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EFFECTS OF RELIGIOUS INTERACTION AND FANATICISM  
ON CHURCH GROWTH IN OKE-OGUN AREA OF OYO STATE  
1999 – 2005

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## ABSTRACT

The pivotal interest of this research is "Effect of Religious Interaction and Fanaticism on church Growth in Oke-Ogun area of Oyo State 1999-2005. In the recent years, religious fanaticism and crises have made inroads into religious practice in the area of our study. Religious fanaticism and crises that engulfed the area have affected both the temporal and spiritual lives of the people. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine various causes of religious fanaticism and crises and how these factors are grossly affecting Christian evangelization and church growth in the area.

This piece of work is to contribute to the writings on the plight of the Christian church in the midst of religious fanaticism and crises. Reaching out to religious fanatics with the gospel of Christ even in the face of fierce persecution and intimidation is highly essential. This researcher opined that there is danger in keeping silent against the task of soul-winning and evangelization; the trends which religious fanatics are trying to attack and affect for redundancy and thereby subjugate Christians.

As the nature of this research is historical, therefore available related books were consulted in collection of data while sociological approach was used in interpreting the relationships and interactions between religious adherents in Oke-Ogun. With this method and approach, the researcher finds out that Toblik, a Muslim group is the main Muslim group that always exhibits ardent militancy against people of other religions in Oke-Ogun Community. It is also discovered that there are various causes of religious fanaticism and crises. Those factors were briefly discussed.

This research also reveals some effects of religious fanaticism. These include both functional and dysfunctional effects. Church responses to each of the religious fanaticism and crises in affected towns were also discovered and discussed briefly.

This piece of work has contributed to scholarship by way of making the plight of the Christian church known in the midst of religious fanaticism and crises between the years 1999-2005 in Oke-Ogun area of Oyo State. Another notable contribution of this research to scholarship is that it added to the source of information on the causes, effects and the non-violent responses of the Christian church to the religious fanaticism and crises in our area of study.

This study's recommendations will help in creating awareness on how to reach out to religious fanatics in the face of fierce persecution for effective church growth. Among other things that this researcher recommends for peaceful co-existence and propagation of religious faiths in religious tolerance by religious adherents, as no one can live successfully and no religious faith can thrive in a confused atmosphere.

## B. Conclusion

One of the distinctive features of our contemporary society is the overwhelming presence of violence at various levels and this has become a great threat to the world peace and security.<sup>2</sup> Having discussed some causes of religious fanaticism and crises, on different spheres of life, it has been discovered that religious fanaticism is a bad omen in religious practice of our time. Despite the functional effects of religious fanaticism and crises, religious fanaticism is not something to embrace and champion in this present age for propagation of religious faith.

Though Muhammed and his followers established Islam in Arabia Peninsular by conquest<sup>3</sup>, but it is obvious that "times have changed and there should hardly be any cause anymore for resorting to war in order to gain freedom of worship."<sup>4</sup> If propagation of any religion is done orderly in

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<sup>1</sup> Sayyed Mohamimed Mubawi. "In the name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful" in *Dialogue & Alliance*, Vol. 15: 2 (Fall/Winter, 2001), 37.

<sup>2</sup> Abduljalil Sajid. "Islam Against Religious Extremism and fanaticism," in *Dialogue & Alliance*, Vol. 15.2 (fall/Winter, 2001), 12.

<sup>3</sup> M. T. "Yahya, Jihad and peaceful co-existence: contrasts or causalities,; in Religion Peace and Unity in Nigeria, Sam Babs Mala and Z. I. Oseni, (eds.) Ibadan: Nigerian Association for the study of Religions, 1984), 43-48.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

proclamation of religion, we will not need fanaticism to achieve peace, which can ease the spreading of our faith.<sup>5</sup>

Respect and sensitivity to the religious views of the others should be embraced for mutual tolerance in multi-religious society like Nigeria.<sup>6</sup> There is the need to know that religious fanaticism through which lives are lost and valuable properties destroyed is against God and humanity. It is said to note that many tragic religious wars had been fought on a misconception of religion and what people think God wants them to do.<sup>7</sup> God in His sovereignty, is never the God of confusion, but of peace. George Santayana once said “fanaticism consists in redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim.”<sup>8</sup>

Religious leaders should therefore begin to value a broad religious education for their followers in order not to condemn them to struggle with the forces of violent radicalism that they may regard as being anathema to their faith. With real religious education that spells out oneness of mankind, there will be an understanding that once it is possible for people with different names to live together harmoniously in a family, it will then be easier for people with different religious faith to co-exist in the society.

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<sup>5</sup> M. T. Yahya. “Jihad and Peaceful co-existence. Contrasts or causalities” in *Religion Peace and Unity in Nigeria*, Sam Bab Mala and Z. I. Oseni eds (Ibadan, Nigerian association for the study of religious, 1984), 46 – 52.

<sup>6</sup> R. D. Abubakre. “Islamic Nostrum for Religious Tolerance in the Polity of a Multi-Religious state. The Nigerian Experience”, in *Religion peace and Unity in Nigeria*, Sam Babs Mala and Z. I. Oseni, eds (Ibadan, Nigerian association for the study of religious, 1984), 70.

<sup>7</sup> J. O. Onaiyekan. “Religion and Peace. Ideals and Realities’ in *Religion Peace and Unity in Nigeria*, Sam Babs Mala and Z. I. Oseni, eds (Ibadan, Nigerian association for the study of religious, 1984), 127.

<sup>8</sup> George Santayana Quotes. Fanaticism.  
[Http://atheisme.free.fr/quotes/fanaticism.htm](http://atheisme.free.fr/quotes/fanaticism.htm) accessed January 31st 2006.

Shihab has observed that: "The diversity of mankind is a test of our capacity as well as our willingness to establish harmony in difference and constructive co-operation in diversity."<sup>9</sup>

This will enable us not to condemn one another religiously. With all respect "diversity among fellow human beings must be recognised, appreciated and valued in all aspects of life."<sup>10</sup>

In conclusion, the relationship between religious adherents in Nigeria especially Christians and Muslims is still very competitive, the fact remains that it is neither realistic nor practicable to expect Nigeria to have a state religion.<sup>11</sup> Christianising or Islamising any society in Nigeria may not be possible. These theocentric religions (Islam and Christianity) are the sources of all imaginable follies and disturbances; they are the parents of fanaticism and civil discord.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Lord Acton noted that "fanaticism in religion is the alliance of the passions she condemns with dogmas she professes".<sup>13</sup>

### C. Recommendations

Having highlighted the causes, effects and Church's response to the religious fanaticism and crises in Oke-Ogun area of Oyo State, the following recommendations are therefore made for neighbourhoodness spirit:

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<sup>9</sup> Alwi Shihab. "Islamic concept of Plurality" in *Dialogue & Alliance*, Vol. 15.2 (Fall/Winter, 2001), 22.

<sup>10</sup> Sajid, 16.

<sup>11</sup> Sam Babs Mala "Religious Pluralism in Nigeria: The way out and factors favouring it," in *Religion Peace and Unity in Nigeria*, Sam Babs Mala and Z. I. Oseni, eds (Ibadan, Nigerian association for the study of religious, 1984), 245.

<sup>12</sup> Quotes: Fanaticism.

<sup>13</sup> Lord Acton. Quotes on fanaticism [www.freedomsnest.com/cgi-bin/q.cgi? Subject = fanaticism](http://www.freedomsnest.com/cgi-bin/q.cgi? Subject = fanaticism), accessed January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2006.

In their interactions all religious adherents in the area should devise a meaningful and peaceful way in propagating their faiths in atmosphere of peace and tranquillity rather than being destructive by the way of religious fanaticism. It is clear that religious intolerance promotes disunity and political instability, therefore religious tolerance must be encouraged by religious leaders. Paul-Henri has noted that "tolerance and freedom of thought are the veritable antidotes to religious fanaticism"<sup>14</sup>

Religious leaders must henceforth stop over emphasising religious particularism and the concern with who belong to what religion or what denomination or sect. All religious bodies are to mutually cooperate to identify and solve the doctrinal problems to avert both intra and inter-Religious violence.

The Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) that comprises all the representatives of all religions being practised in Nigeria should work harder in fostering religious peace through their media addresses and publications, and to educate people to be broad minded, and be tolerant toward people of other faiths other than theirs. Religious leaders should bear it in mind that "education is the torch of knowledge".<sup>15</sup>

Religious dialogue and inter-religious conferences must engage in discussing important topics of interest that will advance peaceful co-existence.

As the constitution of this nation stipulates the plurality of religions and freedom of worship, moderation in religious practices and observances should be encouraged, while excesses and fanaticism should be candidly

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<sup>14</sup> Pant-Henri. Quotes. Fanaticism. <http://athenisme.free.fr/quotes/fanaticism.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Jamal A. Shurdom quoted by Bernard Schechterman in Religious Fanaticism as a Factor in Political violence hyperlink "<http://members.tripod.com/mecra/schechterman.htm/>"

discouraged because “there is only one step from fanaticism to barbarism”<sup>16</sup> J. O. Awolalu has once emphasised a truth that it is only a religion treated in a broad based manner with emphasis on its ideals which have been spelt out that can foster national unity.<sup>17</sup>

On church growth in the face of religious fanaticism and crises, it is recommended that actions and decisions which affect Christians and their families should be given careful consideration by Christians without any compromise.

Christians from the grassroots should be encouraged to be part of the groups who make decisions that may affect Christian witness and evangelisation.

Christians should encourage qualified people to be active in partisan politics and other social organisations. They should not be left out in decision-making groups at all levels.

Christians should intensify discipleship programme to foster Christian maturity in Church membership and thereby reaching out to non-Christians.

One to one and mass evangelism should be embarked upon to fulfil the great commission commanded by Christ.

There is the need for all religious leaders to be selective in their choices of sacred texts and concepts and should give preference to those

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<sup>16</sup> Denis Diderot. Quotes on fanaticism. [www.freedomsnest.com/cgi-bin/q.cgi?Subject=fanaticism](http://www.freedomsnest.com/cgi-bin/q.cgi?Subject=fanaticism), accessed, January 31<sup>st</sup> 2006.

<sup>17</sup> J. Omosade Awolalu. “Religion and National unity” in *Religion Peace and Unity in Nigeria*, Sam Babs Mala and Z. I. Oseni, eds (Ibadan, Nigerian association for the study of religious, 1984), 7



which encouraged greater understanding and co-operation among people of different faiths and ideologies.<sup>18</sup>

Youth empowerment programmes should be promptly introduced. Churches should establish schools, health institutions, and businesses to create employment for unemployed Christian youths.

Every Christian parent should strive to educate their children and teach them to live above reproach in the society.

In the face of religious fanaticism and crises every Christian should persevere and stand firm no matter what confronts him to deny his faith.

In reaching out to Muslims, Christians should not try to compare the Bible and Quran in details, or compare Jesus and Muhammed. Sharp arguments should be discouraged and avoided of in Christian witness.

Christian Churches should be active participants in the Christian Association of Nigeria programmes and keep their people informed about important topics through fora and conferences.

Lastly, Christian Churches should continue to pray fervently for Church growth to thrive in the area despite religious oppositions.

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<sup>18</sup> Shihab, 22.