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RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS, CRISIS PREVENTION AND PEACE BUILDING: NIGERIA IN PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This study explores the role of religious institutions in crisis prevention and peacebuilding in Nigeria, which has a history of religious and ethnic conflicts. Religious institutions that have been instrumental in advancing peace, resolving disputes, and building communal harmony include the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Jama'atul Izalatul Bid'a Wa-Iqamatus Sunnah (JIBWIS), and interfaith associations. It finds that they have been effective in peacebuilding through interfaith dialogues, community mediation, and partnerships with various organizations, especially in conflict-prone areas like Borno, Jos, Kaduna, and Sokoto. But obstacles like political meddling, resource scarcity, and religious prejudice prevent them from reaching their full potential. Using a qualitative approach and document analysis, the study examines sermons, reports, and publications to understand these institutions' contributions. The study comes to the conclusion that while religious institutions play a significant role in promoting peace, more cooperation and assistance are required for long-term peace initiatives.
KEYWORDS: Religious Institutions, Crisis Prevention, Peacebuilding, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The global perspective draws attention to the important but diverse roles that religious institutions—influenced by political, cultural, and religious contexts—play in preventing crises and promoting peace. Religious authorities frequently serve as moral guides and mediators, even though they may be constrained by secular governments and legal systems. They usually play a supporting role in peace initiatives, with the UN and other organizations taking the lead, in more secular societies (Anthony, 2020). One instance is the peace process in Northern Ireland, where formal agreements were mediated by political actors after discussions were facilitated by religious leaders. In contrast, although the state was in charge of the larger peacebuilding process, religious leaders were instrumental in Rwanda's post-genocide reconciliation. In general, religious organizations lead peace initiatives in Nigeria, even though they frequently work with official interventions worldwide (Aemro, 2018).

Nigeria stands at the crossroads of religion, culture, and governance, a nation where diverse faiths interweave into the fabric of society, often shaping its destiny. Amidst this rich tapestry, religious institutions play a pivotal role, serving not only as centers of spiritual guidance but also as influential forces in matters of social cohesion, conflict mitigation, and peace building. In this introductory exploration, this study delves into the intricate nexus between religious institutions, crisis prevention, and peace building in Nigeria (Anthony, 2020). While Nigeria's religious landscape is characterized by a multiplicity of beliefs—Christianity, Islam, indigenous religions, and a spectrum of syncretic practices—this diversity can be a source of both strength and tension. For instance, these religious conflicts are multidimensional and have mainly involved Christians against Christians, Muslims against Muslims, and tensions between Muslims are common features of religious conflicts in northern Nigeria. Notable examples of these conflicts are the Muslim-Christian conflict in Jos and Kaduna, as well as the Sunni-Shia violence in Sokoto (2007) and Kaduna (2015). Based on historical accounts, Kano State has been implicated in a number of interreligious and ethnoreligious violent incidents, including

those that occurred in 1980, 1982, 1994, 1996, 1997, and 2002. The Maitatsine riots in Kano and other places from 1980 to 1984 are mentioned as important instances of interreligious strife. Since the start of Nigeria's Second Republic in 1979, Kaduna has seen a number of conflicts, including an outbreak that killed at the College of Education in Kafanchan in 1987 and student violence at Ahmadu Bello University in 1977 (Shehu,2021). The violence in Zangon Kataf in 1992 over chiefdom and market disputes is another noteworthy conflict.

In Nigeria, religious institutions, especially Christian and Islamic groups, play a significant role in mediating conflicts and influencing governance, which is more pronounced than in many other countries with secular governance. Crisis prevention in Nigeria often focuses on ethnic and religious tensions, particularly between Christians and Muslims, as well as farmer-herder conflicts. In contrast, global crisis prevention addresses a wider range of issues like political instability and environmental challenges (Shehu,2021). Nigerian peacebuilding efforts are primarily led by religious, ethnic, and community leaders tackling local conflicts, such as the Boko Haram insurgency. International peacebuilding typically emphasizes diplomatic negotiations and development aid, operating within a more secular framework. The key distinction lies in the close connection between religion and ethnic identity in Nigeria's conflicts, while global approaches are generally less influenced by these factors (Habibu,2019).

Against a backdrop of historical antecedents and contemporary challenges, this inquiry seeks to illuminate the roles played by religious leaders, institutions, and practices in promoting social stability and fostering interfaith dialogue (Shehu2021). Moreover, the study emphasizes the role of religion as a force for peace, enlightenment, and human development, advocating for its potential to foster coexistence and spiritual well-being. However, it critiques the relative neglect of religious institutions in scholarly studies on peace and historical religious studies, noting a gap in understanding their roles in crisis management and peace building. analysis.

Conceptual Analysis

Religion in Perceptive Discourse

This study delves into the intricate discourse surrounding religion, drawing insights from scholars across diverse academic fields such as sociology, philosophy, and history. Central to this exploration is the challenge of defining religion, a complex phenomenon influenced by political, legal, and personal interpretations (Nathaniel, 2014). Scholars throughout history, including Emile Durkheim (1858-1917); Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917); George Frazer (1854-1941) and Karl Marx, have grappled with defining religion, yet consensus remains elusive. This challenge stems from the multifaceted nature of religion, which directs attention to complex social and material relations for specific purposes (Andresen, 2004). Religion, derived from the Latin word "Religare," meaning to bind or reconnect, serves various functions across human endeavours, connecting individuals' souls with spiritual realms. It encompasses diverse beliefs, ideas, and symbols, providing a unified worldview that underpins human life and the cosmos. Moreover, religion is recognized as a powerful instrument for peace, enlightenment, and development, fostering coexistence and spiritual well-being among adherents and beyond. However, despite its significance, religious institutions have often been overlooked in studies of peace and historical religious studies (Shanjedun, 2015). Few studies such as Muhammad (2021), Alexander (2018), Felix (2015), Shitu (2015), and Onuh (2021) have extensively examined the role of religious institutions in crisis management and peacebuilding. Some like Nafiu (2022), David (2021), Josef (2021), and Fethullah Gulen (2020), fail to address the unprecedented challenges of religious incitement and misconceptions of other religious beliefs, values, and norms due to the complexity in its nature, while others successfully integrate contemporary challenges into their work (Shehu, 2021). Addressing these gaps in understanding is crucial for comprehensively examining the role of religious institutions in fostering peace and addressing conflicts (Nathaniel, 2014). By bridging these

divides and acknowledging the complexities of religious dynamics, scholars can contribute to more effective peace studies and interventions.

Religious Institutions

Scholarly discourse has significantly contributed to broadening the conceptualization of religious institutions. The key criterion for defining a "religious institution" lies in its role in furthering religion as a transformative force in society. Determining whether an institution qualifies as a "religious institution" tends to involve both objective and subjective considerations, with the objective functional approach being dominant. This approach seeks to establish the meaning of religious institutions within the context of religious values, beliefs, and theological aspects that shape human social relations. According to William (2014) religious institutions extend their functions beyond worship and prayer to include activities such as mediation, reconciliation, and support for all faiths. They affect the moral, spiritual, and sometimes political aspects of life profoundly. Churches, mosques, and temples serve as community hubs and offer moral guidance, instruction, and cultural preservation. Religious leaders, such as rabbis, imams, and priests, oversee religious ceremonies and activities in these typically hierarchical organizations. They uphold social order, encourage community identity, have an impact on laws and customs, and provide social services. However, they could also become points of contention if doctrinal or political differences surface. Anthropologists such as Zoe (2014), Andresen (2004) and Berger (1969) argue that religious institutions serve a functional purpose, focusing on whether they engage in activities that contribute to religious transformation and human development. Moreover, they play a crucial role in fostering inclusive human relationships and promoting harmony among diverse religious communities.

Crisis Prevention

The concept of crisis has emerged as an interdisciplinary study in the 21st century, defined as abnormal circumstances or unstable situations that threaten an organization's strategic objectives, reputation, or viability. From a perceptual standpoint, a crisis can be understood as a moment when an individual undergoes a loss of rationality or even physical control over their behaviour. In broader terms, crisis prevention involves anticipating actions capable of causing harm to individuals, groups, or society, whether verbally, mentally, or physically. Effective preventive measures are implemented in advance to mitigate the likelihood of such occurrences, thereby upholding social behavioural norms and preventing violations thereof. Crises can be traced back to various historical contexts, each with its own distinct dimensions. Firstly, during the second industrial revolution (1870-1914), the advent of new machines in industries or a period of rapid industrialization and technological advancement led to industrial problems. The fact that, significant technological advancements and economic growth were brought about by the Second Industrial Revolution, but it also brought about a number of crises that include labour unrest resulting from subpar working conditions gave rise to unions and strikes, as evidenced by the Pullman Strike (1894) and the Haymarket Affair (1886). Deflation and widespread unemployment were the results of economic crises such as the Long Depression (1873–1896) and the Panic of 1873 (Olatunbogun, 1981)). As countries fought for resources, Imperialism stoked wars like the scramble for Africa and the Boer War (1899–1902). Diseases and pollution brought about by urbanization resulted in health and environmental crises. As political tensions increased, socialist movements posed a threat to the capitalist system, sparking reforms and social unrest (Olatunbogun, 1981).

Secondly, the aftermath of World War I and II created significant upheaval in Europe, for instance, the Great War brought about the fall of empires, the emergence of fascism and communism, extreme economic hardship, societal transformations, and the founding of new states. In addition, it caused extensive damage, psychological suffering, and paved the way for World War II. Despite its formation, the League of Nations was unable to keep the peace, and

the Balkans, marking a period of liberalization in the 17th century. Thirdly, in the post-World War II era, as the Cold War loomed, many African and Asian countries struggled for sovereignty, grappling with the legacy of colonial subjugation by Western imperialists in the early 19th century (Shehu, 2022). Crisis prevention entails methods aimed at averting future crises. This includes teaching strategies for early identification of crisis-inducing situations or signs of mental health destabilization (Stefan, 2017).

The Perspective of Peacebuilding

Peace building is an emerging concept in academic discourse, yet it has received relatively little attention from conflict researchers and has been insufficiently operationalized due to its diverse range of activities, which often receive less publicity. It focuses on fostering social, psychological, and economic environments at the grassroots level. Historically, peacebuilding gained prominence as one of the United Nations' primary approaches to peace processes. Its global acceptance was solidified by Boutros-Ghali's influential speech on peace delivered in 1992. Boutros-Ghali (1992) categorized peace building into three distinct phases: pre-conflict, post-conflict, and early warning mechanisms. Pre-conflict peacebuilding involves measures such as demilitarization, small arms control, institutional reform, improved policing and judicial systems, human rights monitoring, electoral reform, and socio-economic development. It aims to identify and address conflict triggers through early warning mechanisms (Michelle, 2021). Post-conflict peacebuilding focuses on reintegration, reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation in the aftermath of conflict. For example, in the case of the devastating impact of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria, post-peacebuilding efforts aim to rehabilitate, reconstruct, and resettle internally displaced persons and refugees, laying the groundwork for future peace (Reuchler, 2001). The overarching objective of peace building is to establish non-violent structures of peace based on principles of justice, equity, and cooperation, addressing the root causes of violent conflicts to render them less effective in the future. It involves identifying and addressing not only the immediate triggers of conflict but also underlying factors contributing to conflicts such as civil wars, terrorism, communal clashes, and religious violence.

Methodology

The Document analysis method is used in this study, Religious Institutions, Crisis Prevention, and Peacebuilding: Nigeria in Perspectives, to investigate the role that Nigerian religious institutions have played in both crisis prevention and peacebuilding. Through document analysis, materials that are already available are thoroughly examined and offer insightful information about the policies, initiatives, and activities of religious institutions in relation to peacebuilding efforts.

Research Design

The research uses a qualitative research design with a specific focus on document analysis. This method is particularly suitable for exploring the contributions of religious institutions to crisis prevention and peacebuilding as documented in various forms of written, audio-visual, and digital content. Through the systematic review of these documents, the study has extract relevant information and themes that highlight the roles religious institutions have played in maintaining peace and preventing crises in Nigeria.

Sources of Data

The primary data for this study is obtained from a variety of secondary sources, including: Official reports from religious institutions like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Jama'atul Izalatul Bid'a Wa Iqamatus Sunnah (JIBWIS), Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), and other interfaith organizations. Publications, newsletters, and annual reports from religious bodies documenting peacebuilding activities and

initiatives. Sermons and speeches delivered by religious leaders in Nigeria related to peace, conflict resolution, and crisis prevention. Policy documents and declarations from interfaith councils or forums that discuss collaborative peace efforts between different religious groups. Government reports and NGO publications focusing on religious involvement in peacebuilding and crisis mitigation in Nigeria. Academic journal articles, books, and research papers analyzing religious institutions' contributions to peacebuilding in Nigeria.

Sampling of Documents

Documents are selected based on their relevance to the topic and credibility as sources of information. A purposive sampling method is used to identify documents that specifically discuss:

A. Crisis prevention strategies initiated or supported by religious institutions.
B. Peacebuilding efforts led or facilitated by religious leaders and organizations.
C. Interfaith collaboration aimed at promoting peace and resolving religious or ethnic conflicts in Nigeria.
D. Case studies of specific crises or conflicts where religious institutions played a role in de-escalation or resolution.

Data Collection Process

Identification of Documents: The first step involves is identifying relevant documents that cover the role of religious institutions in crisis prevention and peacebuilding. This is done through searching religious archives, online databases, academic libraries, government reports, NGO publications, and media outlets.

Document Retrieval: Documents are retrieved from both digital and physical sources. For instance, official reports from CAN or JIBWIS are available on their websites, while academic articles and books are sourced from university libraries and online academic databases such as JSTOR or Google Scholar.

Categorization of Documents: Once retrieved, the documents are categorized based on their type (e.g., policy reports, sermons, case studies, etc.), the institution they originate from, and their focus on crisis prevention or peacebuilding activities. This is to ensure that the documents are organized for systematic review.

Data Analysis

The document analysis has followed the thematic analysis approach, which involves identifying key themes and patterns within the documents. The following steps guide the analysis:

Coding: Key information from the documents is coded into categories such as:

1. Crisis prevention strategies
2. Peacebuilding initiatives
3. Interfaith dialogue efforts
4. Challenges faced by religious institutions in conflict resolution

Theme Identification: From the codes, themes are emerged that relate to the research questions, such as how religious institutions act as mediators, their collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations, and the impact of their peace efforts.

Content Synthesis: The information from the documents is synthesized to form a coherent narrative that answers the research questions and highlights patterns, trends, and insights regarding religious institutions and their contributions to peacebuilding.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected from documents, the following steps are taken:

Source Credibility: Only documents from credible and authoritative sources (e.g., official reports, peer-reviewed articles, or government publications) are used.

Cross-Referencing: Information from multiple documents is cross-referenced to verify accuracy and ensure that findings are consistent across different sources.

Data Triangulation: The findings from the document analysis are triangulated with information from other existing literature to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Ethical Considerations

Since this study is based on document analysis, ethical considerations are focus on the appropriate use and citation of sources. All documents are appropriately referenced. Furthermore, any sensitive data contained in reports or publications are handled with care to ensure that the privacy of individuals or institutions involved is maintained.

Limitations of the Study

While document analysis provides valuable historical and contextual insights, it may not capture real-time changes or the most recent initiatives undertaken by religious institutions in crisis prevention and peacebuilding. Additionally, some documents may be biased in presenting the achievements of religious bodies without reflecting their challenges. The study has addressed these limitations by cross-referencing documents and supplementing them with existing academic literature.

Empirical Review

A number of empirical reviews examined religious institutions as visible and organized manifestations of practices and beliefs in particular social and historical contexts. Like human emotions and attitudes, religious beliefs and practices project outward onto the social and historical plan. They create identities, openness representations, determine attitudes, emotion and behaviour. These manifestations and outward projections originate from beliefs and practices, but they are also limited by historical contexts. Religious institutions, then, take shape in relation to both religious impulses and contextual configurations. Imaekhai (2011), explained that for centuries, religious institutions like Church were among the first institutions to provide asylum for accused criminals through the influence of the established correctional chaplains. For Africa, religious institutions have been involved in education, health, and other developmental programs. Gbedero and Adeleye (2011), maintained that the presence of religious institutions introduced the need for the rule of law, which includes political equality of citizens and the protection of their rights as well as those minorities, which is however grossly lacking today and possibly have paved way for the growth of corruption in the Nigerian society (Anthony, 2020; Gbedero, 2011; Imaekhai, 2011). Daniel Hungeriman reviews the evidence on the role of religious institutions play in individuals' lives and how engagement with those institutions' shapes individuals' economic wellbeing (Daniel, 2020). The functional aspect of religion is prayer and different classes of people belonging to different castes of society assemble in religious institutions for performing prayers and worship. By doing these activities it buttressed common feelings, generate a common sentiments and fellowship amongst the worshippers of a particular religion (Shanjedun, 2015).

Religious institution in their various capacity mediate, reconcile ethnic clashes between herders-farmer old conflict in Benue, Taraba, Niger and Kaduna or intervened into political crisis as mediator in reference to what transpired in Nigeria during election process. There was public opinion that religion was the main trigger of conflict in the country. Contrary to the critics, the role of religion in conflict as a causer, sometime unjustified with bias connotation as the case may be. In Nigeria, the perception concerning crisis probably in Northern Nigeria, was connected to the mainstream of religious factor as prime source of destructiveness, but ignoring the task of religion in peace-making and peacebuilding. It bridges the communication

link between opposing sides, and provide training in peace-making methodologies (Aemro, 2018).

In Northern Nigeria, a number of religious and interfaith organizations have been instrumental in advancing peacebuilding and harmonious cohabitation. Their initiatives help to ease tensions, promote understanding, and create connections across racial and religious divides. These institutions address the root causes of conflict, encourage communication and tolerance, and support socioeconomic development in order to contribute to peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria. They cooperate and operate independently to guarantee that the various ethnic and religious communities in the area live in harmony with one another (Habibu,201). Through outreach programs and youth seminars, the Joint Youth Islamic Organization (YIO) works to promote peaceful Islamic values and ward off radicalization. Jama'atul Izalatul Bid'a Wa Iqamatus Sunnah (JIBWIS) uses outreach and education to combat Boko Haram and promotes peaceful Islamic teachings in order to combat religious extremism. In addition, CRUDAN is a peacebuilding organization that promotes Christian-Muslim relations through facilitating interfaith discussions, particularly in conflict-prone regions like Plateau State (Odumusu,2019) The Foundation for Muslim Welfare (FMW), another religious organization committed to creating self-supporting mechanisms, works to combat poverty and unemployment in Gombe State by providing microfinance and vocational training, which lowers the risk of youth violence. Peace initiatives in Kano State are greatly impacted by the leadership of women-focused peace campaigns and conflict resolution by the Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN) (FOMWAN,2022).

The Muslim Corps Association of Nigeria (MCAN) works with Kaduna State's youth corps members to build cooperative peacebuilding projects that foster interfaith harmony. Sisters Da'awah Group (SDG) established a women's council to mediate disputes and encourages interfaith conversation between Muslim and Christian women in Sokoto. By engaging in peace mediation and dialogue with Muslim leaders, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) helps to lessen violence in places like Southern Kaduna (Habibu,2019). The Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN) promotes peaceful coexistence in academic settings such as the University of Maiduguri by encouraging interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance among students (Aliyu, 2015). Religious conflict management in Nigeria had yielded some fruitful aspirations in many occasions. It intervened during 2011 election crisis where religious leaders took a bold step in doused the tension from further escalation. In 2014, religious leaders through their magnanimous institutions used wisdom in controlling subsidy demonstration in the Nigeria. Equally to that, during the EndSars riot, religious leaders amplified their voice in some part of the country managed the escalation to zero level. In 2007, when intrareligious clashes erupted in Sokoto state between Sunni and Shia the violent was contended to minimal barest before metamorphosis into interreligious mayhem. The beauty pageant contest in Kaduna was also contended by security agencies coupled with religious leaders' intervention, cooperation. Covid-19 palaver was also managed through religious medium of communication (Shehu,2022; Shehu,2015).

The Roles and Functions of Religious Institutions in the Society

The roles and functions of religious institutions in the society is paramount considering mankind cannot do without religious spiritual guidance for social interaction. One of the pivotal roles of religious institution is to create social solidarity which is regarded as a societal glue, because it provides harmony of attitude, developed ideas and excellent habit among its followers for unity and common purpose. Religious institutions controlled and influenced other human activities such as religious ritual that include weddings, birth, burial and celebration of special occasions. These activities, no doubt, promote groups solidarity and cohesion as well as instill discipline among its members on how to respect one another, not just that but also

buttresses synergy and cooperation with other religious institution for viable human development. It was welled established fact that religious institutions perform not only their cardinal duties, but also equally discharge different kinds of activities related to social welfare such as charitable hospitals, schools, homes for the less privileges and orphans. In spite of integrating force, there is also provision of rules of standard behaviour, fear of divine punishment for those who do not abide by the rule. Religious beliefs, no doubt, transform the conduct of those who believe in them by keeping people in line through folkways and mores. Religious sanction inevitably plays pivotal role on changing primitive cultures, because many taboos in various cultures have religious sanctions, e.g., the taboo against eating of pork in Jewish and Muslims and cows' meat in Hindus. Religious institutions help to determine what is considered acceptable behaviour and what is not. For instance, both Islam and Christianity divides actions into categories; the right acts lead to heaven and the wrong deeds to hell. Protection and support individual during times in need of personal and social crises such as death of love one, serious injury is ordained in their respective holy texts (Shanjedun, 2015).

Prevention of Radicalism and Extremism

Crisis prevention is integral to early warning systems for conflict prevention. It involves identifying indicators or signs that conflict or violence may escalate due to individual or group behaviour changes or misunderstandings between religious institutions. Religious institutions bear the responsibility of promoting empathy among their members and educating them on the importance of understanding and respecting the feelings of others objectively. They also ensure that no individual or group within the institution promotes ideologies that could disrupt peace or destabilize society (Ibrahim, 2020). Vigilance is crucial for religious institutions, as they must monitor the behaviour of clergy members, pastors, imams, and fellow members to prevent the spread of radical attitudes such as intolerance, fanaticism, exclusivity, and a propensity for violence. If such attitudes are detected during sermons, teachings, or evangelism, immediate action should be taken by the leadership to address them before they escalate out of control (Shehu H. , 2015). In the biblical context, relationships in the Kingdom of God are founded on principles of honour, respect, and service to one another. Similarly, Islamic teachings emphasize coexistence with other religions in a peaceful and harmonious manner. Islam acknowledges the existence of other religions and encourages cooperation among them, provided that individual differences are recognized, respected, and utilized. Islamic institutions recognize monotheistic or revealed religions, their scriptures, and prophets as part of their worldview (Daniel, 2020).

The Role of Conflict Management

Religious institutions have a comprehensive role in managing conflict at their disposal before, during and post conflict situation. A number of literatures that include Onigu (1999); Ross (1993); Ho-Won Jeong (2019) and Charles (2007) opined that conflict management which is encompasses conflict prevention, dispute resolution, conflict settlement and peace processes that involve mediation, negotiation and arbitration. It is a concept that deals with factual and actual intervention in an ongoing conflict process in such a way as contain and, if possible, to reduce the level of violence and destruction, to prevent the vertical escalation toward the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as well as to prevent the horizontal expansion into other theatres. The aims of conflict management are to transform clash into less productive and damaging form of interaction by searching for temporary solutions (Deacon, 2021). Its undeniable fact, that religion touches the deepest level of identity. It can engage people for war and to some large extent disengage them from the battle field for peaceful coexistence as in the case of Israel and Palestinian decades' conflict. There is a notion that religion itself is the main source of making violence because of the nature of intolerance, humans' rights violation. But

justifiably, religion also serves as the bridge of coexistence and a means of non-violent conflict transformation, a defender of human rights, an element of integrating.

The Nature of Evangelism and Da'awah as a Major Constraints toward Peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria

Understanding the root cause of extremism and interreligious conflict among religious institutions in Northern Nigeria is attributed to the conduct and manner by which these two institutions propagate their religious teaching to their followers. The comprehensive nature of evangelism and Da'awah are worrisome by both sides. The two concepts have played pivotal role in causing the root of extremism whether direct or indirect between Muslims and Christian in Northern Nigeria. Evangelism is quite obvious, an important element in Christianity, as it characterizes a process for spreading the gospel in accordance with Jesus' directive to his disciples that:

> Go into the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15).

Perceptively, Dawah implies to invite mankind to Islam:

> Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is (rightly) guided (16:125).

The astonishing things is not about proselytization and propagation of the faith, but the manner in which Evangelism and Dawah are blindly coordinated and conducted was the major issue of concern that led to growing intolerance. However, lack of accommodating other religion also led to breeding of extremist confrontation and violence across Northern Nigeria (Aliyu, 2015). For instance, Muslims view Christian as an insensitive, wordily and intolerant religion, while many Christian view Islam in a negative light as a blood thirsty and violent religion that tries to impose its religions doctrines on other groups. These different views and misunderstanding have set both religious groups against each other in the region. Therefore, whatever anyone does was judged in the light of 'in-group' aggressiveness (Yake, 2015; Shehu,2021). Another problem in relation to religious institutions in Nigeria was is of co-ordination and unity of common purpose during disaster period like Boko-Haram devastation in northern region, ethno-religious crisis coupled with herders-farmers conflict ravaging the north central or kidnapping and banditry which become order of the day in northwest.

Religious Peacebuilding: An Overview

Peacebuilding is a process with clear objective of veritable dialogue strategies to resolve misunderstanding and violence peacefully. Religious peacebuilding focus on cultivating saturation through intervention and empowerment operates on various fronts. The fact that religious leaders have a big role in national reconciliation because they control norms, beliefs and societal values in accordance to religious theorem. Religious peacebuilding cannot operate without supportive elements of interreligious dialogue interfaith dialogue and faith-based organizations (Atalia, 2015; Tajudden, 2015). Religion as a peace building has not been given adequate attention until after eleventh September attack in USA in 1990s, that new strategy unveiled unprecedented approach that there was the need to explore other medium of peaceful cooperation through religious means. The fact that, previous leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther king have explored religious means for peaceful coexistence, non- violence, social justice, equality before the law as well as struggle for races and colours. The historical antecedents revealed that a number of successful religious peacebuilding have been recorded in some part of the globe with clear principle and objectives that include conflict management, conflict resolution and consolidation of peaceful coexistence in conflicts and war zones

respectively. These worthy achievements of recognition cannot be completed without giant strive of both state and non-state actors of driving force to actualised the mission properly.

The Elements of Religious Institutions, Peacebuilding and Crisis Prevention

1. **Reconciliation**

Go and Be Reconciled: There is no doubt, any healthy community groups commit to responding to conflict according to biblical principles since there are called to maintain "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). As believers, there are called to actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither. There are called to

> Forgive others as God, through Christ, has forgiven us and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences (Matt. 5:23-24; 6:12; 7:12; Eph. 4:1-3, 32; Phil. 2:3-4: Ephesians 4:32).

From biblical perspective, there also are called to keep short accounts with one another (Ephesians 4:26); to take responsibility for their own contribution to the conflict (Matthew 7:3-5); to go show our brother his fault (Matthew 18:15); and to seek reconciliation (Matthew 5:23, 24). Perceptively, people tend to respond in similar ways (Barry; Institute, 2016; Matt Postiff, 2017).

'Suhl' an Approach to Islamic Conflict Reconciliation: The principle of *Suhl* (settlement) and *Musalaha* (reconcilement) are Islamic institutional kinds of resolving conflict because even Islamic Judicial systems revolve around these methods. In another relative term, *Suhl* is referring to 'conciliation', dating prior to Islam, aims at "ending conflict and hostility between believers so that they may conduct their relationships in peace and unity. Suhl goes beyond conciliation but also reaching consensus or agreement in Islamic law, thereby, binding the parties to the conflict to resolving any disputes (Cader, 2017). 'Suhl' has been mentioned in the following chapter and verses. The Quran says:

> And if you fear a breach between the twain (the man and wife), appoint an arbiter from his folk. If they desire amendment God will make them of one mind. (4:35). "Lo! God commands you that you restore deposits to their owners, and, if you judge between people, that you judge with justice. Lo! Comely is this, which God admonishes you. Lo! God is ever Hearer, Sear. (4:58). "But no, by your lord they can have no real faith until they make you judge in all disputed between them, and find in their souls no resistance against your decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction. (4:65).

2. **Dialogue in Discourse**

The term 'Dialogue' derived from the Greek word '*dialogos'*. In relative syntactic meaning *'Dia'*, literary means 'through' or 'across', while *'logos'* referred to 'meaning' or 'reason'. Therefore. Technically, dialogue refer to bringing different faith together to share similar thought, to checkmate their difference in terms of ideology, ethics, theology and to understanding the religious barrier. Dialogue provides communication network toward physical coexistence among diverse society. The overall objectives of dialogue are to build channels of understanding and forum for listening others. Dialogue is a reflective form of communication, changing one's perception through internalizing thoughts, considerations is seen as a strength. Dialogue, thus, requires a degree of openness to others and oneself (Mohsen, 2019: Shehu,2021))

Inter-Religious and Interfaith Dialogues

Scholars in academic forum including interdisciplinary researchers are battling on the final note and distinction between "inter-religious" and "interfaith" dialogues, terms commonly used to describe efforts at fostering understanding and cooperation among individuals from different religious traditions. Inter-religious and interfaith movements emphasize the importance of respecting the uniqueness of each faith tradition without attempting to amalgamate them into a new belief system (Josef, 2021). The struggle to define inter-religious dialogue is noted, with scholars like Daniji (2007) highlighting its role in promoting peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and tolerance among people of diverse faiths. Despite its significance, inter-religious and interfaith dialogues have not always received recognition from state and non-state actors due to the complexity involved in achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. Research indicates that interfaith dialogue initiatives serve as effective tools for addressing misconceptions and preventing interreligious conflicts. Advocates argue that interfaith dialogue enables individuals from different faith backgrounds to come together for mutual understanding and respect, fostering cooperation while maintaining the integrity of their respective beliefs. Overall, the passage underscores the importance of embracing interfaith dialogue as a means to prevent interreligious polarization and extremism, advocating for its adoption by various stakeholders including governments, religious groups, and socio-cultural organizations (Aliyu, 2015; Mohsen, 2019).

The Holy Bible also implores the simplicity of dialogue as mutual understanding between nations. In Mat 5:25, Jesus taught how to be humble in listening others, to act accordance to how one would want to be treated and to settle differences while one travels together. However, the holy Bible command mankind to be good, being kind to other faithful who are neighbours regardless of their religious inclination as being righteous and being among the ones in the Kingdom of God in the Exodus:20. Again, Biblical textual passages also encourage good neighbourliness devoid of hospitality with non-Christians as elucidated in John 14:16, Matt:5:17 and Matt: 22:40. In 1st Thessalonians 5:21. The Bible says:

> Prove all things and hold fast to that which is the truth Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your strength…you shall love your neighbour as yourself (MK 12:28-34).

Again, the Bible says:

> Blessed are the peace makers for shall be called sons of God (Matthew 5-9). For whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good, they must seek peace and pursue it (I Peter 3:10-11). Try your best to live in peace with everyone. Try to be holy. Without holiness no one will see the lord (Hebrews 12:14).

From Quranic perception was a clear testimony that people of the Book are said to be respected and consider them closer to Allah than pagan or Atheist. The Quran said:

> Say, O people of the Book, come to terms common between us and you: that we worship none but God, and that we associate nothing with Him, and that none of us takes others as lords besides God. And if they turn away, says, Bear witness that we have submitted (3:64).

Islam encourages its adherents in numerous places to being fair and just and to engage other faith to a discourse of dialogue, especially people of the Book, because dialoguing is the best way to understand each other and to share values of each other and discouraging misunderstand (Taufiq, 2020). The Quran said:

> Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice, and debate with them in the most dignified manner. Your Lord is aware of these who astray from His path, He is aware of those who are guided.

The holy Quran and the tradition of the prophet (Hadith) edify peace and admonish Muslims to live in peace. The Quran says:

> …And cooperate (with all) in (doing) what is good and piety and do not cooperate in (doing) what is sinful and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty (5:2). And good and evil deeds are not alike. Repel evil with good. And he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend (41:34)'

It has been reported by the tradition of the prophet that:

> On the Authority of Ummu Kulthum (R.A), who said: I heard the messenger of Allah (PBUH) saying: He who lies to establish and build peace between people is not a liar (Hadith: Bukhari). (Aliyu, 2015).

Pastor James Movel Wuye stressed the importance of interfaith cooperation between Muslims and Christians at the World Muslim League International Conference in order to avert ethnoreligious conflicts. He emphasized that effective communication requires cooperation, understanding, and trust, all of which must be fostered in order to close the divide between the two communities. The ultimate goal of this conversation is to put an end to armed conflicts by lowering extremism, hate crimes, and acts of violence. Pastor James emphasized the difficulties in Nigeria, where mutual trust is hampered by persistent mistrust and misconceptions like fears of Islamization. Inter-religious dialogue is unable to produce tangible outcomes in the absence of this trust (James, 2014).

The Challenges of Religious Leaders in Task of Building Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria

Leadership is magnificent in term of controlling social interaction. The person who leads, control the affairs of state or organization is defined as a leader. In religious terms, he could be linked to an Imam, Reverend father, Pastors, preachers of any religion, a religious teacher of any form, and religious journalist. In critical examination of this term, one can also appreciate the importance of a leader in any given organization as the person who plans and determines the thinking and action of his followers. Thus, in that regard, leaders are credited or held responsible for the considerable deeds of their followers (Ojo, 2021; Shehu, 2021). From the Christian point of view, a religious leader must be seen as someone who possess some qualities/traits which will make such a person serve as a good example for others. In Paul's exhortation to Timothy listed some of these traits that are apposite for a leader: He says:

> This is a true saying, of a man desire the office of a bishop, he desired a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant sober, of good behaviour, given to hospital, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filth lure; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous. One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;(for if a man knows not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) …1 Timothy 3:1-7 (New International Version) (Ojo, 2021).

On the other perspective, the importance Islam places on leadership, suggesting that even in small groups, a leader must be appointed. However, some religious leaders, both Christian and Muslim, are accused of manipulating their followers, turning minor disagreements into serious conflicts. These leaders often engage in campaigns of incitement, spreading hatred and distorting facts about each other's beliefs, portraying the conflict as an "us versus them" battle (Ojo, 2021). Prominent religious figures in Nigeria have contributed to this tension through accusations and counteraccusations, fueling Christian-Muslim polemics and deepening hatred, fear, and suspicion between their followers (Shehu, 2021; Ojo, 2021).

Proper Solution to the Challenges Bedeviling Religious Institutions in Nigeria

To address these challenges, efforts by religious leaders in Nigeria to promote religious understanding and peaceful coexistence. John Cardinal Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria, has led advocacy campaigns focused on unity, love, and progress. James Wuya and Muhammed Ashafa, co-founders of the Muslim-Christian Dialogue Forum of Kaduna, have been key figures in promoting interfaith harmony (James, 2014). The late Sultan Abubakar III also left a legacy of leadership advocating against fanaticism and promoting peace in Sokoto. These leaders emphasize non-violence and reconciliation. Ideally, religious leaders collaborate with governments to support policies that improve society, offering advice and constructive criticism while remaining neutral regardless of the administration's religious or tribal affiliations (Shehu, 2021).

Findings

1. According to the document analysis, religious institutions like JIBWIS and CAN have been essential to Nigeria's efforts to promote peace. In regions where religious and ethnic violence is a problem, these institutions have helped to prevent conflict, defuse tensions, and foster peaceful coexistence through their initiatives.
2. These religious organizations use interfaith dialogue as one of their primary tactics. They have been successful in lowering tensions and advancing understanding between various religious communities by encouraging dialogue, especially in crisis-prone areas like Borno, Jos, Kaduna, and Sokoto.
3. Using sermons during Jumu’a prayers and Sunday Church service, public campaigns, and educational programs, religious institutions have also actively promoted messages of peace, tolerance, and coexistence. By increasing awareness, these initiatives have lessened the likelihood of further conflicts.
4. According to the finding, religious institutions have strengthened their peacebuilding efforts by collaborating with governmental and non-governmental organizations. These partnerships have made it possible to respond to crises in a more organized and coordinated manner, which has resulted in more successful interventions.
5. Religious institutions encounter a number of difficulties in their attempts to promote peace, notwithstanding their beneficial contributions. The institutions' own religious prejudices, political meddling in their operations, and resource constraints were found to be important obstacles impeding the success of their projects.
6. The analysis demonstrates that religious institutions have effectively de-escalated conflicts, promoted reconciliation, and encouraged peaceful coexistence in areas like Borno, Jos, Kaduna, and Sokoto. They have played a critical role in these areas in lowering violence and promoting harmony among neighbors.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, religious organizations are very important in forming social norms, influencing conduct, and promoting communal harmony. Because of the nation's strong religious ties, these organizations are in a unique position to support initiatives aimed at preventing crises and promoting peace. But there has always been a problem with religious tensions and conflicts, which are frequently exacerbated by racial, political, and economic issues. It is imperative that religious leaders and organizations persist in their efforts to foster tolerance, comprehension, and harmonious cohabitation among diverse faith communities. Therefore, they should not be misuse by religious elite and politician for political gain, rather they should be strengthened to solidify the principle of interreligious harmony inclusively. Religious institutions have the power to significantly reduce conflict and promote lasting peace by using their influence.

Recommendations

1. **Interfaith Collaboration and Dialogue**: To advance respect and understanding amongst faiths, religious organizations ought to organize and actively take part in interfaith conversations. By doing this, tensions between various religious communities can be reduced and conflicts can be avoided.
2. **Education on Religious Tolerance**: Programs offered by religious organizations ought to include lessons on tolerance, peace, and diversity. This can be accomplished by fostering a culture of peace among followers through sermons, religious instruction, and community outreach programs.
3. **Involvement with Government and Civil Society**: In order to promote peacebuilding, religious leaders should work with civil society organizations and government agencies. Together, they can support initiatives like mediation and early warning systems that aim to prevent conflicts.
4. **Youth Empowerment Programs**: Religious institutions should create and support programs that give young people access to education, skill development, and employment opportunities because they are frequently the target of recruitment into conflicts. Youth who are active and empowered are less likely to be drawn into violent situations.

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