

## **A Biblical Free Market Approach to Religion: An Imperative for Religious Diversity and Peace in Nigeria.**

**Simeon Iember Aande PhD**

Department of Religion and Philosophy  
University of Mkar, Mkar, Benue State  
[aandesimeoniember@gmail.com](mailto:aandesimeoniember@gmail.com)

&

**Solomon Terhemen Igyor**

Department of Religion and philosophy  
University of Jos – Plateau State  
[terigyor@gmail.com](mailto:terigyor@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Nigeria is simultaneously one of the most populated and religious countries in Africa. Its diversity is driven largely by its belief in mostly Christianity, Islam and traditional religions and hence many of its governance activities, development and even conflicts are largely influenced by religious ideologies and values. Unfortunately, the diversity has been badly managed by the Nigerian leaders/citizens with great consequences on the peace and development of Nigeria and Africa at large. This research recognises that, to achieve true religious diversity and peace in Nigeria, leaders and citizens must turn to the biblical teachings on free market approach to religion. The resources used for the research were sourced through secondary source of data collection. Phenomenological and analytical approaches were adopted for the data analysis. The research findings review that, religious manipulation and violence, fundamentalism and religious fanaticism were among other factors that hinders the attainability of religious diversity and peace in Nigeria. The research recommends among others the Biblical Free-Market approach where citizens are allowed to choose for themselves the religion to follow and believe in and that our religious leaders should show more commitment and sincerity to laws on religious freedom and human rights, for sustainable peace, harmony and diversity in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society like Nigeria.

**Keywords: Biblical, Free Market, Religion, Diversity, Peace and Nigeria.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout her history Nigeria has been a battle ground for religious riots or conflicts. Before Nigeria's Independence in 1960, the colonial masters in 1947 divided Nigeria into three political regions: East, West and North Starting from there the country quickly recognises the inter-play of religion. The North, which was predominantly Hausa, Fulani was mainly Muslims, while the East and West, Igbo and Yoruba were mainly Christians. Since then, religion has constituted a major impediment to Nigeria's unity, diversity and freedom of religion. Eyruruma and Allison (2013)

observe that, “religion seems to be manipulated as instrument of distraction and disintegration which threatens the peace and stability that constitute basic requirement for nation building. Nigerian citizens are being torn apart and disintegrated by ethnic and religious differences” (p. 209-210).

The issue of religion then created prejudice and hatred among believers of different faith as different religions started looking at each other suspiciously in all spheres of national contact. Unequal and differential treatment on the basis of religious divides has created disparity in areas of politics, education, economic life, and appointment of persons into key positions not by merits but on the qualification of religion. This unequal and differential treatment is also responsible for the intense competition in the recruitment of personnel in the military and para-military, police force and other agencies of the nation. Anaedo and Izunwa (2013) assert that,

The 1966 coup and counter coup occurred because the army itself was divided along ethnic and religious lines, its ranks, became embroiled in an increasing violent power struggle. The increased tensions culminated in the massacre of up to 30,000 Igbo who are all Christians living in the North (p. 111).

The issue of religious affiliation has been a major cause of violence in the country, people are usually upset just on the basis of religion when they ascend a position of authority. Wariboko (2013) states that, “the proclamation of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan as the elected President of Federal Republic of Nigeria by the Independent Electoral Commission was greeted with violence in Kaduna, Kano, Zaria and Sokoto states as loyalists of former President General Muhammadu Buhari (Current President) went to streets destroying and killing innocent citizens. This however later culminated in religious violence” (Anaedo and Izunwa 2013: 111).

Considering the present cases of religious crisis unequal and differential condition of Nigeria, the thrust of this paper is therefore, to investigate why religious diversity and peace seems not to yield the desired result for national growth. In responding to this problem, the paper starts by clarifying the concept of religion and free-market approach to religion. The biblical free-market approach to religion was made and recommendations and conclusion were also made on the above background.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

Religion is one of the oldest features of human history. Robertson (1987) defines religion from sociological understanding as, “a system of communally shared beliefs and rituals that are oriented toward some sacred, supernatural realm”. (p.401)

Emile Durkheim one of the first sociologists to study Religion pointed to value of Religion in every given society in the following words,

Shared religious beliefs and the rituals that go with them are so important that every society need a religion, or at least some belief system that serves the same functions. The case of much of the social disorder in the modern societies, he contended, is that, “the old gods are growing old and are already dead, and others are not yet born”. In other words, people no longer believe deeply in traditional religion, but they have found no satisfying substitute (Robertson 1987:401).

This according to Durkheim, religion plays very important functions in human society by binding people together, helping the control of social behaviour, explaining the human predicament and even providing individual members of the society with emotional support in the uncertainties of life.

Here too religion plays the role of bringing people together and reminding them of their common group membership (Robert. 1987:401), not by force or compulsion but by free sharing of their traditional or cultural values and beliefs' system.

It is also important to know that, another common feature in most of the world religion is the explanation of uncertainties of life through the doctrine of theodicy. Robert (1987) also states that,

A common feature of these world religions is that, they provide a convincing theodicy, an emotional satisfying explanation for such great problems of earthly existence as human origins, suffering, and death. We are born, live a brief span of years, often suffer, and then die. This universal sequence can easily seem purposeless. And bleak, but a theodicy gives it meaning by explaining or justifying the presence of evil and misfortune in the world (p.401).

Even though, the conflict view of religion by Karl Mark, who saw religion as a form of false consciousness and as a tool of the powerful in the struggles between competing social classes (Robertson 1987:403), but closer analysis suggests that this understanding may have been too narrow. Robertson explained that,

Contemporary conflict between Jews and Muslim in the middle East may seem as arise from religious differences, but the tension is really over competing claims by two different ethnic groups, the Israel and the Palestinians, for the same homeland. In much the same way, the continuing conflict in Northern Ireland seems on the surface to be one between Catholics and Protestants, but the roots lie much deeper in ethnic and class divisions between Irish of native descent and those descended from British Settlers. (p.404).

This is to explain that, despite the conflict theory of religion, the core value of religion as cementing a relationship between people is stronger, free approach to religion bring people together and help them maintain social control and individual behaviour.

From a philosophical consideration, Cornelius Vantil (1951) underlined some definitions of Religion from different authors thus, "Religion is an emotion resting on a conviction of a harmony between ourselves and the universe at large".

"Religion is the projection and pursuit of idea personal relations with the universe and man- Because it is a projection and pursuit, religion is an ever-moving process in the directions of complete personal adjustment and control in man's total environment" (p.82).

These may not necessarily give clear understanding of Christian view of religion, but the central idea here is, religion brings harmony and control between man and the universe. So here too religion is not for violence, but a personal adjustment in man for harmony in the society.

### **Free Market Approach**

The Biblical account of Genesis chapters 1 and 2 made it clear that, man is made in the image of God. And man was created with the freedom to choose...you are free to eat from any tree in the garden (Gen. 2:13b NIV) and the freedom led man to even go against God's command of not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (Gen. 3:11b NIV). This is to explain that, God the creator of all humans' value freedom.

In free market approach, we are referring to a situation like in the trading structure (physical or logical) where goods and services are bought and sold (Smith 2005: 157) freely by the sellers and the buyers. Here the buyer has the liberty to buy or not to buy. Such is not under any control or to suffer from something that is not coming from a free choice. From a religious point of view Cornett (2011) states that,

A free-market approach to religious faith... it provides an open market place to all religions, where the vendor of any faith may attempt to impress potential customer (citizens) with the superior benefits of his particular religion the customer may then make his selection (if any) or reject all options. (p.33)

This is to explain that, for any country to truly and freely practice diversity; Citizens must neither be punished nor rewarded for the choice of religious faith. According to Vantil (1951) thus religion becomes the joyful submission to the inevitable". It is this state of complete, self-committed, this total-surrender to reality, with consequent command over all the resources of personality, is possible when one fills his mind with the thought that underneath all other facts is the basic fact upon all else depends. This basic fact can be called the structure of the universe or it can be called God. (p.137). He further states that, whenever we commit ourselves in love to God, accepting Him with affection and all things else for His sake, we are free from fear. This state of mind requires cultivation (p. 137).

Religion is therefore, a free feeling (emotion, or attitude or behaviour), rooted in the personal quest after the meaning of life, and its purpose is for the welfare of humanity. From this perspective, Religion must be practice from free mind of view.

### **Nigerian State and Religion: An Impediment to Religious Diversity and Peace.**

The dilemma of Nigerians in respect to lack of peace and religious diversity in the country is traceable to the way religion is practised in the country. The stories of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria differ significantly in terms of the historical and cultural experience of Nigerians with them (Kukah 2007:97). He further asserts that, when both religions arrived, they sought to assert themselves by dislodging the traditional religions of the communities with which they interacted by offering their people new gods as a basis for moral legitimation. This was the beginning of the defect in the true religious diversity and peace in Nigeria. The quest to convert and subsequent expansion created various forms of internal problems from some communities. For instance, in a place like Northern Nigeria conversion to Christianity was an attractive option for some of the many minority ethnic groups which had experienced tribulations in the hands of what some saw as Hausa/Fulani colonialism and imperialism during and after the Jihad (Kukah 2007:97).

Since the time of the Sokoto Caliphate the Northern part of Nigeria had been under conflicts of religious freedom.

The Maitatsine or Yan Tatsine brand of quasi group that emerged in the early 1980s, unleashed some many violent attacks in Zaria which led to the loss of property and human lives, mainly Christians. Isichei (1987) in the words of Anaedo and Izunwa (2013) is of the opinion that, the Maitatsine uprising of 1980 in Kano, 1982 in Yola and in 1985 in Bauchi were obviously the first attempts by Muslims in the North to impose a religious ideology on a secular, independent Nigeria (112).

This lack of free-market approach to religion recorded the loss of more than 4,177 people mostly Christians in Kano, while that of Bullum-Kutu in Borno state claimed about 400 lives and many were left homeless as a result aggressive converting of people to other faith. In similar development when General Babangida dragged Nigeria to organization of Islamic conference (OIC) and claimed that it was a joint decision of Armed Forces Ruling council, but his Deputy denied his involvement. It led to his sacked from government. Describing Babangida's motivation in this regard, Arthur Azenbe said, "Ibrahim Babangida dragged Nigeria into OIC, party to demonstrate even within his constituency, his credibility as both a Northerner and an authentic Muslim (Olasupo. 2011:36).

The multiple cases of religious conflicts in the Northern cities of Kano, Kaduna, Jos, Zamfara sprang from the introduction of Muslim Sharia courts in some states of the North.

The recent over reaction of the National Vice President of Miyatti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), Husaini Yusuf, who openly threatened that, more blood will flow in Benue except the anti-open grazing law is repealed (the prime vol. 5 No. 13, 5<sup>th</sup> -28<sup>th</sup> Feb., 2018. P.9&15), has been interpreted as having a religious undertone. According to Ter (2018),

The Fulani herdsmen have no doubt held the state to ransom and under traumatic siege and in what today seems like a premeditated and calculated expedition in which many are scared might be a jihad in disguise unleashed on not just the state but the entire nation (p. 83).

He further stated that,

These seems to be a coordinated conspiracy to decimate the population of other ethnic nationalities so as to further the dominance of a particular group and foist a particular religion on the generality of Nigerians (p. 97).

As it is, most Christians considered the slow coach approach to these lingering virulent activities of the Fulani insurgent as renewed spirit of Uthman Dan Fodio's Jihad. And this could escalate into a serious religious crisis and may trigger a widespread unrest resulting into a full-blown war that eventually tears Nigeria apart.

The country is currently going through the bitter experience of Boko Haram that, on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2019, had declared Jihad on Nigeria. The mission of the sect was to establish an Islamic state where "Orthodox Islam" is practiced.

Considering all the above, it is therefore, imperative to dwell on what the researcher referred to as Biblical free-market approach to religion to learn lessons from the Bible to achieve religious diversity and peace in Nigeria.

## **Biblical Free-market Approach to Religion**

A careful study of the Bible revealed that God created man in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26). Thus, as God Himself is free in His creative act, man too was created free to have relationship with the creator in love and worship. Erickson (1985) agrees with the above when he stated that,

...the image of God is intrinsic to man. Man would not be human without it. Whatever it is that sets man apart from the rest of the creation, he alone is capable of having a conscious personal relationship with the creator and of responding to him. Man can know God and understand what the creator desires of him. Man can love, worship, and obey his maker. In these responses, man is most completely fulfilling his maker's intention for him, and thus being most fully human, since humanity is defined in terms of the image of God (p. 471).

When the government of a society views man from this approach as a free creature in the image of God, it enables man to function better as a full human being. In the creation of man, we saw man as part of creation in general, yet man has a unique place in the creation story. All other creatures and things are said to have been made "according to their kind (Gen. 1:24-25). Man, on the other hand, is described to be made in "the image and likeness of God" (Gen. 1:26). God also bestowed on man the ability and intelligence to freely love and worship God and to freely make a choice, "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die" (Gen 2:16-17). God of creation from the very beginning of His creation accorded great value to man when it comes to making choice.

Cornett (2011) also states that,

After forming Adam and Eve, and placing them in the Garden of Eden, He allowed them to make a choice, a choice that meant the difference between continued fellowship with Him or complete separation from Him. God applied neither force, nor pressure nor coercion to Adam and Eve in making their decisions. It was solely and completely their own voluntary choice. They chose poorly, and then lived with the consequences. God could have prevented them from choosing wrongly, but He allowed them the choice (p. 33).

Cornet further stressed the free market approach to religion during the time of Joshua as they were preparing to enter the Promised Land

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Ammonites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we shall serve the Lord (Josh 24:15 NIV).

Freedom of worship or religious activities was demonstrated by almost all the Old Testament prophets, for instance, when Prophet Elijah grew tired with the people of Israel for their spiritual rebellion, yet he employed a free market approach to choose who to worship. In first kings 18:21 the prophet said "then Elijah approached all the people and said, how long will you hesitate between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him". Cornett (2011) add that,

In fact, Elijah not only permitted the followers of Baal the opportunity to demonstrate the strength of their religion but he even encourages them to take additional time to make their argument to the people (1Kings 18:25-29) when finished, Elijah would present his case for the God of Israel, and the people could then choose. Elijah though outnumbered 450 to one (1Kings 18:22) believed that when the truth was presented and a comparison made, the people would choose correctly (p.34).

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ Himself presented to the whole (sinners) to choose to have life or death. The Gospel according to John 3:16, 18 states thus;

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life... whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stand condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Here, Jesus allowed for religious liberty and freedom which His listeners were given the opportunity to believe in His preaching, or free to make their choice and lived with the consequences of their wrong choice.

The apostles also follow the pattern of Jesus Christ in the preaching and missionary activities. Their general strategy was preaching to every town and city, language and people, nation and society the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. They also demonstrated that their religion can make unique positive contribution to the stability and moral fiber of the society.

Cornett (2011) also states that,

The same pattern was also demonstrated throughout the various missionary endeavours of the apostles. Unfortunately, this biblical approach was abandoned during period II, but thankful reintroduced by the Reformers in period III. The Reformation minded Christian Ministers and individuals... carried this scripture free-market approach with them and thus allowed rather than excluded other religions in their Christian colonies (p. 34).

Also, in a clearer language, Noah Webster an early American Judge reminded Americans in the following words:

Let us remember that force never makes a convert, that no amelioration (improvement) of society can be wrought by violence and that an attempt to reform men by compulsion must produce more calamities than benefits. Let us reject the spirit of making proselytes to particular creeds by any other means than persuasion (Cornett 2011:34).

The free-market approach to religion does not make any religion to be weak, but it creates peace and harmony in a given society for better and sustainable development. Also, worthy of note is the fact that, the 1999 Nigeria constitution (section II) unequivocally declares, "The government of the federation or of any state shall not adopt any religion as state religion". In subsection 2, the constitution emphasized that, "the Federal Government of Nigeria shall not be governed nor shall any person or group of persons take control of the government of Nigeria or any part thereof, except in accordance with the provision of this constitution". In other words, Nigerian constitution,

past and present, endorse the secularity of the Nigerian and the state and the freedom to practice religion of one's choice without fear of persecution and prosecution (Eyeruroma and Allison 2013:215). Christians and Muslims are called to respect one's choice of religion.

It is unfortunate, that most of the conflicts in Nigeria today are always manipulated to have religious undertones. The political malaise and economic depression are the growing rise of the incidents of confrontational religious crisis in the form of riots. One can say from the outcomes of these religious crises that, Nigeria has really lost both personalities and assets that could have been used to change the country from a developing nation to a developed nation. Nigeria as a state should honestly and sincerely accept the free-market approach to religion in Nigeria for peace and development irrespective of our religious affiliations.

### **Recommendations**

The cost of religious violence, conflicts and killings are quite high both for individual Nigerians as well as the country at large. This disrupts the peace and development and stability of the country and her people to develop the full potentials of the nation to take her place in pride of nations. To achieve this peace and diversity the under-listed recommendations are put forward.

Leaders of all religions in the country must preach, promote and inculcate moral values ethical and religious values of peace for the maintenance of our diversity and existence.

All religious bodies in the country for the sake peace and diversity must accept the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the separation of religion and state and the freedom to practice religion of one's choice.

Leaders of all religions must teach members to create a permanent and sustainable channel of communication and interaction with people of different faith to enhance mutual understanding of each other's religious beliefs, to achieve peace and diversity among all citizens irrespective of their religious affiliations. The government and leadership of all religions are called to seriously encourage and promote more practical projects that will aim at meaningful involvement of the members of these religious groups for cordial relationship. This will help to consolidate national unity and promotion of diversity.

The government and leadership of all religions must also provide a forum for mutual co-operation of youths to understanding themselves and the value of peaceful co-existence among all people irrespective of one's religious affiliation. The government should revisit the idea of unity schools that will accept students from all religions to develop peaceful co-existence and friendship among our youths for the rebirth and rebuilding of a better nation.

### **Conclusion**

The recurrent nature of religious violence and conflicts in Nigeria is quite unacceptable and the Nigerian government, religious leaders and groups, and in fact all citizens must act fast to curb the incessant uprising that are an impediment to the diversity and peace of the nation. The obvious negative influence of non-implementation of free-market approach to religion on the growth, peace and diversity of our nation is seen. This situation calls for proper and urgent measure to protect the country's economic and development activities from collapse. It is also important to note that, Christians and Muslims are entrusted with the responsibility to love one another, protect and



provide hope to humanity, after all what is religion, if it is not love and happiness for humanity. We must also remember that the free-market approach to religion is practically friendly and gives every citizen equal and voluntary choice about his or her religion and eternal future. It is only through this that we can achieve our dream for true peace and unity in our diversity, which is our strength.

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