Religious Conflicts and Inter-Religious Development in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract
Nigeria is multi-religious nation with many religions who have engaged in conflicts for decades, leading to terrorist's attacks and suicide bombing in recent times. This paper examined how inter-religious dialogue could be used as a tool to resolve religious conflicts in Nigeria. The paper used multi-dimensional method which involves interview, observation and secondary sources for data collection. Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis to assess the challenges and prospects of religious conflicts in Nigeria. Findings have shown that religious conflicts has caused loss of human lives and properties leading to hunger, refugees camps, psychological torture, under development and insecurity. The paper recommends amongst others, the need for dialogue, and establishment of advisory council for religious affairs, cooperation and unity amongst adherents of the different religious groups in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, Conflict, Inter-Religious Dialogue, Violence and Riot

Introduction
Nigeria is a pluralistic and multi-religious nation with diverse cultures, ethnic groups, languages and religious groups (Ikenga-Metuh, 1989). The country is not an Islamic state. Christians and Muslims each claim 50% of the population. So this is one country with a sizeable Islamic population, but in which Christians do not accept a minority status. While population figures remain political and controversial in Nigeria, what is not in dispute is that the overwhelming majority of the population of the North is Muslim, while the overwhelming majority of the population of the South is Christian (Oyayekan, 1986). The population of traditionalists is fragrant as compelled to Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. The adherents of these religions existed peacefully together until the last 15 years when people of the two religious groups, especially Islam and Christianity started engaging in religious violence, destruction of human lives and properties. This religious scenario has assumed a violent dimension, leading to terrorist attacks and suicide bombing.

The most affected parts of Nigeria with terrorist’s attacks are the North-Eastern and defunct North-Central Nigeria popularly called today “Middle Belt” of Nigeria. These religious conflicts with its destructive consequences is epitomised in the fraudulent enlistment of Nigeria into the Organisation of Islamic Countries (O.I.C.) in the mid-1980s, and the unconstitutional declaration of the Shariah (with its criminal elements) as state law in 11 Northern States between the year 2000 and 2001 (Diana, 2001). This latter development has
done the greatest damage to the Nigerian nation and as result destroyed the fragile peace that existed between Muslims and Christians in Northern part of the country from the time of independence in 1960. What we now find in the area is tension, mutual suspicion, a feeling of insecurity, and occasional eruption of violence. Many non-Muslim and non-indigenes of the affected states in the Northern Nigeria have had to relocate for fear that they might lose their lives during one of the now frequent conflicts, or have their hands cut off for the flimsiest excuse, or simply out of the realisation that their fundamental human rights are no longer guaranteed in these states. The religious crisis in Nigeria has become more frequent than ever before and often times give birth to reprisal attacks in Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria (Nnoli, 2003).

The reprisal attacks by Christians in South-Eastern part of Nigeria are directed particularly to the Northern Muslims who suffer death casualties of every twist of events. The same situation applies to the reprisal attacks by Muslims in the Northern part of Nigeria. In all the reprisal attacks both groups (Southern Christians and Northern Muslims) lose their lives. This ugly situation calls for promotion of inter-faith collaboration to enhance peaceful co-existence, religious harmony and cordial relationship among different religious groups in Nigeria.

**Clarifications of Concepts**

**Religion**

Religion is defined in many ways, and the definitions usually vary in accordance with the level of education and experience of the definers, namely, how they were brought up, what they have seen, heard or read, where they have been and what they have gone through in life. Religion to some people, may be defined in a narrow sense to refer to “a particular group”, or it may be used in a broad sense for “the belief systems, morals, norms and value held by members of the society” (Dzurgba, 2006). Some scholars, on the other hand, hold the view that religion should be seen from a broader perspective and that we should regard it as an integral part of the culture of a people. Religion has been defined as “the existence of a supernatural ruling power, the creator and controller of the universe, who has given to man a spiritual nature which continues to exist after the death of the body” (Bliss, 1972).

Religion in the context of this paper can therefore, be defined 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…All those who adhere to them (Hornby, 2006).

These above definitions of religion given by scholars are accepted by many as a general one because it encompasses all aspects of beliefs and practices that unite people as one moral community.

**Conflict**

Conflict refers to a situation in which there are opposition in ideas, opinion, feelings and wishes. Religious conflicts therefore, can be defined as “a situation in which religious adherents are involved in a serious disagreement or argument with one religious group or the other”. For other scholars, religious conflict is the struggle over values and claims to scarce resources, status and power in which the aims of the opponents are to naturalize, inure, or eliminate their rivals” (Stanley, 1981).
Inter-Religious Dialogue

The term “dialogue” implies mutual exchange. This exchange can be religious, economic, political, social, and educational, among others. Etymologically, dialogue can be described as “…conversational exchange…oral communication…an exchange of ideas and opinions”. Inter-religious dialogue is therefore defined by as a meeting of heart and mind between followers of various religions; a communication between two followers on the religious level. It is also defined as walking together towards truth and a working together in projects of common concern (Nnoli, 2003). Inter-religious dialogue also known as “inter-faith dialogue” involves real inter-personal communion of trust and confidence in the way that all religions collaborate with one another to build up a society that is God fearing and the spirit of brotherhood/sisterhood is sustained by the citizenry. Inter-religious dialogue is also called “a conversation” or a formal discussion between two religious groups, especially when they are trying to solve a problem or end a disagreement. This definition of inter-religious dialogue involves adherents of the different groups who are engaged in talking with the aim of solving a problem to end a disagreement, discord or religious conflict. Inter-religious dialogue is the international engagement with persons of other faiths for mutual understanding, co-operation and learning. It is a continuous process that involves peacemaking and strategies towards building peace. Inter-religious dialogue could be therefore, formal or informal and its essence is to seek relationship with other religious groups in order to expose misunderstanding, stereotype and to break down barriers that separate, create hostility or conflict in the society (Arinze, 1987).

Inter-religious dialogue therefore, could be defined in general perspective as:

A complex process that includes: (i) a sincere effort by persons of good will to purify their knowledge of religions from all prejudices, misunderstanding and distortions (ii) an exploration of the ways in which the adherents of different religions may develop paternal relations expressive of mutual reverence and human solidarity (iii) a combined effort of persons belonging to different systems of beliefs to arrive at a working consensus on conceptions of transcended human values and ideals that may be responsive to the religious aspirations and concerns of contemporary man (Chime, 1985).

This traditional definition of inter-religious dialogue shows that its main purpose is to work towards the common good of all religions in achieving peaceful, cordial and harmonious relationship with one another in Nigerian society.

Background of Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

The history of religious conflicts in Nigeria could be broadly discussed under three broad headings, namely: Religious-Historical and Socio-Political Background to Religious Conflicts in Nigeria, inter-Religious Christians/Muslims Conflicts in Nigeria and intra-Religious (Muslims/Fundamentalists/Orthodox Muslims) Conflicts in Nigeria. The religious conflicts in Nigeria dates back to the period prior to Nigerian Independence in 1960 when religious consciousness started to develop. During this period, there were three major religious groups, namely, African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity and the relationship that existed between them was cordial and peaceful (Bliss, 1972). The religious conflicts experienced during that time were tribal and on regional basis motivated by the desire to acquire political and economic control of the nation’s infrastructures. The struggle for control of political power, economic resources only became noticeable with the outbreak of civil war in 1967-1970. The desire for economic and political control in Nigeria later led to the development of
religious consciousness in country; especially in the Northern part which resulted to religious discrimination among the different religious groups. Thus, the Muslims and Christians started to talk of political control on religious affiliations. As a result, jobs opportunities, recruitment into the armed forces, Para-military and admission into tertiary institutions were now made on the basis of religious affiliations and quota system in Nigeria. This segregation gradually assumed a religious coloration in the relationship among the different religious groups in Nigeria (Ehusani, 1996). The remote causes of religious conflicts in Nigeria have always been misconception, intolerance, misconception and misinterpretation of religious doctrines as well as lack of religious liberty. This drama became more acute during the 1980s and later degenerated into violent open wars and skirmishes in the 1990s. Since then, frequent violent religious conflicts have characterized religious landscape, socio-political and economic spheres of Nigeria (Durkheim, 1915). Thus, from 1980s till date, Nigeria has witnessed countless cases of inter and intra-religious conflicts that have great impacts on the socio-economic, political and religious development of the nation (Adamolekun, 2002).

i. Inter-Religious Conflict in Nigeria
The inter-religious conflict occurs between the Christians and Muslims who constitute the two biggest and well organized religious groups in the Nigeria. The conflicts for most parts have devastating effects on the peace and tranquility processes in Nigeria. However, the adherents of African Traditional Religion are rarely involved, except where the conflicts follow the ethnic cleavage. The most notable inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria include: The demand by Muslims in 1973 for the Entrenchment of the Federal Sharia Court of Appeal in the Nigerian Constitution. This religious demand by the Muslims created a heated debates and long drawn-out arguments on religious and legal grounds among the general public and constituent assembly members on the issue of the Sharia court (Mala, 2000). The Muslims saw the issue as a chance to introduce the Sharia into the rest of the country by establishing a Federal Sharia Appeal Court and by instituting it in all the states. They argued that since half the population of Nigeria was subject to Islamic law, it was necessary for this diversity to be fully acknowledged. A prominent Muslim in Southern part of Nigeria once noted that no true Muslim could legitimately reject the command of Allah. This issue continued to surface in some religions conferences, lectures and workshops, and the Government in 1988 set a committee to review the constitution but the bitterness of both groups paralyzed the activity of the committee (Bala, 1990). This eventually made the government to decide to leave the matter as it was in the 1979 constitution for the states that want to practice Sharia law or Muslims states that are already practicing Sharia law. Other inter-religious conflicts took place in Nigeria include: the 1981 burning of a Christian Church Building by Muslims in Kano, the Fagge Crisis of October 1982 in Kano and the surreptitious Enrolment of Nigeria as a Member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986. The Fagge religious crises of 1982 in Kano started near Sabon gari where some Christians attempted to reconstruct a dilapidated “Christ Church” had the most devastated effect on the Christians in Kano (Gofwen, 2004). The Muslims living around the area felt that the old Church was located too close to a mosque and should rather relocate elsewhere rather than constructing it. The Christians on the other hand, felt that they have to do anything within their powers to ensure that the building was not disrupted by the Kano State government (Bliss, 1972).

Under protection, the Christian soon started to reconstruct the Church. The Muslims reacted violently burning three Churches and vandalizing many other Churches in Kano and it’s environ. The Federal Government resolved this issue by paying ₦75, 000.00 as compensation
to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Kano (Adegbite, 1978). The surreptitious Enrolment of Nigeria as a Member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Nigeria. This was one of the issues that rocked the boat of relationship between Christians and Muslims. It was the most devastating issue that had led to bloody conflicts with loss of lives, burning of Churches and Mosques and destruction of property worth millions of naira. The Muslims in support of Nigeria’s entry into OIC argued:

We cannot see any disadvantage that Nigeria will suffer as a result of joining OIC has not denied Christians freedom of worship, neither has it any way made Islam the official religion of Nigeria (Masha, 1986:16-26).

On the Christian side, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria issued a press release after their meeting thus:

The fact that secrecy and rumour eventually gave way to belated official admission that Nigeria has joined the OIC cannot but disappoint us. Now that the fact is clear, after mature deliberation and having listened to the plea of numerous representations from Christians, non-Christians and some Muslims, we have come to this inevitable conclusion: we do not and shall not agree to Nigeria’s membership of the OIC (Omoyajowa, 1989:16-27).

Enugu Diocese Catholic Laity Council saw the entry as “illegal, unconditional, incompatible and irreconcilable with the long-standing status of the country as a secular nation. The government immediately set up a commission to study the implications of Nigeria’s full membership of the OIC. The body was later converted into a permanent one known as Advisory Council on Religious Affairs (ACRA) with twelve members, each from Islam and Christianity (Olukpona, 1992). The committee resolved that nothing should be done to infringe section 10 of the constitution but could not agree on a categorical statement of withdrawal or non-withdrawal. These conflicts claim many human lives and properties worth millions of naira were destroyed (National Concord, March, 2015).

ii. Intra-Religious Conflicts

There were also many intra-religious conflicts that happened in Nigeria. These include: Kafanchan College of Education Riot in Kaduna 5th March, 1987, Reinhard Bonnke Riot in Kano of 1991, Zango Kataf Religious Riot of 1992, Bauchi Riot of 1991, Alalaka crises of 1994, Shaki Riots of 1995 and 2000 and Maitatsine Riots of 1980-1985 as well as the Shiite Attacks of 1996 and 1997 (Kenny, 1986). The Kafanchan riot of 1987 in Kaduna State started during an open Air Fellowship meeting with mounted loudspeakers of a Christian group, the Evangelical Church of West African (ECWA), at the College of Education in the town. During the fellowship, Abubakar Bello, who allegedly recently converted from Islam to Christianity, was said to have made a comparison between the Bible and the Qur’an (Umar, 1989). A Muslim female student who overheard him found this so odious that she went to the rostrum and challenged him. She then shouted with fisticuffs and other Muslims soon joined. This soon developed into a fight between the Christians and Muslims students which left a Muslim student dead. The riot spread into the town leaving nine people dead. Two mosques were burnt and private properties destroyed. The next day, the riot spread to the predominantly Muslim areas like Zaria, Katsina, Kano and the State Capital, Kaduna (Stanley, 1981). The Muslim Youths (al majaris) attacked Christians, burnt hundreds of Churches, hostels and business houses belonging to Christians. At Wusasasa, the oldest Church in Northern Nigeria, St. Bartholomew was burnt down. The family home of former Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon (a Christian) was burnt, and his late father’s grave
was defaced. It took the intervention of the armed forces to restore order (Mbiti, 1969). The Reinhard Bonnke Riot of 1991 took place in Kano as a result of religious crusade organized by the charismatic movement in Kano. The crusade was to be preached by a German preacher, Evangelist Reinhard Bonnke, and some American preachers. The publicity given to the event attracted the attention of the Muslims who felt that the crusade must not be allowed to hold in Kano. The Muslims then accused the government of double standards for failing to grant permission to one Sheikh Deedat from South Africa who had wanted to organize a religious revival for the Muslims in Kano. They asked why the same government should grant a license to Reinhard Bonnke to preach in Kano, an Islamic city (Agai, 1998).

The Muslims were also annoyed by the tone of the Christians advertisement of the proposed crusades, especially the one carried out by some posters saying, “Jesus for All by the year 2000”. The messages on some of the posters and handbills were even written in Ajami (Hausa language written in Arabic letters) which the Muslims saw as something very provocative. More detested by the Muslims were photographs and pictures of some blind men who were strolling away as they abandoned their walking sticks (Eghosa, 1994). This was supposed to be an open invitation to the blind men and women in Kano to accept Christ as a precondition to regaining their sight. The Kanawa saw this as something very provocative and resolved to stop Reinhard Bonnke’s crusade from holding. Thus, the first attempt by the Muslims was to protest to the government that the Christians should not be allowed to use Kano Race course for the religious revival. Pressure was also mounted on the government to withdraw the permit earlier issued to the expected German Preacher, but it was too late to withdraw Rev. Bonnke’s license. The Christians therefore, changed the venue of their programme to the compound of St. Thomas/St. Louis School in Sabongari. The Muslims still resolved to use force in preventing the crusade (Stanley, 1981).

On the arrival of Rev. Bonnke in Kano, violence broke out. Several hundreds of people were killed on the two sides and properties destroyed worth millions of naira. The Kanawa devoted more time during the Kano riots to destroying Christian’s properties but the Southerners cooperated with one another by constituting themselves into hit squads and militia groups and launched counter-offensive attacks against them, thus inflicting great human and material losses on them also (Kaigama, 2006). In 1992, the Zango Kataf Religious Riot took place with the aim of throwing off the yoke of the emirate rule imposed from Zaria, and to drive away all Hausa/Fulani settlers in the locality. The feuds were fought along religious lines. While in 1991, the Bauchi Riot started as a result of the denial of natives butchers of Bauchi who were non-Muslims the right to use the same abattoir as the Muslim butchers. However, when the disturbances developed, it took on an inter-Christian/Muslim dimension. The main target of the rioters was not only Churches and mosques, but also, Christians and Muslims, some of who were from other parts of Nigeria, especially Igbo Christians from Southern Nigeria. They were attacked by elements among the rioters who saw them as not only other Christian enemies, and also by outlaws, who took the opportunity to loot their properties without having a stake whatsoever in the socio-ethnic conflict (Onaiyekan, 1987). This riot involved the Christianized ethnic minorities of the Tafawa Balewa Local Government of Bauchi State. They rebelled against the emirate rule imposed on them from Bauchi, and temporarily succeeded in expelling some Hausa-Fulani settlers from their area.

The Alalaka crises of September, 6th, 1994 in Kano started when an Igbo man, Gideon Akaluka was accused by the Hausa-Fulani of desecrating a leaflet of the Koran and was
beheaded by some Shites fundamentalists at the Bompai prison where he was awaiting trial (Bringa, 1994). Gidean’s head was stuck to a spear and taken round the city of Kano in broad day light by the “victorious” Islamic faithful. The annoyance and the reaction of how the rioters could have so easily broken into Federal prison intensified the gravity of crises in Kano. The Government of Kano, however, came out with apologies that later calmed the charged atmosphere (Pushparajah, 1983).

But up to the present time, the head of Akaluka is yet to be found by his kinsmen who claim it is an abomination in Igboland to bury their dead headless. As long as the “search” for Akaluka’s head continues in Kano, the relationship between the Igbo and Kanawa will continue to be conflictual. The Shaki Riots of November, 22nd 1995 and April, 25th, 2000 were led by the Tabliq Muslim sect respectively. They invaded the Church and damaged the gate and vandalized Late Rev. Togun’s tomb in the Church premises (Kenny, 1979). The reason given by the Tabig Muslim sect for their action was baptism of new members, among who were some Muslim converts to Christian faith. Another reason was that first Baptist Church gate was preventing Muslims living at the back of the Church access to pass through the Church to their homes (Gunut, 2004). The matter was taken to the court, and the Muslim groups were found guilty and were asked to pay the sum of three hundred thousand naira compensation for the damages done. They were further made to sign an undertaking that they would not disturb the peace of the town. However, the Christians did not get the money because of the persuasion from some eminent Church members. In 1999, the Tabliq Muslims threatened to burn some Churches because a member of “Gidemon International” distributed Bible to Muslim students in AND Muslims Grammar School, Shaki and some interested Muslim students demanded to have copies (Chukwulozie, 1986).

The cause of the April 25th, 2000 crises was an open air preaching organized by Tabliq sect of Muslim in Shaki in front of First Baptist Church, Shaki gate. They blocked the entrance gate to the Church with provocative preaching. The Church pastor reported the case to the police and the king (Okere of Shaki). Efforts to maintain peace by the police and Oba failed. The Muslim Youths broke the fences of the First Baptist Church Shaki to gain entrance, having failed to open the Iron Gate locked by the gateman. The Church and pastorium were set ablaze. The violent destruction was extended to other Baptist Churches in the Town and the house of some prominent Christian members. The government of Oyo State later set up a judicial commission of inquiry to investigate the crisis (Ayandele, 1966). As fanaticism and fundamentalism developed and were practical among Muslim and Christian adherents, each religion was making frantic at creating some reforms concerning the restoration of orthodoxy of their religion. Both Muslims and Christians, therefore, became very aggressive in their preaching’s. These intra-religious conflicts occurred between fundamentalists and orthodox Muslims. Their origin in Nigeria is traced back to the jihads of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio in 1804-1817. Islam was first introduced into Borno area of North Nigeria in the 7th century, and in the Hausa States between 14th and 15th centuries. And with the jihads of Usman Dan Fodio, Islam had made an in-road into many areas of Nigeria and had won large followers, especially in the North (Kukah, 1993).

By the “indirect rule system”, the polarity between the Hausa-Fulani Muslim ruling class and the ordinary Hausa-Fulani made up of peasants (talakawa) and the laboring class, socially stratified and polarized the society that inspires intra-religious conflicts (Miall, 1992). The Maitatsine Riots of 1980 and1985 were the most notable intra-religious conflicts in Nigeria and there were characterized by five major conflicts that took place in different parts of Kano.
These intra-religious conflicts include: the Yan-Awaki Ward, Kano riots of 1980 which claimed 780 live, the Bulunkutu Ward riot, Maduguri riot, the Rigassa/Tundu Wada Ward riot and Kaduna riots of 1982 (Mukhatar, 1992). During these intra-religious riots two people lost their lives in two different encounters. Other maitatsine riots that took place at Dobei Ward in 1984, Jimeta-Yola in 1984 and Pantami Ward, Gombe riot of April, 1985, claimed total loss of close to 600 lives. In the historical development of these intra-religious conflicts, Kano played host to different kinds of Islamic scholars, especially from North Africa and the neighbouring Cameroun and Chad Republics (Arinze, 1987). A few of these Islamic scholars in the colonial and post-colonial periods introduced Kano fundamentalists religious activities, which led to the development of several Islamic sects in the city. The maitatsine riot of December, 1980 was the first devastating in the series of popular denunciation of the activities of some of these fundamentalist Islamic teachers, especially Koranic mallams in Kano; in 1980 when the maitatsine riot took place in Yan-Awaki (Cohen, 1998).

The most articulate among these were: Mohammed Marwa, M. Salih, Salisu Kofar Wamba, M. Damma Kashi, Illyasu Gwammaja, Musa Gwammaja and Uba Yakassai (Mukhatar, 1992). Each of these Islamic scholars preached fundamentalist Islamic religion and denounced those in Kano who belonged to the “Kadiriyya” sects as pagan. They preached that, there is no place in the Koran where such nasty religious sects exist. All the efforts to make mallams stop their illegal religious activities failed. Marwa who was believed to have emigrated from Northern Cameroun to Kano as an Islamic scholar in 1945 struck his neck out as the most deviant of them all when he declared himself “a prophet of God” and started engaging himself in several rituals and statements that the orthodox Muslims in Kano considered heretic. He challenged some contents of the Koran and preached against moderation of Prophet Mohammed and branded as infidels all Muslims using wrist watches, motors, cars, bicycles, among others (Abbas, 2008). Marwa asked God to punish whosoever refused to accept his teachings (… wanda bai yarda ba Allah tat sine mishi...). This was why he was also referred to as “maitatsine”, (He who courses). His followers who had numbered up to between six and ten thousand in 1980 were popularly known as “yantatsine” (the children or followers who curses). On account of his fundamentalist religious activities, Marwa was deported in the early 1960s by Alhaji Mohammad Sanusi, the late Emir of Kano but quickly returned to Kano to continue his religious activities in 1965 (Otite and Olawale, 1999. In 1973, Marwa was again convicted for threatening the peace of Kano and quietly sneaked back to the city after completing his jail terms at Makurdi prison. By the late 1970s, he had become “a menace beyond the law of the land” (Musa, 2013).

On 26th November, 1980, Alhaji Abubakar Rimi, the then governor of Kano State asked Marwa to demolish some illegal structures he had built for his homeless followers and was given fourteen days within which to complete his evacuation from the public land on which the structures were constructed. He was also accused of being in possession of some illegal weapons, which he was asked to submit to the government immediately (Mazrui, 1980). Marwa reacted by asking his followers to attack the “infidels” that had declared war on him and the targets of the Yantatshine were the police and the Orthodox Muslims. Over 500 people including Marwa himself lost their lives in this crisis and goods worth several millions of naira were destroyed by the fundamentalists (Thomas, 1966). Similar riots were organized by the Yantatshine in other parts of Nigeria such as Bulunkutu, Jimeta, Yola, Gome and Funtua between 1982 and 1987. They adopted puritanical fundamentalism and radicalism as tool and use their students and adherents to foment trouble. Furthermore, the Shiite Attacks of
1996 and 1997 were classical incidents of intra-religious conflicts in Nigeria. The Shiites are fundamentalist Islamic groups that caused intra-religious conflicts among the Muslim adherents in Nigeria. The base of the sect in Nigeria was Zaria under the leadership of Mallam Ibrahim El-Zak-zaky who was detained by the Federal Government on account of activities considered to be inimical to public peace and order in the country (Dali, 2005).

The Shiites youth movement, were generally believed to be supported from Sudan and Libya. The sect preached against political corruption and held anti-establishment view. They had a pathological hatred for the Nigerian judiciary and police, all of whom were considered to be instruments of Satan. They particularly referred to the police as “Babbuque”, meaning the “burnt ones”. The Shiites in Kano broke away from their organization in 1992 and for some unknown reasons; they declared Mallam Zaky as their enemy and even had to physically assault him in 1994, while he was preaching at a Mosque at Bayero University Kano (Ikenga-Metuh, 1989). Members of these sects in Kano were popularly known for indoctrinating their converts with “a mixture of anti-establishment rhetoric and threats against Muslims and non-Muslims that do not follow Shiites teachings (Mbiti, 1969). The major grievances of the people of Kano against the Shiites were not actually their anti-establishment activities, but the way they blasphemed against some Caliphs and faithful of Allah. Some of the things they said while preaching were considered by the orthodox Muslims in Kano to be heretic and insolent, and the physical violence within this context. Kano’s peace was threatened several times by the Shiites and two of these moments are quite outstanding in terms of their human casualties (Asue, 2012).

The first was the clash between the Shiites and the Yan tuari in August, 1996. The ‘Yan tuati’ were a special category of street boys/youths in Kano who engaged in different kinds of street hooligalism and were popularly known for “buying” street fights from weak parties, thus helping to fuel simple disagreement into large-scale civil disturbances. The August 1996 crisis was as a result of the failed attempts that Orthodox Muslims around Adakawa quarters made to prevent the Shiites from operating in their area (Agai, 1998). In August 1996, the Shiites had indicated their interests to mark the Id El Maulud, the birthday of Prophet Mohammed, at Adakawa quarters. The people living around this area were worried that such a forum could be used by the Shiites to offend the religious sensibilities of other Muslims. They therefore asked the Shiites to keep away from the area (Onwubiko, 1991). The fundamentalists, however, swore to carry out their programmes as scheduled, asking the members of the community to do their worst. It was at this stage that the Yan tuari threatened that the Shiites either obeyed the simple warning earlier given to them or risk a violent attack. The police also warned the Shiites to keep away from the area, but they remained adamant. As they were defiantly holding their Maulud meeting on the 11th August 1996, the Yan tuari appeared on the scene asking that the gathering should be dispersed immediately. This led to a free from all fight in which various kinds of dangerous weapons were used. Supported by members of the Adakawa Community, the Shiites were, overpowered (Thomas, 1966). The police also came to the scene so quickly that the crisis could not spread round the city of Kano as experienced in the past.

On the 7th February, 1997, the Shiites struck once again, in Kano, on the occasion of the annual Id-el-Fitri prayers that were held at Kofan Mata, one of the popular quarters in Kano. The Shiites came to the vicinity to “punish” the Orthodox Muslims in Kano for their “lukewarm” attitude to the practice of “true” Islam (Parrinder, 1976). The Orthodox Muslims
who started arriving at Kofan Mata praying ground and noticed the presence of the Shiites fundamen-
talists around the praying ground felt that a true Muslim should have violently revolted against
the political injustice and corruption in Nigeria. For failing to take arms against the government of
the day, the Shiites saw the Orthodox Muslims in Kano as accomplices of the Abacha regime (Deryke,
2001). They therefore found it difficult to understand why Allah would not compensate whoever
waged war against such “infidels”. Taking the law into their hands, the Shiites vowed to violently
prevent the Muslims from saying their Id el-Fitr prayer and blocked all entrance to the prayer
ground (Ogbonnaya, 2011). The Shiites started to make provocative statements about the political and
religious leaders who in their own estimation misled their followers from practicing true Islam in
Kano. The police soon arrived at the scene and asked the Shiites to either join the prayer team
or vacate the premise. The Shiites reacted by calling the police sheepish agents of corrupt
regime and when the verbal assault on the police did not yield the desired result, the Shiites
started howling stones and bottles at them. In the shootout that ensued, four of the
fundamentalists were killed and several others wounded (Sanneh, 2003).

Sources of Continued Religious Conflicts in Nigeria
The sources of continued religious conflicts in Nigeria are: The bombing of Afghanistan in
October 2001 - which was followed by a reprisal attack in the city of Kano, Nigeria, by
extremist Muslim groups, who went on rampage, burning Churches and destroying the
property of some Christians (Odomosu, 2011). The war on/and occupation of Iraq and the
continued bombardment of Palestine by Israel. As long as these situations exist, Christians in
the Muslim dominated parts of Nigeria can only sleep with one eye closed, as we perceive a
strong bond of solidarity between Muslims of the Arab world and Muslims in the northern
part of our country. And on the other hand many Muslims believe that whatever the leaders
of the West do, have the blessings of Christians everywhere, even though there is no rational
basis for such an assumption in the contemporary society (Parrinder, 1976). It is nevertheless
important for the leaders of the Western countries to know that their policies towards any
Arab country can have far-reaching implications not only for the Middle East, but also for
countries like Nigeria with a mixed population of Christians and Muslims. The worsening
economic fortunes of the majority of people in Nigeria, following the structural adjustment
programme embarked upon by our leaders at the instance of the World Bank and IMF
(Tunde, 1978). With the increasing level of poverty and unemployment and decreasing access
to the available resources, there is the tendency to resort to scapegoating - pointing accusing
fingers to, or holding the other group responsible for the economic and political woes of the
land.

This situation is often compounded with the problem of ignorance and illiteracy. Our
circumstances in the last few years have demonstrated how easy it is to recruit poor and
ignorant young people into the army of religious fundamentalists (Sanneh, 2007). Problem of
cultural integration made Southerners, the majority Christians in Nigeria to be in constant
conflict with the Hausa-Fulani because of their unwillingness to be assimilated into the
Islamic cultural system. They resisted the Hausa-Fulani attempt to Hausa-Fulanised them or
force to accept Islam, wear Hausa-Fulani dresses and speak Hausa-Fulani languages. The
limitation of the Southerners to Christian’s dominated areas for settlement creates permanent
division or segregation in social settlement and contact (Deryke, 2001). The differing political
philosophy of the two major religions practiced in Nigeria (Islam and Christianity) made
Nigerians not to accept principle of a secular state, which Christians assume had been
bequeathed to the country by the colonial masters. The colonial masters operated emirate rule which was theocratic with the Muslim controlling instruments of power in the prevalently Muslims Northern Nigeria (Kenny, 1986). Christians in these states protested, describing it as the use of government apparatus and money to favour and promote one religion. The fraudulent enlistment of Nigeria into the Organisation of Islamic Countries (O.I.C.) in the mid-1980s, and the unconstitutional declaration of the Shariah (with its criminal elements) as state law in 11 Northern States between the year 2000 and 2001 are other sources that heightened religious tension in Nigeria (Stuart, 2004).

The attempt to register Nigeria as a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (O.I.C) was faced with violent protests by Christians and this led to setting up of a committee to advice government on the issue. The report of the committee has not been published out of resentment and suspicion. This generated tension and suspicions, resulting to religious disturbances in Nigeria. Fear of domination, and mutual suspicion made Muslim adherents to distrust westernization, including the western system of education and western system of government. They saw westernization as deriving from Christian traditions or veiled attempts to ensure that Muslims into abandoning Islam and embracing Christianity (Stuart, 2004). Muslims complained that many elements of the colonial heritage like accepting Sundays and Saturdays as work free days, the name and emblem of Red Cross Society, and the present Nigerian education system, all have strong Christian bias, and give Christianity undue advantage. Christians on the other hand, see the Muslim persistent control of power at the Federal level and the theocratic tendencies of the Federal Government, as prelude to the veiled Muslim objective to secularize Nigeria as an Islamic state. This calls for dialogue in the administration of public affairs in order to allay these fears and clarify any misunderstandings (Ogbonnaya, 2011).

Suspensions and misunderstanding among the two major religions in Nigeria as a result of ignorance of each other’s beliefs and practices leads to massacres that spared neither Christians nor Muslims. Ignorance of other people’s faiths often breeds similar bigotry. Peoples of the different faiths in Nigeria today, needs more dialogue ever to open many doors closed by the tensions that have marked (inter-religious) relations in Nigeria (Cohen, 1998). Provocative preaching’s in the history of violent religious conflicts in Nigeria greatly influenced religious conflicts in Nigeria. Some of these crises were. The Kafanchan disturbances which was provoked by the testimony of a convert from Islam over a blaring microphone and the Bauchi religious riots said to have been provoked by derogatory remarks made by a Muslim boy about a Christian “Suya” (barbecue) (Flere, 2001). Religious Intolerance and Fanaticism in high degree explains the incessant intra-religious and inter-religious conflicts in the country. Religious intolerance cut across all religious groups. Hence, the Muslims are opposed to the Christians and the Orthodox Muslims would have nothing to do with the members of the fundamental sects. Muslims were intolerant of peoples of other religions (Mojzes, 1994). The influence of Non-Nigerian Muslim Migrants from neighbouring African countries like North Africa, Cameroon and Chad Republic by Kanawa played host to religious conflicts in Nigeria. Some of these foreigners exploited open-door policy Hausa-Fulani to turn Nigeria into a breeding ground for many kinds of fundamentalist Islamic ideas. Only one out of the many people who were arrested for the 1995 disturbances was found to be an indigene of Kano state. Most of them came from neighbouring African countries (Roger, 1999).
The worsening economic fortunes of the majority of people in Nigeria, following the structural adjustment programme embarked upon by our leaders at the instance of the World Bank and IMF. With the increasing level of poverty and unemployment and decreasing access to the available resources, there is the tendency to resort to scapegoating - pointing accusing fingers to, or holding the other group responsible for the economic and political woes of the land (Kant, 1973). This situation is often compounded with the problem of ignorance and illiteracy. Our circumstances in the last few years have demonstrated how easy it is to recruit poor and ignorant young people into the army of religious fundamentalists. Urban poverty in Nigeria leads to most of the poor people fighting on the side of the maitatsine and Shites in 1980s (Rescher, 1993). Some of them were farmers who had lost their farmlands in the process of Kano’s expansion as an administrative and commercial nerve center of northern Nigeria. Maitatsine riot for many Islamic scholars was considered to be a conflict of the marginalized urban peasants who were displaced from their lands and had no official means of rehabilitation (Shenk, 1997). The bombing of Afghanistan in October 2001 - which was followed by a reprisal attack in the city of Kano, Nigeria and the continued suicide bombing by Boko Haram extremist Muslim group, who went on rampage, burning Churches and destroying life and property worth millions of naira. As long as these situations exist, Christians in the Muslim dominated parts of Nigeria can only sleep with one eye closed, as we perceive a strong bond of solidarity between Muslims of the Arab world and Muslims in the northern part of our country (Jacques, 1997). Many Muslims on the other hand believe that whatever the leaders of the West do, have the blessings of Christians everywhere, even though there is no rational basis for such an assumption in the contemporary society (Robert, 2006). The phenomenon of Street Culture further promoted religious riots in Nigeria. Most of the riots in Kano according to Albert would not have been seen as fatal as they were if there had not been the problem of ‘street culture’ in the city. The streets of Kano are, at every hour of the day over crowded by many idle hands such as the Almajirai begging for alms and different categories of hawkers or street hooligans like the Yan Tauri looting, maiming and making difficult any preventive action of the people (Hans, 1991).

Obstacles on the Way to Wholesome Inter-Religious Dialogue in Nigeria
There are many obstacles to inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria. Some of these obstacles include: The absence of, or the lack of commitment to the Rule of Law in Nigeria as a result of apparent collapse in moral and family values in Western societies (Stephen, 2007). What is perceived as moral decadence in Western countries is unfortunately often interpreted by some Muslims as the decadence of Christian civilization. And this is a fertile ground for the nurturing of fundamentalist or puritanical (extremist) orientations within Islam. The same tendency towards fundamentalism is noticeable today among fringe sects within Christianity. The "Globalisation of bad news," by which atrocities committed in any remote part of the world are beamed through satellite for everyone else to see, makes dialogue difficult today. Muslims in Nigeria can see all the violence in Iraq and in Palestine in a manner that would not have been possible before our technological age (James, 1999). There is need for international media corporations to know what to do with bad news. In my view there is too much bad news in the media today. A few good things do happen in many parts of the world, but it appears that good news is no longer news-worthy. This situation does not help our quest for global peace (Jean, 1962).
The absence of a central (authoritative) interpretation of the Quoran and the Hadit, and the clear absence in Islam of any authority that can call aberrant or violent extremist groups to order. Thus among the various groups of Muslims that exist in Nigeria and elsewhere, there is no common understanding of the Shariah legal system, the notion of a Secular (pluralistic or multi-religious) society, when capital punishment can be enforced, the status of non-Muslims in a majority Muslim society, the place and status of women, etc (Renée, 2004). We are beginning to have in Christianity also fringe (evangelical) groups which do not operate under any recognised authority or with any well thought-out theology.

**Prospects of Inter-Religious Dialogue in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, today, the need for inter-religious dialogue is more crucial than ever before because of persistence religious conflicts among religious groups. This urgent need for inter-religious dialogue is clearly stated thus:

> There is need for us now to re-examine our judgment and link up more closely with the positive overall vision of biblical theology. We must give more consideration to its view of inter-religious dialogue or inter-faith stages in salvation history...and then we must try to apply this view to concrete religions. Moreover, we must remember that the early Church found itself in a different position vis-à-vis other religions in its milieu, just as Israel did in an earlier day. This hardly fostered a positive evaluation of those other religion (Asue, 2012).

Despite the challenges or obstacles faced by adherents of different religions on the way to wholesome inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria, the inter-religious dialogue has helped in bringing about peace and harmony to our religiously troubled nation. No one can fail to see its importance and the need which inter-religious dialogue assumes for all religions in Nigeria. All religious adherents are called today more than ever before to collaborate so that every person can reach his/her transcendent goal and realize his/her authentic growth to preserves their own religious, cultural values in the presence of rapid social changes (Gremillion, 1978). Inter-religious relations with Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion are very vital channels in bringing about the moral values that unite, reconcile the differences and rebuild bridges of distrust, envy and misconception between adherents of different religious groups in Nigeria (Odumosu, 2011). Inter-religious dialogue is the very heart of our authentic existence and to lack in it is to be opposed to the dynamism which it produces through the gift of God in us. Many people regard inter-religious dialogue as an authentic instrument of communication which one transits to the other, not only what he/she has but also what he/she is. Inter-religious dialogue involves not just words but the entire life because:

> It involves real inter-personal communication of trust and confidence such that all religions collaborate with one another to build up a society that is God-fearing and one in which the brotherhood of all men is a reality and man is able to attain his spiritual and material well-being (Stuart, 2004).

This above assertion presupposes that inter-religious dialogue takes place at different levels. In Nigeria there are four levels that inter-religious dialogue takes place among religious adherents. These include: Dialogue of life, practical dialogue of life or dialogue of action, dialogue of discourse and dialogue of spirituality (Tunde, 1978). Dialogue of life is an
encounter of people of different religious traditions in the course of everyday life. It is a relationship at the level of the ordinary life, such as the family, school and place of trade or commerce. When neighbors of different religions are open to one another, share their projects and hopes, concerns and sorrows, they are engage in dialogue of life (Catherine, 2008). Dialogue of life has characteristics features which bring Christians and Muslims close together in daily life. These include:

Celebrations and festivals like weddings, marriages, sallah and Christians, school graduation, naming ceremonies, among others. These religious activities are opportunities for interactions and demonstration of genuine friendship. Thus, at celebrations and festival periods deliberate efforts should be made to broaden them to include neighbors or friends of other religions (Robert, 2006).

This form of inter-religious dialogue promotes mutual trust and harmonious living among adherents of various religions. It also promotes religious accommodation and empathy which breeds acceptance as a major ingredient of genuine inter-faith. Practical dialogue of life also known as “dialogue of action” is the form of inter-religious dialogue involving people of different faiths, coming together to co-operate in a joint action, towards the promotion of human relations and issues that concerns them such as promotion of peace, justice, protection of the environment, defense of human rights, Hiv/Aids, poverty eradication, and so on. Such collaborations have yielded immense benefits in Nigeria, rather than confrontation, which needs to be, encouraged (Hans, 1991). Dialogue of discourse involves people of different faiths coming together, to exchange information and ideas on their respective of religious beliefs and heritage. They articulate faith perspectives, and encounter one another, in an effort to understand the religion of the other at a deeper level as articulated by qualified and well-prepared representatives of the other religious traditions. Thus, the Nigerian Association of the Study of Religion (NASR) was formed to achieve this goal in Nigeria (Burg, 1997). Today, there are centers for Gender and Social Research (Inter-Gender) that have been involved in such kinds of dialogical discourses.

Dialogue of spirituality is another form of inter-religious dialogue that involves encounter at the level of religious experience. It involves the totality of the person’s religious experience, in mediation, prayer, faith and expression (Cvitkovic, 2004). It is the dialogue of the heart though some people have criticized dialogue of spirituality as compromising one’s religious integrity or tending towards uncritical syncretism, but it immense benefits of peaceful co-existence provides vitas for Nigeria’s Christian/Muslims relations. Inter-religious dialogue has its foundation in the scripture. First and foremost, the family is the example, par excellence of what inter-religious dialogue is and should be in the life of a community of human beings created in the image of God and likeness (Cohen, 1998). The Father, the son and the spirit are a community of life, of dialogue, to the extent that Christ said “the Father is in me and/in the father, He who has seen me, has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). The dialogue that began with creation proves to have its center in Christ from the very beginning. He is the firstborn of all creation because all things were created through him (Col. 1:12-20). God, who is a dialogical being, created man by his nature to be in dialogue with Him and fellow man. The Christian-Muslim inter-relations in Nigeria have become difficult because:

When one side suspects the other of trying to win converts to its fold by means of this inter-religious dialogue. While dialogue cannot close its door to the possibility of change of religion, the aim of inter-religious dialogue is to
increase mutual understanding and respect and to encourage an effort by each participant to be more obedient to the will of God (Stuart, 2004).

Inter-religious dialogue does not attempt to convert people through preaching or indoctrinations; but it aims at building bridges of faith with other people; it learns about other person’s religion, discourages hypocrisy in discussions and real life, avoid provocative preaching bread hatred, ill feelings, conflict or crises; it encourages openness, respect and reciprocity as well as learn to work together, forgives and forget the past memories and wrongs to be able to restrain the excesses and religious extremism of their leaders (Flere, 2001). With the encouragement from the Vatican II, the Church has not been left out in the efforts to entrench the necessity of inter-religious dialogue among other religions in the global society.

In Nigeria, for example, the Catholic Bishops Conference (CBC) has set up two commissions: one for African Traditional Religion with Archbishop S.N. Ezeanya as Christian and the other for Islam with Bishop A. Sanusi; as chairman (Diana, 2001). They have the duties of animating and coordinating the activities relating to inter-religious dialogue. The major assignments of these commissions are to study other religions, promoting understanding, acculturation and inter-religious activities (Kwak, 2005). The Catholic Bishops Conference employed three theological positions in precutting the projects of inter-religious dialogue among other religions in Nigeria. These include: The theocentric approach which emphasizes God as the central and culminating point of all religions, the Christocentric approach insisting on the centrality of Christ in salvation history and the dialogical approach to realize the commitment each person has made to God through the respective founder-Christian through Christ and Muslim through Mohammed that cannot be surrendered without destroying the essential identity of that faith and the Catholic approach that combines these three theological positions without their excesses or exaggerations (James, 1999). These theological approaches helped in sustaining the principles of collaborations between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. Inter-religious dialogue has contributed positively in the development of peace, unity, justice and human rights in Nigeria. For example, Amina Lawal and Safiya, the two women whose condemnation to death by stoning for adultery, which was headlines in the international media, have been discharged on technical grounds (Ikenga, 1989). So far therefore, no one has been executed on the basis of the Shariah criminal law introduced in many states in the year 2000. A few people have their limbs cut for petty offences, while others have been victims of corporal punishment and other acts that amount to violation of their rights according to the secular constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Bliss, 1972).

The Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) comprising of 25 Christians and 25 Muslims, which was founded in the year 2000 and enthusiastically supported by the government continues to function, though the goals and strategies of the body are yet to be clearly defined. There is an apparent disconnect between this high profile bodies that brings together the national leaders of the two main religions, and the ordinary Muslims and Christians on the ground who, especially in the Northern part of the country have to live with perennial religious tension (Gunut, 2004). The Catholic Church at various levels has organised a number of Workshops on issues of Inter-Religious Dialogue, bringing together not only Christians, but in many instances Christians and Muslims (Nnoli, 2003).
One of such dialogue sessions which occurred in the year 2002 was organised in Abuja by the Catholic Secretariat of done in collaboration with Missio Aachen. Among the resolutions reached at that particular Workshop are the following:

i. Inter-religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims is very important because it will help clear the cloud of misunderstanding and create a better atmosphere of mutual enrichment.

ii. Dialogue of action, communion and socio-political life should be promoted at all levels of society. These could include joint social projects, joint health projects, joint economic ventures, etc, that will promote community development and peaceful co-existence;

iii. Christian Women Organisations should reach out to counterpart Muslim Organisations and work out common grounds for dialogue.

iv. Christian and Muslim religious education should be tailored in such a way as to promote mutual respect and peaceful coexistence (Manus, 1992).

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria invites the Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (SCIA) to the opening session of its annual meeting in March every year. At the opening session of its meeting this year, Dr. Lateef Adegbite was present, and he presented a very welcome Goodwill Message from the Islamic community (Adamolekun, 2002). In the discussion that followed his presentation, the mutual desire for peaceful coexistence among Christians and Muslims was very evident. More Christian leaders, including a good number of Catholic priests are now studying Islam, with some doing specialized studies in Islamic Theology and Arabic. A few have gone to Egypt for that purpose. The Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Vatican has been in the forefront in promoting this study of Islam (Chime, 1985). The goodwill messages of the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II on the major Islamic feasts are now published in paid advertorials in Nigerian Newspapers every year by the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. In recent years, we have even published them in both English and Arabic. Above all, the dialogue of life continues, as the overwhelming majority of Nigerians of both faiths lives together, works together, inter-marries and interact in an atmosphere of friendship and mutual respect (Ehusani, 1996). In many parts of the country, a number of community development projects are jointly embarked upon by Christians and Muslims.

On the practical level of discussion, inter-religious dialogue promotes co-existence of the three major religions in Nigeria, while on the theological level of discussion, ATR lacks representations and those who speak for it are mainly Christians and Muslims and the so-called nationalists who do not know themselves or where they belong, for they hardly claim allegiance to ATR (Arinze, 1987). However, wherever Christians and Muslims gather for an inter-religious dialogue, it is taken that ATR is also represented indirectly. The purpose of inter-religious dialogue is to provide an academic form for a discussion on the three principal religions in Nigeria (Islam, Christianity and ATR) with a view to encouraging mutual understanding and cooperation among the people (Hornby, 2006). One important thing to note here is that the discussions between ATR and other religious (Christianity and Islam) is growing and more studies have been carried out by researchers on different areas on inter-religious dialogue between ATR and other religious groups aspects such as: Titles-taking, secret societies, oath swearing in ATR shrines, comparative studies of Christian and ATR doctrines among others, with a view to identifying areas of agreement and divergence, conflict and formation of guidelines for a practical approach to ensure maximum pastoral benefits as well as the pastoral care of converts (Agai, 1998).
enhanced cooperation between Christians and Muslims in the task of building a just, peaceful and democratic Nigerian society, working together in all the projects involved in our democratic transition has enhanced unity, mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence (Ityavyar and Gundu, 2004). It encouraged greater networking among civil society groups, including church NGOs and NGOs of Islamic origin in the promotion of human rights and in the struggle for greater justice and genuine democracy in our country (Eghosa, 1994). This common meditation and action to respond to the challenge of corruption, mismanagement of resources, bad governance, collapsed infrastructure, widespread disease, especially the epidemic of HIV/AIDS, the fallen standard of education and the collapse of moral and family values, among others, positively contributed in the development of religious dialogue in Nigeria and addressed internationally Islamic fundamentalism which has negatively impacted on the country in recent times (Bartolotta, 2011). Inter-religious dialogue ensured that a uniform standard of human rights is applied everywhere. These human rights emanate from some fundamental and universal human values that are upheld by everyone who wishes to be part of the civilized human society.

Conclusion

Inter-religious dialogue demands a collaborative approach in resolving religious conflicts and deepening the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. It demands respect, mutual responsibility and peaceful co-existence among adherents of all religions in Nigeria. Most importantly, inter-faith dialogue demands a lot of courage, sincerity, commitment and people who are well informed of the issues about religion in Nigeria. It also has the prospect of helping to moderate the growing proliferation, of diverse religious voices in Nigeria, and amidst the ever-raisining upsurge of religious revivalism and fundamentalism in Nigeria. Inter-religious dialogue holds hope for meaningful relations that guaranteed religious peaceful co-existence, mutual respect and the stability of the Nigerian nation. Thus, the following suggestions would in view go a long way in promoting cooperation and unity, among the Christians and Muslims in Nigeria:

(i) There is need to encourage interaction of ideas among the adherents of the two religions. The school system has an important role to play in this regard.

(ii) Proselytization should be pursued with caution. It should be done without offending the adherents of other religions.

(iii) The advisory council for Religious Affairs should vigorously pursue a policy of amplification of areas of similarities in the two religions among the masses, making use of the mass media.

(iv) The media should treat religious issues with caution and less sensation. They should strive to maintain objectivity when reporting matters involving the adherents of the two religions.

(v) The government has a vital role to play in promoting co-operation and peaceful co-existence among the adherents of the two religions practices in Nigeria. There is need for the spirit of give and take. If these suggestions are pursued with sincerity, we have no doubt in our minds that the Christians and Muslims of Nigeria would be able to accommodate one another on the basis of the spirit of tolerance entrenched in the teachings of the Holy Books (The Bible and Qur’an). A more harmonious relationship would be developed among them and they would be able to live together as partners in progress.

(vi) Emphasis should be place on the Rule of Law, Economic Growth, Justice and Fair-play and the Dialogue of Life.
References


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