

Religious Violence in Nigeria – the Causes and Solutions: an Islamic Perspective

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Introduction

M. M.C. K. Ajuluchukwu in his rejoinder to Northern Zone of the Christian Association of Nigeria's booklet *Leadership in Nigeria* observes: "Ordinary Nigerian know nothing about inter-religious cleavages except when incited by their respective doctrinal leader.¹" This remark is a challenge and indictment to Nigerian religious leaders, and worth taking up keeping in mind the recent history of Nigeria in term of inter-religious harmony. So the purpose of this article is to examine the causes of inter-and intra-religious violence in Nigeria. It will also examine the role of religious intellectuals in the unfolding disturbances witnessed in Nigeria within the last twenty years, and what could be done to prevent recurrence and promote an environment of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

Survey of religious violence in Nigeria

Within the last two decades Nigeria has witnessed a variety of disturbances some of which have threatened the existence of the country as a nation. Some of these disturbances could be described as intra-religious while the others are inter-religious. There are others that are more of politico-tribal in nature than religious even though some people may see them as religious simply because each group involved come from a different religion. Below is a brief account of these disturbances according to the above classification.

Intra-religious violence

In December 1980, the Maitatsine riot broke out in Kano, claiming many lives. The exact number of people who lost their lives is very difficult to ascertain. Government presented a figure of hundreds while others put it at many thousands. It was the first major religious violence in the recent history of Nigeria. In October 1982, there was another Maitatsine uprising in Maiduguri in which considerable numbers of lives were also lost. Later on, the same riot spread to Kaduna and to the Sabon Gari area of the city of Kano. In the middle of February of 1984 there was yet another Maistatsine riot in Jimeta-Yola of what was then Gongola State. Some lives were lost. There was another Maistatsine disturbance in Gombe (now capital of Gombe State) in April 1982². Little information was given about it.

Inter-religious violence

The first major inter-religious violent broke out in Kafanchan on 6th of March 1987. It later spread to Zaria and Funtua (now part of Katsina State). Many lives were lost on both sides

¹ M.C.K. Ajuluchukwu, 'C.A.N., Christ and Government' published in *Democratic Weekly*. Sunday August 13, 1989, pp. 9-10.

² C. O. Imo, *Religions and the Unity of the Nigerian Nation*, *Almqvist and Wisksell International*, Uppsala, 1995 p. 21-22. Also see National Concord Newspaper of 27th October 1982.

though that of Muslims was higher. Large numbers of properties were destroyed, most especially mosques and churches. This riot was a result of the misrepresentation of Islam by one Revd Abubakar Bako, who distorted some facts in the Qur'an and made derogatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammad³. In April 1991, roasted meat otherwise known as *suya* brought about a violent confrontation between Muslims and Christians of Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area of Bauchi State. This dispute spread later to Bauchi City and other parts of Bauchi State. Many lives were lost and properties worth millions of Naira were destroyed. These include mosques and churches⁴. Later in the same year, there was more violence known as the Reinhard Bonnke riot broke out in Kano City. Many people died and properties worth millions of Naira were also destroyed⁵. The most recent religious violent is the one reported in the Guardian Newspaper of May 28 1998 in which twelve people were said to have been killed at Abule-Taylor on the outskirts of Lagos⁶. According to the police report, it was a pre-emptive attack on another Maitatsine sect led by Alhaji Muhammed Adamu. But since there were no clashes before the police raid, it is very difficult to ascertain the police's claim as it is also difficult to determine whether it was an inter- or an intra-religious problem.

Political violence

These were some other disturbances that were more political or tribal in nature than religious, which were erroneously described by some people as religious, simply because the two parties involved belong to a different religion. These include the Zangon Kataf riot of 1992. This involved Hausa settlers and non-Hausa people of Southern Zaria. The riot spread later to Kaduna, Zaria and their environs. Many people died. In April 1994, Aminu Mato, Hausa by tribe, was appointed as Chairman of the Caretaker Committee of Jos Local Government of plateau State, to the displeasure of local people. This led to serious violence in which many lives were lost and the appointment was reversed. The only connection between these two incidences and religion was that Hausa settlers in the first case were largely Muslims and Aminu Mato in the second case was also a Muslim, while the opposing sides were largely Christians.

Causes of religious violence

Many factors are responsible for religious violence in Nigeria. However, in order to do justice, it will be proper to classify these factors according to the nature of the violence. As already pointed out, Nigeria has experienced both intra and inter- religious violence. In the case of intra-religious violence, two major reasons can be identified. Firstly, there is ignorance or half-knowledge of the true teaching of the very religion that the people involved claim to be defending. For example, if Maitatsine had been well informed enough in Islamic teachings, he would have realized that at no time did the Prophet or his companion attack anybody who has declared himself as Muslim. He would have realized also that gentle persuasion is more effective in making people observe the true teaching of religion than force, as is enjoined by the Qur'an: "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..."⁷

³ Bshir Isyaku. *The Kafancha Carmage* (no Publisher) 1991, p. 25

⁴ See *the Punch Newspaper*, 22 April 1991, pp. 1-2.

⁵ See *The Guardian* (News paper) 17 October 1998. pp. 1-2.

⁶ *The Guardian* (Newspaper) 28 May 1998, pp. 1-2

⁷ Qur'an 16: 125

The second reason is the economic factor as a cause of religious violence in Nigeria. In spite of the fact that the country is blessed with both human and natural resources, the gap between the haves and the have-nots is ever on the increase and this has led to frustration and disillusion among average Nigerians on the lower side of the economy. While many of them turn to outright criminal activities, many others turn to churches and mosques. That has also led to a proliferation of churches and mosques having extreme tendencies.

As for inter-religious violence, it is possible to identify many factors, four of which are the following:

1. *The lack of recognition of one another:* Muslims in particular believe that Christianity does not recognize Islam as a religion that is entitled to exist and consequently it does not recognize their (Muslims) other rights. They maintain that if there is any recognition of Islam by the Christians in Nigeria, it is simply because the Muslims have refused to be ignored.
2. *Campaigns of hatred and blackmail:* Both Christians and Muslims are actively involved in campaigns of hatred against each other. This is manifested in various forms including: incitement, distortion of fact about each other, blocking each other's chances as demonstrated in the issues of *Shari'ah* and Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). Beside that, blackmailing and the distortion of facts caused the famous Kafanchan riot, according to Bashir Isyaku and Imo⁸. It was reported that one religious leader, the Revd Abubakar Bako, publicly misinterpreted and falsified some verses of the Qur'an and made uncomplimentary remarks about the Prophet Mohammad to the hearing of Muslims.
3. *The lack of genuine desire to understand each other's belief and culture:* It is true that institutions of higher learning here and there offer some courses under various names but a careful study of such programmes has shown that they were not intended to foster understanding and respect. Instead they are used as a means of blackmailing and incitement, under the cover of academic freedom and dialogue.
4. *Extremism:* Extremism from both sides is another important reason behind religious violence in Nigeria. As indicated above, in most cases this extremism is based on poor knowledge of the teaching of the religion being defended by the group involved. It is very unlikely that Christianity taught the Revd Abubakar Bako to provoke adherent of other faiths as a means of propagating his religion.

It is worth noting that most outbreaks of inter-religious violence in Nigeria were between Islam and Christianity. This is due to an old rivalry between the two that has dates back to the sixth century A. D., the time of the advent of the former. This is coupled to the fact that Christianity came down to Africa (Nigeria inclusive) through the West, which, according to Wifred Smith, has seen Islam as enemy and threat. In his words:

Europe has known Islam for thirteen centuries, mostly as an enemy and a threat. It is no wonder that Muhammad more than any other of the world's religious

⁸ Isyaku Bashir. Op. cit. p. 25. Also see C. O. Imo, op. cit.. p. 26.

leaders had had 'a poor press' in the West, and that Islam is the least appreciated there of any of the world's outside faith⁹.

This perceived threat and enmity were passed down along with colonialism and Christianity, to the colonies. At the local level, flavours were added to create a blind rivalry between the two religions. The relationship between the two is so hostile to the extent that there is hardly any point of agreement except in the areas of recrimination and suspicion, even where there is no genuine ground for one. The mere fact that an adherent of one of the two faiths presides over affairs of the nation or headship of a parastatal not only provides room for accusation but also will instantly lead to the conclusion that he is using his position to Islamise or Christianize the nation even when the opposite is the case. Furthermore, the sense of threat felt by one of these two religions can be explained by the fact that both have much in common, when compared to other religions such as Judaism and traditional religion.

Position of Islam on religious violence

Islam, like other religions before it, sees religion as an ideal way of life that has to be shared with others by way of propagation and preaching rather than forcing it on others. Qur'an 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..."¹⁰ The position of Islam is probably informed by its belief that the place of faith is in the heart. When some desert Arabs came to the Prophet and claimed that they were faithful. Qur'an replied: ..Say ye have no faith, but ye (only) say we have submitted our will to God, for not yet has faith entered your hearts..¹¹

In spite of the fact that Islam had to engage in several self-defence wars at its advent, it believes in peace and peaceful co-existence. Perhaps the best way to note Islam's attitude towards peace and peaceful co-existence is the way it dealt with the unbelievers in the Makkan period and also with the people of the book later in the Madinah period. In the Makkan period, there was no any time anybody could be harassed or molested simply because he or she was not a Muslim or if they refused to become Muslim. Instead, Islam made it clear to the Makkan pagans that if they refused to change over from their idol worshipping, they were entitled to continue with their religion:

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 mine¹².

In fact Qur'an insists on kindness and justice to anybody for as long as he did not prevent Muslims from observing their faith:

God forbids you not with regard to those who fight you for (your) faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for God loves who are just.¹³

⁹ Wifred Cantwell Smith in *Modern History*, Princeton University press, 1977, p. 105

¹⁰ Qur'an, 9:15

¹¹ Qur'an, 49:14

¹² Qur'an, 109:1-6

¹³ Qur'an, 60:8

As for the Madinah period, the situation was slightly different in the sense that the inhabitants of Madinah were largely “people of the Book” (otherwise known as *ahl-alkitab*) made up of Christians and Jewish. These are the people with whom Islam enjoys a degree of familiarity because they share many things in common, including common origin as demonstrated in the name given to them in the Qur’an *ahl-al-kitab*. So, Islam first extended the hand of friendship to them by inviting them to dialogue as stated in the following verse:

Say O people of the Book!
Come to common terms as between you and us that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not from among ourselves Lords and patrons other than God...¹⁴

Islam also advises the faithful Muslims that they should not allow arguments between them and the people of the Book to lead to unpleasant situations:

And dispute ye not with the people of the Book except with means better (than mere disputation) unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (an injury): but say, “we believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which come down to you; our God and your God is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)..¹⁵

In fact Islam singled out the Christians for special respect among other people of the book because of what it terms as their affection for the Muslim:

And thou will find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say: Lo! we are Christians.¹⁶

On general note, Islam believes that recrimination of any form, be it verbal or physical particularly between two different faiths, will not bring any good. Hence, it forbids Muslims from abusing non-Muslims:

Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides God, less they out of spite revile (your) God in their ignorance...¹⁷

At the individual level, the Prophet was reported as saying “It is a cursed person that abuses his parent”. His companion asked him how someone could abuse his own parent? He replied: “by abusing someone else’s parent and the other person abuse his father and mother in return”.¹⁸ If Islam forbids abusing and insulting other people, beating and killing is even more repugnant in the eyes of Islam. It forbids Muslims from killing innocent and condemned the Jewish before it for killing the innocent:

¹⁴ Qur’an, 3:64

¹⁵ Qur’an, 29:46

¹⁶ Qur’an, 5:82

¹⁷ Qur’an, 6:108

¹⁸ Abu al-fida Isma ‘il b. Kathir, *tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Abridged Edition), ed. By M. A. Sabuni)

And remember we took your covenant (to this effect); Shed no blood amongst you nor turn out your own people from your homes; and this ye solemnly ratified, and to this ye can bear witness. After this it is ye, the same people, who slay among yourselves, and banish a party of you from their homes..¹⁹

In Islam, nobody should be killed without due process of law and only for offences that requires capital punishment. Jihad involving physical combat is the only justification that can lead to the shedding of blood in Islam but it is a very long process before that could happen. This is because Jihad involving only in self-defence, after exhausting all avenues for peaceful resolution, and after a formal declaration of war by the appropriate authority.

Role of religious leaders in preventing or provoking religious violence

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Leader is a “person followed by others”. By this definition one can describe a leader as an “opinion leader” and in the religious context it includes: Imam, Reverend, Bishop, Pastor, Preacher of any Religion, Religious teacher of any form, and religious journalist. From the definition, one also appreciates the importance of leader in any organization as the person who determines the thinking and action of his followers. That explains why leaders are credited or held responsible for the considerable deeds of their followers.

Islam attaches importance to the position of leadership to the extent that no matter how small the number of Muslims in any given situation may be, be it on a journey or a gathering a leader must be appointed. He must be the best among them in terms of spiritual disposition and character. While he is charged with good and responsible leadership, he is also assured of absolute loyalty for as long as he is within his limit.²⁰ The above explanation shows the extent to which a leader is responsible for what is going on within his organization. The leadership of the two antagonist religions in Nigeria – Islam and Christianity cannot exonerate themselves from the present situation between the followers of the two religions. Because whatever idea or impression is held by the followers of each religion, this depends on the kind of information passed down to them by their leaders.

A careful study of the relationship between the two religions shows that instead of using the areas of common interest between them to foster better understanding, the leadership of the two religions particularly the intellectuals use considerable amount of their efforts in terms of literatures and sermons to incite or create sense of hatred and enmity among the followers. Many books have been written not to bring about reconciliation and understanding but in order to present “ugly side” of the other faith, even if this so-called “ugly side” may even been deliberately falsified. The scholars, though knowing quite well that only tolerance and the spirit of give and take can bring about peaceful co-existence, refuse to recognize and accept the right of other faiths to exist in the first place, and even less of giving other rights that make existence meaningful.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Muhammad b. Isma'il al-kahallani As-Sana'aani, *Subl As-Salam*, Dar Ihya, At-turath al'arabi, Cairo, 1960, vol. 1. p. 116.

In the situation where there is a spirit of tolerance and co-existence, there is no reason why the issue of membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) should present a dilemma to Nigeria, which has more than fifty per cent Muslim population, while Ivory-Coast and Uganda with smaller Muslim population find it convenient to be members of the OIC. Moreover, if Nigeria can be a member of British Commonwealth presided over by Queen Elizabeth II, the head of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion, opposition to the OIC by any religion in Nigeria is very difficult to understand, after all both organization are no more than political and economic forums. As Justice Bashir Sambo of Abuja Shariah Court puts it: “If OIC provides money to Nigeria to construct a bridge or road, not only Muslims will use it..²¹

Equally, if commonwealth provide money for any project, not only Christians will benefit from it. Already there are many things working in favour of Christianity at the inconvenience of other religions. The present official working hours, which have made Saturday and Sunday completely work-free days, is in favour of Christianity whereas Friday, which is the equivalent of Sunday in the Muslim calendar, is not. If the Muslims had insisted and agitated for making Friday a work-free day, as has been done in other countries like Lebanon, they would have won but it would certainly have created inconvenience to all workers.

Christians often argue that Muslims are not interested in entering into dialogue with them. They cite some changes, which according to them were aimed at establishing a bridge between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria. They mentioned, for example, that almost every university and seminary that offer courses on Christianity include dialogue as a subject in their syllabi. They also study Islam and other world religions.

Muslims in turn argue that it is Christians who do not have an interest in genuine dialogue. They admit that Christians offer a variety of courses in the name of dialogue but the end product of such courses in terms of write-ups and utterances show little or nothing in the direction of dialogue or a desire to co-exist. Muslims see Christian’s dialogue as another means to propagate Christianity and blackmail other religions. Muslims argue further that in terms of dialogue they have made giant strides even on fundamental issues, none of which is yet reciprocated by Christians. They maintain that right from its inception, Islam has recognized respected and extended hand of genuine dialogue to Christianity as contained in the Qur’an, the primary source of Islam. Up till now, according to the Muslims, Christians in Nigeria have not recognized Islam and when it comes to religious matters they still prefer to deal with followers of African traditional religions who have little or nothing in common with both Christianity and Islam respectively. Besides that, the amount of blackmailing directed towards Islam is out of all proportion, when compared to other religions such as Judaism and traditional religion. So in their view, meaningful dialogue can only take place when both sides genuinely recognize and respect the right of each other to exist.

It is important to present to readers some of the utterances and published writing of religious intellectuals that, in one way or another, have influenced religious disharmony and at times caused violent reactions. While both sides are guilty of the offence, the level of bitterness and

²¹ BBC Interview with Justice Bashir Sambo of Abuja Shari’ah Court. 12 June, 1998.

hatred felt by each other is the only determinant of which side is guiltier. In other words, this can be judged by the level of treats perceived towards each other.

Examples of Christian polemics against Islam

One Reverend Father, J. O. Odetayo, is reported to have said in his book: *Battle for Nigeria: the Cross or the Crescent*, on page 5:

Every Christian parent holds it a duty to tell his or her children as the Christians inform one another that:

- Allah is the name of the chief of the pagan Arabian deities, being worshipped before Mohammed was born. The spirit called by the name would make sirs worshippers violent and blood thirsty;
- Muslims put no value onto human lives and they are intolerant. Hence they can kill even when hired to do so;
- If any child becomes a Muslim, his or her name is struck off the list of possible renowned achievers and genius in any human endeavours;
- Muslims would not speak the truth with non-Muslim especially on political matter. Hence the Nigerian written constitution was always violated and election figure falsification remained;
- No Islamic country is developed;
- No Islamic State is independent of Muslim Empire whose Headquarters is in Saudi-Arabia.²²

Mohammad A. Ali who was born a Muslim but later converted into Christianity wrote a book entitled *My Encounter with Jesus Christ*. In chapter Two on page 20, there is sub-head “The foundation of Islam”. He states:

*Islam was built upon unreliable five pillars viz: Believing in the oneness of Allah and his messenger, saying five daily prayers, paying the poor due (Zakat), Pilgrimage to Mecca at least one in life, fasting during the month of Ramadan. But all these mentioned pillars are unreliable; hence they did not provide our need known as “salvation”. So, no matter how many pillars Islam or other religion has, whether five or ten pillars does not make sense to the wise.*²³

One G. J. O. Moshay wrote a book that he called *Anatomy of the Qur’an*. The book consists of ten chapters all of which were devoted to the criticism of Islam and the Qur’an. Secondly, he made several attacks on the personality of the Prophet Muhammad and he even described him as a liar. To Moshay, the fact that the word “salvation” was mentioned only once in the Qur’an is an indication that Islam and Qur’an have nothing to do with salvation. This is in contradistinction to the Bible, where the word is repeated many times in each chapter. On the whole Moshay presented the book as if he has come across some fact about the Qur’an that nobody before him is aware of.²⁴

²² Osman Bari, *Islam or Christianity “The Up Right view”* Bureau for Islamic Research, Kano, 1993, pp. ii-iv.

²³ Muhammad A. Ali, *My encounter with Jesus Christ* (No publisher), ND p. 20.

²⁴ G. J. O. Moshay, *Anatomy of the Qur’an*, Fireliner International, Ibadan, 1994, p. 46.

The other works are worth mentioning. The first is a booklet entitled *Leadership in Nigeria*, which was prepared by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the second is a book called *who is this Allah?* Also written by a Christian. The first one was reviewed by M.C.K. Ajuluchukwu, a Christian, who maintains that Nigeria is being Islamised by successive Muslim leaders. These leaders have given undue advantage to Muslims at the expense of Christians by ensuring that the percentage of appointments was always in favour of the former. They also claim that Abuja, the new Federal Capital is being Islamised, because the architectural design of the city was derived from Arab countries and because of the large number of mosques in the city. However, a careful statistical analysis by Ajuluchukwu proved not only the contrary, but also that they book was motivated by sense of intolerance. Presenting his finding, Ajuluchukwu observed that:

*There was nothing in the entire tenure of the First Republic to justify the North Zonal C.A.N.'s allusion about the nation's ruling class, having been dominated by Muslims. Statistically, there were more Christian than Muslim top office holders during the period under review. And since politics is said to be a game of numbers the Muslims could not have been dominant in view of their lesser representation in the hierarchy of Government.*²⁵

Ajuluchukwu seems to have been irritated by the content of the book to the extent that he was compelled to say:

*As one sharing the same religious faith with the Northern Zone of C.A.N., I feel a sense of distress that most of the contents of its aforementioned booklet "Leadership in Nigeria" seem in my opinion, to have deviated somewhat from the diving path of charitable humanity, love, justice and good neighborliness of which the Bible impresses upon true Christians.*²⁶

As for *who is this Allah?*, I have not have the opportunity to lay my hand on it but the title gives an impression of the content and it is not in the spirit of tolerance.

Examples of Muslim polemics against Christianity

The above examples from the Christians are just the tip of the iceberg in view of huge amount work that has been published. However, it is not all a one-way traffic, as Muslims have also made many uncomplimentary remarks about Christianity and they, too, have written much anti-Christian material. This is either as a result of their frustration, that Christians have refused to appreciate the gesture of goodwill extended by Islam or because some Muslim scholars feel that the gap between the two faiths is so wide and cannot be bridged.

²⁵ M.C.K. Ajuluchukwu, *op. cit.*, p.10

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.9

However, there is one fundamental difference between Christian criticism of Islam and Muslim criticism or Christianity. While Christians feel free to attack both Islam and the Muslims including the Prophet of Islam and the concept of God from Muslim point of view, the Muslims feel constrained in attacking Jesus because of their belief that Jesus is one of the prophets of Allah is an article of the Islamic faith. This has reduced the scope of Muslim criticism to the Christian's interpretation of Christianity. Muslims also believe that even though Christianity is divine religion, they contend that with the appearance of Islam, Christianity has ceased to be valid because, according to them, Islam was intended to replace Christianity.²⁷

The following are examples of Muslim attacks on Christianity, based on local rivalry between the two religions. The first book for discussion is *Why You should Never be a Christian*, written by Ishaq Kunle Sanni and Dawood Ayodele Amoo. It deals with fundamental issues that are dear to many Christians; some of these are:

1. Jesus as the Son of God. The authors criticize the Christian's belief that describes Jesus as Son of God and they maintain that it was not accepted by Jesus. In fact, Jesus referred to himself as "son of Man" in several places in the Bible. Examples of this were given as John 3:14, 12:34 and John 12:23.²⁸
2. Jesus as God. The authors criticize the belief among the Christians that Jesus is god. They cite references from the Bible as well as opinion of other Christians to prove the contrary. Among the examples provided are Isaiah 43:10, Isaiah 44:8 and a quotation from the Gospel of Barnabas.²⁹
3. The two authors also stake up the issue of whether or not Bible was inspired by God. At the end they conclude that it was not and if it was, the fact that many revisions of it have been carried out over the years has changed the contents of the original Bible.³⁰

The book also contains other criticisms of both Christianity and Bible, which cannot be mentioned here.

Similarly, another book is titled. *Dilemma of the Faithful Christian* and written by a. S. Suleiman.³¹ Like the previous examples, the author also criticizes Christianity on numerous issues, including the origin of Bible, Jesus as God and many others. As for the origin of the Bible, the author maintains that the New Testament, which contains many of Christianity's teachings, did not come into being until about 200 years after Jesus. The author also maintains that Christianity was to a universal religion as claimed by the Christian. In the words:

The fact that Jesus was sent to the Israelites alone is unmistakable. It is stated in various passages of the Bible that Jesus was sent to no other nation than Israel³².

²⁷ See Qur'an 61:6

²⁸ Ishaq K. Sanni and Dawood A. Amoo, *Why You should Never be a Christian*. Iman Publication. Ibadan, 1987 p.

3.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 23-24

³¹ A. S. Suleiman, *Dilemma of the Faithful Christian*. Ibrashi Publication Centre, Lagos, 1997 p. 1

³² Ibid., p.33

He also argues that the divinity of Jesus was not part of early Christian doctrine. According to him, it stated much later. The original controversy, according to him, was about the relationship between Christ and Godhead but as time went on he was seen as incarnate of God and finally God³³.

These are not the only books written by Muslims as their contribution to the ongoing recrimination between Nigerian followers of the two religions. The title of these two books, like those written by Christians, are not in the spirit of dialogue or peaceful co-existence. Above all, the contents too are not between what the two authors need or must say before they could successfully preach Islam to somebody, as there are many beautiful ideals of Islam that could be cited without necessarily discrediting Christianity or other religions. If Christians insist that their religion is universal what is the business of Muslims in trying to deny it? Similarly, whether or not Qur'an was the word of Allah or the word of Muhammed, is entirely the business of the Muslim. Each group will get the respect it deserves only when we recognize the right of others to exist and accord that right.

Conclusion

In the course of examining the causes of religious violence in Nigeria, a number of facts have emerged. They are:

1. Provocation by religious leaders, Intra- and inter-religious violence in Nigeria is neither incited by laymen nor does it occurred naturally. People who claim to be representing one religion or the other even though they could be described as suffering from a lack of adequate knowledge of the very religion they represent or suffering from a lack of adequate knowledge of the very religion they represent or suffering from extremism, incited this violence. These representatives prevent normal people from seeing negative implications of preaching or provoking violence as a means of advancing their religions.
2. Inter-religious violence is encouraged by the failure of religious leaders or intellectuals to imbibe the spirit of live and let live by accepting the existence of other religions along side their own and through demonstrating this acceptance by recognizing all necessary rights to which others are entitled.

The failure of religious leaders to provide good examples as preached by their religion also has a serious and negative impact on inter-religion relation. When the Prophet Muhammad was in Makkah he was nicknamed "*Al-amin*" (the trustworthy), by both Muslims and non-Muslims, because he was able to preach his religion more by his character than his words and this helped him secured more converts than through using force. If our religious leaders and intellectuals could demonstrate the beauty of their religion to everybody within and outside the their fold, it will go a long way to resolving this hostility. Islam does not encourage nor preach violence. Several references from the Qur'an and Hadith are the living proof to this. Instead, Islam encourages peace and peaceful co-existence with other religions for as long as those religions wish Islam same Islam also encourages kindness and justice to every body irrespective of their religion.

Inter-religious violence was also very much encouraged by the "tit for tat" spirit that exists between the two main religions in Nigeria. This is demonstrated by provocative utterances,

³³ Ibid., pp. 12-14

damaging literature and competing atmosphere that at presently prevails in Nigeria. This work has also revealed that the policy of recrimination and blackmailing adopted by respective followers of the two religions has not and will not bring peace or any other desirable objective. If the desire of the Revd Odetayo in writing his book, *Battle for Niger: the Cross and the Crescent*, was to see all Nigerian Muslim renounce their faith and *en mass* convert to Christianity, which has not happened and never will. Equally, if the intention of Suleman, Kunle Sani and his co-author was to make all Christians renounce their faith, it has not happened. But their works have succeeded in adding to the bitterness and hatred on the ground.

Solution

To put an end to religious violence in Nigeria, the government, groups and individuals have very important roles to play in their respective capacities. Government should set up a religious committee made up of religious leaders and intellectuals from the major religious groups in the country with representation from all the federal states. This committee should serve as a regulatory body for all religious activities in the country. It will also serve as regulatory body for all religious activities in the country. It will also serve as an advisory body to the government and link between various religious groups.

Government, through the religious advisory committee should ban any kind of preaching that involve criticism, condemnation and abuse of other religions. Likewise, any book that contains criticism, condemnation or negative impression of other religion should be outlawed. If it is possible for manufacturers of two brands of the same drug to advertise their products without necessarily discrediting each other, it should also be possible for the leaders of each religion to sell their religion to others without doing so at the expense of the other religion. When set up, the religious advisory committee should embark on genuine dialogue and reconciliation aimed at bringing about the spirit of peaceful co-existence. Such dialogue should focus attention on identifying areas of disagreement so that they can be resolved or avoided. It should also identify areas of abuses such as the ones mentioned above and do away with them if possible through enabling legislation.

Government should encourage the teaching of genuine dialogue at all levels of education. If religious leaders teach people with all sincerity that they should tolerate and respect other religion they will certainly do. Religious leaders should learn to tolerate and respect others' faiths and accept them as part of the reality of life, to live with some things one does not necessarily like.

ARTICLES

Human Rights practice in Nigeria 199-2004: Critique. <i>Professor J. Nnamdi Aduba</i>	1
The Importance of Marine Insurance Law in Foreign Trade <i>Y. I. Isa</i>	20
The Judiciary Functions and Responsibilities in the Presidential System of Government <i>Dr. Patrick Ndubisi Oche</i>	32
The Legal Framework for Community Compensation in Nigeria	49

John M. Shishi

Regime of International Environmental Law: The Import of Kyoto protocol. <i>Abdulkarim a. Kana</i>	72
Articles of Association Extent of companies Power to Alter. <i>Dr. Anthony O. Nwafor</i>	87
Integrating Information Technology into Legal Research: Challenges for the Legal Scholar <i>Janet M. Asagh</i>	108
The Language Factor in the interpretation of Islamic Law: The Word AMR is Focus <i>Dr. A. O. Omotosho</i>	131
Legal Implications of Dual Nationality: The Nigerian case <i>Gabriel G. Jande</i>	143
The Justification for War Under International Law: <i>Suleiman C. Chuks Okoronkwo</i>	158
The Nature and Extent of Mineral and Mining rights in Nigeria <i>Peter T. Akper</i>	173
The Challenges of the Principle of Uti possidetis: An Examination of the case concerning Kasikili/Sedudu Island (Botswana V. Namibia) <i>Dr. Ifeoma P. Enemo</i>	194
Impact of the Distinctio Between Law and Morality on Nigerian National Orientation <i>J.T. Aese and M.M. Dura</i>	217
The Rule of Law and The Prevalent Socio-Economic and Political problems in Nigeria <i>Aondofa Aligba</i>	237