

RELIGION AND THE CRISIS OF NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT Many religious crises in Nigeria have arisen due to the intolerance of various religious groups in the country. Often, this results from the suspicion with which each group holds the other. This is particularly the case between adherents of Christian and Muslim religions. This has weakened national unity and has affected the perception of Nigerians of the government.

Key Words: Crisis; Plural; Religion; Tolerance; Unity; Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, one of the major factors that have raised and continue to raise question about the unity of Nigeria is religion. This arises mainly from the plural religious nature of the country. Nigeria has two principal religions, Christian and Muslim. Others are very small and, therefore, do not cause anxiety on the continuous existence of Nigeria like the two principal religious groups. Initially, the problem posed by these two religions was not very obvious because of the level of tolerance among the religious groups. This has, however, ceased since 1978 when the issue of a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal (FSCA) arose at the Constituent Assembly. The acrimonious debate which followed the FSCA debate deeply affected the country and brought to fore the divisiveness of religion on the national unity of Nigeria (Obasanjo & Mabogunje, 1992: 172).

This paper illustrates how the divergence of religion in Nigeria has affected the unity of the country, with the focus on the role of the government as on well as the religious leaders in the whole episode.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptualizing religion has remained a problem for several scholars who have attempted the definition of the term. This is mostly because people's views of God differ. Notwithstanding this spectrum, scholars have attempted to define the term. According to Birnbaum (1964: 588), 'religion are (sic) systems of belief, practice and organization which shape an ethnic manifest in the behaviour of their adherents.' In a similar vein, participants at a Farm House Dialogue at Otta contended that religion is 'an expression of faith and belief. It is the conscious and subconscious response to the ultimate source of existence' (Obasanjo & Mabogunje, 1992: 169). On his part, James E. Dittes (1972: 414) posited that 'religion affords dra-

matic, insistent phenomena centrally entrenched in the intimate structures and functions of personality.'

What the above shows is that religion is diverse and each individual or group tends to have varying interpretation of what it means. It is, therefore, possible for people adhering to different religion to have divergent views of what they practice. Because of this, states with multi-religion try to provide for each group so as to minimise crisis. Thus, it is not surprising that Nigeria, being a plural religious state, has found it convenient to distance its government from any of the religions. This could be seen from the constitutional provision with regard to religion. The state has also proclaimed its neutrality in religious matters. Section 10 of the 1979 Nigerian Constitution which speaks of prohibition of state religion clearly presents this neutral position. This provision was made in such a way as to assure all Nigerians of the impartiality of the state. Section 10 of the 1979 Constitution is supposed to affect all aspects of national life. The question necessary at this juncture is whether this provision has reduced or prevented crisis among the followers of different religions in Nigeria. This question is pertinent if we must verify the efficacy of this Constitutional provision.

RELIGION AND THE CONSTITUTION

The divisive tendency of religion in a multi-religious state of Nigeria was manifested during the process of drafting the 1979 and 1989 Constitutions. This manifestation was evident from the manner the issue of whether to include the FSCA in both the 1979 and 1989 Constitutions was handled by members of the Constituent Assembly (CA). The debate on the issue portrayed the centrifugal pressure which the adherents of the Christian and Muslim religions usually brought to bear on state policies. The debate was cantankerous and tended to create anxiety about the feasibility of a civilian second and third republics.

Members of the CA during the debate for the two constitutions were divided in their opinion about the inclusion of the FSCA. This division was essentially along religious line. Those who supported the inclusion of FSCA in the two constitutions were mostly Muslims, whereas the opponents of such clause were predominantly Christians. Each group took an extreme position with non willing to concede any ground. For the proponents of FSCA, there were basically four reasons why the clause should be in the 1979 Constitution. These were, first, their claim that 'the Sharia was an absolute necessity for all Muslims in the Nigerian Federation in order to guarantee their basic way of life.' Second was that the provision would solve 'an administrative anomaly and was not a major concession to Nigerian Muslims.' The third argument was that fairness demands for such a provision in a heterogenous state where different groups 'must be dealt with equitably.' To the pro-Sharia group, the provision of FSCA would 'bring fairness to Muslims since other groups had already been taken care of in many ways.' The fourth reason was that the anti-Sharia group was either 'malicious' or 'ignorant' and 'unconcerned' about the problems of Nigerian Muslims (Laitin, 1982: 417-418). The pro-Sharia group also advanced the argument that the appeal procedure of FSCA 'would ensure a higher quality of jus-

tice, and this would be in the interest of all Nigerians.' They further pointed out that religion would enhance the moral development of Nigerians (Laitin, 1982: 419).

The reasons put forward by the pro-FSCA group did not, however, persuade those in the opposing camp to yield to the inclusion of FSCA in the 1979 Constitution. Instead, they advanced the argument that the inclusion of such a clause in the Constitution would amount to the establishment of 'a dual system of justice in the country' (Laitin, 1982: 419). They, therefore, entirely rejected the position of the pro-FSCA group. In fact, a member of the anti-FSCA group in the CA, I.A. Ani (Anambra), took the matter to a ridiculous extreme when he alluded that the establishment of the FSCA might lead to the creation of 'a Federal Court of Appeal for Aladura, one for Cherubim and Seraphim, one for the Christians' (C744).

Matters came to a head when members of the opposing groups refused to accept compromise provisions suggested by either the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) as presented by its Chairman, Chief Rotimi Williams or by other members of the CA. It was in exasperation over the unyielding position of these groups that a member of the CA, C. C. Onoh (Anambra), asked whether there was no Sadat or Begin in the Assembly who can resolve the conflict amicably (C112b). In fact, at a point, the supporters of FSCA in the CA staged a walkout from the Assembly. This generated much tension as to whether the issue would either lead to the postponement of the transition programme of the Obasanjo government or to another pogrom, as was witnessed in 1966. It was to avert these, that the Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo intervened. General Obasanjo warned members of the CA 'of the grave consequences of their action if they allowed any issue to degenerate to the abandonment of the Assembly.' He, therefore, called on the members to be accommodating. Happily, General Obasanjo's request seemed to cool down tempers. According to Obasanjo (1990: 62-63), some of those who participated in the FSCA debate at the CA were merely playing politics with the matter so as to seek public support in their places for their planned entry into party politics.

Mahmud Tukur lent credence to Obasanjo's statement when he posited that:

Certain groups with political ambitions from the North and the South decided to use the Sharia debate as a means of mobilizing support, the advantage being that either way, these individuals would still use the support they had earned in presenting themselves as defenders of Sharia or defenders of their people from the cloak of Islamic domination. The idea then was for either side to build up a pool of supporters that should be relied on for electoral advantage in the second republic for the advancement of their collective class interests (Kukah 1993: 121).

This attempt at using religion to gain political advantage falls in line with what Yusuf Bala Usman (1987) considered as the manipulation of religion in Nigeria. In the words of Usman (1987: 11) 'the campaign of systematic manipulation of religious sentiments is being conducted for the sinister and reactionary purpose of diverting attention... they wear a cloak of religion in order to confuse and divert the attention of our people from their harsh conditions of existence.'

This was evident from the number of those who spoke either in favour or against FSCA. Most of the supporters of FSCA were Muslims from the Northern part of the

country where Islam was predominant. CA members from the Eastern and the Middle Belt part of the country were mainly in the anti-FSCA camp. This could be because of the dominance of Christianity in the East and the perceived persecution of the Middle Belt by the predominantly Islamic North. Those from the Western part of the country were more in the group of compromisers. This could be explained from the standpoint that Christianity and Islam shared membership in the area almost proportionally (Laitin, 1982: 422-426).

Matthew Hassan Kukah (1993: 122-123) summed this up thus:

There were some strident voices of opposition as well as conciliatory calls for understanding from non-Muslims and non-northerners. For example, within the North, some non-Muslims and Muslims saw the Sharia in the context of their historical pre-and post-colonial experiences with the Hausa-Fulani ruling class. As such, they interpreted the moves to entrench the Sharia as aimed at reasserting the old hegemony that they believed had collapsed with independence. This accounted for the very strong anti-Sharia lobby that was mounted by some Muslim and non-Muslim Middle Belters, along with other CA and CDC members.

The same scenario as the 1979 Constitution was again witnessed during the FSCA debate in the CA when the 1989 Constitution was being prepared. Hardline positions were adopted by the Muslim and Christian members with neither willing to yield an inch. This again prompted the intervention of the government. The government decided to handle the FSCA matter by itself and thus barred the CA from discussing the issue further. Eventually, the government merely repeated most of the FSCA provisions of the 1979 Constitution in the 1989 document. According to President Babangida, the reason for this was to ensure religious harmony in the country (The Guardian, 6 May, 1989: 11). This can be seen from the standpoint that the FSCA Provisions of the 1989 Constitution tried to meet the demands of both the pro- and anti-Sharia groups to a certain degree.

The cantankerous debate over the FSCA in the discussion over the 1979 and 1989 Nigerian Constitutions clearly showed that instead of the heterogenous religious nature of the country being a cementing factor in national unity, it has tended to widen the gulf between different adherents. This is remarkably so because adherents of different religions see their faith as competing with each other. Thus, each aspires to gain supremacy over the other. What results from this is crisis of confidence and suspicion of each other's activities.

RELIGION AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

The absence of religious tolerance in Nigeria has become increasingly noticeable among the adherents of different faiths. This lack of tolerance is not restricted to any facet of life in the country. Evidences of this intolerance abound in the country. It could, however, be argued that such religious intolerance manifested itself more boldly during the 1980 Maitatsine Kano and 1982 Maitatsine Maiduguri riots. The riots arose out of the belief by the followers of Maitatsine that those who did not

practice their own brand of Islam were disbelievers, and thus needed to be brought in line. The resistance of the other groups not to succumb to forceful conversion led to the uprisings which claimed many lives and properties (Hickey, 1984: 252-253). Both the government and the people were shaken by these religious mayhem. In response, the government introduced new regulations so as to control public religious preaching by authorising those who should preach (Hickey, 1984: 252).

Lack of religious tolerance was again witnessed in 1986 at the University of Ibadan. This was between the Muslims and the Christians in the community over a white cross in front of the Chapel of Resurrection. The university Muslim community insisted that the cross should be removed from its strategic position between the Catholic chapel and the Protestant Church in the school. Their argument was that the cross constituted a distraction to many Muslims during their Jumat prayers. The Muslims even brought the matter to the Federal Minister of Education (Newswatch, 4 August, 1986: 31) whom they believed would give them good hearing because of his Islamic background. The matter could, however, neither be resolved by the Minister nor by the university authority. The non-resolution of the issue came from the unyielding positions of members of the two religions. The Christians refused the removal of the cross from its position. Their argument was that the cross had been there for over 32 years and could not be removed because of a newly built mosque. The Muslims on their part refused to accede even when the University Works Committee 'resolved to landscape the area and shield the cross from the view of muslims (sic).' What eventually happened was that some people believed to be religious fanatics set fire to the cross (Newswatch, 4 August, 1986: 31).

Another incidence of religious crisis occurred on March 7, 1987 at the College of Education Kafanchan between the Christians and the Muslims. The Muslims felt aggrieved over the way some portions of the Koran was interpreted by members of the College Christian Fellowship Conference (CFC). The anger of the Muslims led to an attack on the CFC members. During this attack, dangerous weapons were used by both groups and this resulted in the destruction of many properties (Newswatch, 30 March, 1987: 8). The Kafanchan incidence later spilled over to other towns including the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria, where the Muslim students burnt some churches near their campus at Samaru. Other places visited by fundamentalists were Kaduna and Katsina where several churches, mosques and properties were razed and many people killed. The toll turned out to be heavy: 25 people killed and 61 injured. The number of churches and mosques burnt were 40 and 3, respectively, as well as 46 private houses, 19 vehicles, 30 hotels, 9 shops, workshops and offices, 1 petrol station and 9 cows (Newswatch, 30 March, 1987: 20). This destruction alarmed both the Federal and the Kaduna State Governments. The President, General Babangida described the disturbance as 'a civilian equivalent of an attempted coup d'etat' (Newswatch, 30 March, 1987: 14). What the statement of the President portrayed was that religious intolerance posed a grave danger to the unity and stability of the country.

The Kafanchan riot arose out of the deep-seated suspicion between the adherents of Christian and Muslim religions. This suspicion which had been there for a very long time was waiting to explode. According to Kukah (1993: 188):

Testimonies from the various witnesses after the Skirmishes in the campus laid emphasis on different areas. But what seemed to be very clear was the fact that the riots expressed deep-seated feelings of resentment, prejudice and all forms of frustrations between Muslims and Christians on the one hand, and the people of the area against the government on the other. The attempts by the school authorities to manage the crisis were frustrated by the intransigence of some of the Muslim students who erected a barricade around the school area and terrorised many passers-by.

The ill feelings generated by the University of Ibadan and the Kafanchan crisis amongst the Christians and the Muslims was so much that each group sought to overpower the other whenever such religious problem arose. And, such a problem was bound to recur especially when each group was suspicious of the other. The stage for another confrontation came in March, 1988 when the Muslim students of Kaduna Polytechnic allegedly pulled down a church under construction at the school. The Christian students of the school reacted immediately by marching into the streets of Kaduna in protest (Newswatch, 28 March, 1988: 25). Sensing a grave danger, the school authority closed down the institution. This was to allow time for tempers to cool so as to avoid arson and bloodshed. It worked, as the students had to scamper for their homes in different parts of the country.

Another religious incident took place in February, 1992 in Zangon-Kataf, Kaduna State. This followed a disagreement between the Christian Kataf and the predominant Muslim Zangon Hausas over the plan by the local government council to relocate the traditional Zangon market. Here, the Kataf population supported the relocation while the Zangon people opposed the move, and succeeded in getting a court injunction restraining the relocation (Newswatch, 1 June, 1992: 11). In spite of this injunction, the local government tried to relocate the market. This ignited clashes between the proponents and the opponents of relocation. Over 60 people were killed and properties estimated at ₦2 million were destroyed. These included residential houses and farmlands (Newswatch, 1 June, 1992: 10). In order to calm frayed nerves, the Kaduna State Government under Dabo Lere set up a seven-member judicial commission to investigate the causes of the crisis. However, this judicial commission was accepted by neither of the parties in the dispute. The Kataf people even accused the government of constituting a panel that weighed heavily in favour of the Zangon Hausa community. Indeed, the Kataf Youth Development Association argued that the panel's composition was an 'obvious slight' which fell short of the 'balancing criteria to enhance the commission's credibility' (Newswatch, 1 June, 1992: 12).

It was perhaps due to the unamicable resolution of the February crisis that a fiercer one erupted between the two communities on 15 May, 1992. This time, the crisis spread to neighbouring towns such as Kaduna, Zaria and Gwagwalada. At the end of it all, the toll was heavier than the February instance. The death toll was officially put at 300. Many farms, homes, vehicles, churches and mosques were burnt down by the rioters. (Newswatch, 1 June, 1992: 10). Several prominent citizens were killed, including Bulus Kaneiyock, Secretary of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Zaria, three clergy men and a popular artist with the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Kaduna (Newswatch, 1 June, 1992: 10). Even police-

men were not spared, as some of the rioters were said to have disguised themselves in police uniforms and carried automatic weapons with which they shot their opponents' (Newswatch, 1 June, 1992: 11). At least one injured person claimed at the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital claimed,

When I saw the two men in police uniform, I thought I was safe. I thanked God, and started running to them for protection. I was not carrying any weapons, so they couldn't have mistaken me for a rioter. I was shouting on top of my voice. But rather than save me, I was shocked when I saw them lift their guns. They started shooting at me, and others coming behind me. I fell on the ground. I am sure they must have killed many people that day (Newswatch, 1 June, 1992: 11).

Perhaps, it was as a result of this type of statement and in order to stamp out religious intolerance in Nigeria that the Babangida regime decided to set up a Judicial Tribunal to try the perpetrators. At the end of its sitting, some prominent indigenes of the warring communities were sentenced to death. One personality in this category was a one-time Military Governor of Rivers State and ex-Nigerian Ambassador to Senegal. However, owing to pleas of clemency from several quarters, the death sentences were commuted to jail terms.

Other religious crisis have taken place after the Zangon-Kataf incidence. Prominent amongst these were the Tafawa-Balewa, Kano, Kafanchan and Sokoto instances. The Kano incidence indeed introduced a new dimension to religious crisis in Nigeria. This is because Muslim fundamentalists went to the prison, where Gideon Akaluka was placed in protective custody, and beheaded him believing that he defamed Islam.

The two most recent religious crisis in Nigeria are, however, the Osogbo and the Kaduna incidences of 1996. In the case of Osogbo, the problem was between the Muslim youths and members of Guru Maharaji—led one Love Family. The problem arose as a result of the determination of the Muslim youths to prevent Guru Maharaji from paying a courtesy call on the Ataoja of Osogbo. According to them, 'Maharaji was a heretic, in that he claims to be God' (The Guardian, 24 February, 1996: 3). They, therefore, invaded the palace to prevent the visit.

The eruption of the religious crisis in Kaduna in 1996 resulted from the arrest and detention of Mallam Ibrahim El-Zak-Zaky by the Kaduna State Police Command. His members who belong to the Shiite Muslim Community protested the arrest and detention. During their protest, a police sergeant was killed, and another one was beaten 'to a state of unconsciousness.' They were also accused by the police of 'damaging window louvers, gadgets and looting of police property at a police barrack' (The Post Express, 21 September, 1996: 1). For this, 35 Shiite Muslims were arraigned in court on murder charges (The Post Express, 21 September, 1996: 1). It was in anticipation that the riot might result in a Christian-Muslim confrontation that the Christians were directed to report at a designated Church in Zaria whenever they heard the sound of bell (The Guardian on Sunday, 22 September, 1996: A4). The Christian Community took this precaution not to be caught off-guard. Again, their decision resulted from the suspicion and antagonistic relationship between adherents of the two religions in the Northern part of the country, as a result of past

religious conflicts.

Religious bigotry has also manifested itself even in the type of school uniform for Nigerian students. The controversial case of the introduction of separate school uniforms for the Muslim students in Queens College, Lagos and some schools in the Northern part of the country further worsened the deteriorated relationship between the Christians and the Muslims in Nigeria. In fact, by that decision, the Christians felt that the government favoured the Muslims (Newswatch, 31 October, 1988: 29). This helped to create doubts in the minds of the Christians over whether the government served the national interest or the interest of a particular religion. This became increasingly so because of the domination of the presidential seat by Northern Muslims.

It was to counter the Christian perception that the Muslims decided to question the observance of Saturday and Sunday as public holidays in Nigeria. According to one of them, Saturday and Sunday were Christian days of worship (Newswatch, 31 October, 1988: 29). The Muslims have also accused the government of favouring the Christians over other public holidays in the country. It was partly to douse this allegation that the Nigerian government decided that any public holidays that fell on a weekend would no longer be shifted to a working day. This included both the Christian and the Muslim holidays. The two groups have accepted this decision.

Other religious crisis have contributed immensely towards the weakening of national cohesion, such as the competition over the religious population in the country. This contest has contributed greatly to the present lack of accurate census figure for Nigeria. Indeed, the competition became too choking to the extent that the National Population Commission (NPC) decided to delete anything that related to religion in the 1991 national census exercise. This partly contributed to the low disputation of the provisional census figure announced by President Babangida in 1992.

The Christian-Muslim divide was also evident when the Federal Government under Nigeria's Second Republic gave a piece of land and N10 million to the adherents of Islamic religion to build a mosque in Abuja. This gesture was challenged by the Christians who saw such a decision by the government as a subtle support of one religion against the others (Kukah, 1993: 162-163). In order to stop the acrimony such a challenge would generate, the government decided to extend the same generosity to the Christians (Ekoko & Amadi, 1989: 128). It was also for this same reason that the various state governments set up both a Muslim Pilgrim Board and a Christian Pilgrim Board. These establishments have helped to diffuse the tension that would have arisen otherwise.

The distrust between individual adherents of Christian and Muslim religions can also be volatile. To this day, leaders of these two religions frown at inter-religious marriage and consider any member of their group who by marriage converts to the other religion as an outcast. The case of a former Catholic Priest, Mr. Sulayman Iwobi who converted to Islam is typical of this incidence. According to Iwobi:

when I became a Muslim I lost the love and trust of my family; my religion exhumed (!) unexpected problems between my bosses in the office and me, I was served an ejecting notice by my Landlord on the condition (!) that I will not practice the Hausa

religion in his compound, my friends deserted me and avoided me with the same degree with which one avoids an infectious disease (Raji, 1982: 221).

At this juncture, it must be stated that the maladies discussed so far is not restricted to inter-religious relationship, but also manifests in the fold of those professing the same faith. The frequent misunderstanding among different Muslim sects which occasionally culminate in open confrontation is a good illustration. This situation often arises because, whereas some of these sects are so extreme in their positions over certain national issues, others adopt moderate and conciliatory posture. For instance, some Muslim sects pledge loyalty to both the constitution and the government of Nigeria, while some others such as the Muslim Students Society (MSS) refuse to accept this. Rather, the MSS believe in the ultimate attainment of an Islamic State, akin to Iran (Hickey, 1984: 255). The same divergence is also noticed among the Christians. Of particular reference is members of the Jehovah's Witness that refuse to accept the national flag, anthem and pledge whereas many other Christian groups accept these national symbols. These divergences help to reduce the converging influence of the various religious denominations on national unity. This is because each sect sees the other as a rival that wants to usurp it and become dominant. What results from this is continuous bickering which further creates disharmony and weakens national unity.

RELIGION AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Religious plurality in Nigeria has affected the country's external relations just as its domestic policies. A particular instance could be seen in the country's relationship with Israel during the first republic. It was obvious from the dichotomous debate over whether Nigeria should receive aid from Israel as well as establish diplomatic relations with her that religious sentiments beclouded objectivity. Both the proponents and the opponents of Nigeria's cordial relationship with Israel saw their positions as a way of furthering either the Christian or the Muslim religions. For instance, the opponents of a diplomatic relationship with Israel, who came mainly from the dominant Muslim North, were against Israel mainly because of their antagonism with the Muslim Arabs. On the other hand, supporters of Israel in Nigeria who came from the predominantly Christian South saw Israel as a Biblical state of God's chosen people. They were thus all out for immediate relationship with Tel Aviv (Nwosu, 1993: 129). These postures affected the position of the Federal Government as it had to find a middle ground between the feuding groups. Even the resumption in diplomatic relationship with Israel in 1992 following the earlier break in ties on the order of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1973 generated heated debate amongst people of these two religious groups (Nwosu, 1994: 25).

It is, however, important to note that the greatest religious acrimony on Nigeria's external relations came when the Babangida regime decided to take the country to the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) as a full member. The argument over the merits and demerits of this decision was very divisive, prompting the Babangida regime to set up a twenty-man committee of 8 Christians, 8 Muslims and 4 ministers

to examine its implication. Owing to the volatile religious nature of the OIC issue, the report of this committee was not publicly released. It rather set up an advisory council on religious affairs comprising of both the Christian and the Muslim leaders (Kukah, 1993: 233-234). Owing to disagreement over the need for this council especially by the Christian leaders, the body became moribund (Nwosu, 1989: 20). Thus, even today, members of these two religious groups dissipate energy in quarrels over whether Nigeria's full membership in the OIC was necessary or not. This has affected the careful examination by the country's foreign policy elites of the utility or non-viability of the OIC full membership. The government does not want to torpedo the fragile unity. The government has, however, encouraged a body known as National Council for Religious Tolerance in the hope that it would bring people of these two main religions closer.

It is necessary to state that religious crisis are not peculiar to Nigeria. It has been shown in studies outside Nigeria that religious crisis are a universal phenomenon, as reported studies in Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, India, Nicaragua, Tibet and United Kingdom. Mary-Jane Deeb's Algerian study illustrated that:

The Algerian Islamists did not confine themselves to haranguing their followers, or to writing pamphlets but moved to action in the early 1980s. They took over mosques which had been under government control for two decades, and established independent places of worship of their own, even ousting officially appointed imams... and replacing them with members of their own movement. When government security forces attempted to stop the takeover... bloody clashes erupted and resulted in a number of casualties. They also attacked public places suspected of selling alcoholic beverages to their customers, and harassed women in Western clothes. University campuses witnessed pitched battles between Muslim fundamentalists and left-wing students culminating in the death of a student in November 1982... (Deeb, 1989a: 7).

Religious crisis in Algeria has continued ever since the electoral victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was annulled by the military early in the 1990s. Giving support to Deeb's position, Mark Juergensmeyer (1989: 48) in a study on Tibet posited that 'several monks were killed when police fired on the crowd' protesting against the Chinese authorities. This religious problem was equally highlighted in Marius Deeb analysis of the Egyptian situation. According to Deeb (1989b: 65-66), in spite of the participation of the Muslim Brothers in the political system, clashes between Islamic groups and the police have continued. One of these clashes near Asyut in March 1988 resulted in the death of one person and the arrest of 85 Muslim militants.

What the above illustrate is that religious fundamentalism is not restricted to Nigeria. Indeed, it is pervasive and affects the social relations of many peoples. It also creates distrust amongst adherents of various religions in the world.

CONCLUSION

The multi-religious nature of Nigeria has adversely affected national unity and

cohesion. This negative impact comes mainly from the Christians and the Muslims. Each of these religions has tried to ensure that the other does not gain supremacy over it. In this contest for superiority, nothing has been left to chance. What has resulted from this competition is the crisis of national unity currently facing Nigeria.

It is important to point out that the Nigerian government has found itself often entangled in this religious crisis. Some notable instances are the FSCA debate in both the 1979 and 1989 Constitutions, the University of Ibadan cross crisis, diplomatic relations with Israel and the OIC controversy. In all these, the government has attempted to play the role of an umpire, even though occasionally it was accused of bias by one religious group or the other.

In the final analysis, it must be pointed out that even though religion has contributed to the crisis of national unity, it can still be put into fruitful use as a vehicle for national cohesion and rebirth. This could, however, only happen when the leaders of the various religions understand that the ultimate goal of all faiths is closeness to God and service to humanity. Only then will religion begin to play some crucial role as a vehicle for national unity.

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