Faith Based Violence Juxtaposing Christianity with Islam: The Way Forward

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Abstract
Irrational killings and prejudice for and against one religion and another has been ravaging Nigeria. The risks associated with the re-occurring violence and terrorism in Nigeria remains of concern. When such incidents are juxtaposed with the state of affairs in Nigeria and the rise of religiosity in Nigeria, it becomes glaring that faith based violence is a time bomb which explodes at any little opportunity. It is however established that those that execute these violence actually do grave harm to the reputation. The dangers are undesirable and despicable. But this requires an urgent call to action towards eradicating faith based violence as a result of psychological complex. To live beyond this menace, there is need to intensify vocal denouncement of terrorism by non-Islamic and Islamic leaders, a guarantee of good governance, proper and modest hermeneutics of the scripture, intra and inter-faith dialogue and tolerance as way forward to this plague called faith based violence.

Keywords: Faith, violence, juxtapose, Christianity, Islam.

Introduction
With the recent happenings in the world, people have unconsciously chosen violence over peace. This is common with the everyday life of the common man; social media inclusively. People jokingly say they prefer Violence over Peace or that peace was never an option. It is very bad that this common man is going astray with those thoughts which

have transited into the religious life of Man. However, they may ascribe it to be what they call "cruise". The current situation of Nigeria is obviously bad and needs help. The citizens are suffering from gross economic backdrop and insincere administration from the leaders of the nation. Religious violence has devalued our national economy. If there is any role sociologists expect religion to play, it is to unite mankind. But one doubts whether this is the case in modern societies. Mankind's existence is threatened more by religious conflict than any other phenomenon. The civilization that man has built centuries may be destroyed by religious conflicts. It is unfortunate to state here that violence has been one of the characteristics of religion. Religion has been identified as one of the major causes of inter-group conflicts of Israelites and Canaanites, of Christians and Roman Empire, of Muslims and Jews, of Sikhs and Hindus, of Reformers and Catholics. When it is not based on the perception of the truth of each religion, it is based on the historical origin of the religion, in some cases it is prophetic revelation, mystical experience or rational apprehension of ultimate reality. Most of the world religions teach the unity of the mankind, but historical incidents cast doubt of their seriousness over their claims. The dominant motif of the history of religions is that of intolerance and violence. More wars have been fought; more persecutions have been initiated and executed.

Faith-based conflict in Nigeria has devalued our national economy. A cursory look on the Nigeria socio-political structure clearly indicates multiplicity of voices and the diversity of cultures within the nation. Religious pluralism in Nigeria has been disrupted by religiously motivated conflict. And to add to this is also Colonial policies towards Muslim and Christian communities which has institutionalized racial and religious differences with far-reaching consequences before and after independence. Most of Nigerian's inter-religious forums have responded to religious conflict only after it has

escalated into violence. This is a cankerworm that has impeded peaceful existence and nation-building.

In Nigeria, the main religious persuasions include Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR). Within the last two decades, Nigeria has witnessed a variety of disturbances, some of which have threatened the existence of Nigeria as a nation. Some of these disturbances could be described as intra-religious while others are inter-religious.

An Overview of Violence

Kirk-Duggan (2000) defines violence as:

> ethical, physical wrong; extreme wickedness, malicious witness institutional injustice; injurious language, violent mechanisms. It designates innocent suffering, with human subjects and objects, resulting from greed or hatred, but not natural catastrophes. (p.48).

Kirk-Duggan's definition captures the essence of this study's conceptualization of violence. It is aggressive physical attack which results in forced migration, injury or death. It also refers to injurious language that results in loss of dignity and respect or which has potential to insight attack. Violence can be categorized as structural, direct, indirect, divine or ethnic/religious" (Claassens, 2018:619). Specifically, this study is concerned with such violent behavior as directed to the ethnic/religious "other".

The transition of violence into the religious life of the people didn't start today. It has been as old as the writing of the religious books. The leadership of the nation amidst the current situation still accommodates and does not frown at religious violence. This is as a result of the reactions of the various tribes in the country. The leadership tends to have chosen diplomacy instead of the truth when it is related with issues like this. Religious violence in Nigeria has always been referred to Christian-Muslim strife in the modern Nigeria. As noted earlier, religious violence has been old and can be traced back to

1953 followed by the case of Tafawa Balewa in 1948 up till the recent case of Deborah and attack on churches. So far, it is understood and believed by many that this religious violence has been used effectively by ardent believers of one of the Abrahamic religions- Islam. These radical believers engage in this in the name of fighting for Allah, whilst the other Abrahamic religions have so far shown peace. But the question remains if they have really shown Peace? According to Ogbuehi (2016), Religious conflict emerges when a religious man conceives the idea of the supernatural being. Violence has a portion in all religions as it is a matter of who preaches it and who takes it literally. This incessant religious violence has only succeeded in making some persons in the nation to question their space. It has been disturbing and unsafe for other religions which may be tagged peaceful. For the other religions, they will consequently worship in fear as their religion is being circumspected to some areas. This has hampered national development as well as a whole lot such as suspicion, disunity, reprisal attacks and loss of humanity.

Religious Violence
Religion which has no globally accepted definition has been individually defined by several philosophers in their own understanding. For Marx (1970), Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opiate of the masses. For Berger (1961), religion is the human attitude towards a sacred order that includes within it, all being; human or otherwise. In otherwords, belief in a cosmos. Going with the theoretical inflationary type of religion which Idinopulus (1998), assumes to be an entity of some kind called Religion that can clearly be distinguished from other things, "religion is a unified system of ideas and practices with particular instances known as actual religions such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and so on" (p.45).

Karl Marx's definition of religion speaks more of faith based violence. "Religious violence covers phenomenon where religion is either the subject or the object of violent behaviour" (Wellman and Tokuno, 2004:291). It is important to note that there is an atom of violence in every religion. In the world, religious violence is gingered and motivated through many ways. These ways could be seen also in Nigeria whereby it is usually gingered by or through texts, religious beliefs, and doctrines of the violator and that of the victim. Violence motivated by religious intolerance is easier described than defined. Muggah (2019), viewed religious violence as one that "spans intimidation, harassment and internment to terrorism and outright warfare"(n.p). It is however clear that the major religions in the world has a place for violence.

Islam and Violence
The monotheistic faith; Islam means peace and submission. It is evident in their everyday greeting whereby Muslims greet each other by saying "*salaam alaykum*" meaning "Peace be upon you". However, Violence in Islam dates back to the early history of monotheistic faith. They had religious wars which are referred to as Jihad whose concept includes aspects of both a physical and an internal struggle which can be misunderstood. Pacifism is known amongst Muslims but most Muslims are not pacifists because of the teachings in the Quran and the Hadith which allows for wars to be fought if they can be justified. Now, what can be referred to as Justified? The Quran and Hadith contains verses believed by its adherent to be revealed to the Islamic Prophet; Muhammad at different times and different places which is born or birthed out of certain circumstances – some exhorting violence against enemies and others urging restraint and conciliation. Most scholars assume Quranic phrases on violence to be only in the sphere of a defensive response to opposition; violent groups and fanatics in the

religion have interpreted those verses and phrases to endorse their violent actions.

In Quran 2:190, it says "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress limits, for Allah loveth not transgressions". With this verse, it is evident that the passage is generally of the idea by endorsing the violent nature of the religion. There are two valid points made in the passage. The first is that the killings of others is authorized in the event of persecution while the second valid point is that fighting may persist until 'religion is for Allah' and there is no more '*Fitnah*' (Fitnah here is interpreted to as trial or testing). Micheline (2008), argued that "the Quran justifies wars for self defense to protect Islamic communities against internal or external aggression by non Islamic populations and wars waged against those who violate their oaths by breaking a treaty" (p. 45). One can see another reason why Violence took a better part of the religion in Quran 9:5 which says "But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them and seize them, beleaguer them and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if ye repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charities then open the way for them; for Allah is often forgiving, Most merciful. This can go to the extent to explain the display of violence over the past decades in Nigeria.

Christianity and Violence

Christianity is an Abrahamic monotheistic faith which is based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The religion has its scriptural book; bible as their guide and inspiration. Overtime, Christians had diverse attitudes towards violence and non violence. Both currently and historically, Robert (1986) postulates that "there have been four attitudes towards violence and war and four resulting practices of them within Christianity; non-resistance, Christian pacifism, Just war and preventive war" (p. 13). Weaver (2001) suggests that there are numerous evolving views on violence and non violence throughout the

history of Christian Theology. According to the views of many historians, John (2000) posits that "the Constantinian shift turned Christianity from a persecuted into a persecuting religion" (p.22). Volf (2008) identifies the intervention of a new creation as in the parousia, as a particular area of the monotheistic faith that generates violence. Writing the latter, Volf (2008) states that:

> Beginning at least with Constantine's conversion, the followers of the crucified have perpetrated gruesome acts of violence under the sign of the cross. Over the centuries, the seasons of lent and holy week were, for the Jews, times of fear and trepidation. Muslims also, associate the cross with violence; Crusades' rampages were undertaken under the sign of the cross. (p.13).

According to Matt. 10 vs 34-39, Jesus Christ was found preaching Violence. Vs. 34 says, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword". This biblical passage resonate the sounds of violence just like the Muslims' monotheistic faith. This statement attributed to Jesus "I come not to bring peace, but to bring sword" has been thought of and been interpreted by some scholars to be a call to arms for Christians. Juergensmeyer (2004) argues that "despite its central tenets of love and peace, Christianity like most traditions has always had a violent side. The bloody history of the tradition has provided disturbing images and violent conflict is vividly portrayed in the bible"(n.p). Unfortunately, this history and these biblical images have provided the room and raw material for the theologically justification of violence among contemporary Christian groups.

Juxtaposing Faith-based Violence in Nigeria

The way in which both Islam and Christianity were introduced into Nigeria made for a competitive and conflicting relationship between the two. Having been introduced at different times and historical epochs, they all fitted into the different world views born out of their

historical experience of antagonism and hatred towards each other. The regions question though, unresolved never blow open in the colonial era. This was because the ideological holds of the competing religions remain a dominant and exclusive feature of the regions. This situation continued right into the early part of the neo-colonial state as the struggle for power among the regional based political parties was accentuated by need to mobilize maximum support for effective dominance.

Religious violence in Nigeria has been characterized of Christian-Muslim strife. In the recent times, there was a case of a second year college student of the Shegu Shagari College of Education Sokoto; Deborah Samuel Yakubu who was killed by a mob of fellow students after being accused of blasphemy. She was accused of posting a blasphemous statement against the Islamic Prophet Muhammed through a Whatsapp Voice note. She was forcefully taken from the security room where she hid in the Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto. A trending video has it that a mob of fellow students stoned Yakubu and beat her with sticks before dumping tyres on her and burning her body beyond recognition. A witness claimed that her last words were "what do you want to achieve with this".

Every religion has a tone of mild violence which tolerance should be the ultimate. There have been cases of Muslims blaspheming against Jesus Christ by saying that Jesus is not the son of God just like the Docetists that proposed that the son of God never fully took on human flesh and that the body of Jesus was an illusion and that of Arianism that proposed that the title 'Son of God' was just a title. Christians have also witnessed the saying from other denominations that Mary is not the mother of Jesus but so far so good in the recent times, Christians have had this tolerance with other religions. The ability to curtail some teachings and practices should not be overlooked. Nigeria has passed through incessant religious conflicts and their attendant consequences of loss of human lives and properties. It is unfortunate that despite all

the efforts made to resolve religious conflicts in Nigeria through dialogue yet peaceful resolution of religious conflicts have remained a mirage. Religious conflicts abound in Nigeria because it is a pluralistic country where there is a diversity of religious beliefs and practices. Dialogue cannot thrive in an environment where a religion seeks to dominate others, display superiority complex and exhibit unquenchable desire to convert adherents of other religions. Hence, Religious conflict has become a household name in Nigeria. There is hardly a day that passes without hearing of religious disturbances in some parts of this country. The incessant religious conflicts have hampered national development as well as encouraged suspicion, reprisal attacks, disunity, acrimony and rancor among the adherents of these religions. There is no doubt that religious conflicts have turned some parts of this country into 'war zones' where lives and properties are not safe. The problems associated with religious conflict have affected the unity of the country, and how it is regarded by the outside world. Just recently a political party in Nigeria (APC- All Progressive Congress), had there presidential aspirant who is a Muslim picking up another Muslim as his running mate. This action has generated lots of comments from both Christians and Muslims as insensitive and damaging to the already damaged unity of the country. Nigeria's recovery is both necessary and essential. And the Church as an agent of reconciliation should be well placed to lead the country to be a united, recovered, healed, and reconciled nation.

Prospects of Faith based Violence in Nigeria
Faith based violence in Nigeria has not been the exclusive preserve of any particular religion. Referring to Christian's and Muslims in Nigeria, Windibiziri (2007) notes that "religious leaders of both communities have been known sometimes to instigate or exacerbate violence and confrontation" (p.158). However, the intensity of the violence and terror unleashed by Maitatsine in the 1980s, Talibans and presently,

Boko Haram since 2009 all with Muslim foregrounding is second to none. A seeming dominance in the records of violence is attributable to Muslim fundamentalists who have resorted to an 'interpretation' and most times 'misinterpretation' of the Islamic Quran that has been most susceptible is the call to Jihad as enshrined in Quran 9:5 and 9:29. An excerpt from 9:5 states: "fight those who do not believe in Allah... not follow the religion of truth". Little (2007) therefore succinctly states that "religious teachings are being used to legitimize wars and all forms of brutality and violence" (p.4). A biblical parrell of the foregoing can be seen in 2Chronicles15:13. Probably Christians are yet to find this a potent tool for playing the violent madness.

Jihad in Islam has been particularly known as physical violence against non Muslims and an opposing Muslim sect. Jihad is a command in Islam basically known for struggle. It could be struggle against behaviours and attitudes, against the teachings of the Quran or for the propagation of Islamic religion. Its meaning is however dependent on the interpretation given to it at any point in time by any particular person. When the interpretation is moderate, it then becomes desirable but when it is intense and violent, it actually serves as motivation for violence. It then would not be out of place to surmise that their action to sections of the Qur'an that stipulate violence, appeal to Muslim adherents differently. By this supposition fundamentalists appear to appropriate the above contexts of the Quran denotatively, while moderate Muslims approach the sections connotatively. The above presuppositions are explicit in the positions advanced by Christian theologians.

There is therefore the possibility that with time, if religious uprisings and repugnant religious machinations by unscrupulous groups that claim to be championing religious course in Nigeria are not curbed, there will most probably be actual and clear manifestation of violence. This could then lead to fierce confrontations, ridiculous polemics (this is already apparent from arguments in the social media),

attacks and reprisal attacks that would result in the desecration of sacred human lives and destruction of properties.

The Way Forward

Everywhere faith based violence has been seen, It has been associated with tales of woes that instigate fear. There is therefore need to pre-empt such fears in Nigeria so as to avert the consequences that come with it. Engaging some positive actions will hopefully, tame the prospects of faith based violence and subsequent dangers in Nigeria. Non-extremist clerics and leaders should be more vocal in denouncing terrorist groups that claim to be fighting to expand the frontiers of their doctrine. They should be called what they are-terrorists and misguided religionists who are defamers of faith. It is advisable to curtail or avoid inciting and unguarded statements that sow seeds of radicalism and hatred for non Muslims, but trumpet the pacifistic elements across religious divides. For example, Islamic clerics should keep sermons within the realms of balance and decency so as not to inadvertently incite bellicosity (same applies to Christian clerics).

Moreso, a clear distinction should be made between Muslims and terrorists who perpetrate violence in the name of religion. The general public should desist from qualifying terrorists as Islamic. Even though these terrorists claim to be Islamists, they are in actual sense, perverts of the Islamic religion. Boko Haram for in stance has more political undertone than a religious one. Perhaps they draw their ferocious and destructive strength from their use/misuse of the Quran. However, non-Muslims and especially Christians must understand that just as some groups or sects that claim to be Christians are apparently misguided and cannot be reckoned as representative of Christianity, terrorists should not be reckoned as Islamists and therefore, using the adjective-Islamic to qualify terrorists should be discouraged even though that is what they claim.

The government also has a part to play. Terrorism is sometimes an ugly way of expressing dissatisfaction by aggrieved members of a particular society. Most times, this dissatisfaction Is towards the government of the day and Nigeria is not an exception. Whether they hide under the guise of religion or anything else, their recalcitrant attitude could be traced to bad governance. Hill (2013), Halliru (2012) and even Kukah (2011) all agree that poverty and unemployment which are to a great extent, governance factors are underlying causes of faith-based conflicts and violence in Nigeria. Government has a role to play in addressing issues such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, marginalization, exploitation and so on. Moreso, effective intra and inter-faith dialogue in Nigeria is indispensable in dismantling negative stereotypes like Islamophobia. Dialogue could help to jettison adverse rhetoric and polemics among different faiths. It would no doubt foster better understanding and solidarity between/among religious groups which could lead to sheathing the sword (physical, verbal and psychological/emotional sword). It would rather motivate these religions to collaborate and topple their common enemy-the terrorists and other perpetrators of violence in the name of religion. The latter sort of dialogue is what Rasmussen (2007) describes as 'from discursive to cooperative dialogue'.

Tolerance is the best key to religious violence in Nigeria. It cannot just be over emphasized. The moment each religion understands that they both have a red-line and should be tolerated the better for the nation. Like the popular saying, 'two wrongs never made a right and it will never make a right. Islam preaches peace and humility. Peace is central to Islam and the religion aims to achieving a world free from attack and conflict. The Quran reminds the Muslims that Allah is always watching and taking account of their actions so they should always be ready to accept peace. Christianity as well, advises that men should follow peace with all. From the biblical perspective, the absence of conflict is only the beginning of peace. True peace includes personal

wholeness, political justice, absence of violence and prosperity for all creation. That is the way God intended things to be when he created his garden, his paradise; Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives (John 14:27). The Islamic perspective is as well about peace and knowledge. Peace is promoted as Allah (S.W.T) says in the Quran 'God does not forbid you to be kind and equitable to those who have neither fought against your faith nor driven you out of your homes.

In this nation, Muslims burn down churches, Christians burn down traditional altars and the likes. This is violence and should be totally condemned and stopped. There is need for one to come to an understanding that there is one Supreme Being which different religions have a name they call it and different ways to getting to their supreme being. But at the expense of Religion, it should consider humanity. Humanity happens to be the bedrock of every successful society in the world. Knowing how people put the love for religion first over love for humanity is the more reason there is rise of violence and conflict. The honest truth is that no religion is worth fighting for. Human life is supreme. Any God that needs one to fight for him is not a God. God is meant to fight for us and not us fighting for him. If he claims to be supreme, he should have a way of dealing with his offenders. Hence, there is need to appreciate and embrace humanity over religion. Humanity, tolerance, peace and love tend to be considered for a better and violent-free sovereign state in a state where there is no state religion.

Projecting a positive self- image of an in-group is a normal cognitive experience. Each religious group ordinarily would want to project a positive image that will make them look palatable and unique before the out-group. This is very normal. But the danger therein is when this normal impulse is misconstrued; when it is negatively expressed; when it instead leads to discrimination, antagonism etc. The study therefore recommends that in as much as the in-group would

want to project a positive image of the self, they should not lose sight of the fact that the out-group has an image to project too. Therefore, there is serious need for each group to appreciate and respect the needs and aspirations of the other group; be it social, political or cultural groups. Each has an image to project and protect. This later mindset will go a long way in ushering an atmosphere of peace in our society. Secondly, from our study so far, it is very clear that Nigeria is a plura-religious, plura-cultural and plura-ethnic society. Therefore, the right culture to be adopted in such pluralistic society should be one that recognizes and respect these diversities. Unity- in- diversity should be the appropriate model of the unity to be sought. The universe as a whole is one fashioned along plurality. In Nigerian for example, a reasonable percentage of people who are Christians or Muslims inherited these religions as hegemony of cultures, traditions and accident of history and birth. This reality must be accepted. Taking cognizance of this plurality, Madu (1996) opines that:

> Since Nigeria's plural state is a reality, her survival will depend very much on the level of awareness by the different ethnic and religious segments that these differences must be there. Is it not an accident of history that Chukwuma Njoku is an Igbo man while Sani Ibrahim is a Hausa man? Is it not also to a very high extent that a particular tribe is predominantly Muslim while the other is predominantly Christian? It is my contention to say that all these differences must be there for it is in those differences that we shall manifest our level of awareness to share our assets and liabilities and therefore, be ready to resolve seaming contradictions to our own advantage, growth and development. (p. 96).

Pluralism recognizes heterogeneity of peoples with the underlying features of mutual awareness or sharing. For a religious pluralism to be a force to be reckoned with in the society it implies that the individual religious groups lay claim to some kind of truth; none of the religious traditions in such a society depend on each other for the interpretation

of her own truth. According to Imo (1990), plurality is a step to an authentic enculturation and dialogue. Dialogue facilitates constant interaction, conversation and communication between severed groups. It opens the way for mutual understanding, tolerance and respect of the view point of each group. In the context of inter- religious dialogue, however, for any successful dialogues between Muslim and Christians in Nigeria, certain principles are required. This is because the sides involved cannot make any meaningful progress, if each holds tenaciously or rather fanatically to its own point of view. Nwanju (2012) notes that both groups must endeavor to listen to one another, understand each other in sincerity and honesty. Above all, any inter-religious dialogue worthy of the name, must be free, and tolerate a certain degree of disagreement.

Conclusion

Faith based violence is apparently a disaster waiting to happen in Nigeria, the recent killing of Deborah in Sokoto is worrisome worthy. The begging question that is worth puzzling about is; can Nigeria contain such looming menace? The onus therefore lies on religious leaders to properly guide their faithful. Political leaders who have displayed incompetence in managing Nigeria's religious diversity have to work out modalities to curb faith based violence and prejudice. They should strive to build bridges among different religions in Nigeria and not fences and suspicion. It is however disheartening that some of the political leaders who are looked upon for solution to this problem of prejudice and stigmatization among religious organizations in Nigeria are complicit in orchestrating this violence. Furthermore, proper sensitization about one another's religious doctrines and practices as the inter-religious dialogue group has been doing could also go a long way to curb negative stereotypes and minimize skeptical disposition towards one another's faith.

There is no gainsaying that faith based conflicts have plagued Nigeria more than any other kind of conflict in its history as a nation. Therefore, if there must be relative peace in the country, then religion must play an indispensable tool for such peace to be attained. The fundamental tenet that the religious person should be seen to bring to the fore is peace. The need to forestall indiscriminate killing and violence in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. It is now more expedient than ever for adherents of different religions to learn to live in peace and mutual respect in Nigeria. The 'us' versus 'them' mentality should be erased for a mutual coexistence among the diverse religious adherents in Nigeria. This perspective is one among others suggested in this paper in efforts to overcome faith based violence in Nigeria and keep its prospect at bay.

Having synthesized the implications of religious violence in Nigeria, it is necessary to make some recommendations which the following antidotes are, therefore, expected to go a long way in combating the phenomenon. The Constitution must be strengthened and respected. This include the respect for the rule of law, respect for the fundamental human rights, independence of the judiciary and respect to all democratic norms and values. This is the running of Government affairs in a positive and progressive manner that will be beneficial to the governed by following due process and the rule of law. The issue of faith is the concern of every individual. Thus, man has the choice and freedom to follow whichever religion he or she thinks he can find solace and tranquillity in. So also must every person be free to invite others to consider his or her religion of choice without any harassment whatsoever. In doing this, the principles enumerated by different religions on how to invite people to the way of Allah should be employed. Invitation of another person to one religion should not be done in an aggressive manner. The invitation should be done with wisdom and discretion, meeting people on their own ground and convincing them with illustrations from their own knowledge and

experience, which may be very narrow, or very wide. The use of social and economic diplomacy can also be employed to win souls into one's religious belief.

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