



RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AS A PANACEA TO RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article examines religious education as a panacea for religious conflict in Nigeria, focusing on the causes of religious conflict and how religious education can help mitigate the ongoing conflict. This study uses secondary sources to collect data. The literature review also shows that there are multiple causes of religious conflict and that religious education is a viable solution to religious conflict in Nigeria. It provides practical strategies that can be used to implement religious education in the Nigerian education system. The article also provides recommendations for religious leaders, teachers, parents and the government on how to effectively promote religious education as a panacea for religious conflict in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religious Education, Religious Conflict, Religion, Nigeria



INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's history of religious conflict dates back to independence in 1960. Before that, there were three major religions - traditional African religions, Islam and Christianity - and their followers coexisted peacefully. However, the post-independence religious crisis was largely due to tribal and regional factors as different groups vied for political and economic control over the country's resources. These tensions led to the Nigerian Civil War from 1967 to 1970. As the events unfolded across the country, religious awareness grew, particularly in Nigeria's northern and central regions. Christians and Muslims began to compete for political control based on religious beliefs, which affected employment, military conscription, and access to higher education. This growing religious consciousness led to a rift between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. The causes of religious conflict between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria are based on religious, social and political factors. The intolerance of the two religions led to one conflict after another, sometimes resulting in conflict and violent conflicts. The 1980 Zaria religious crisis and the 2002 Maitatsin riots led by the Cameroonian Kuka Muslim clergy resulted in deaths, the destruction of churches and mosques, and other forms of violence in several parts of Cameroon. Religion plays an important role in the social fabric of human societies around the world. It is a fundamental aspect of everyday life that brings people together and provides a framework for social interaction.

These are considered guiding principles by which an individual can live and even die. Religion is an institution that recognizes the existence of a supernatural being, usually called God, who is the subject of worship, obedience, and love, and who promotes godliness and piety. There are many religions in the world and each religion has its traditions and beliefs. Religion plays an important role in bringing diverse people together. According to Agunwa (2017), "Through religion, we can endow individuals with virtual qualities such as Obedience, humanity, gentleness, love, and forgiveness of injuries. Obedience, love and forgiveness are considered important aspects of society." Through religion, a person learns which actions are good and which are bad, and this leads him to a virtuous life. This is necessary for both individual and national development. Since the beginning of religious education in the school curriculum, the meaning of religion has been revealed to students. Many Nigerian schools have integrated the three major religions into their curriculum, allowing every student to take classes in his or her religion. Because of this, some



schools allow only one religion to be taught in school. These can be Biblical Studies (BK), Islamic Religious Studies or Christian Religious Studies, also called African Traditional Religions.

Religious education seeks to instil in Nigerian citizens sincerity, honesty, trust, loyalty, patriotism, tolerance and respect for God. The purpose is to guide individuals to follow both the laws of the land and the teachings of God, especially in societies that place little emphasis on ethical living and honesty. They play an important role in raising men and women who are prepared to live the Word of God in their daily lives. This ultimately contributes to the development and stability of society and provides the skills necessary for a successful life. Unfortunately, today's society places too much importance on academic qualifications at the expense of moral education. Passing examinations has become a major objective, overshadowing the deeper objectives of formal education, especially religious education in secondary schools (Molagun, 1999).

Literature Review

Nnoli (2003) argues that the concept of religious conflict goes against the peace process, arising from various perceptions, behaviours, phenomena, and tendencies. Miall (1992) also suggests that religious conflict can arise when there's a clear contradiction between participants who view the outcome of such conflicts as extremely important, indicating that suspicion can fuel religious conflicts.

Gotan (2004) defines religious conflict as interactions where religious adherents engage in opposing actions, often using coercive behaviour to control their opponents. Aliyu (2004) sees religious conflict as a struggle over resources, power, beliefs, and desires. Oyeshola (2006) describes it as a disagreement or controversy in ideas or viewpoints among individuals, communities, or religious groups, which can turn violent when force is used.

Religious education in Nigeria generally focuses on teaching Christianity in the west and east and Islam in the north, while traditional African religions are often offered in higher education institutions. This limited view can prevent a comprehensive understanding of these religions. Anyam and Odey (2015) propose using religious, cultural, and peace education as a means to foster peace and stability by instilling moral and ethical values in the youth. They believe that a deeper



understanding of religious tenets and peace principles can help mitigate issues such as insurgency, conflict, and terrorism in Nigeria.

Causes of Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Sulaiman (2016) outlines the following as some of the major causes of religious conflict in Nigeria:

➤ **The Theological Factor**

Every religion necessitates specific intellectual beliefs. Each religion possesses a carefully preserved compilation of texts that contain historical information regarding the validity of their teachings and how they were disseminated. However, as a result of inadequate comprehension, sheer ignorance, misinterpretation, or manipulation, these scriptural texts have been clumsily and arbitrarily interpreted to serve predetermined agendas. Such actions have frequently incited emotional reactions and conflicts among adherents of different religions in Nigeria (Ekwenife 1993; Nayak 2008). In this context, missionaries must possess the ability to differentiate between missionary activities and conversion. This is because religious sermons undergo modifications in response to social and political changes, particularly in the context of global spiritual revolutions.

➤ **Religious Intolerance**

Religious intolerance is an unwavering and enduring cognitive and emotional bias against religious convictions and rituals that contradict deeply held beliefs and practices (Balogun 1988). These unfavourable attitudes are consistently manifested in the violence that pervades the political and economic aspects of citizens' lives. Consequently, the absence of understanding and respect for differing perspectives and viewpoints stands as a significant catalyst for religious strife in Nigeria. The religious communities in Nigeria, particularly Muslims and Christians, exhibited no tolerance for conflict.

➤ **Religious Discrimination**

Religious discrimination is portrayed as violent, and unbridled religious fervour manifests as irrational enthusiasm. Those labelled as religious fanatics in Nigeria often exhibit excessive zeal, leading them to become agents of destructive religious disharmony in society (Balogun 1988; Sulaiman 2014a). Followers of both Christianity and Islam, at various points, succumb to fanaticism, triggering violent confrontations.



➤ **Uncontrolled Action of the Press**

The press plays a crucial role in society by providing information, entertainment, and education to the public. Under no circumstances is the press expected to misinform, mis-entertain and mis-educate people. Mass media practitioners ought to be cautioned in their reports on sensitive issues that could threaten stability and order in society. In Nigeria, experience has shown that mass media reports, news analysis and features are capable of playing a positive or negative role in the relationship between religious adherents, particularly Muslims and Christians depending on the intention and orientation of the journalist concerned. More often than not the actions or reactions of the Muslims to Christians's actions or vice versa are determined by the mass media reports (Bashir 2002: 23- 30). Press on many occasions in Nigeria had fanned the embers of disunity through junk journalism and sensational headlines (Bashir 2002: 27- 29). These negative and sensational news reports and analyses often lead to religious conflict. For example, the April 1991 protests led by Mallam Yakubu Yahaya that turned into mass riots in Katsina were religious. The protest, which turned into a riot, was sparked by chants of "Would you marry a famous born-again prostitute?". It happened because of the article. Orlando Emmanuel Giwa Atanda for Fun Times Magazine. In this article, the personalities of both Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad were abused and insulted (Dauda 1993: 20-26). This was nothing but blasphemy and sacrilegious. The role played by the press in the year 1987 Kafanchan riot was also negative. Members of the public were grossly misinformed by the press with partial reports which created another crisis between Muslims and Christians (Bidmos 1993: 32-39; Sulaiman & Ojo 2013: 21-38). Even today, the unbridled actions of Nigeria's press towards national issues like Shari'ah and other sensitive religious issues are capable of causing conflict

➤ **Aggressive or combative preaching/evangelism**

It refers to the abusive or coercive methods of promoting and disseminating a person's religious beliefs. This happens when religious groups or individual preachers within the same group try to convert to their religious system people they do not believe in or consider to be "pagans".

➤ **High level of Poverty**



The problem of poverty, especially in urban areas, is the cause of most conflicts (ethnic or religious) related to issues of unemployment, inadequate housing and physical and social infrastructure (Obateru 1994: 32-35; Sulaiman & Ojo 2013): 21-38). The current economic crisis in Nigeria appears to have worsened the problem of poverty and is partly responsible for the resulting religious conflict. Poverty also creates social problems, especially when many people cannot buy basic goods such as housing, clothing and food. Poverty creates social problems because Nigeria does not have a structured economy that can support its large population. Extremely poor people can do anything to make a living. Especially in northern Nigeria, poor youths (almajiris) with little money are manipulated to incite religious unrest.

➤ **Wrong Religious Orientation**

People learn differently in different religions. When wrong methods are used to indoctrinate the followers of a particular religion, religious fervour often arises and leads to ongoing conflict.

➤ **Literacy Level of Religious Adherents**

All Nigerians belong to one religion or the other. However, not many people in Nigeria are educated. Because most people believe what the religious leaders say. Illiterates do not think critically and logically, so they are easily manipulated to achieve one selfish goal or another.

➤ **The selfish interest of the Religious leaders.**

Some religious leaders, despite their calling, tend to be selfish. They use the words to stir up religious strife, knowing that the ruling government will summon them for their agreement. In this way, they access power for personal gain.

➤ **The impact or Influence of foreign theologians on African Religion**

There is mutual distrust among Nigerians. Some see Christianity as a tool of American and European imperialism, while others believe that Muslims have close ties to Saudi Arabia. Both religious groups are known to often receive financial support through petitions.

Incidence of Religious Conflict in Nigeria

The issue of religious violence is undoubtedly a serious threat to national stability and order. This problem is illustrated by a series of tragic events documented by scholars such as



Ikenach-Metuh (1994), Ogege (2001), Eniola (2010) and Tihan (2010). Notable cases occurred in Kasuwan Magani in 1980, Zango Kataf and Gure-Kahugu in 1987, Kafanchan and Lere in 1987, Ilorin and Jere in 1989, Tafawa Balewa in 1991 and Zango Kataf in 1992. It is a part of the country that includes predominantly Hausa/Fulani Muslims and Christian minorities. The “pagan problem”, as argued by Sulaiman (2015) and Eniola (2010), appears to have contributed significantly to the creation of an atmosphere of suspicion and intolerance among these groups. For example, the religious riots that broke out at the Kapanchan College of Education in 1987 were the result of perceived blasphemous language in a Christian convert's March 6 sermon. The initial clashes on the campus escalated into violence that engulfed Kafanchan and six other towns in Kaduna State: Kastina, Funtua, Zaria, Kankia, Daura and Kaduna. Unfortunately, this resulted in numerous casualties, the destruction of numerous churches and mosques, and significant damage to both life and property. Similarly, in Tafawa Balewa, in April 1991, a market dispute between Christian butchers and some Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups led to violence that killed many Muslims. When the army was called in to restore order, the situation worsened, leading to further violence and heavy casualties. These incidents demonstrate the dire consequences of religious violence against the nation. The 1992 Zango-Kataf crisis occurred in January 1992 when the Kataf-controlled local government council passed a resolution on 6 February 1992 to move the market from Zango. This decision led to an immediate attack on the Zango community and the death of many Kataf. The conflict later took on a religious dimension and spread to Kaduna and Zaria, resulting in a cycle of attacks and repression. The tragic result was several massacres that claimed thousands of lives. What initially started as an ethnic conflict quickly escalated into a national crisis with religious overtones (Egwu 2001 and Ademola 2006).

Moreover, an important aspect of the religious crisis was the rise of the Yang Tatsini movement, known as Maitatsin. The group is known to commit severe religious violence in the north of the country. There were two Maitachin rebellions between 1979 and 1983, the 1980 Kano rebellion being a notable example. The incident killed between 4,000 and 6,000 people and caused property damage worth millions of naira. The intervention of the Army and Air Force was necessary to quell the 11-day unrest (Olupona 1992 and Rowley 2014). In 2000, a series of violent incidents related to religious conflict left a trail of death and destruction. Between February 21 and 22, tragic clashes between Muslims and Christians took place in Kaduna, the capital of Kaduna State, killing an estimated 3,000 people. Retaliatory attacks took place in Aba, Abia State, killing



about 450 people (Olukorede 2002). These conflicts arose with the introduction of Islamic criminal law in some northern states. In addition, Kaduna experienced violence again in May 2000 due to clashes between Muslims and Christians, resulting in over 300 deaths (Olukorede 2002). The following year, 2001, religious clashes continued, this time in Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area of Bauchi State, lasting from June 19 to July 4, resulting in over 100 deaths (Alanamu 2005 and Odey 1999). In the fourth week of November 2002, religious violence erupted in Kaduna after the English language newspaper *This Day* published an article insulting the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) during an international beauty pageant held in Nigeria. This led to a fierce backlash from armed Muslim groups who targeted churches and private property. The riots soon spread to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The newspaper apologized unconditionally and resigned as the author of the article. However, the violence sparked a violent backlash from minority groups, resulting in over 200 deaths and thousands of refugees (Cherian 1995 and Sulaiman 2014). Plateau State is experiencing unrest due to frequent ethnic and religious crises in different parts of the state.

These conflicts led not only to genocide but also to systematic humiliation, deliberate extermination and mass displacement, transforming Plateau's reputation from a "home of peace and tourism" (Shobayo 2004). Initially, the Highland conflict began as a land dispute between self-proclaimed indigenes and so-called settlers, reminiscent of the Tiv/Jukun crisis. But in September 2001, religious tensions erupted into conflict, leading to unprecedented violence. Between September 7 and 12, more than 500 people were killed and about 1,000 injured (Onyeka-Ben et al. 2004). On 8 June 2004, religious violence broke out in Numan, the headquarters of Adamawa Local Government in Numan State, killing over 17 people and destroying some places of worship. The violence was believed to be the culmination of two weeks of tensions between local Bachama Christians and the local Muslim community over the location of the town's central mosque, a few meters from the seat of the Bachama Supreme Leader (Alanamu 2005). The reconstruction of a mosque destroyed in a similar religious conflict in the city in 2003 has sparked excitement among local Christians who believe the minaret of the mosque should be raised higher than the palace of Hama Bachama (Bachama's supreme ruler). . bad. and asserting dominance in cities (Murray & Ajose 2004 and Mustapha 2004). The Boko Haram insurgency in northern Nigeria has claimed many lives and created more than 3,000 refugees (Dogo 2003).



Dates	Locations	Principal Actors
May 1980	Zaria (Kaduna State)	During the unrest in Zaria, properties mostly owned by Christians were destroyed.
December 18-28,1980	Yan-Awaki Ward in Kano (kano State)	Maitaxin sect riots kill 4,177 people and cause widespread destruction of property
October 29-30,1982	Bullumkutu, Maiduguri (Borno State)	In Kala-kato and Maitatsin sects, people died and property was badly damaged.
27 February-March 5, 1984	Dobeli Ward, Jimeta-Yola (Gongola State)	Maitachin sect, 586 dead, intentional destruction of property.
April 26-28, 1985	Pantami Ward. Gombe (Bauchi State)	105 members of the Maitachin sect died in the destruction of property.
March, 1986	Ilorin (Kwara State)	Muslims and Christians clashed during a Christian Easter procession.
May, 1986	Ibadan, University of Ibadan (Oyo State)	Demonstration of Muslims burning an effigy of the resurrected Christ at the Resurrection Chapel of the University of Ibadan.
March, 1987	• Kafanchan (kaduna State)	Conflict between Muslims and Christians in the College of Education,



		Kanchan; Several mosques were killed and burned by the Christians and the inhabitants of Cajes.
	• Katsina, Funtua, Zaria, Gusau and Kaduna (Kaduna State)	A wave of religious unrest in which Muslims burned many church buildings and damaged Christian property. Many people lost their lives.
February, 1988	Kaduna, Kaduna Polytechnic (Kaduna State)	Religious riots among students destroyed the foundation walls of Christian churches.
April, 1991	• Katsina (Katsina State)	Religious violence was led by Mallam Yahaya Yakubu, a fundamentalist Shiite leader from Katsina. It was an objection to an old, blasphemous publication. Several people were killed and destroyed.
	• Tafawa Balewa (Bauchi State)	Tafawa started with an argument between a Fulani man from Balewa and a Sayawa meat seller. Open violence erupted and later assumed the colour of a religious war in Bauchi. Several people were killed



		and properties worth hundreds of millions of naira were destroyed.
October, 1991	Kano (Kano State)	Peaceful protests started by the Ijara sect to rescue Rev.Reinhard Bonnke from the Kano crusade later turned into bloody religious violence. Thousands of people lost their lives and properties worth millions of naira were destroyed.
May, 1992	Zangon Kataf, Zaria, Kaduna, Ikara (Kaduna State)	The communal conflict between Katafs and Hausas later assumed an interfaith dimension between Muslims and Christians in other major towns in Kaduna. Several lives and properties were destroyed.
January, 1993	Funtua (Kaduna State)	Members of the Calakato religious sect attacked the village chief and set fire to a police car. People and property are gone.
February 2000	Kaduna	Clashes between Christians and Muslims over the implementation of Sharia law swept the city. Thousands of lives and



		millions of properties were destroyed.
Sept. 28th, 2013	Zangang	Muslim militias attacked a Christian village, killing 15 residents and burning their houses.
Sept. 17th 2013	Borno	Boko Haram, dressed in military uniforms, attacked and burned mostly Christians, killing 143 people.
July 27th, 2014	Communal attack by youth groups in Muslim and Christian neighbourhoods on Mosque and church in the University of Jos.	Muslim extremists throw a bomb into a Catholic church, injuring eight people and killing five parishioners.
July, 2014	Borno, Maiduguri	The Islamists attacked three churches, killing 27 Christians.
June 29th, 2014	Chibok, Maiduguri	Boko Haram attacked the church with grenades and guns, killing at least 54 people.
Jan. 12th, 2014	Maikatako	Muslim terrorists attacked Christians on Sunday morning, killing at least eight people and injuring others.



Sept. 23rd, 2015	Yola	Boko Haram killed 241 women and children in two villages.
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(Source: Jegede, 2019)

Importance of Religious Education

The significance of religious and moral education for individuals cannot be overstated. As Banjo (1980) emphasized while quoting the Duke of Wellington, "Educate men without religion, and you make them clever devils." This shows the important role of religion in shaping human life. No society seeks to educate those who act against progress and stability. Because this tendency is harmful. It is important to prioritize values that promote wholeness and well-being. Only through contact with spirituality can we resist actions that have a negative impact. Therefore, religion plays an important role in promoting good citizenship and creating a more harmonious society (Molagun, 1999). Molagun (1999) pointed this out. Reflecting on the spiritual aspects of the subjects covered in religious education classes helps to eliminate negative tendencies in an individual. From a metaphysical perspective, humans are believed to have a duality that includes both biological and spiritual dimensions. Ignoring the spiritual aspect can hinder your overall progress. Plato argued that the spiritual aspect deserves special attention because it is the ultimate essence of man. Therefore, physical development must serve the welfare of the soul and must place eternal truth before temporal gain. This perspective emphasizes the need to consider individuals not only for their personal and public interests but also for their eternal relationship with God.

This understanding can guide our relationships with God and others. Famous Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle recognized the importance of religious education and the virtues it imparts and emphasized that the virtues derived from religious education are the foundation of true happiness and should be the basis of education. Another influential philosopher, John Hubbard, argued that the core of education is morality, which judges a person's worth according to his will, character, and individuality, not his intellectual capacity. Therefore, religious education becomes the most important way to shape children's behaviour and solve social problems that hinder their daily development, which is in line with the goal of idealists to educate children's souls and awaken them to the glory of God (Molagun , 1999).



The need for Religious Education

The arrival of Islam in Nigeria in the 14th and 15th centuries led to the introduction of Quranic education, followed by the introduction of Arabic and Quranic schools such as Makaranta Allo and Makaranta Ilmi in states such as Kano and Katsina. Today, Islamic studies are widely taught in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. In 1842, Christian missionaries came to Nigeria primarily to spread the gospel. However, they recognized the need for translators, cooks and converts who could read and teach the Bible, which led to the introduction of Western education. Mission and colonial schools emphasized subjects such as British history, British geography, Latin, French, English, arithmetic, basic sciences and crafts, as well as religious education, to produce literate, law-abiding individuals. Religious education played an important role in turning hearts to God and promoting unity in society. Even after Nigeria gained independence, religious education remained important in building a morally correct society. The national curriculum was revised in 1969 to adapt subjects to local needs, leading to the adoption of a new education policy by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1977. The National Policy on Education (1981) is a document that emphasises the importance of teaching religious and moral education in Nigerian schools. According to Section 1, Number 3 of the Nigerian Policy on Philosophy of Education, quality education at all levels should aim to inculcate the following values:

- Recognizing and respecting the worth and dignity of individuals is fundamental to fostering a positive and inclusive society.
- Faith in humanity's capacity for rational decisions reflects optimism in our collective reasoning and problem-solving skills. It acknowledges the potential for thoughtful choices and progress.
- Moral and spiritual values play a crucial role in shaping interpersonal and human relations. They guide ethical behaviour, foster empathy, and contribute to the development of meaningful connections based on respect and understanding.
- It encompasses individuals actively contributing to community well-being, institutions prioritizing ethical practices, and collaborative efforts to address societal needs.
- Respect the dignity of labour.
- Promoting the emotional, physical, and psychological health of all children is crucial for their overall well-being. (FGN, 1981).



The values mentioned above have a moral foundation, which indicates that religious and moral education must be strengthened to ensure that these values can be fully absorbed by students. It was pointed out that according to the national policy there is still religious and moral education which is against the wishes of the parents. Therefore, it can be said that the Nigerian government has made religious and moral education possible in our schools. The value of religious and moral education as a discipline should not be underestimated, as it forms the basis of other disciplines that require it. It is now the responsibility of Nigerian schools to implement effective strategies in religious education to ensure that the necessary virtues flow to students. According to the curriculum documents, the study of religion and faith is compulsory for all students up to the general secondary school level. In upper secondary schools, the subjects "Biblical Studies" and "Islamic Studies" are also optional.

CONCLUSION

Religious education is one of the most important tools that can play a valuable role in limiting religious conflicts in Nigeria. This promotes understanding, tolerance and empathy between people of different religions. The practice of religious education develops interreligious dialogue, teaches religious tolerance, prevents misunderstandings about faith, and increases the sense of unity and social cohesion in societies with different religions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study therefore recommends that:

- The government should make religious education and religious conflict one of the main reasons why it should be taught and offered to all students at all levels of education. This will help Nigerian students broaden their knowledge by exposing them to the evils of religious conflict in our society.
- Religious leaders, teachers, parents, and governmental and non-governmental organizations must also develop sound policies and programs based solely on religious education to serve as a panacea for the religious conflict in Nigeria.
- It is important to conduct religious education carefully and comprehensively to avoid favouring one religion over another or promoting one religion over another. Moreover, it



must be complemented by broader efforts to address socio-economic inequalities, political issues and ethnic tensions that are often intertwined with religious conflicts in Nigeria.



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