

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN CENTRAL NIGERIA: A CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

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Abstract

Religion has played crucial but ambiguous roles in the history of humanity. It has been a viable tool for reconciliation and conflict resolution. This paper, "Ethno-Religious Conflicts and the Role of the Church in Central Nigeria: A Challenge to the Church", enquires into the conditions that precipitate ethno-religious conflicts in Central Nigerian. The author explains that a group's definition of her membership or citizenship in terms of ownership and habitation of indigenous territories, migratory history and myths of putative ancestral links are formulated and manipulated in order to establish contested territorial claims. It demonstrates that most of the conflicts in Nigeria which arose out of ethno-religious protests have been given religious coloration. Using the Noam Chomsky's theory of "Hippocratic Principle" and the Jain's concept of ahimsa, the essay argues that the church in her quest for retributive justice in Central Nigeria should interpret and re-interpret history differently because working for peace and reconciliation is a very long process requiring for patience and long range plans. It, therefore submits that Christians of Central Nigeria have to be reformed first before the vision of reformation of Central Nigeria could be viable. This essay makes a good analysis of ethno-religious conflicts.

Keywords: Central Nigeria, Conflict Resolution, Reconciliation, Restorative Justice

Introduction

Religion has played crucial but ambiguous roles in the history of humanity. It is an obvious fact that religion's influence on secular life is much more remarkable than vice versa. Religion has been used to motivate and justify violence and conflicts, and to encourage tolerance, reconstruction of broken societies and ensure

global peace. This dual role of religion is quite bewildering. How can a thing be “hot” and “cold” synchronically? Secondly, in the face of anti-tolerant religious beliefs which command adherents to strongly oppose those who hold a different view how can one say, “Live and let’s live”? The question that would naturally follow is: How can one be a militant supporter of one’s view and an opponent of others who hold contrary view without generating conflict? How can a religion, which professes Christ on the cross, condone violence? In the light of the varied and various religious conflicts that have ravaged the unity and peace of humanity, should religion be taken seriously in an all-important discussion of this national and regional transformation?

This paper, “Ethno-Religious Conflicts and the Role of the Church in Central Nigeria: A Challenge to the Church”, is therefore, poised to answer these and other puzzling questions. It shall investigate briefly the crucial but ambiguous roles religion has played in the history of humanity; enquire into the conditions which precipitate ethno-religious conflicts in Central Nigerian and demonstrate that most of the conflicts in Nigeria which arose out of ethnic protests have been given religious coloration. Using the Noam Chomsky’s theory of “Hippocratic Principle” and the Jain’s concept of *ahimsa*, the essay will show that the quest for peace and reconciliation is a long term process that requires patience. It shall also illuminate on how religion creates the much-needed new man who sees man as man, to resolve conflicts; and that religion qua religion does not condone violence; while the unifying role of religion shall not be left out. Finally, since every society has something called religion which Influence one’s expression of oneself, an omission of religion in conflict resolution quite unthinkable.

Models of Conflict Resolution

According to J. C. Wenger¹, conflict involves, “two opposing kingdoms: the one is the Prince Peace, the other Price of Strife.” Similarly, Van Bright² depicts conflict as involving two opposing forces; those who were “born by nature to seize and destroy” and those with “no desire for revenge”. For these Anabaptists conflict is

¹ Wenger, J. C. (Ed.), *The complete Writings of Menno Silmons Scottdale*, (PA: Herald Press, 1956) 554.

² Van Bright, T., *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror*. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985) 427.

of dual cosmology. Generally, conflict is driven by unfulfilled needs of the people in terms of autonomy, sense of justice, identity, basic needs and rights of individuals. It is an experience of the heterogeneity of interests, values and beliefs that arise as new formations generated by social change come up against intrinsic and inevitable aspects of social change. Although conflict is a persistent feature of modernity and a universal phenomenon, the manner and approach of how to transform potentially violent conflicts into non-violent alternatives is of great concern to us. Throughout history, individuals and groups have handled conflict in multi-dimensional ways: evasion of fight, submission or voluntary subordination of goals and interest to the stronger party. Conflict can be categorized into two: violent and non-violent conflict. A conflict is said to be violent when it involves damage, destruction or death by means that are authoritarian in the sense of overpowering consent and human dignity. Non-violent conflict refers to initiatives and practices of peacemaking, which actively transforms violent conflicts or latent ones.³

Sam G. Egwu⁴ states that Ethnic and religious violence is the extreme manifestation of conflicts rooted in crises of identity. Although, it involves grievance directed against state in capacity and failure of the existing asymmetry in the distribution of social and economic power with realistic effect, it can hardly be endowed as with revolutionary violence. The dominant dependency inherited from classical writers such as Marx Weber, Karl Marx and the functionalist tradition, was to reduce religion to some other epiphenomenon and denying it of any independent existence, Religion was treated either as ignorance or error by the elites to keep lower classes assigned to misery. Durkheim whose classical formation of religion is often cited merely presented a functional and conservative image of religion whose essence was the creation of common symbol for social coherent and continuity. Some of the assertions found within these traditions are difficult to fault for example, what is regarded as the “standard” Marxist position of the obscurantist role of religious relation to human emancipatory project is buttressed by the increased religiosity among members of the subaltern class or

³ Stassen, Glen H and M. I. Wester Moreland-White. “Defining Violence and No-Violence” in *Teaching Peace: Non-Violence and the Liberal Arts*, Ed. by J. Denny Weaver and G. Biesecker-Most. (London: Rowman & Littlefield. 2003) 17.

⁴ Egwu, Sam G., *Ethnic and Religious Violence in Nigeria*. (Centre for Democratic Governance, 2001).

the heightening of religious zeal and fundamentalism during periods of sweeping changes and massive economic decline as has been the case in Nigeria since the 1980s. Anifosose⁵ postulates that:

Violence or the threat of violence is a Universal phenomenon. Individuals and groups throughout history have in one way or another resorted to violence or its potential use as tactic of political action. Violence has been used by groups seeking power, by groups holding power and by group on the process of losing power. Violence has been pursued in the defense of order by the privilege, in the defense of justice by the oppressed, and in fear of displacement by the threatened. For many decades however, the study of ethno-religious and political violence was given negatively scanty treatment in the science literature. Social theory has little to say about the occurrence of large scale violence which is regarded as being incidental to the basic character of structures and processes.

According to Ekwunife⁶ in, *Politics and Religious Intolerance, the Nigerian Experience:*

Religion can be an-integrative factor in any society, when the divisive elements of religion is not properly handled and brought under strict control; they create tensions and un-rest in a society, often manifesting themselves in forms of religious riots and intolerance.

Shedrack G. Best⁷ asserts that, there are diverse opinions concerning the sources and causes of conflicts. But most scholars agree that the causes of conflict can be reduced to three broad classifications, namely: resources driven conflicts, conflicts over values and those over psychological needs.

Onigu Otite⁸ in *Ethnic Groups and Conflicts in Nigeria* identified many factors that usually lead to the occurrence of conflicts/violence in Nigeria. He said that the

⁵ Anifosose A., *Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Yoruba and Tiv Experience*, (London: NOK, 1979) 1.

⁶ Ekwunife, N., *Politics and Religious Intolerance, the Nigerian Experience*, (n.p., 1992) 5.

⁷ Best, Gaya Shedrack, *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Resolution in West Africa*, (Ibadan: Spectrum, 2007) 10.

⁸ Otite, Onigu, *Group and Conflict in Nigeria*, (Akoko: n.p., 2005).

concept of ethnicity in Nigeria involves the factor of territoriality, the Nigeria civil war and various phenomena of ethnic conflicts, including the one demonstrated by the land factor sometimes goes beyond tolerable levels with disastrous consequences. A group defines their membership or citizenship in terms of their ownership and habitation of their indigenous territories, migratory histories and myths of putative ancestral links. These are often formulated and manipulated to establish contested territorial claims. Having written extensively on ethno-religious conflicts in Kaduna State, Otite⁹ in his work identifies the pre-conditions that necessitated the occurrence of ethno-religious conflicts. He said the question of groups perceiving themselves as neglected or excluded from the terrain or corridors of political power and in sharing from the benefits of the resources and wealth of a country is central. Other factors are the problematic contestations concern of cultural issues about class relations, ethnicity, religion, gender, justice, social equality, citizenship rights and governance. Other factors such as manipulations by the elite class, identity-contestations, resistance to perceived domination, historical antecedents and people's attempt to assert themselves, urbanization unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy, among others, have also been used in explaining religious conflicts in Nigeria¹⁰.

D. Sheen in his book *Peace of Soul*¹¹ reports that there are three major approaches to conflict resolution. The first is "hegemony", in which one group dominates others by force of arms or by other exercise of irresistible power. This is the "threat system" basic to all imperialisms. The disadvantage of this model for peace building is that its dependence on violence leads to further violence. The second approach is "balance of power," in which all sides to conflict reckon with the advantages and rewards of respecting each other's interest by tapping those interests for mutual benefits. This is "a trade system" in which the rewards are both economic and non-economic, including spheres of profit, influence, and prestige. The weakness of this system is twofold; most power balances are dynamic, changeable, and unstable. Further, as in most tradeoffs in politics, some on both sides are usually denied a share in the rewards or feel that the terms of

⁹ Otite, *Group and Conflict*

¹⁰Gwamma, Dogara J. "The Turning Tides of Religious Intolerance in Nigeria". *The External Connections and Internal Dynamics: Historical Perspectives on the Post-Colonial Conflicts*, (Lagos: Unimark, 2007) 135.

¹¹ Sheen, D., *Peace of Soul*, (New York: Image Books, 1954)

trade arc unfair. Finally, few governments will trust economic forces to provide security, and publics will not tolerate extraordinary sacrifices of economic resources in the name of security. The third model is “common security.” This is an “integrated system” based on induced identification of the self with others. The bridge between interpersonal and collective ties is the ability of conflictants to identify with the interests, situations and histories of the “other”. The weakness of this model is empirical; cultures and interest impose blinders on human ability to perceive and respect the cultures and interests of others. These blinders may degenerate into misunderstanding, fear and hatred.

The psychosocial virtue commended in the third model is empathy, a virtue that is both intellectual and emotional. The political and moral wisdom in this model calls for a fourth model, which might be tagged “dialogue”. This is the process by which the agents in the conflict search together for a commonality that “does not yet appear”. Real dialogue exists when the agents in the conflict enter “a realm where the law of the point of view no longer holds”. In their courage to risk and dialogue, participants reach out for something that will bind them beyond the limits of their respective points of view. This approach keeps the two sides talking to each other long enough until they finally can hear each other, and discover a way into a political peace that took account of their difference, fears, interests, and assumptions. This is where the Christian Churches must provide the agents in Central Nigeria conflict a space to sit down at round-table with hope that something good will come of it.

Religion, Violence and Conflict Expression

This section of this paper shall examine, from a historical perspective, the ambivalent roles of religion in human society. When the social structures of our society are in a flux, transition or crisis, people tend to look for something that could give them a point of reference. Should a line of battle be drawn between two parties, religious or political ideologies would act, as a determinant factor of which party an individual would belong. The relationship between religion and political ideology is an inseparable one. They both involve systems of values and beliefs, and systems of actions, which are justified in terms of these values. This relationship is often an explosive one, as events in the Middle East has shown. In

the formation of nationalist movement in Palestinian, religion was the element that made up ideological weaves of the Palestinian movement¹².

Nigeria too has had its own share. The Nigerian civil war of 1967- 1970, the abortive coup of 1990 led by Gideon Orka, and the annulment of the 1993, June 12 election allegedly won by M.K.O. Abiola were given a religious coloration. With respect to the latter, the South-West on ethnic basis felt marginalized. The upsurge that followed had a religious undertone. Religion, in this context, is used as a force to generate political ideologies to legitimate actions that are actually motivated by ethnicity or personal gain. When ethnic issues pick up religious badges it makes conflicts more protracted, more violent and more intractable. Here religion is playing a very crucially role which may be termed “religiofication” of conflicts. These are conflicts, which cleanly begin with secular forces and in term assume a religious shape. The reason of this is that religious mobilization is a way of defending threatened identities when nationalism has failed. It is pertinent to state that religion qua religion does not have unsalutary effects unless it is wrongly used by its adherents. In such a situation, it becomes the worst cloak that mars the spiritual happiness and peace man longs to attain. Religion then becomes a potent tool for fanning tribal antagonism, and a fuel for religious intolerance in which case religious fanatics fail to recognize the importance of other’s faith. In fact many issues which might be easily compromised at are reinforced by religious flames.

This fact was buttressed by Johnson. While writing on the politics of Palestine he reports that, “Some of the atrocities in recent Middle East history were perpetuated in the name of religious differences”¹³. Religious and political ideologies cannot be discussed in a vacuum. Ideologies are shared by a group of people. Ideologies become politically significant depending on the structure of the group professing it. For instance, religious doctrines that have been around for decades suddenly assume new importance in a new political or economic situation in which case ethnic groups and political groups use religious ideologies to solve their problems. On the intrinsic relationship between religious convictions on political choice Kent Greenawalt asserts that the latter is grossly influence by the former. He maintains

¹² Johnson, N. *Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism*, (London: Keyan Paul International, 1982) 1.

¹³ Johnson, *Islam and the Politics of Meaning*, 13.

that, "When people reasonably think that shared promises and other, criteria for determining truth cannot resolve critical questions of facts and fundamental questions of values, they do appropriately, rely on religious convictions that help them answer these questions."¹⁴ Such religious convictions have a profound influence on the legal culture and might render laws or government programs invalid. Consequently, with respect to America's national development, many American intellectuals, at the end of a long period to secularism, is recovering religion's strength. Some are ready to accept it as the major source of stability and democracy¹⁵. It would, therefore, be quite out of place to have a discussion on conflict evolution in a highly religious society as ours without recourse to religion.

The epitome of religious crisis which shook the nation to its solid foundation was the Maitatsine riots which took place intermittently between 1980 and 1985 and its varied and various resurgence in Bulliem Kattu, Bornu State in 1992; Kigassa village, Kaduna State; Jimita-Yola, Adaniawa State in 1985 and the most recent Boko Haram insurgency. Another religions-political conflict though not yet an outbreak is the Nigeria's alleged membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (O.I.C). The then Babangida's administration believed that Nigeria stands to gain from the Conference through its development bank since borrowing from the Bank does not attract interests, but the Christian populace saw in it a secret plot to declare Nigeria an Islamic state. Religions discrepancies and antagonism are not limited to different religions. It is also inherent in a particular religion in the guise of denominationalism and sects. Here the difference between conflicts that use religions as a symbol for issues of identify and conflicts over religions doctrines is clear. Based on doctrinal differences Protestants conflict with Catholics; the Maitasine sect of Islam does not only pick up arms against 'unbelievers' but also against 'nominal' Muslims. Even within denominations factions are bound to exist. The tensions that are often generated often negate peace and harmony in the society. Hence, Owete aand Odili reports that, religions controversy is an "ill wind and that blows no one any good", and that, "religions is a slippery terrain, more slippery than a banana peel"¹⁶. There is, therefore, a need for caution when handling religions conflicts. One thing to be made clear of religionized 'conflicts is that although religious fanatics and bigots portray their

¹⁴ Greenerwalt, Kent, *Religious Concoctions and Political Choice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 12.

¹⁵ Lipset, S., *The Political Man: The Social Basics of Politics*. (London: Heinemann, 1963) 71.

¹⁶ Owete, Kingsley and Odili Jones, *Religion and National Development: The Nigerian Perspective*, (Owerri: Lighthouse, 2008) 64.

actions as a get-back-to-basics fundamentalism, it, really, is nothing but a creation of a new form of religious expression which clouds itself with an appeal to traditionalism which very often represents a radical shift from religion qua religion.

Around the world today, conflicts and violence has become prevalent features in many areas that were once colonized or controlled by Western European or Soviet powers, The causes of most of these conflicts, stems from post-colonial and especially those regarding territorial boundaries, the treatment of indigenous population with preference of some groups over others, the uneven distribution of wealth and Local Government infrastructures, and the formation of non-democratic or non-participatory Governmental systems. It is therefore essential if one wants to understand intractable conflicts and violence and its causes to examine not only the issues and problems of the moment, but also influential factors most notably the post-colonial era. It is the concern of this paper to give an overview of the root causes of the ethno-religious conflicts in North-Eastern Nigeria. Such an overview would give us a critical insight the contemporary ethno-religious conflicts and violence in that region of the Nigeria so as to be able to proffer a long lasting solutions to the problems there.

Some Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Central Nigerian

Many scholars and researchers have documented several conflicts that are popularly referred to as “ethno-religious” conflicts in North-Eastern Nigeria. The term, ethno-religious implies those conflicts that have both ethnic and religious causative factors. Some case studies of religious conflicts in Nigeria as identified by Gwamna Dogora Ji’adayibe¹⁷ are the Kafanchan (1987), Zangon Kataf (1992), Tafawa-Balewa (1991, 1995, 2000), and Jos crises (2001) among others. 2000 has the sharia crisis, 2002 witnessed the Miss World Pageant crisis, 2001 was Osama Bin Laden’s Riots and 2006 witnessed the Cartoon Riots. There is also the protracted Maitatsine riots which ran through the 1980s that affected the states of Northern Nigeria and the most recent Boko Haram insurgency that has ravaged the economy of the that region of Nigeria. Turaki¹⁸ further stressed that:

¹⁷ Gwamma,. “The Turning Tides of Religious Intolerance

¹⁸ Turaki Turaki (1991) in, *Sharia, the Socio-Political Implication for the Christians in Nigeria*. n.p.

A significant sharia politics in Nigeria is a shift from National Constitutional functions to that of state or sectarian legislative function, from the centre to the periphery, from international to sub-national, herein lies that greatest danger in the national body policy, the re-instatement of the sub-nationalism, parochialism above and against national goal, ideas and values. Nigerian nation is gradually moving back into the dark ages under the guise of constitutional freedom.

Many internal conflicts have been occurring amongst Muslims and Christians in North Central Nigeria as a result of religious intolerance. It is becoming difficult and complex to analyze conflicts of these types sampled above as multi-faceted perspectives are brought to bear in most crisis that have been witnessed particularly in North Central Nigeria. Shedrack G. Best in his study, *Introduction to Peace Building, Plateau State, Nigeria*,¹⁹ chronicled reports about the Bassa and Igbira Conflict in Toto Local Government Area of Nassarawa State of Nigeria. The conflict referred to the negative physical confrontation that occurred mainly between Bassa and Igbira Ethnic groups. The *Gbayi* ethnic group was a neutral group in the earlier phase of the conflict, but it would appear that the group was entangled gradually in the conflicts, especially after the events of 3 May, 2003. The conflict had a fairly long history of the ethnic groups, the Igbira, being perceived as lording it over the group of Bassa. With the creation of two Chiefdoms within the area, the Igbiras insisted it was within their territory looking at it during the Solomon Lar administration (1979-1983) in Plateau State, which by implication excluded the Bassa and Gbagi. This trend gave rise to political conflicts and a spring board ground for ethnic tension. At the early stage of conflict, the Igbira gained an upper hand. The Bassa had more of its people displaced and creating in the process a great Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) catastrophe.

Turaki,²⁰ identified one reason why there are frequent ethnic riots and violence in Northern Nigeria, According to him, the political regimes of many states, whether military or civilian, since several creation of states out of the defunct Northern Nigeria region, in 1967 up to the present time has consistently and deliberately

¹⁹ Best, Gaya Shedrack. *Introduction to Peace Building, Plateau State, Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum, 2007.

²⁰ Turaki, *Sharia, the Socio-Political Implication*

refused to create and grant autonomous chiefdoms to Ethnic groups such as the Kabilu of the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. Another reason why there are frequent Ethnic riots and violence in Northern states of Nigeria is because the Governments in these states give preferential treatment to others.

Comments on marginalization of ethnic groups are similar to the problem in the area under study. Shedrack Best's²¹ study is very relevant to this work. Commenting on the Yelwan Shendam ethno-religious conflict he wrote that the Yelwan Shendam is a significant factor in the conflict calculus of the southern Plateau Zone, and its history is equally an important ingredient. A key difficulty in Yelwa which breed the conflict emanates from the conflicting history of the settlement as held by both the Goemai, most of the Christians and African Traditional Religion (ATR) practitioners, on the one hand, and the Jarawa supported by the Boghom, Hausa/Fulani pre-dominantly Muslims, on the other hand. The Jarawa in Yelwa are also the direct descendants of the Jarawa of Dass in Bauchi State. It is on record that the Jarawas left Bauchi together with the Fulani Jihad leader and founder of Wase, Madaki Hassan, in about 1820, and having stayed at Wase for some years, they later moved to Yelwa after brief stopovers at Kwanpe in Lantang North Local Government Area, Kwap Bakwa in Mikang Local Government Area and Yelwa Maiganuwa, 1.6km from present Yelwa. The claim of ownership of the Yelwa Shendam has been a major source of ethno-religious violence.

The first inter-religious violence in Numan Local Government Area of Adamawa State was witnessed in June 2003 after the gruesome murder of evangelist Esther Jinkai in her home near her Church by a Hausa Muslim water hawker who took her life while she was resting after leading a service in the morning²². Another ethno-religious conflicts and violence was recorded at Maiduguri in 2006. It was that day that hell was literally let loose on the Christians by their Muslim neighbors and within four (4) hours dozens of corpses mainly Christians were deposited at the Maiduguri Specialist Hospital Mortuary. People were injured, while in the streets, shops of Igbo traders were either looted or burnt and businesses shut down. The Violence was said to have occurred because of a

²¹ Best, *Introduction to Peace and Conflict*

²² Gambo, 11

Denmark cartoon published in a Newspaper which they said, made a caricature of Prophet Muhammad. The security agents thought that it was going to be a peaceful demonstration. But it later resulted into mass destructions: twelve Children and fifty two adults died while thirty seven Churches were burnt.²³ The Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), had been warned not to intervene in the Plateau crisis because their coming into the matter was inviting an enemy to poison his victim rather than to cure him of the affliction, while pointing out that the people of the (Middle Belt) would respond appropriately and when necessary.

On 12th April, 1994, Jos the home of peace and tourism lost her sanity. The violent conflict that engulfed the state according to Mwadkon was the pragmatic expression of accumulated anger and grievances. This was an attempt by the Federal Government to establish the hegemony of Hausa-Fulani by constituting the Jos North Local Government committee with a Hausa-Fulani from Bauchi as chairman, an Igbo, a Birom, a Yoruba and a Jarawa person as members while the Anaguta were excluded. The interpretation was that the area belongs to the settlers and also that the city was deliberately turned into an Islamic center. The appointment led to a peaceful protest by the indigenous people and later a counter protest by the Hausa and Fulani, which later degenerated into spontaneous violence. This crisis was ignited by mutual distrust, suspicion, fear and frustration as large numbers were mobilized to fight it out.

Bagudu's documents in detail the events before now, and went further to state that Alh. Danfulani Baba Joda stated that their action was just the beginning in a series of what they intended to do until Alh. Mato was allowed to take over office. He highlighted the meeting by the Hausa-Fulani community near the central mosque, where Alhaji Yaya Aga Abubakar, instigated them to come in mass to embark on a demonstration. The person in question here according to him was the president of the Jasawa Development Association. These actions ravaged the entire city for three days as the city of Jos was in flames, shooting, killing and looting also characterized, the period in Jos. The conflict also led to the burning of part of the Jos ultra-modern market and properties worth millions of naira destroyed. It also affected the Kabong village market, a mosque adjacent to the market and another along Rukuba road.

²³ (Abraham 2006:11).

The 7th September 2001, Jos ethno-religious crisis, scholars have documented a lot of the remote and immediate causes of the Jos crises of September 2001. Again like the April 1994, the appointment of Alhaji Muktar, considered to be a non-indigene, as one of the major causes. Bagudu also stated that posters appeared for and against this appointment. There were write-ups by the Jasawa (name used by the Hausa/Fulani and other northern Muslims who believed they own Jos town) and the indigenes threatening fire and brimstone, bloodshed and death.

The Northern Traditional Rulers Council began an emergency meeting in Kaduna to deliberate on the 2001 crisis in Jos, with the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammed Sa'ad Abubakar describing the events in Jos and its environs as genocide. The Sultan claimed that the recent crisis in Jos is genocide, because the amount of massacre that took place was not witnessed during the Boko Haram crisis in Maiduguri as at then and Kala Kato crisis in Bauchi of recent. He identified failure of leadership at all levels as the reason for the recurring crisis in Jos.

What we know and what we believed is that there is a complete failure of leadership at all levels. If there is good leadership, problems like this would never occur. There are so many people all over living together despite religious divide and ethnic divide. In a Century where a migrant black American is the president of the world greatest power, how are we now taking it ourselves here as ethnic minorities, as settlers, as non-indigenes? I think it is time we act and put an end to these entirely if we really want to move forward. Enough is enough; because we cannot just keep turning back the hands of the clock of progress and development of our country backward because of the action of some misguided murderous killers in our midst. What happened in Plateau is unfortunate and it would have been planned by anybody, but I am yet to know whether it was planned or not²⁴.

The future of the North is bleak, according to Arewa Consultative Forum (ACE). After reflecting on the State of affairs in the North the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACE) urged the stakeholders in the region to unite to save the region. Speaking

²⁴ Mubashiru and Ishmail 2010:1

during the opening of the board of Trustees (BOT) of the Forum, its Vice Chairman, Senator Ladan Shuni, said

For the region to advance, all its socioeconomic problems must be addressed squarely in order to save the future of our children which he believes is bleak if not saved. We have to actually rise up and see how we can save this our noble culture and noble orientation. He added that there is an urgent need for leaders in the region to address the massive poverty and growing problem of begging among the people of the North. In the past, we were only hearing cases of kidnapping in other places, armed robbery was not part of us but now we have similar things here too” The Education sector of the region, according to him, has gone backward too; we have a lot of unemployment in the North, The unemployed are roaming the streets and in some cases they become ‘area boys’. Before it was difficult to find Northern armed robbery gangs but today is common. He also raised alarm on the massive relocation of Fulani cattle rearers to the southern part of the country, saying virtually all Fulanis have moved to the south in search of grazing areas. While stressing the importance of the North in the socio-economic development of the country, he said, “It is our duty to see that these problems are solved”. He wanted them to frankly state their mind, they have been meeting, but the problem is implementation, we have to come up with ways of implementing the resolutions. Otherwise, we will not go anywhere; we have to agree on how to implement our discussions²⁵.

The Church and Restorative Justice: A Sine qua for Transformation in Central Nigeria

The need for reconciliation is now recognized in many countries throughout the world. The last few decades in Central Nigeria have been characterized by violent conflicts and strife. They were bitter and tragic. Atrocities were carried out on religious institutions, neighbors and even family members. In such circumstances the process of reconciliation has to be subtler, and more nuanced. Structural and economic programs have not been able to address the problem. They did not reach the depth of the alienation. ‘In other words, there is the need for a spiritual dimension to the problem: economic reparation is not enough. According to Stephen R. Godwin:

²⁵ (Mubashiru and Ishmail 2010:2)

Social reconciliation lies beyond the structural realm and does not therefore respond to the mechanical manipulation of institutions. Because reconciliation is a pre-eminently human endeavour, involving the moral and ethical will of individuals and communities alike, it is most naturally situated in the locus of the personal and relational, not the structural and institutional. Religion is at home in this realm and should be able to make positive contributions”²⁶.

It is in this wise that the Christian Churches should provide a sacred space where the virtues of repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, love and peace can be harnessed to heal the wounds of the people of Central Nigeria. This is a discursive shift. We advocate for restoration and not retribution. The advocacy for a restorative model of justice has become imperative because it confronts the crime without continuing the cycle of violence. Instead it empowers victims in their search for healing and holds offenders responsible for their infractions by impressing upon them the real human impact of their behavior. The restorative model emphasizes on the harm done to people, to relationships and to communities. Its focus is on the obligation of the offender to repair the harm done the victim. Thus the object of restorative justice is actual restoration – as much as is humanly possible – to bring wholeness back to the situation and the people involved (Gingerich, 2003:196). The call for restoration does not mean the return to the “old order” (the Edenic paradise) but a “new order”, where the resources of Central Nigeria can be harnessed to lift the region from systemic violence of underdevelopment, neglect, poverty, and misery to one of empowerment, wealth and prosperity. Communities, feel that resources are taken away and wasted in ways and areas that do not ultimately benefit them. This has led to the breakdown of law and order. In the article, “Why Children become Guns for Hire and African Wars,” the Business Day Africa (2005, July 4:10) asserts that “hopelessness and poverty drive young people into rebel groups for exchange for money or a share of the loot... A lack of job means that violence can offer economic opportunities not found elsewhere”.

²⁶ Goodwin Stephen R. “From UN Safe Havens to Sacred Spaces: Contributions of Religious Sodalities to Peace Building and Reconciliation in Post-War Bosnia & Herzegovina” in *Studies in World Christianity*, 9.2 (2003) 174.

The violence and disturbances experienced daily in Central Nigeria are as a result of the people's quest for restorative justice. Uche Onyeoguocha²⁷ enjoins all who suffer injustice to continue the struggle to defend their human dignity. Although Onyeoguocha failed to tell us what mode the struggle should take, he undoubtedly, was opting for restorative justice: a nonviolent approach to conflict resolution and reconciliation. Revenge is one of the most powerful human emotions. Acts of revenge range from the trivial to the horrific. Men have committed bloody massacres to avenge their impugned honor. As to what kind of attitude is expected of those seeking for restorative justice, Duane Friesen's²⁸ advice is apposite: "In the struggle for justice, what is powerful and enduring for history is persuasive love. If one begins with this premise, one would also interpret history differently".

It is necessary to discuss non-violent alternatives, the times and places where non-violence has averted wars and conflicts. Richard Deats²⁹ has pointed out that non-violent actions have been recognized globally and have been dramatically effective in toppling dictatorships and moving nations toward peace and justice. Some instances where non-violence were instrumental to restoring a "new order" were the overthrow of the dictators Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines in 1986, and Augustus Pinochet of Chile in 1988, and the disintegration of the former USSR. The mere suggestion that non-violent worldview exists will sound heretical to the armed advocacy groups. The conventional wisdom or usual presupposition in political science and history is that violence is both inevitable and necessary. A corollary is the assumption that the way things turned out was the necessary and inevitable way. In response to the use of violence, Noan Chomsky³⁰ reminds us that "one choice, always available, is to follow the Hippocratic principle; 'First do

²⁷ Onyeoguocha, Uche. "The Environmental Question": The Emperor Has No Clothes. Report of the Conference on the Peoples of the Niger Delta and the 1999 Constitution. Benin City. Environment Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, Nigeria, (2000) 19.

²⁸ Friesen, Duane. "Means and Ends: Reflections on Opposing Theologies of History" in *Non-Violent America: History Through the Eyes of Peace*. Edited by Juhnki and Louise Hawkley. (New Newton: Kansas Bethel College, 1993) 267.

²⁹ Deats, Richard. "The Global Spread of Active Non-violence" in *Peace is the Way: Writings on Non-Violence from the Fellowship of Reconciliation*. Edited by Walter Wink. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000) 283.

³⁰ Chomsky, Noan. *The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo* Monroe, (Maine: Common Courage Press, 1999) 156.

no harm., if you can think of no other way to adhere to that elementary principle, then do nothing; at least that is preferable to causing harm". This is akin to the Hindu and Jam's concept of ahimsa. Nonviolence is an active process that requires courage and not cowardice; it requires discipline and strength of wills and it entails risks of injury to its practitioners. The way we deal with conflict is a matter of choice. There should be a repeated refusal to accept warfare as a policy against those we classify as enemies.

Derrick Wilson³¹ cautions that in human relationship chaos is often resolved in seeking identifiable scapegoats who are to be blamed, yet not responsible; we should not remain under the illusion of peace secured in scapegoating others. The definitive renunciation of violence without any second thought will become the sine qua non for the survival of humanity itself and each of us. The quest for non-violent resistance should not be seen as a mechanism for aiding the oppressor and oppression. Non-violence can be a way of life, a life style, as well as, a strategy for social change.

Peace Making in Central Nigeria: A Challenge to the Churches

If the ethno-religious violence, killings, bigotry, fanaticism, misery and squalor are to be averted in Central Nigeria, we must find effective ways to live with each other and with our conflicts. The Christian Churches have contributions to make to this hopeful future. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9), he was giving the Churches the mandate to make peace knowing that conflict is inevitable. But how does the Christian Church respond to this mandate of conflict resolution, especially in Central Nigeria?

Since violent conflict begins in the minds of individuals, it is in the minds of men, women, and children that the desires for peace and nonviolence must be constructed. This is to say that peace, to a large extent, depends on very concrete decisions made by people doing their own peace initiatives, at the micro level (the family, and the inner person), meso level (the society), and macro level (inter societal and inter- regional). Consequently, a key strategy of a culture of peace lies in the education and training based on the principles of concretization which

³¹ Wilson, Derick "Living Through Chaos, Seeking the Gaps and Creating space for Learning: Learning for a Change in Northern Ireland" *Studies in World Christianity* 9.2 (2003): 205.

embody organizing, mobilizing and advocating for sincere economic, social and political reforms. For peace education to be effective, we have to be open to certain changes and re-orientation of our views and attitude towards resistance, from violent resistance to non-violent resistance³².

Peace is conceived not just as the absence of conflict and violence, but in a positive sense, as a co-operation among individuals and groups to achieve justice and freedom³³. Peace includes the values, principles and practices based on respect for life, human rights, inter-cultural understanding and solidarity. There is, therefore, the need for reconciliation among the stakeholders in Central Nigeria for the good and development of the region. Reconciliation models need to be diverse in its approach. Reconciliation cannot be forced; it cannot be imposed from 'above'. It can only come through repentance, and not from thousands of hours of political debate. It is a spiritual process. Victims impelled by a desire for revenge find it difficult to see any aspect of their enemy in a positive light. Solomon Schimmel³⁴ observes that a danger of revenge comes from our tendency to generalize both with respect with the perpetrator himself and the group to which he belongs, but we fail to see their human complexity, an admixture of good and evil. There would be healing if we see those we judge in their totality and must not focus exclusively on the harm they might have caused us. In Joseph Butler's words:

Anger may be considered as another false medium of viewing things, which often represents characters and actions much worse than they really are.... Thus in cases of offence and enmity, the whole character and behaviors are considered with an eye to that particular part which has offended us, and the whole man appears monstrous, without anything right or human in him, whereas the resentment should surely at least be confined to that particular part of the behavior which gave offence³⁵.

³² Onduku, Akpobibibo. "Towards a Culture of Peace in the Niger Delta "An Open Letter to the Honourable Members of Delta State House of Assembly. 7 pp. Online. Internet. 11 August (2001) 2.

³³ Onduku "Towards a Culture of Peace, 2.

³⁴ Schimmel, Solomon, *Wounds Not Healed By Time*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 4.

³⁵ Butler, Joseph, "Upon Resentment and Upon Forgiveness of Injustice" in *The Works of Joseph Butler, D. C. L. Vol. 2. Sermons*. Edited by W. E. Gladstone, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 137.

It can no longer be acceptable or persuasive to say that evildoers attack merely because they hate or because they have some kind of genetic predisposition to kill. For instance, historians recognize that Hitler's fanaticism did not arise in a vacuum; the seeds were laid in the humiliating, punitive peace and economic disintegration imposed upon Germany by the victors of World War 1. What is, therefore, needed in Central Nigeria is understanding not revenge; a need for restoration not retaliation, a need for *ubuntu*, a need for reconciliation not victimization³⁶.

It must be pointed out that unless the fundamental injustices of the past are redressed, reconciliation would not be sustainable. The past has to be dealt with properly and expeditiously if not, it could return to haunt the future. Victims' desire for vengeance is that they want the truth to come out so they can meaningfully forgive, and where possible, receive their rightful due. Remembering the past may be costly, but it may be more costly not to remember it in a way that can contribute to healing and genuine reconciliation. Because perpetrators of evil tend to forget their past more quickly, for their victims, it is always fresh in their memories. Reconciliation is all about seeking justice, healing memories and rebuilding society. When the harm caused and evil committed in the past are not admitted or minimized, there is no sign that reconciliation has taken place. People cannot be merely exhorted or manipulated into a truly heart felt reconciliation. It must be initiated from the side of the victim³⁷. The victims must be heard, the issue addressed, and their pains and plights well understood. There is the need for perpetrators and victims to sit together and listen to each other and undergo a process of forgiveness and healing through narrating their stories.

If we explore our histories together with people whose experiences differ, then new histories may eventually flourish³⁸ and in the definition of own self-identity

³⁶ Tutu, Desmond "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission" Longford Lecture: The Independent. February 16 (2004) 7.

³⁷ Schreier, Robert J., *Reconciliation, Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books. 1992) 45.

³⁸ Wright, F., *Northern Ireland — A Comparative Analysis*, (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1992) 30.

we make room for the “self-identification of the other”³⁹. True Reconciliation takes place when victims and transgressors come together in justice to repair the injustices suffered. If the transgressor accepts his guilt and the victim accepts his genuine apologies, then the parties are reconciled with justice, God and each other. We need to strengthen our efforts in dialogue with each other so that our real or perceived conflicts can move towards reconciliation rather than spiral into violence and counter violence. In a conflict there is one guilty party. Once one acknowledges one’s guilt, one must do all one can to repair the specific pain or damage (physical or psychological) that one has wrought by one’s offence. This usually involves apologizing and making restitution, to the victim for the harm caused. Christianity teaches us that we can rectify the damage caused by our sins through the process of genuine repentance (Philemon 1: 1-25). If we realize that we have sinned against others or violated their trust or norms or hurt them, and feel alienated from them, it behooves us to repent and return. Repentance entails the recognition and acknowledgement of our sins and feeling the guilt and remorse for the sins committed. As Solomon Schimmel⁴⁰ puts it “the repentance process includes self-confrontation, self-control, and self-sacrifice: the latter includes restitution, reconciliation and forgiveness”. Self-sacrifice depicts the broad range of elements in the repentance process that are necessary to make repentance complete. This is not only a matter of restitution in the sense of returning a stolen item, but also of extending the necessary effort to alter the fabric of relationships, the negative consequences, or mistrust and broken covenants that need to be corrected. We often shrink from the effort required to make these corrections, but such self-sacrificing effort is an essential point of redeeming the situation.

The first duty of the Christian Churches is to oppose violence. The second is to reconcile the victims with their oppressors – this means a return to justice and the law. Therefore, contacts with the conflicting parties are necessary. There is the need to provide opportunities for meeting, dialogues, and learning in communities to dispel ignorance, prejudice and fear, and to promote mutual respect and trust. When our feet get used to walking towards those we have

³⁹ Baum and H. Wells (Eds). *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenges to the Churches*. (Maryknoll, New York. Orbis Books. 1997) 191.

⁴⁰ Schimmel, *Wounds*, 158.

historically been estranged from, we will become wise – wise enough to ensure our interdependence of one another. However, the role of intermediaries becomes necessary when the parties themselves are unwilling to engage in direct contact. It then becomes obligatory for the Christian Churches to serve as intermediaries for ‘kick-starting’ the peace process by convincing the parties in conflict of the benefit of opening channels of communication. Their role, here, is to facilitate and not to dictate the terms of the contract. This may mean adding support to the weaker side or absorbing criticisms from both sides. Before going into the phase of negotiation or mediation, there is the need for the Churches to perform the task of sensitization towards the weaker side, and of helping them get organized in order to reduce the gap between oppressed and the oppressors⁴¹. The churches must be aware of underlining aspects of the conflict and apply pressure on the stronger side so as to bring the situation in Central Nigeria under control.

It is pertinent to state that neither the conflicting parties nor the mediators are infallible. All are composed of personalities, with ambitions, personal agenda and preconceived expectations. The work of reconciliation requires open acknowledgement of this fact and financial limitations. The church, as a mediator, should be acquainted with democratic and problem-solving ideas and practices. The task of reconciliation can be difficult and controversial. It calls for psychological insight into a people’s culture, a high degree of flexibility, capacity to judge a situation non-sentimentally, the talent to communicate with simplicity and clarity, and the readiness to adopt apolitical and agnostic stance when working with communities. The tasks also required “a high amount of psychological stress endurance, the capacity to encourage people and an unlimited trust in the success of the work as a community organizer”⁴².

To move out of conflict, there is the need for Christian Churches to come together. Doctrinal issues should be set aside so that the church of Christ can face the problem with a single voice as one body. The churches should therefore liaise with

⁴¹ Salter-White, James H., “Non-Violence, Political Movements as Misused Opportunities in Kosovo.” in *Teaching of Peace: Non-Violence and the Liberal Arts*. Edited by J. Denny Weaver and G. Biesecker-Most, (London. Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) 94.

⁴² Koch, Andrea and B. Scheiger “Testimonies of Atonement: A German Protestant Movement (ASF)” in *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenges to the Churches*. Edited by G. Baum and H. Wells. (MaryKnoll. New York: Orbis Books, 1997) 151.

the various levels of government and NGOs to constitute a Commission for reconciliation among the stakeholders in Central Nigeria. Such a Commission should oppose any desire for revenge and retributive justice, but insist that the truth be told. The sacred space is therefore created where the deeper processes of forgiveness, confession, repentance, reparation and reconciliation can take place. Then a very sincere commitment is required on the part of the churches to ensure that the dust of violence expressed differently across the region is permanently settled. In the words of Erich Weingartner (1997:78):

Work for peace and reconciliation is a very long process, requiring patience and long range plans. It is impossible to solve in a few years' problems that have a history spanning decades of centuries. 'Quick-fixes' often create more problems than they solve. By the same token, ultimate and win-lose options should be avoided. These simply pave the way for disappointment or later, retaliation.

Breakthrough can be ephemeral and set backs are inevitable. They are both parts of the process. Rather than think in terms of conclusions, it is better think of it as an on-going process that needs to be nurtured. This issue is quite complex but the resurrection of Jesus Christ teaches us that no stone is permanent. All of them can be turned aside – even the stones of prejudice, misunderstanding and political differences. The churches are enjoined to move quickly into Central Nigeria to persuade people that it is in their interest to lay down their weapons and embrace peace. Therefore, the task of reconciliation in central Nigeria is not a humanitarian option but a Christian obligation.

Concluding Remarks

We have noted that most of the violence experienced in central Nigeria is ethnic in nature. Most of them are based on agitations of identity and sense of belonging. Arms are taken up in protest against marginalisation. The result has been fatal and unimaginable, as several communities have been desolated. We have also argued that the various measures taken by successive governments to address the underdevelopment and hence calm the restiveness and violence in the region have remained largely unsuccessful. This is because they do not address the depth of the problem. In its place, we have proposed a new discursive shift of conflict resolution in which the churches would provide a sacred space to harness the

virtues of the scripture such as non-violent resistance, peace, repentance and forgiveness to effect reconciliation in Central Nigeria. The new shift of restorative justice is not mutually exclusive but complements the structural measures already in place. Central Nigeria's quest for national development should not be sought in science and technology, governments legislations, strategies of sociologists and political analysis alone This has to be south in the light of the spirit because it is man who has to be reformed first; then society would be remade by a reformed man'. A man who has not known peace cannot create a peaceful environment. A reformed man would be patriotic and not catastrophic.

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