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Religion as a Tool in Promoting Conflict Management, Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa

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Abstract: Religion is a social phenomenon that pervades every aspect of human existence and human interactions. Religion is an established institution in every human society in the world. The power of religion, as an instrument of peace, substantially rests on morals which every religion preaches and propagates. Morality deals with the question of what is right and good and what is wrong and evil in human conduct. Morality and religion go together. Conflict in human society is inevitable. It is part and parcel of human existence. Conflict in Nigeria evolve as war, violence which are predominantly ethno - religious in nature. Peace building is essentially important for sustainable development in Nigeria. On this note, the thrust of this research is premised on religion as a tool in conflict management and peace building in Nigeria. The work adopted theories of Emile Durkheim on Religious functionalism and the Divine Command to establish its claims. It made use of descriptive methods, socio-ethical and historical approaches. Its findings showed that religious ethical values such as justice, love, tolerance. Patriotism and peace which are entrenched in various religious practices (African traditional religion, Christianity and Islam) are germane for conflict management and peace building in Africa. The work recommends religious and ethnic dialogue among communities and also encourages continental moral rebirth among religious adherents which is pivotal for sustainable development in Nigeria and Africa at large.

Keywords: Africa, Conflict Management, Peace, Sustainable development, Religion

Introduction

The entire African continent is bleeding from the pain of tribal animosity, ethnic tension, hatred, violence, poverty, political instability, injustices and bad governance. Africa is today a home to many religious organizations and many people have viewed this as a positive development in the continent, the situation is otherwise different.

Nigeria has been characterized by communal conflict often time with ethnic and religious under pinning. While politically motivated or even economic crisis could easily be understood and explained, religion and ethnicity have emerged as the constantly used element in fueling crisis in Nigeria. (Alamu, 2021, p. 70; Gwamna, 2010, p. 62 and Salifu, 2024, pp. 165-172). Scholars have addressed conflict management from the standpoint of policy formulation, dialogue and use of litigation from its angle of morality. This research appraised the deliberate revival of moral values which are germane in all religions (Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion). Research methods adopted were both descriptive and analytical in nature. Interview was employed as our primary source of data collection. 72 respondents where purposefully selected, 24 from each religion (Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion). The research was domesticated in the North-Central part of Nigeria using Kwara state (Kwara-South Ajase Ipo, Kwara-North Tsaragi and Share and Kwara-Central Ilorin respectively). What informs the choice of this location is in its peculiarity of religious crisis and ethnic violence. It is also a microcosm setting that envelops the three major tribes (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) in Nigeria. Imams, pastors, religious adherent and traditional priest form the composition of the interview respondents in order to avoid being bias and to garner authentic information for data analysis. Archival materials such as journals, books, encyclopedia and internet sources were consulted as secondary sources of data collection.

Theoretical Framework

The research was premised on Emile Durkheim's theory of religion. This theory is about the role of religion in society popularly known as functionalism. That is religion has a social function or functional role to play in the society. Durkheim gives a sociological interpretation of religion as a creation of the society. He believes that it is the society which creates and the uses religion as an instrument of control. Thus, he focuses his attention on the impact and contribution religion makes to the social needs of society. (Dzurgba, 2004, p. 15).

Durkheim observes the general relevance of religious beliefs and practices to the life of man in society by creating conditions for social well-being, self-discipline, social solidarity, social cohesion and continuity of religion and knowledge. Based on the unified and unified value system, his analysis was based on the general relevance of the religious beliefs and practices to the people's social living. He doubts the survival of any society without the existence and support of religion. This is because religion according to him, structures they cause of human civilization and social life for continuing existence. Hence, religion enhances confidence and conformity to the values, norms and rules of society (Dzurgba, 2004, p. 36).

The relevance of this theory today work is seen under the interaction between

religious adherent and their conformity to the values, norms and rules of society. These values are considered as moral qualities that help to shape motives, desires, actions and character formation. Thus, there is need for maintenance of order, advancement in self-discipline, social solidarity and cohesion in Conflict management and peace building.

Clarification of Concepts

This study has clarified two concepts that are germane to the discuss which are Religion, Conflict Management, Peace and Development.

Religion

There is no unified definition of religion, however, various scholars define it according to individual ideology and religious peculiarity. Karl Max considered religion as the "opium of the people" He summed up his definition of religion in his famous statement which says: By defining religion as the opium of the people, Marx means that all categories of people use religion to solve their problems. The privileged class (the rulers and the rich in the society) use religion to maintain the status quo by telling the subjects and the poor masses that God has destined them to be subjects and the poor; that everyone should accept the will of God in his condition; that the masses will receive their reward in heaven for accepting their condition and obeying those in authority. The masses on the other hand, use religion to pacify themselves and accept their condition in hope for a blissful life in the hereafter.

Conflict Management

Conflict in human society is inevitable. It is part and parcel of human existence. All that is important therefore is not conflict per se but how people respond to it in terms of management (Olatunde, 2006, p. 71). The word "management" according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (6th edition), is "the act or skill of dealing with people or situations in a successful way". Ogunleye (2013, p. 58) seize conflict management as they attempt at bringing things and Conflict situation under control. Conflict management performs a healing function in society. Peace is restored in society by facilitating discussions that can resolve difference to stop conflict is not as important as the handling. The reason is that it is the one (handling) that normally produces a result. A minor conflict can degenerate to a major one; while a major one can be settled amicably, depending on the ways and manner with which each situation is managed or handled. If a conflict is well or properly handled, it can be a precursor to social changes in terms of progress, growth and development of a society (Salifu 2024, pp. 165-172).

Peace

Peace in this context is defined as "a political condition that ensures justice and social stability through formal and informal institutions, practices and norms" (Miller and King, 2003, 40). It is dangerously misleading to think that the absence of war means the presence of peace, but acting in accordance to some of the conditions that must be met to guarantee peace in any society.

Development

Development has been considered as a state of modernization as well as the sustained increase in the real per capita income which results in social and structural changes in a country over a long period of time. For many scholars

today, when we talk of development, we are talking about means of reaching an acceptable standard of living for all people. It means that people have the basic things they need to live and at same time, all the people have the right to make choices about their lives, and have the opportunity to improve their living situations. Thus, it is clear that development is seen as materialistic and economic terms. Scholars like Gofwen (2004, p. 15) have a problem when development is defined in this way, because for him, "development does not mean mere economic growth or westernisation, but rather the total sum of a country's well-being, virtues minus the total sum of the country's well-being vice's (Gofwen, 2004, p. 16). While well-being qualities include modernization/democratisation, qualitative education and critical consciousness, the well-being vices include dependency, bribery and corruption, unwarranted military interventions, dictatorship and the abuse of human rights, etc (Gofwen, 2004, p. 20). This moral and holistic conception of development is shared by Kuka, (2000, p. 27) who has argued that to take development seriously means to take it in terms of adequate responses to the entire existential conditions in human beings, function, conditions which encompasses the economic, political, moral, cultural and other sphere of life.

Overview of Conflict in Nigeria

The past three decades in Nigeria have witnessed diverse conflicts, some, of the very violent type. From political to economic conflicts, Nigeria has been characterized by communal conflicts, oftentimes, with ethnic and religious under-pinning. While politically

motivated or even economic crisis could easily have understood and explained, religion and ethnicity have emerged as the constantly used elements in fueling crisis in Nigeria. Religion is becoming a divisive issue, and constitutes a growing conflict flash point.

Egwu (2001, p. 30) presents this scenario thus:

Nigeria has demonstrated a very high moral propensity for ethnic and religious violence in the past three decades… there has also been a rise in the level of religious fundamentalism, millenarian religious movements of all kinds, and an extreme sense of religious intolerance resulting into numerous cases of intra and inter-religious violence on the other.

Kukah M. H. (2000, p. 16) corroborates Egwu's observation but added ethnicity as the twin evils along with religion which pose serious threats to the stability of the Nigerian nation. He says that, "most students of the African political scene are agreed on the fact that both ethnicity and religion are the most dangerous threats to the attainment of democracy in Africa" It is a fact that religion is compounding the ethnocentric rivalry in Nigeria.

Obstacle to Peace and Conflict Management in Nigeria

The following have been identified as challenges to peace and conflict management, be it religious, ethnic or communal conflicts.

I. Religious rivalry among Christians and Muslims

O. B. Adebayo (personal communication, May 12, 2024) opines that religious conflict occurs over religious beliefs, doctrines and practices. Rivalry between Muslims and Christians has obviously ignited violence in Nigeria, especially

with regard to the strict Islamic law (Sharia) by states in the predominantly Muslim North like Zamfara state. Christians, who are in the majority in the south, have perceived this as a threat of islamisation, and in the flash points such as kaduna in the North and Jos in central Nigeria has been a source of Christian Muslim violence (Adeola and Ajani, 2021, pp. 14-18).

ii. Differences in Ideology

Ideological conflict occurs between two or more ethnic groups or countries, competing supremacy in power, prestige, wealth, prosperity, culture or cultural heritage, science and technology (Dzurgba, 2006, p. 29). The conflict between Christian and Muslims and between the Federal Government and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) are good examples of ideological conflict in Nigeria. K. M. Abdulrazak (personal communication, June 3, 2024) asserts that all these violent conflicts have contributed to the state of underdevelopment in Nigeria. In a sentence, the peace and security and indeed wellbeing of the people of Nigeria has been seriously compromised.

iii. Prejudice, Hatred and Discrimination

The tendency for division and separation is seen in all racial relations in cultural, political, societal, economic and religious institutions. These often result in conflict between major and minor ethnic groups, such crying against discrimination and marginalisation in economic and political affairs. M. O. Saba (personal communication, May 20, 2024) buttresses that politically, the highest office in the land is contested for, but emphasis is on a racial groups ambition for the presidency. This creates division among the numerous racial groups in the country.

iv. Poverty

Egwu (2001) states that many social science disciplines, in addition to psychology, have firmly established that poverty and its contextual life circumstances are major determinants of armed violence. Religious violence is most prevalent among the poor, regardless of race (Egwu, 2001, p. 18). L. M. Kolawole (personal communication, June 5, 2024) adds that over the years, the rate of poverty has hampered development in the nation.

v. Unemployment

Y. O. Elizabeth (personal communication, June 17, 2024) was of the opinion that more than a few religious disturbances are carried out or executed by persons who are not gainfully employed. It is not uncommon to see energetic school leavers roam the streets unemployed. Such persons have easily become tools in the hands of agents of religious crisis. Therefore, government should formulate policies that should lessen the unemployment problem.

vi. Corruption

S. O. Aluko (personal communication, June 26, 2025) postulates that corruption is a complex issue that involves society, politics and economy. Years of misrule, massive corruption and squandering of development opportunities by successive governments have pauperized large segments of the population. The end result or product of all actions that tamper with or compromise justice and fairness is conflict. This is why corruption is one of the major obstacle to peace and conflict management in Nigeria

(Dzurgba, 2008, p. 48).

vii. Bad Governance

When governance is characterized by economic mismanagement, rabid corruption, irresponsible political behaviour and squander mania and the state becomes largely irrelevant to the lives of the people and when you have a violation of fundamental human rights of the citizens, the governance process is dubbed "bad governance". Bad at governance represents a governance process where the resources of the state are being managed to advance personal and group interests rather than to promote the public and collective good or public interest.

viii. Get Rich Quick Syndrome

Today, people no longer belief in hard work but short cut to get Rich. They involve themselves in all kinds of crimes, such as cybercrime, armed robbery, kidnapping for ransoms, ritual killings, assassinations and prostitutions to become rich and belong in the society. These kind of violence is on the increase in Nigeria and it involves both young and old including students. M. O. Farouk (Personal communication, May 30, 2024) emphasizes that there is no more fear of God in the minds of people, morality is thrown into the air and, immorality has become the order of the day. People are outsmarting each other in joint business ventures by sending assassins after their business partners in order to corner proceeds of the business. This is one of the obstacle to peace and conflict management in the country.

ix. Environmental Destruction

Environmental pollution induces conflict, especially in the communities where the exploration and exploitation of natural resources such as, crude oil are carried out (Adeola and Ajani, 2021, p. 14-18). A. Y. Mabel (personal communication, June 18, 2024) explains that in these communities, the means of livelihood are destroyed by industrial activities. Farmlands, water resources and forests are polluted, depleted, degraded and wasted. In such communities, ecological benefits are all together damaged or destroyed and thereby making the people in such communities suffer from lack of good water, shelter, clothing, food, health services, education and other necessities of life. As a result of this, there is frequent agitations and clashes between the communities and businesses corporations as well as between the communities and government agencies e.g Niger Delta.

Consequences of Conflicts in Nigeria

The various religious crises in Nigeria have left negative imprints on Nigeria's body polity. These crises have caused the death of several people, led to loss of property and disruption of the socio-economic life of the Nigeria citizens. This is in addition to threatening the security of lives of Nigerians. In most cases where official figures of losses were given, they were oftentimes, underestimated. The religious crises in Nigeria have left their enduring legacies of tension, insecurity, mutual suspicions, arms buildup and negative inter-religious relationships.

Since the 1980s when religious crises heightened in Nigeria, people have relocated to what they consider *safe areas*. These relocations are based on ethnic and religious borderlines, which have serious security implications in future. This is because, battle lines are already being drawn for potential war in times of crises. Today, major cities in the North are patterned along Christian-

Muslim divides. For example, in Kaduna, there are Christian predominant in Jenta Adamu, Kabong, Auguwan Rukuba, and Tudun-Wada areas. This is because, there has been a great deal of suspicion, mistrust, fear, and even open resentment between some Muslims and Christians in Jos town.

In Bauchi, the ancient city is still predominantly inhabited by Muslim, while Christians inhabit the Bayan, Gari, Yelwa, and *Government Reservation Area* (GRA). The crisis in Tafawa Balewa has widened ethnic and religious relations in Bauchi particularly, between the Hausa-Fulani, the Sawaya and the Christian population generally. Even the resettlement houses that were built by government in the aftermath of the Zangon-Kataf crisis, separated people along ethnic and religious lines. The Sabon Gari (stranger settlements) in Kano still accommodates Christian and other non-Muslim population, with Muslims concentrated in the ancient city. It is to be noted however, that these dislocations and relocations have created socio-economic problems as some are thrown out of their jobs. Some of these settlements have also become a haven of idle hands who constitute potential bands of armed robbers, and other social vices. The continuous escalation of religious crises in Nigeria is gradually creating and conditioning people to harbor bitterness, and grievances against each other, which has the potential danger of bursting into serious crisis.

The obvious spill over or hangover effects of these crises have also been the weaponization of the Nigeria state. It is a fact today that where religious crises have occurred, a lot of arm has been stockpiled as a measure to either checkmate potential "opponents" or as deterrents to opposing religions foes in the future. This scenario has serious security implications for the peaceful co-existence of Nigerians.

In some cases, restive youths have taken advantage of these weapons to organize ethnic and religious militias and even armed gangs on the highways. In fact, the incessant religious conflicts have polarized even the military along religious lines.

The *politicization of religion* by the state itself has created its own problems. Ilori (1992, p. 54) has rightly noted this when he states that, "the state has appeared as an innocent bystander in the religious conflicts when actually it is not. For the religious actors, the state is partisan in its approach to religious issues.

Religion as a tool in Promoting Conflict Management, Peace and Sustainable Development

The relationship between religion and peace down through history, has been ambivalent (Gwamna, 2010, p. 36). According to him every religion in the world proclaims "peace" and has "peace" as a major theme in their sacred writing. In other words, the beliefs and doctrines of the three religions practised in Nigeria (Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion) advocate peaceful coexistence and tranquility in the society. Religion therefore is an effective tool of promoting peace and harmony in the society.

The power of religion, as an instrument of peace, substantially rests on moral which every religion preaches and propagates (Olatunde, 2007, pp. 47-50). Our concern in this section is to examine some religious values viz-a-viz their implications for conflict management and peace building. To the best of our

knowledge, keeping these moral values will no doubt engender peace in any society. In this piece, religious moral values are actions prescribed for religious adherence to integrate into all aspects of life (Familusi and Oke, 2013, pp. 51-53). The cut across the three major religions practiced in Nigeria. The list of ethical principles in religions is long. However, we shall discuss some of them that concern conflict management and peace building.

The first one is Justice: in religious ethics, justice means given an individual what he or she deserves. This is a clear departure from philosophical ethics, which explains the concept to mean many things. Justice is not the same thing as equality, which at times could lead to injustice. The word equity is a good way of understanding Justice. To be just is to be fair to all and sundry, collectively and individually irrespective of race, colour, sex, social status, ethnic background or religious affiliation. In Islam, Christianity and traditional religion, justice is a sine qua non for well-being. The Quran in Surah 5:8, 10:90 and 57:25 emphasizes the imperative of Justice while the Bible recommends it in Proverbs 21:3, Amos 5:24 among several other passages. As expressed in various proverbs and sayings such as *ogbo amine k'ojo chi chokete,* (every human being is the same as far as process of childbirth is concerned) and *Agbayilo chaka cha lu Kate ma che* – (no bird of the same class is taller than the other). These sayings express nothing other than Justice. It is germane to ask if justice is practiced in Nigeria. Cases of violence and agitation were prompted by perceived injustice. The Niger Delta became a theatre of war as a result of the maltreatment if it's indigenes, who have nothing to show for

their being an oil producing people. In this case, we can talk of injustice from within and without. This is because apart from insensitivity on the part of the government some leaders of the area are equally agents of injustice. This development led to the activism of Ken Saro-Wiwa and others who were executed in 1995. According to Familusi (2011, p. 24), "The Niger Delta became engulfed in conflicts when the indegenes felt cheated because of crude oil, which is the main story of the economy of Nigeria, is produced in their area, yet the people and the territory continue to suffer neglect. This necessitated their clamour for resource control

Also, we see love as a prerequisite for peace. Though a very broad and in a way inexplicable concept, it is a fundamental element in religion. The Bible describes it as the fulfilment of the law. (1 Cor:13). Love is expressed in hospitality, care, sympathy, empathy and spirit of oneness. It can be said that where there is love, justice will prevail and other vices that could lead to conflict would be avoided. Love is analogous to the golden rule, which states that "Do unto others what you expect them to do unto you". (Matthew 7:12). Muhammed in his sunnah says "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself" (Ayantayo, 2009, p. 32). An Igala adage says "Alo li du kpe ki ma kola woli" that is, (while felling a tree in the forest, one must think about how it feels). In other words, in whatever we do, we must always be conscious of those who will be affected. Immanuel Kant as cited by Omoregbe (1998, p. 52) opines that an action will be adjudged to be good if the actor would want it to be a universal law. Despite the quintessence of love, it is a scarce commodity in

Nigeria. The happenings of recent times, especially in the Northern Nigeria, can only be explained in terms of lack of love. Every religion has an account of how many was made, God being the giver of life. Consequently, life is sacred and it can only be taken by the giver, God. This explains the Job's statement "God gives, God takes, blessed be the name of God". Taking another man's life is an aberrant behavior in religious ethics. Thus, all efforts are to be made towards its preservation. But the question is, how sacred is human life in Nigeria where dead bodies litter roads and where lives are lost at every regular interval even in the name of religion? To say the obvious, lives are no longer construed to be sacred. The result is the Nigerian experience during ethno-religious crisis.

Peace building is anchored on honesty, which is described as the best policy. To be honest is to be truthful, plain, straightforward and trustworthy. Social relation is based on this principle and jetitioning it will lead to interpersonal dissension. Honesty is expected of leaders and followers. In fact, every Nigerian who recites the national pledge expressly promises to be honest, this is a demonstration of good citizenship, which is a sacred duty of religious people. The Igala people of Kogi State (North-Central) stresses the adage on honesty as follows:

Ena ki cho chi   It is good to be honest
Ena ki ge cha   It is good to be truthful
Aki cho chi   It is only rectitude that
Akpo ji ologbo   Prevents one from dying young
Iya no lo Ji fufu   And enables one to grow exceedingly hoary
Ojo ogi Jo   At his old age.
(Salifu, 2021).

The Quran metaphorically refers to truth as a missile to be hurled at falsehood, thus, knocking out it's brain. Muslims are enjoined to be honest in their words and deeds. Quran (2:42) says "and cover not the truth with falsehood, no conceal the truth when you know what it is".

Also, honesty is indispensable to Christian living. As stated in the Bible, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). Pathetically many Nigerians of all statuses are dishonest. As many leaders are dishonest, many a follower is not in any way better. A line of the national pledge that says "to serve Nigeria with all my strength" has been replaced with "to serve Nigeria is not by force" in some quarters. Leaders who fail to lead by good example cannot expect their followers to be faithful. They are many unresolved issues in this country that are premised on mistrust on the part of the government. One will not be wrong to think that a leader must not make any promise that will not be fulfilled, but there are many of such in Nigeria. That is why embarking on strikes is the only weapon that workers have. There is an emerging conflict on the selection of Muslim -Muslim presidential ticket which negate the normal constitutional norm of Christian - Muslim or Muslim - Christian ticket in other to give room for equilibria religious balancing at the top echelon in government. But presently the reverse of this orderliness is the case. We are not honest to the stipulations of the Constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria because of the religious bias and dominance. They are more concerned about retaining power, which Awolowo,

as cited by Olatunde (2006, p. 26) describes as tenacity of office, that is, "a political monstrosity, whose characteristics are an inordinate and shameless love of power for its own sick, and a morbid tenacity for public office even when all the legitimacy for continuing in such public office has completely disappeared."

Many of the wars wagged against the Federal Government are by-products of betrayal of trust. In the political terrain, scores of those who were used and abandoned after election have become social miscreants.

Furthermore, peace building is entrenched on the principle of tolerance, which must be demonstrated in religious, social and political relations. To be tolerant is to endure hardship and recognized the inevitability of conflicts. Provocation will surely come, but retaliation is definitely not always the answer. Lending credence to this is an aphorism: "an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind." With tolerance and perseverance, violence will be avoided, and dialogue will be applied. Virtue, according to Aristotle as cited by Dzurgba (2000, pp. 31-33) lies between two extremes. In this case, it will be wise to imbibe the virtue of moderation while agitating for rights even in the face of provocation. In ethics, that one has a right does not mean that such a right must be asserted in all cases. Sometimes, it may be ones duty not to do so. For example, the need to claim a particular right may lead to conflict among individuals or groups, and it will be wise if that right is for gone by one or some of the contending parties in the interest of the entire community. The capacity of knowing when to assert a right and when not to is a fine and rare quality of a moral person.

It follows that as reasonable as some of the activities of militias are consequent upon violation of rights and other grievances, still tolerance code have been a very table tool.

We are not oblivious of the fact that tolerance cannot tolerate intolerance, but it is not in all cases that violent reaction could bring expected results. The advice given by Jesus in Matthew 5 is a compedium as well as summary of every sermon on tolerance. In Surah 41: 34-35, Muslims are enjoyed to tolerate everybody, non-muslims inclusive, while in indigenous African society, harmonious life manifests traits of character like contentment, patience, gentleness, avoidance of vindictiveness and quarrelsomeness, temperance, moderation and seeking the goodwill of all. (Akintola 1999, p. 43).

Experience has shown that many Nigerians are not tolerant in spite of their religiosity. A good way of knowing how impatient a Nigerian could be is when he or she is behind the wheel. They have been cases of pastors raining curses on other drivers only to discover that the offenders were members of their churches. How would such people preach tolerance? Social cohesion and tolerance as core values for mutual coexistence have been discarded by many a religious practitioner and it is a negation of theories of religious functionalism and divine command. Consequently, victims have no choice but defend themselves and this is largely responsible for conflict problems in Nigeria.

Recommendations

As established in this work, the problem of conflict in Nigeria can be blamed on non-adherents to religions moral values. On this note, we recommend a total

revival of this values at every level of existence, as to curb the menace. This can be achieved by engaging in practical and purpose driven religiosity as opposed to hypocritical religiosity. The church, mosque, school, family and other agents inculcating morality should be alive to their responsibilities by extolling virtues that can enhance peace. The Maxim "practice what you preach" is very relevant at this moment because people are prone to not leading by good example. Therefore, we recommend moral rectitude for leaders so that followers will be challenged to leave moral lives. More importantly, integrity must not be sacrificed on the altar of materialism. If this happens, religious leaders will have the boldness to tell the truth rather than becoming apologists of ungodly leaders. The Spirit of patriotism cannot be done away with in this matter as lack of it is also an issue in Conflict. The government must be more practical about resolving the conflict problems. Appropriate steps must be taken at the right time. Thus, force most not be used where dialogue is the answer.

Conclusion

The stability of Nigeria will be greatly enhanced if religious influence or its use is underplayed, in order to safe guard the rights and privileges of fellow Nigerians. Once religion ceases to remain a major factor in determining political power, identity, and even favor's in public life generally, Nigeria will emerge as a strong and united polity, instead of the fragile religiously charged nation, which is the present state of Nigeria. It is within this context that we shall illustrate the interplay between religion and ethnicity in the Middle-Belt area for our further

understanding. Without doubt, religion has all governing principles of life, and infuses discipline and social order, Thus, religion is a cord that binds people together in order to promote social cohesion and communal well-being. As the rule of law is machinery set in place to guide the conduct of the people, religion is both social and legal mechanisms for harmonious living and peaceful coexistence. It is in this context that the theories of religion functionalism and the Divine Command are of paramount importance to this study.

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