

# **The Socio-Economic And Political Dimensions Of Religious Rivalry/Crisis In Nigeria: Challenges And Remedies**

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## **Abstract**

*There are two major religions in Nigeria-Christianity and Islam. The relationship between these two religions have been marked by fierce rivalry that often snowballs into full-blown conflicts, violence, banditry and insurgence of various forms. In this sad scenario, the society has been condemned to being a total strange to peace, tranquillity, harmonious co-existence and the progressive dividends of diversity. Religion is often a victim of bad governance, poverty and hardship, given that history, time and again, is replete with instances where religion has been exploited both for political and economic gains. The fact that peace is central to the doctrines of these two religions suggests that the problem is not religion perse. Thus, this article shed light on the concept of religion, revealing religion as a relationship encounter with the Supernatural. It went on to examine the socio-economic and political dimensions of religious rivalry/crises in Nigeria. In examining the political dimension of religious rivalry/crises in Nigeria, it considered its historical background, informing one's better understanding of the enduring spiral of rivalry, violence, crises and insurgencies, and threats and realities of the moment. A major finding is that religious rivalry/ crises experienced in Nigeria cannot be simplistically reduced to issues between adherents of Islam and Christianity. As it is, it is argued that some self-serving political motivations underly this rivalry and most of the resultant conflicts as religion, religious groups, religious practices and values are often employed by dubious politicians to the service of their political interests. Again, the article also explored the socio-economic motivations and impacts of religious rivalry/crises in Nigeria revealing that poor economy is a breeding ground for idle and ignorant youths-willing tools for the advancement of unhealthy rivalry and violence. Besides, it highlighted the socio-economic consequences of religious rivalry and crises which leaves the society reeling with woes of economic losses and setbacks. By and large, with the conviction that the situation can be redeemed for a harmonious and progressive co-existence of the two religions and a better society, it proffered some recommendations. The task of stemming the tide of this unhealthy rivalry and its associated conflicts and violence is a collective responsibility. Therefore, a call was made on both the government and religious leaders who certainly have some pivotal roles to play in this regard towards creating a society we yearn for.*

**Key Words:** *Religious Rivalry, Religious Crisis, Socio-economic, Political, Challenges, Remedies, Nigeria*

Date of Submission: 16-08-2025

Date of Acceptance: 26-08-2025

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## **I. Introduction**

There are two major religions in Nigeria: Christianity and Islam. While there is a lot of compelling evidence to be positive about the significances and values of religion in a country like Nigeria, it is also difficult to argue against the feelings that all is not rosy. In fact, undignified rivalry between these two major religions in Nigeria has often left our society tethering at the brink of untold disaster and collapse. This rivalry, we must be fair to note, did not begin in our time, and it is not even peculiar to our clime. Often, this rivalry escalates to full blown violence and conflicts as is often the case in some states in the Northern Nigeria like Plateau, Kano and Kaduna. In some other cases, the rivalry skyrockets to the level of insurgency like the case of *Boko Haram*, that for decades, has been threatening to wreck the ship of our peaceful co-existence on a slippery hard rock of disaster. And, more recently, several communities in Northern Nigeria, and sometimes, in the South have become strangers to their homes for series of unprovoked and gruesome banditry of Fulani terrorists- an ugly trend that have gone on for years unchecked by the successive governments in power. Our society has been condemned to being a total stranger to peace and tranquillity. It is more difficult to reckon moments of peace than periods conflicts have threatened to sear the very heart of our peaceful and happy living. This compels one

to wonder why things have to be so, especially when we remember that at the very heart of the beliefs and teachings of these two religions is not only peace, but more remarkably, the golden rule. In the Holy Bible, the golden rule is clear in the words of Jesus, "Always treat others as you would like them to treat you: that is the meaning of the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12) In the case of Islam, we have in the traditions of An-Nawai. "None of you is a believer until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself" (Arinze, 1988, pp.7).

To be fair, critical reasoning must compel us to believe that it is not the nature of religion or faith per se that pushes the adherents into rivalry or conflicts, it is rather human pervasion or deviation from their faith or their lust for power that leads people to hatred and exploitation of one another (Ha'ader & Turtkovic, 2002). There are many conflicts that our societies have seen or are seeing that have practically no connection with religion. "But we have to admit that religion can often colour such conflicts or aggravate them. And religion can be exploited to foster division and conflicts" (Arinze, 1988, pp. 7). Most times, politicians and other sets of people exploit religion to achieve their personal goals, and in turn, some religious leaders and fundamentalists see political power as a chance to dominate the adherents of other religions and stamp the superiority of their own faith. For instance, in the perplexing case of Fulani banditry, yielding to the perennial temptation of narrowing the massacre down to inter-ethnic or tribal skirmishes could only prove one is a poor student of history. As we would see later in this work, in the Islamic worldview, there is no demarcation between the secular and religious space; reality is one, and reality is theocratically governed by the Islamic values and ethos ordained by *Allah*. Thus, the Fulani-Muslims from among whom the bandits are suspected to have germinated could construe their acts of banditry massacring scores of innocent victims and destroying valuable properties as a mini jihad against the victimized communities who could then pass as infidels. While this claim is not undisputable, it is also not dismissible either. Further again, the tie between economy and politics is a very stark one in that from the ancient time, those who control political power have been those who possess economic power.

In the face of all these, we consider the socio-economic and political dimensions of the rivalry between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. Experiences validate that these rivalries and their resultant crises have political and socio-economic implications. Several times, crises associated with religious rivalries have socio-economic and political consequences, taking some bizarre tolls on people's lives, and many a times as well, such crises are influenced by socio-economic and political factors, such as when politicians employ religious divisions and bigotry as tools to gain and consolidate their hold on political power and influence. To that effect, exploring these dimensions of the rivalry with a particular attention to how they promote religious crisis in the country is the chief concern of this work. Beside this, the concept of religion is examined as a take-off point, the background to the political dimensions of religious rivalry/crisis, and some insightful recommendations are also discussed in this piece.

## **II. The Concept Of Religion**

Religion generally is an institution or system of belief that has to do with relationship between the visible and the invisible realities. The rites, rituals, liturgy, sacrifices, atonement and practices inherent in religion are all based on the conviction that there is a possibility of communicative bridge, solely transcendental and invisible, which can bring us in proximity with the divine beings. It is a metaphysical conception that has to be based on belief and a well-developed and redefined rationality. It is a system of belief that offers us answers to the world beyond especially about eschatological visions of realities, that is, what we are to expect after our sojourn on this earth. It gives directives and instructions on code of conducts and moral certitudes that will bring about a stable relationship on earth and eventually a stable relationship with the divine in the world beyond. Durkheim (1995) defines religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them" (pp. 44). Stackhouse (2000) defines it as a comprehensive outlook or 'metaphysical moral vision' embraced as binding because of a belief that it is fundamentally true, even if not all of its aspects are verifiable. Religion is also taken as a firm belief in a supernatural power (s) capable of controlling human destiny (WordNet, 2010).

These varied conceptions about religion have a unanimous certainty; religion has to do with the divine. It has to do fundamentally with our relationship with the divine. If that is the case, one wonders why humans should fight for the divine in this temporal world? The correct concept of religion makes a case that our practice of religion ought to fundamentally lead to blessedness; having a glimpse or an imperfect experience of what blessedness is all about here on earth before final unification and perfect experience with the divine in the beatific vision. That is why every true religion gives moral code of conducts on how one should conduct his life on earth that to have a guarantee of blessed experience with the divine. In strong terms, then, we can affirm that any religious rivalry or crisis has indeed other motivations and dimensions than the ultimate divine consolation and prize.

Religious rivalry, crisis and violence in the modern Nigeria are usually the Christian-Muslim struggle for religious identification and assertion in their respective states which have led to massacre, genocide, destruction of properties, economic and political destabilization, and so on. There are arrays of crisis which have been witnessed in Nigeria and properly documented for posterity. We are thus convinced of the fact that religious rivalry and its associated crisis have political dimensions, socio-economic dimensions, cultural dimensions and indeed other motivations and undertones than mere defence and pursuit of the Supernatural; a being who is superior to us in all ramifications. Unscrupulous people simply use religious crisis as a façade for achieving other sinister purposes be it economic, political or otherwise. A quick dive onto the political dimension of religious rivalry/crisis in Nigeria is next!

### **III. The Political Dimension Of Religious Rivalry/Crisis In Nigeria**

#### ***The background to the tragedy***

The point of departure in our enquiry on the political factors behind religious rivalry rests on the fact that for most Nigerians, and by extension, Africans at large, there is little or no separation of religion from every other sphere of their lives in the society. This worldview cuts across all the religions, and particularly Christianity and Islam. However, we must point out that this ideological phenomenon is all the more truer and stricter for the adherents of Islam. The very concept of the state as an independent political institution is alien to Islamic worldview. Colonel Gaddafi's rash reaction to the issue of separating religion from government in modern states in a Muslim-Christian consultation held at Tripoli in 1976 is indicative of how Muslims take this issue. In his reaction, he asked if the Church could be separated from the state in the administration of the Vatican City state (AECAWA, 1987). His point was that such distinction is not allowed in Islamic states, for all that is required for good ordering of society are taken to be contained already in the Qu'ran. Thus, just as the Catholic Church needs external structures of government, so does Islamic religion need it. This explains the central place of *Sharian* law in the administrative structure of some Muslim-dominated states in the country. In fact, during the drafting of the 1979 Nigerian constitution, the *Sharian* controversy raged strongly, as some members of the drafting committee made an attempt to insert the *Sharian* law into the laws of the Supreme Court of Nigeria. The failure of their plan was thanks to the fierce resistance put up by other members (Chukwulozie, 1986). But even with the present socio-political and legal structure that parrots that Nigeria is a secular state, some Muslim-dominated states continue to uphold the supremacy of the *Sharian* law over the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria. In states like Zamfara, Kano, Kaduna, Borno, and so on, where there is much Muslim presence, we continue to witness a spiral of desecration of the laws of the country in favour of the *Sharian* laws, and consequent abuses of people's fundamental human rights.

Since the inception of the fourth Republic in 1999, Sharia has been established as a main body of civil and criminal law in 9-Muslim dominated states and some parts of three states where they are minority. The genesis of this ugly trend is owed to the Ahmadu Rufai Sani, a one-time governor of Zamfara state (Adam and Anamesere, 2019). This politico-religious structure has served as a recipe and breeding ground for desperate and dubious politicians who spare no chance to exploit religious sentiments in the service of their political or class interests.

Nevertheless, we can say, with every sense of conviction that the issue of the separation of the church and the state is nowadays a little or no problems for the Christians. The reason for Christians' ease in the acceptance and adaptation to the system is not difficult to come by when we consider the post-colonial history of these two major religions in West Africa. As AECAWA (1987) reveals, the struggle for independence and self-government was spearheaded by western educated figures, who were trained in mission schools, and automatically were Christians. As in cases like the northern Nigeria, the Muslim population were not ready for western-style independence. Consequently, when many states became independent, almost all the heads of state were Christians, apart from Nigeria and Cameroun. But even in such exceptions where the Muslims were heads of state, the dominance of the western secular worldview still found its way into the new independent states. This owed to the fact that with the presence of different ethnic and cultural groups that came together to form the nations, they sought a uniform administrative system that could consider the interest of all. Hence, with the need to forge a sense of national consciousness, these Christian leaders and politicians who were brought up in a western educational system were left with no other alternative than to implement the western secular worldview in which the government was clearly separated from religion. The Christians were already much more at home with the secular arrangement of the society, and have little or no problem with a secular administrative arrangement.

But the same cannot be said about their Muslim counterparts who played a minor role in the struggle for independence, "and gave their allegiance and loyalty to *umma*, the community of the prophet" AECAWA, 1987, pp. 17). Yet, in countries like Nigeria that had Muslims in top political positions in government, the Muslim leaders' allegiance was split between loyalty to the nascent country on one hand, and the wider Islamic world, on another hand, in which case, loyalty to the Islamic world often enjoys higher precedence. And, in

cases where this separation seems to apply in West Africa, there is often overbearing pressure from the Muslim population to be accorded special recognition and power to control certain spheres of public life (AECAWA, 1987). Nigeria is a ready example of this. In the 1980s, the then Military Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida in connivance with his Muslim elites enrolled Nigeria as a member-state of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (Michael, 2019). This of course aggravated religious tension between Christians and Muslims. The issue of power and prestige is very dear to the Muslims. They seek power and dominance at all costs, and in their numbers, they see power (AECAWA, 1987). Hence, any other religion that rivals them in terms of population is already a first-class enemy.

However, some Muslims also blame the root of the rivalry on the Christians whom they see as seeking to obliterate their own religion and culture with the help of the Western power and civilization. Such Muslims cite such earlier crusades of Christianity against Islam as a planned strategy to exterminate Islam, and enthrone Christianity as the only religion of the world. Given the rise of an Islamic empire against the declining Byzantine and Persian superpowers in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, C.E., the Western Christianity felt critically threatened both from theological and political standpoints (Ha'ader & Turtkovic, 2002). Consequently, in their ignorance and arrogance, they declared Islam diabolical and anti-Christ. "Many of the crusades are often more vivid in the minds of Muslims than of Christians, and some Muslims see the Crusade as continuing today in a different form" (Ha'ader & Turtkovic, 2002, pp. 170). This sort of feeling and mindset is clearly expressed in the following comment of Sheik Muhammad al Ghazali: "This [the peaceful conversion of Christians to Islam] was brought to a halt by the vicious and relentless crusades waged against the Muslims. They started over one thousand years ago, and do not seem to have come to an end" (Ha'ader & Turtkovic, 2002, 170). This, they are bent on not giving a chance to. Hence, in countries where both exist, their co-existence has been one of rivalry and mutual suspicion of each other. Additionally, we must note that, for an average Muslim, Christianity is not different from the West. Since they see the secular view of the societal arrangement as an enemy that must be resisted at all cost, they do not spare Christianity that, in their judgment, seems to promote it.

#### ***Political dimension of religious rivalry and crisis in Nigeria: scenario and consequences***

As it is, it is almost impossible to divest religious rivalry, conflicts or clashes from political motivations and factors. When religious conflicts pounce on us, it is naive to exonerate political motivations as the underlying factor. In fact, as William Cavanaugh has argued, it is "unreasonable to attempt to differentiate 'religious violence' from 'secular violence' as separate categories" (Lefebure, 2002, pp. 18), and claims have been made that "all cases of violence and war include social, political and economic dimensions" (Morreall & Sonn as cited in Michael, 2019). This is better captured in an author's assertion that religion and politics are two sides of a coin (Maurice Bloch as cited in Michael, 2019). Ha'ader and Turtkovic (2002) present it this way: "There is no denying the fact that 'powers and principalities' of the world used or rather abused the traditional religions for their own interests as they do today with civil religion or secular democracies" (pp. 170). Politicians are fond of provoking religious sentiments among the masses as they seek to discredit their opponents, and instigate the wrath of one religious group against another. And this is true for Muslims as it is for Christians in Nigeria. We must agree that just as some adherents of Islam seek to advance their political interests under religious colouration, some Christians also pursue their political ambitions under the guise of religion. It is not strange to observe how religious affiliation has come to be one of the cardinal determinants of who occupies one national position or another. The history of Nigerian Politics, so to speak, is mixed with the history of fierce rivalry between the two major religions in the country. For instance, in the build-up to the 2023 elections, seeing that the Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket of APC did not go down well with a large population of Christians, and determined to take power at all costs, we saw a group of folks hired to fake as Christian clerics by APC, dressed in mismatched clerical wear in campaign arena. Flashing back a bit, in 2015 general elections, religion played a significant role in the emergence of the flag bearers of the two major parties in the country: Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC). This explains the incessant politico-religious crisis we saw in most Northern parts of the country, especially, Plateau, Kaduna and Kano during that time. The case of Kaduna state was a one of outright religious bias on the part of the state government in power then against the Christian population. The Christian population in Southern Kaduna have for long born the brunt of lop-sided distribution of the political positions in the state in favour of the Muslim population; a similar scenario that as well characterizes the past government of Mohammadu Buhari at the national level. In fact, they have been severally short-changed and condemned to a second-class level of importance in a government that promised equal rights and opportunities for all. More often than not, for no just cause, they are slaughtered like fowls by their Muslim counterparts backed by a seeming complacency, nay, complicity by the then state government. By the same token, the ongoing merciless genocide of several communities in the North-Central States of Benue, Plateau, and other parts of the country, spearheaded by Fulani bandits, and receiving little or no interventions from the Muslim-led government in power may not be divorced from the states' overwhelming support for an opposition Christian candidate in the 2023 general

elections. While this claim may be faulted, its significance cannot be ignored. These fanatics are well-positioned tools for political violence in the guise of religious rivalry and crisis. We have seen more and more of this that peace and calmness seem to be strange to the people of these areas. Pathetic! Often, religious rivalry could snowball into a full-blown insurgency. The Islamic Fundamentalist Group, *Boko Haram* which came at the heels of the 2011 elections is a clear instance of what a marriage of political interests and religious sentiments could produce.

In any event, the history of religious conflicts in Nigeria, so to speak, dates as far back as 1953. Since, then, the co-existence of these two major religions in the country has been characterized by unhealthy rivalry, conflicts and clashes. Just a number of disturbing instances to convince us of how bad things have been. The Igbo massacre of 1966 in the North that followed the counter-coup in the same year had a dual cause, namely, the Igbo officers' coup and the already existing sectarian tensions between the Igbos and the local Muslims (Michael, 1986). In the 1970s and 1980s, the *Maitatsine* Islamic uprising held the entire nation hostage. In 1991, a crusade organised by a German evangelist, Reinhard Boonke led to a religious riot which resulted to the death of a dozen souls. In 2002, Nigeria lost her right of hosting the Miss World Contest to London. No thanks to the religious demonstrations and violence leading to deaths of over two hundred persons in Kaduna with a *fatwa* placed on the life of Isioma Daniel who wrote the article that led to the demonstration (BBC Reports, 2002).

Today, our society is at the mercy of one face of religious or religiously-coloured crises and conflicts or another, with *Boko Haram* and Fulani Herdsmen banditry as the deadliest of all. The scenario is heart – rending and the consequences have been woeful. Presenting the disastrous impact of religious crisis and violence and its concomitant impacts on the economy, social and political sectors, Zakaree and Egwaikhide (2012) presented a statistical analysis that:

Since 1999, more than 10,000 Nigerian have been killed in sectarian and communal attacks and reprisals between Muslims and Christians. The most serious of these clashes, they said, “occurred in Kaduna State (February and May 2000, and November, 2001); Jos, Plateau State (September 2001); Kano State and Yelwa, Plateau State (February – May, 2004); and in Northern and Southeastern Nigeria.

They also went ahead to decry that:

“In the ethno-religious hostilities that broke out on May 1 and 2, 2004 in Shimkar and Yelwa in Plateau State, and spread to the neighbouring communities of Zomo, Dokar, and Lupidi, Laraba and Unguwar Adam, a total of 735 families including 1,543 displaced children lost their homes and took shelter in school compounds, while another 2,770 people took refuge in five camps in Bauchi States. Approximately 2,000 people were reportedly displaced in various parts of Plateau State, while another 8,000 displaced people took refuge in the remains of their burnt houses. 22 out of the 33 people hospitalized in Bauchi were confirmed dead. Between 10 – 12 May, 2004 in the Sharada area of Kano city, according to the Kano State branch of the Nigerian Red Cross Society, about 36 people were killed and 598 injured, out of which about 500 carried bullet, machetes and arrow wounds. About 17,087 people were internally displaced (Information Bulletin, 2004) Zakaree & Egwaikhide (2012).

The resultant effect is that:

“In most of these crises the country suffers huge losses in both materials worth billions of Naira, and human resources. Able bodied workforce that could have contributed to the economic development of Nigeria are wasted in their prime ages, especially the Youth Corps members serving their father land Zakaree & Egwaikhide (2012).

The Fulani Herdsmen banditry has become the most destructive terror group in the country. The Australian-based global institute for economics and peace recognized the attacks attributed to the Fulani herdsmen as terrorist attacks, and in 2014, the group was ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the list of the world's deadliest terrorist groups (Akpore-Robaro, M. & Lanre-Babalola, F., 2018). In a rather further disturbing dimension, according to Genocide Watch's report, Nigeria is paraded as the leading focus of Islamic Jihad and religious intolerance in Africa, with a reported number of Christians murdered within the first four months of 2021 (From January to April, 2021) alone pegged at 1,470 victims, with most of these killings, rapping, maiming, abductions, etc., largely attributed to Jihadist Fulani herdsmen (George et al., 2025). Of course, with a continued government's complacency, the number of attacks and casualties since then has continued to be on the increase.

#### **IV. The Socio-Economic Domension Of Religious Rivalry And Crisis In Nigeria: Realities And Tolls**

In its larger context, the socio-economic value of any country is very pivotal to its economic and social position in relation to others. Thus, socio-economic systems, dimensions, policies and projects of any country are indeed of optimal relevance for sustenance and integral development of a country. Its proper utilization and

management yields a progressive development while its misuse and abuse are tantamount to stifled growth. Nigeria is a country blessed with abundance of natural, mineral and agricultural resources that if properly harnessed would lift Nigeria to a greater height. It has been adduced that out of the 1,299 billion barrel of world oil proved reserve, Nigeria has about 35.88 billion barrel or about 2.7 percent of the world total oil proved reserves, and ranked tenth behind Saudi Arabia, Canada, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, UAE, Venezuela, Russia and Libya. Nigeria has about 2.9 percent of the world total natural gas proved reserves, which amount to 171 trillion cubic metres, and supplies about 3.5 percent of the 63.8 million barrels, and 1.4 percent of the 813.8 billion cubic metres of the world total oil exports and natural gas exports per day respectively (Adebayo, 2010).

From this brief statistical exposition, it becomes clear that Nigeria has a presumed sustainable economy should it be properly managed and equitably distributed. However, lack of proper economic utilization and distribution, economic covetousness by unscrupulous persons, corruption, poverty, just to mention a few have all metamorphosed into recognizable calibres of religious crisis in Nigeria. Once governance eludes the masses, they naturally seek refuge in politics of religious, racial, tribal or ethnic affiliations. Religion is often a victim of bad government and harsh economy. People prey on religion to achieve their socio-economic interests, as seen in cases where some religious leaders commercialize religion and religious ritual to enrich themselves at the detriment of their gullible and vulnerable members. In the same vein, socio-economically poor youths are also willing tools for fermenting religious crisis. Building on the foregoing revelations, we may consider some socio-economic motivations behind religious crisis.

### ***Poverty and corruption***

What is so ironical in Nigeria's economy is that albeit Nigeria is really blessed with booming oil economy and other natural and mineral resources as aforementioned, she still wallows in poverty and wretchedness. Statistics have proven that "as of 2016, 112 million Nigerians live in poverty. In 1990, that number was 51 million" (Adebayo, 2010, p. 213). It beggars belief that as Nigeria, a country with over 200 million population and the most populous African country increases numerically, poverty rate grows geometrically. Primary among the causes of the endemic poverty bedeviling the country is systematic and well calculated corruption crippling the socio-political and economic dimensions of the country.

Moreover, a noticeable effect of poverty is poor access to education which doubles as a recognizable dimension of religious crisis. When there is poor access to education, people cannot be led out of their ignorance especially ignorance of the evil of fanaticism and fundamentalism in religious practice. Education is an enlightening experience. Poverty stifles and inhibits the basic infrastructure-education- that would have led to a better understanding of meaning and practice of religion. Nothing stifles the conscience more than the twin weapons of poverty and Ignorance. It is therefore not a surprise that religious crises are predominantly carried out in areas where there are poor or no access to education, the northern part of Nigeria. It is also not a surprise that one of the deadliest harbingers of religious crisis called *Boko Haram* simply means *European Education is forbidden*, that is *Boko* (Education) is *Haram* (forbidden). Thus, one of the socio-economic consequences of religious crisis remains poverty in all its ramifications. Hence, the socio-economic situation of poverty and corruption and its ripple effects remain an important dimension of religious crisis. The height of this ugly result is the displacement of people from their homes, as they scamper for the safety of their lives. Many people have become refugees in various Internally Displaced Camps in the country, rendered miserable and sub-human.

### ***Mass unemployment and its concomitant effects***

Another effect of poverty is Mass unemployment. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2023, about 33% of the Nigerian youths-those under 30 years-estimated to be 60% of the nation's total population are unemployed (Adeniji, 2024). Idle youths are usually the victims of religious crises. They are the soldiers constricted and indoctrinated to fight for religious purposes. They are usually victims of the socio-economic situation of the country, mass unemployment, making them instruments and watchdogs to be used by unscrupulous people for their selfish agenda. Were there affordable jobs for the youths, there would be less opportunities to engage in such heinous ventures.

### ***Multi ethno-religious space of Nigeria and its socio-economic effects***

One of the predominant social structures which influence economic, legal, political and cultural and particularly socio-economic systems in Nigeria is religion. "Family, religion, law, economy, and class are all social structures" (Adebayo, 2010, pp. 214). Nigeria is a multi - ethnic and multi - religious space with cultural diversities, varied faith convictions, different attitudes and approach to realities and diversified convictions of life. It is actually the amalgamation of two protectorates, namely: Northern and Southern protectorates, with varied political, economic and administrative convictions, by the British colonialists for administrative convenience in the year 1914 that gave birth to the country Nigeria. Nigeria harbours over 500 different ethnic groups with three predominant ethnic groups namely Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba and three predominant religious

affiliations, namely: Christianity, Islamic religion and the respective Native Traditional religions. Socially, she comprises varied social classes-the upper, middle and lower classes-due to their different levels of access to resources. All these bring to the fore the perceivable problems of struggle for survival especially socio-economic struggles which include the struggle for socio-economic relevance, struggle for economic sustenance and also poor accessibility to available resources. Adebayo (2010) remarked that with the exit of the colonial masters, the amalgamation which had served administrative convenience in the colonial era became a cause for untold disaster.

Furthermore, he also gave a historical purview of various socio-economic crises witnessed in Nigeria which have evidently metamorphosed into religious crisis. This is because the struggle for relevance and control of economic resources remains the struggle between different ethnic groups with different religious convictions. Thus, socio-economic struggle for relevance and control was given a religious coloration to boost its appeal to legitimacy. For him, socio-economic struggle is attributed to struggle for autonomy and control of respective resources (Adebayo, 2010).

In another place, he writes:

...the violent protests in the Niger-Delta over perceived injustice in resource distribution;... the menace of Odu'a Peoples' Congress (OPC) and the accompanying violence in Lagos and Shagamu areas; the formation of the Arewa Peoples' Congress (APC) and the Igbo Peoples' Congress (IPC); the MASSOB feeble attempt to resuscitate Biafra; the Sharia crisis and the demands for a confederation; the South-South demand for the control of its resources; and all the recent interethnic/ religious conflicts in various states across the country are all...based on the historical structures of mutual fears and suspicions among Nigerian groups in a competitive process (Adebayo, 2010).

In a nutshell, the implication of the above observation is that these inter-ethnic crises which have been given religious appellations are all the bubbles of socio-economic situation. The power tussle and other ancillary socio-economic problems were all given a religious consolidation simply for intensification of the struggle knowing full well the power of emotions and sentimentality inherent in religion. Thus, religious crisis in Nigeria has never been a fight for supernatural identification; it has its socioeconomic dimensions. It is simply, covertly or overtly, a fight for socio-economic relevance, sustenance and resource distribution. Economic marginalization of ethnic groups and struggle for relevance are all socio-economic issues and these issues have become a recurring cause for religious crisis. It was therefore not a surprise when there arose a proposition for the establishment Islamic banking in the country. Islamic Banking is a system of banking that is compliant with the philosophies of *Sharia* (Islamic law) and its practical application through the development of Islamic economics. In its dictates, *Sharia* prohibits either paying or receiving interest fees for lending and accepting money respectively-a practice known as *riba* (usury) (Olaoye et al., 2013). All these are clear indications of adulteration of religion with socio-economic agenda.

## **V. Recommendations**

**1. The imperative of dialogue/ common solidarity/forgiveness and tolerance:** The Second Vatican Council (1965) has given an impetus for Catholics to engage in dialogue with people of other faiths. In no small way have the Fathers encouraged and promoted interreligious dialogue, such that a document on the Council, "Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Relations" (*Nostra Aetate*) was devoted to fostering better relationship, understanding and mutual co-operation between Catholics and adherents of non-Christian religions. As discouraging as the slow pace of implementing this call for mutual co-operation among various religions may be, especially in countries like Nigeria, and as many as there are many challenges to the fruitful results of a number of dialogical initiatives many Christian-Muslim bodies have taken, there is no alternative to continued calls for sincere dialogue, given its place in bringing about forgiveness and healing, tolerance and a lasting solution to unhealthy religious rivalry and crisis in the country.

### **2. Catechesis, sensitization, and enlightenment of the adherents of the two religions**

The inevitability of enlightenment in arresting unhealthy religious rivalry and crisis in the country is even clearer when we remember as we noted before now, that ignorance combined with poverty is a breeding ground for religious indoctrination, fundamentalism and consequent crisis. Lack of enlightenment makes several people vulnerable to pathological indoctrination by their fanatical religious leaders and manipulation by dubious politicians in the guise of religious promotion. There is need for religious leaders to undertake an intense catechesis and enlightenment of their flock on the real meaning of religion and on the core doctrines of their religion so that they may be able to know when they are provoked into fighting for the political cause of some politicians or class interests in the web of religious sentiments. War, conflicts and aggression have never been the founding characteristics of any true religion. Such indoctrinations as we have highlighted have garbs of socio-economic and political quests. They should also be enlightened on the place of love and peace in the

better survival and happiness of the human race to promote their perception of members of other faiths as religious companions with a common supernatural destiny.

### **3. Striving for sustainable development**

There is a clarion call for all nations to work singularly for integral and holistic development of their nations especially on equitable distribution of resources. By sustainable development we mean “the efforts at improving the socio-economic and ecological status and at exploiting and processing the environment or natural resources for the purpose of improving the quality of human life in such a way that the needs of the future generations are not jeopardized” (Adebayo, 2010). The onus lies on the Nigerian government and on the administrative bodies to work on principles and policies that would make such hopes realities. This will thus engender a positive appreciation of the nation’s economy and a more sustainable growth, thereby eschewing all forms of crisis capable of arising as a result of socio-economic structures.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The bearing the socio-economic and political factors have on religious rivalry and crisis particularly on Christian-Muslim co-existence in Nigeria is as clear as it is disturbing. Religious crisis is a whirl wind that blows no one any good. If these anomalies are properly addressed, there will be peace and stability. If they are left or relegated underground, their ripple effects will remain disastrous to the integral health of any nation. The Nigerian government has a pivotal role to play; it must sit up to its primary duties of safeguarding the security and welfare of an average Nigerian, and desist from playing the ostrich or singing the tune of a biased umpire while the country fails and ails, and leaves the citizens lose hope on their country. Likewise, the religious leaders also have some significant roles to play in the lives of their members and in assisting the government in stemming this tide. No nation, not Nigeria, not any other nation can make meaningful progress with the level of religious rivalry and bitterness Nigeria plays a host to. Resolving this puzzle is not optional, it is the only sustainable choice before us!

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