public responsibilities, amongst others. To him, right to freedom of religion would encompass *aqĒdahwa al-ibĒdah* (freedom of belief and worship), right to live by Allah's commandments (*SharĒah*) and (*'amr bi al-ma'rĒfwa 'an al-munkar*) right to encourage good and forbid evil.

With this rigid representation of Islam as a comprehensive tool for the regulation of the entire lifestyle of its faithful, there is no room for separation between spiritual and temporal affairs for those who choose to be pious Muslims. This absolutist characterisation of Islam is held by adherents of the Wahhabi Islam, who privilege Jihad as an instrument for purging Islam of modernisation with its perceived adulteration of orthodox principles. This explains the predominance of religious violence in the Muslim dominated northern part of Nigeria where inflexible adherence to Islamic orthodoxy or Wahhabism continues to grow steadily. In apparent compliance with this inflexible religious commandment, Islamic fundamentalists of the Wahhabi extraction react violently to any act

or omission considered as a violation of the sharia; notwithstanding the fact that other religious groups have a corresponding legal right to the same act(s). Thus the extremists' attempt to maintain a pure state of Islam has knowingly or unknowingly violated the rights of other people thereby igniting religious violence (Achunike 2008:288).

The 1980 Maitatsine disturbances and the current Boko Haram sectarian violence are both products of dogmatic adherence to sharia jurisprudence, which inspires Islamic Jihad and the obliteration of Western civilisation (Danjibo no date; Onuoha 2012). Similarly, the 1991 religious crisis which engulfed Tafawa Balewa in Bauchi state was generated by Muslims' desire to maintain religious purity in a multi-cultural and multi-religious environment. This led to attacks on Christian pork-vendors at the only public abattoir in the Tafawa Balewa market (Adebayo 2010:216); pork meat being Haram (prohibited) under Islamic sharia. The 2002 Miss World riot in Kaduna was also sparked by Muslim opposition, the Muslims contending that the spectacle of girls parading themselves in semi-nude attires and prancing to an ogling audience violated the tenets of Islam (Adetokunbo 2002). The Secretary-General of the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (SCIA), Alhaji Lateef Adegbite, had earlier protested that staging the event in the month of Ramadan was an affront to Nigerian Muslims (Adetokunbo 2002).

Whereas nudity is strongly abhorred by moderate Muslims and Christians, their disposition to accommodating changing societal values under temporal authority, in spite of their offensive characteristics, restrained them from actively protesting against the event, while choosing to condemn it in their Mosques, Churches and other gatherings. On the other hand, it was the exhibition of Islamic fundamentalism that resulted in the violent attacks on Christians by Muslim extremists, who associated the event with Christianity. This also demonstrates the pervasive ignorance amongst some Islamic faithful, who often associate Christianity with profanity, on account of its accommodation of social, economic and cultural activities that are seemingly immoral or perverse. In reality, this liberal accommodation of temporal values is anchored on the Biblical teaching of giving to Caesar and God what respectively belongs to them; as well as the general embrace of secularity which pervaded Western civilisation

at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. Christians and moderate Muslims therefore tend to accommodate and respect the temporal legal order in spite of its incompatibility with the dictates of their faiths.

2. Obstructive and disruptive modes of worship

One other trigger of religious violence in Nigeria is the obstructive, disruptive and annoying modes of worship employed by the two dominant religions. There is a notorious Christian tradition of organising mass crusades and revivals on public high ways or properties adjoining the high ways. Most of these crusades and revivals have the disrepute of obstructing vehicular and human movement for long periods of time (Daily Champion 2006; Ehigiator and Akinbaani 2002) in absolute disregard to tortious and criminal liabilities.⁶ Many road users of other faiths – and even those of the same faith – see this practice as an affront to their legal rights to the use of public roads as well as a demonstration of religious arrogance and insensitivity. In the same vein, it has become an unwritten law for all public roads in Muslim-dominated areas to be blocked during *Juma'at* (Friday) prayers. Accordingly, all intending road users needing access through these roads on Fridays have often had the misfortune of abating their movements and waiting for the completion of *Juma'at* prayers. This tradition has triggered religious disturbances, particularly in places with evenly distributed numbers of Christians and Muslims. The 2001 Jos religious violence was caused by a mêlée that erupted after a Christian woman insisted on having her right of way through a public highway which was barricaded by Muslim worshippers on a Friday.

In addition to the above, both Churches and Mosques have a tradition of erecting large and extremely noisy loud-speakers within and outside their worship places. This sound-magnifying equipment generates serious noise pollution to the annoyance of neighbours. In most cases, the worshippers engage the use of these instruments throughout the nights, in religious rituals commonly known as 'night vigils' in the Christendom and Tafsir among Muslims during the period of Ramadan. Muslim worshippers also engage the use of these instruments every

6 Public Nuisance is a *tortious* wrong that may attract civil remedies in damages and injunctions. It is also a criminal offence, prohibited under section 234 of the Criminal Code Act as well as sections 183 and 194 of the Penal Code Act.

morning between the hours of 4 and 5 am, thereby constituting nuisance to neighbours. With the indiscriminate location of Churches and Mosques in residential areas, the annoyance inherent in this tradition has triggered religious conflicts in the country, and would indeed remain a potential trigger of religious violence in the future. The erection of worship places in public offices has also served the purpose of politicising religion in work places, as both religious groups often compete for public spaces for worship purposes.

3. Disparaging preaching and stereotyping

Disparaging or critical preaching is one of the most common causes of religious violence in Nigeria. First, both religions 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 monopolisation of essence, thereby delving into the arena of judgemental and scornful delegitimisation 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 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

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helped to intensify the recrimination from both sides, Christian and Muslim, and sustain the cycle of violence.

A dangerous dimension to inter-faith ridiculing and provocation in Nigeria is manifested in the publication of critical literature by religious intellectuals. In his treatise, Omotosho (2003) chronicled the following hate-influenced publications by both Christian and Muslim intellectuals: Odetayo 1993; Mohammad 1990:20; Moshay 1994:46; Sanni and Amoo 1987:3; and Suleiman 1997:1, among others. These publications have all made disparaging remarks against opposing religions and their prophetic essences. The mockery of opposing faiths is also compounded by the pervasive stereotyping of religious adherents. For instance, Muslims, especially those from the northern part of Nigeria, are in the habit of referring to all non-Muslims as *Arna* or *Kafir*; Arabic words for 'heathen' or unbelievers; while it is fashionable for Christians to refer to all Muslims as terrorists and violence-mongers. This attitude of religious stigmatisation has generated religious violence in the past and has the potential to do more.

4. 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 (Omotosho 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

7 Amongst other references used are: Qur'an 16:125 which says 'Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious...' and Qur'an 9:15 'Say: ye that reject faith, I worship not that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. To you be your way and to me mine'.

the case may be. Thus the extremist disposition to enlisting conformity by brute force has created serious religious tensions in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the ubiquitous cassette and video culture that now pervades the landscape of Nigeria's religious preaching has done a lot in exacerbating religious violence (Larkin 1997). These emergent forms of 'small media' are perhaps even more instrumental in circulating religious propaganda than the independent media institutions (Hackett no date). The uninhibited playing of these cassettes in public places, particularly the transmission of disparaging messages or accounts of conversion by new converts, have often attracted the outrage of opposing religious groups. Similarly, the Christians' approach of 'evangelism' – a conversion campaign that favours house to house preaching as well as preaching in public places such as hospitals, prisons, public transport avenues – has often outraged non-Christians, who find the common message of 'I am the way, the truth and the light; no one goes to the Father except through me' as provocative and denigrating their own faiths. On the campuses of many institutions of learning in Nigeria, this tendency has resulted in low intensity conflicts between adherents of the two religions, as the evangelisers often invade the privacies, and therefore, sensibilities of rival religious adherents. The deliberate targeting of non-Christian homes for such evangelisation campaigns has been responsible for religious conflicts in the past and remains a potent trigger to religious violence.

5. 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 patronise 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

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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 marginalising 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 marginalising 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 of marginalisation 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 present debacle over the institutionalisation 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.

6. 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) 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.⁸ This has helped to sustain recrimination and reprisal attacks from both groups.

7. The use of religious symbols

The use of religious symbols is increasingly becoming a source of religious conflict and violence in Nigeria. Most Muslim women insist on the use of the *Hijab*, and in extreme cases, *Niqab* and *Burka*,⁹ even where the regulatory regime prohibit their use. In 2005, following the prohibition of the use of head scarves

8 See evidence of these images on Creeping Sharia 2010.

9 Hijab refers to covering everything except the hands and face. Niqab is the term used to refer to the piece of cloth which covers the face and women who wear it usually cover their hands also. The burka is the most concealing of all Islamic veils. It covers the entire face and body, leaving just a mesh screen to see through. See BBC Religions 2011.

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by female law students in the faculty of law, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria; a Christian lecturer, Dr Andrew Akume, turned back a female student who wore the Hijab from attending his lecture. This action drew the ire of the Muslim Students Society (MSS), who mobilised their collectives and issued a *fatwa* (Islamic death sentence) on the said lecturer, thereby forcing him into hiding (Madugba 2005:4). This act did not only cause serious religious tension on the campus, but ignited a diplomatic strain between the governments of Kaduna and Benue states (the state in which the university is located and the lecturer's home state, respectively) over Akume's safety. The inscription of Arabic symbols on Nigerian currency denominations has also been vehemently opposed by Nigerian Christians, who associate it with Islam and an overarching Islamisation agenda by northern Muslims. On the other hand, Muslims have continuously opposed the use of the 'cross' as a symbol on public hospitals' bill/sign boards and other hospital accessories. These situations remain potential triggers of religious violence.

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.¹⁰

10 See section 53 (1) of the Banks and other Financial Institutions Act as well as section 52 of the Central Bank of Nigeria Act.

In spite of these measures, religious violence has remained a critical security challenge to the Nigerian state. Since the Maitatsine religious disturbances in the 80s to date, government's response to religious violence has taken a tri-pronged pattern. This includes, first, state repression or crackdown on religious groups, sects or perpetrators of the violence generally; and second, the constitution of commissions or boards of inquiry to investigate the causes of the violence, identify the perpetrators and sponsors as well as recommend appropriate sanctions and ways of forestalling future occurrences. The third official response to the management of religious violence has been the facilitation of inter-religious dialogue amongst religious groups. This strategy was given policy verve through the establishment of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in 2000 to facilitate mutual inter-religious understanding and thereby enhancing religious tolerance.

In spite of these management approaches, there is a marked absence of a long-term strategy that is targeted at addressing the remote and immediate causes of religious violence 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 characterised 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-radicalisation programmes for the remnants of its cadres, led to the gradual but sustained incubation of its trace elements into more organised radical mass groups. The current Boko Haram movement is, therefore, unconnected with the

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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 politicisation 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 has trailed the repressive state responses to the current 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 violence and evolve a consensual approach to its implementation. It is admitted that some of the causes of religious violence identified above, have been deeply entrenched in the country's constitutional, statutory and policy instruments, and therefore, attempts at reversing them would be difficult and need extreme caution. Still, a closer engagement by the leaders of the two religions and the government may forge some compromise.

Concluding recommendations

Economic development and societal wellbeing can only be achieved in an environment where multi-culturalism and multi-religiosity are guaranteed. The significant growth in human development in the Middle-Eastern states of

United Arab Emirates and Qatar, and in Malaysia, among others, eloquently testifies to this assertion. Religious diversity should not constitute a barrier to human relations and development; rather it should be a tool or resource for national development. The religious faithful in Nigeria should, therefore, realise the fact that religious tolerance and harmony are both legally sanctioned and socially inevitable, as the world can never be composed of one religion or culture. Accordingly, whereas every religious group has the right to uninhibited religious practice, this must be done with commensurate or reciprocal respect for the rights of other faithful to practise their own religious traditions; provided that such does not constitute any derogation to the right of others to observe their own rituals.

This desirable scenario of religious harmony can be achieved in Nigeria only through the establishment and sustenance of 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. Religious education is used to get people to embrace Christianity or Islam, rather than as a process or formation for religious tolerance and dialogue. Consequently, most children and youths are educated within this framework and are thus inclined to adopting a blind faith (Nnaji no date). This religious pedagogic gives little room for inter-faith understanding and harmony; hence religious intolerance is rife even among school children. There is, therefore, the need to reform the current curriculum on religious studies – which hitherto privileged the exclusive teaching of dogmatic Christian and Islamic doctrines – to a new praxis that 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. All religious communities must understand that there is no alternative to inter-faith dialogue, as there can never be a universal religion or an exclusive society for adherents of a particular religion.

Furthermore, all religious communities must educate their clergy on the need for religious harmony and the toleration of other faiths, while also educating

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their clergy and laity on the need to keep their sermons within the realm of moderation and modesty. There is need to strengthen inter-faith dialogue at the national, state and local levels in order to prevent future manifestations of religious violence. The Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), together with relevant Faith-Based Organisations and Civil Society Organisations should constantly engage in dialogue with the various religious communities, while also serving as a platform for conflict analysis and early warning on religious violence.

On the part of government, there is a need for the development of a long-term strategy for the management of religious conflict/violence. First, government should 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 crystallise into the development of an NPSRS. The NPSRS would, among other things, discuss issues of secularity, thereby delineating the role of religion in state affairs and vice versa. It should also design the rules of state-religion engagement in order to establish clear, consistent and predictable standards in state-religion relations as a basis for fairness and equity in the relationship between religion and the state. It would settle issues of proselytisation (encompassing all modes and methods of preaching), mutual engagement by all religious groups (perhaps this would ensure the strengthening of NIREC), the methods, means and extent of worship (involving consensus on acceptable and unacceptable modes of worship), punishment for acts that trigger religious violence, and a comprehensive 'Religious Conflicts Early Warning System' (RCEWS) that would configure an intelligence gathering and evaluation system on religious violence, and also design the means to its timely containment through preventive dialogue.

The NPSRS should also establish a de-radicalisation programme that will gradually eliminate the ideology of terror and also conduct psychological profiling of remnants of radicalised religious cadres. This policy should also

design a strategy for the disarmament, de-radicalisation and rehabilitation (DD-RR) of religious militants who have not just been brainwashed, but have taken religious combat as a vocation. The establishment of a Saudi-type De-radicalisation Centre is recommended in this respect. Once these issues are consensually agreed on by all religious stakeholders, the delegitimisation of the drivers of religious violence by constitutional, legislative and policy reforms would become an easy endeavour. This is because there would be an informed consensus on the religious acts or omissions that constitute criminal offences and should therefore be prohibited by all religious groups.

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