

**THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION IN CONFLICT  
RESOLUTION IN NIGERIA 2006-2011**

**BY**

**MILLER EMEKA OFUNNE  
ART1701094**

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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this project was carried out by Ofunne Miller Emeka in the Department Of History and International Studies University Of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**DR OSIKI ODION.**  
**(Project Supervisor)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**DR. FRANK IKPONMWOSA**  
**(Head of Department)**

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**DATE**

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**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to Almighty God for his guidance throughout my time in school and for his blessings and love upon my family.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My utmost gratitude goes to God Almighty for the gift of life, good health, wisdom, knowledge, understanding and perseverance needed for the success of this work.

My sincere gratitude goes to Dr Osiki Odion my project supervisor May the lord God fulfill and grant you your heart desires (Amen). To my uncle Dr Wilson Ofunne who made my University education feasible, your rewards are in Heaven and to my Anty Mrs Ugo Ejenam, thanks for your encouragement and support. To my siblings, thank you for your love and support. To my Parents i appreciate your support. God bless you all.

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## CHAPTER ONE

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

### **Introduction**

Nigeria is no stranger to conflicts. Before the advent of the colonial master, the conflicts were mainly tribal and geo-political - jostling for relevance among the different ethnic groups that comprised the geographical area called Nigeria. The balance of power between the North and the South, and between the East and the West, was a factor which the colonial master exploited to his advantage. With the masterful dexterity of a puppet master, the colonialist put in place the machinery and mechanism that perpetually set different segments of the Nigerian federation against one another. Indeed, the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 was a consummate and practiced man oeuvre of the colonial overlord to build on the conflicting strengths and weaknesses of the component parts of the country, to ensure their continued relevance and control over the polity.

Nigeria has a population of more than 150 million people divided between Muslims, Christians and followers of traditional African religions. There are around 45–50 million Muslims (c.50 per cent of the population), 35–40 million Christians (c.35–40 per cent), and about 10–15 million followers of traditional religions (c.15 per cent). However, these figures are necessarily speculative because the only census since 1963 (that of 1991) failed to ask respondents about religious affiliation. Religious competition between Muslims and Christians is

now perhaps the single most significant political issue in the country.<sup>1</sup> More generally, since the 1960s religion has been prominent in Nigerian civil conflict where missionaries and religious partisans see themselves in a zero-sum game to win souls, sometimes entering into deadly conflict.

Conflict is a major problem in any given human society and often it is inevitable. In Nigeria, conflict is very often the result of the interaction of political, economic and social instability frequently stemming from bad governance, failed economic policies and inappropriate development programs stemming from exacerbated ethnic or religious differences in society. The fundamental problems in conflict are the religious beliefs and practices, ethnicity, boundary disputes, land ownership and resource competition, poverty, marginalization, unemployment and underdevelopment.

This study is to examine the role of Christians Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the potential to manage and resolve conflicts in Nigeria through their religious values and principles. Some venues of achieving this is through dialogue, seminars and workshop, as media of evangelizing and restoring hope in the country with their gospel of peace.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of Christian Association Nigeria (CAN) to conflict resolution and peace building in Nigeria, while the objectives are;

- i. To examine the origin and structure of Christian Association Nigeria
- ii. To examine the role of Christian Association Nigeria and peace building in Nigeria
- iii. To examine the of role of Christian Association Nigeria in conflict resolution in Nigeria
- iv. To examine the limitation facing Christian Association Nigeria in conflict resolution

### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study is limited to the activities of CAN in Nigeria and its contribution to conflict resolution and peace building in Nigeria from

### **Methodology**

This study adopts the historical method, utilizing both primary and secondary sources.

Primary Source which were utilized in the course of the research will be obtained from historical documentation and oral interview of the crisis in Nigeria and the response of CAN during the course of this study.

Secondary source which were consulted in some university and public libraries across the country, included textbooks, Journals, articles, newspaper and online sources.

These sourced materials helped to provide information for a critical analysis for this research

### **Literature Review**

Conflicts are a part of everyday life – they form in our close relations, at a societal level and on an international level. All too often we see conflicts leading to aggression, hostility and war. But conflicts can also be a steppingstone leading to change and wisdom; if we learn to handle them constructively. There are different literature on conflicts and conflict management, but few are related to this study.

Although conflict has received various definitions and interpretations, to others it simply means, “that I want something and you also want the same, but we both cannot have it all”. According to Fernandez in his work "Conflict Resolution", he wrote that conflict can be viewed as a difference in perspectives: what one sees, think, feel, and believe may be different from what another sees, think, feel, and believe.<sup>2</sup> From the above assertion, it therefore means that conflict is a part of all human interactions, and it can have positive influence. Hence, we can say conflict is inevitable as it is present in daily, public and private life.

Bassey in the introduction to his work “Introduction: The Nexus of Conflict and Development Crisis in Africa” posits that conflict is very often the result of the interaction of political, economic and social instability, frequently stemming from bad governance, failed economic policies and inappropriate development program which have exacerbated ethnic or religious difference.<sup>3</sup> Again, DFID report of 1997 as quoted by Bassey has noted that: Violent conflict generates social division, reverses economic progress, impedes sustainable development and frequently results in human rights violations. Large population movements triggered by conflict threaten the security and livelihood of whole region.<sup>4</sup>

According to Osioma H. “Conflict Management in Nigeria: A Study of Selected Organisations”, Conflict management is the application of resolution and stimulation techniques to regulate the level and impact of disruptive conflict within an entity, while harnessing the more positive and constructive aspects of collaboration, cooperation and compromise. It is a process that seeks to remove cognitive barriers to agreement and group synergy. It often covers an array of measures of conflict resolution: problem solving, super-ordinate goals, expansion of resources, avoidance, smoothing, compromise, authoritative command, and altering the human and structural variables.<sup>5</sup>

In 2007, the United Nation’s Policy Committee defined peace building “[It] involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing

into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and sustainable development”.<sup>6</sup>

Peace building can come in form of direct effort that focuses intentionally on the factors driving or mitigating conflict, in an attempt to reduce structural or direct violence. Alternatively, it may refer to efforts to coordinate a multi-level, multi-sectoral strategy that includes the funding and proper communication and coordination mechanisms between humanitarian assistance, development, governance, security, justice and other sectors within the polity.

The Free Encyclopaedia Wikipedia differentiates between conflict resolution and peace building. It defines peace building as an intervention designed to prevent the start or resumption of violent conflict by creating a sustainable peace. It addresses the root causes or potential causes of violence, creates a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution, and stabilizes society politically, socially and economically.<sup>7</sup> Peace building covers a wide range of efforts by diverse actors in government and civil society, at the community, national and international levels, to address the root causes of violence and ensure civilians have freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from humiliation before, during and after violent conflict.

Nigeria today faces greater challenges to peace and stability than ever before. The various regions in the country, the Northern part of the country, the South West, and the Niger Delta, are a volatile mix of insecurity, ethno religious conflict and political instability. It is unfortunate that while the church in Nigeria has never been without a voice and has always made significant progress in addressing the ills of the country, not many people acknowledge the worthiness of her contributions to the betterment of social, economic, and political conditions of the nation and its people. Consequently, not many writers have addressed the responses of the church.

It is believe that the role of religion is essential in peace building and conflict resolution in any civilized society, that religious leader plays a vital role in promoting peace among their followers. Also religious body should uphold the mantle as a peace building organisation and to be at the fore front in any conflict resolution process.

Iheanyi Enwerem, in his book titled *A Dangerous Awakening: the Politicization of Religion in Nigeria* is correct to observe that, “The relationship between religion and politics has received minimal attention.”<sup>8</sup> This may be because people do not normally assign to the church such a role. Also, many Nigerians continue to believe that the church should limit its activities to spiritual matters and abstain from political activism. Consequently, many authors limit

their attempts to address the church's response to religious conflicts. Another obstacle to holistic scholarship is that the Nigerian academic community tends to link Christianity too closely with colonization. The hatred attitude toward colonialism is transferred to Christianity so that scholars show no interest in its activities and believe it has no role in national development.

Enwerem, limits himself to the political activities of CAN and how politicians have always used religion for their political advantage. Thus he goes beyond responses to religious conflicts and the political marginalization of Christians. In his works, he evaluates the place of religion in different political epochs especially as this relates to the struggle between Islam and Christianity. Even though Enwerem looks at the origins and organizational structure of CAN, he does so only in the light of CAN's struggle for political power among the competing parties. Enwerem's interest is to identify the why and how of CAN's politicization. He reveals that since CAN is involved in the political struggle, it faces opposition from Muslims, the government, and sometimes from other sectors of the Nigerian polity.

The deficiency of Enwerem's work is that he does not deal with the efforts of the Christian organizations that were before CAN and CAN's efforts to respond to a crosssection of issues affecting the common man and good governance nor the motivations for these responses. Politicization of CAN will help the common man

only if it is to bring about social, political, and economic changes which are the bedrock of peace building. Thus, this study will focus on CAN's social and economic roles in relation to peace building and conflict resolution in Nigeria. Further, it will evaluate the political role of CAN in light of its effort to respond to the total societal problems. In addition, this study will argue that the social, economic, and religious roles of CAN are more important than its political role. CAN emerged from Christian organizations that were primarily formed to respond to socio-economic and religious issues and to protest government policies that deprived citizens of better life. This is not to say that in the past Christians were not aware of their political marginalization. Rather, it is to say that they fought against that marginalization through other political and social organizations. All of these will help to show that CAN's responses are from a pragmatic drive. Important in this study too is to look at the implications of activities to peace building and conflict resolution from a pragmatic drive.

Another work of importance here is Father Peter Tanko's *The Christian Association of Nigeria and the Challenge of the Ecumenical Imperative*, which concentrates on evaluating the ecumenical nature of CAN based on CAN's motto- "*that they all may be one.*" His book can be classified as a theological work written in a Catholic style. He uses Catholic ecumenical documents as his basis for evaluating the activities of CAN. The focus of the work is on the unity of the Christian church in Nigeria and his audience is conspicuously Christian. Tanko

believes that the unity of the Christian church is very important in its battle with its common enemy, Islam. Dialogue must happen in the pluralistic religious and political context of the Nigerian society. CAN's dialogue can bring about religious unity in the nation. He also examines the internal dynamics of CAN, its weaknesses and strengths but only in the light of "ecumenical imperatives."<sup>9</sup> The limitation of Tanko's work is that it fails to consider the activities of CAN in relation to peace building and conflict resolution affect the society, which is the main objective of CAN. CAN unites churches in Nigeria in order to respond to societal ills. This work will show that CAN responds to all kinds of issues in Nigeria that affect the common man. As it is said, "The church exists for its non-members." Tanko's shortcoming is that he fails to link this ecumenical unity with CAN's struggle for social justice. This study will resolve that shortcoming by showing how that ecumenical unity has helped CAN to respond to societal ills. Religious dialogue and ecumenical unity will be beneficial only when they affect the lives of the common persons.

Because no thorough and up-to-date analysis of CAN's social, economic, and political activities has been undertaken, this study seeks to supply what has been lacking. It is my hope that the findings will not only demonstrate the viability of CAN but will also present a model for Nigerian church-state relations.

One major problem this study faces is a scarcity of original sources from the Christian organizations under consideration. A celebrated problem in Nigeria, including Christian organizations, is record-keeping. In my study, I met great disappointment trying to collect the materials that I needed. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in particular has done a poor job in this area. Its current national secretariat in Abuja has virtually no single file that contains minutes or other documents of the association

It is against this backdrop that this study focuses on the impact of Christian Association Nigeria (CAN) to conflict resolution and peace building in Nigeria.

## Endnotes

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## CHAPTER TWO

### ORIGIN OF CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION NIGERIA

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will examine the role of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Peace building in Nigeria society. This chapter will trace the origin and formation of CAN, the objectives of CAN and its organizational structure. Also an analysis of CAN activism in ensuring and promoting Peace building in Nigeria.

Prior to the formation of the Christian Association of Nigeria in 1976, complaints and voices were coming from churches, Christian organizations, individual Christians, and other religious bodies, in response to government policies and activities. The government treated the church as a divided house. The incident that became the immediate cause of the formation of the Christian Association of Nigeria was the experience of Christian leaders in a meeting summoned by the then Chief of Staff, Brigadier Musa Yar'adua in Lagos on August 27, 1976. The meeting was attended by 33 church leaders from 13 denominations. The denominations represented according to Enwerem include Roman Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, the Salvation Army, the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, the Apostolic Church, United

African Methodists, the Evangelical Churches of West Africa, the Church of Christ in Nigeria and TEKAN churches.<sup>1</sup>

There was no opening prayer in the meeting. The Chief of Staff read his address which touched on many vital religious and political issues. The main issue seemed to be the new national pledge. The government wanted to know the view of the church on the pledge designed to be recited in schools with the aim of instilling religious and political values in the Nigerian Youth.<sup>2</sup>

The meeting lasted for about forty minutes and the government expected to hear the view of the church later. After the chief of staff's address, he declared the meeting closed. One of the Christian leaders suggested that the meeting be closed with prayer. But the chief of staff cleverly and sarcastically told him that there were many Christian denominations represented and so he did not know which one to ask to pray. Then another Christian leader told him that he could ask anyone to pray, which he did.

This incident made Christian leaders to realize how they were perceived by the Muslims and the government. It also made them to think on the effect of this on the Christians in the country. The Christian leaders therefore decided to see that something was done urgently to reverse the ugly perception. When the Christian leaders went to the Catholic Secretariat to discuss issues raised by the chief of staff, the issue of Christian unity became prominent. According to

Grissen during this meeting, a member asked, “See what has happened, why don’t we have unity as the Muslims have? Why don’t we have a united forum? Aren’t we united?”<sup>3</sup> This led to the decision of the Christian leaders to form a national Christian body without much argument.

Enwerem (1995:81) quoted the observation concerning the Lagos meeting, of one time General Secretary of CAN Mr. C.O. Williams, thus;

The Holy Spirit had another plan.... The church leaders were destined to be founders of a very important Association which by the grace of God will ultimately bring together into one fold all those who claim the fatherhood of God through Jesus Christ---- And so, what for many years appeared an impossibility – the coming together of Roman Catholics and different shades of protestants – became under the inspiration of the Holy spirit, a simple spontaneous, and effortless achievement.<sup>4</sup>

To finalize and come up with the exact name of the association, another meeting was held on 7th – 8th September, 1976. This meeting discussed mainly the issue of the name, Constitution and election of pioneer officials of the association. A sub-committee was set up to come up with a name. Many names were presented for consideration. The committee presented two names to the general meeting – the Christian Association of Nigeria and Inter-denominational Christian Association of Nigeria. At the end the name Christian Association of Nigeria was adopted. The founders of CAN made it clear that the association should never become a church.

The meeting also adopted a provisional constitution and elected officers. Positions were shared among churches or church groups. The first president was His Eminence, Dominic Cardinal Ekanden, while Rev. Habila Aleyideno was the vice-president. The general secretary was Rev. Dr. Adegbite and J.N. Ogbonna was elected treasurer.<sup>5</sup> CAN was officially inaugurated in 1980.

### **Objectives of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)**

CAN's objectives deal with issues of Christian unity, social relations among different people in Nigeria, CAN's role to its member churches, and its duty to the nation generally. The four objectives of CAN as contained in the 2004 constitution are:

- i. To serve as a basis of the response to the unity of the church, especially as contained in our Lord's pastoral prayer: That they all many be one (John 17:21)
- ii. To promote understanding, peace and unity among the various people and strata of society in Nigeria, through the propagation of the gospel.
- iii. To act as a liaison committee, by means of which its member churches can consult together and when necessary, make common statement and take common actions.
- iv. To act as a watchman of the spiritual and moral welfare of the nation.<sup>6</sup>

From the first objective, CAN considers itself a body fulfilling a spiritual role of bringing all Christians in Nigeria together as was the desire of our Lord. This prayer is the motto of CAN. CAN recognizes Christian unity as an obligation for the church – a divine mandate. CAN's logo reflects this desired Christian unity. The logo which was designed through the efforts of Bishop G.G. Ganka of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Jos, has two circles enclosing the map of Nigeria. In between the circles is the name of the association and the motto. There is a map of Nigeria in the inner circle and an open Bible is placed at the centre of the map with a cross in the background. CAN uses green as its colour. This green signifies that CAN wants to put new life in the dying Nigerian Society.

The second objective expresses belief and summarizes the situation in Nigeria. In this, CAN acknowledges that Nigeria has the problem of understanding, peace and unity. The problem of understanding peace and unity is not just among religious bodies but also among the different ethnic groups and classes of people. There is a wide gap between the educated and the uneducated, the rich and the poor, the rural and the urban and between one political group and another. This wide gap also exists between different religious and ethnic groups. These problems bring about instability and lead to economic problems CAN believes that the gospel is the only solution to these problems.

The third objective is more of the function of CAN. CAN is an umbrella organization of the churches in Nigeria. It brings churches together so as to discuss their problems and work together. It also speaks on behalf of Churches and represents churches in Nigeria and to the international community. CAN performs these functions through consultative forums, issuance of communiqués and press statements on national, state and local issues.

The fourth objective shows that CAN acknowledges that it has a duty to the whole nation. Nigeria is characterized by spiritual and moral decay. In this case, CAN is assuming a prophetic role of warning the nation. There is theft and armed robbery on our high ways, in banks, villages and urban areas. Corruption and embezzlement of public funds are found in government and private sectors. Different forms of social, economic, political and religious injustices are carried out openly by governments, institutions and individuals. The rate of poverty in Nigeria is so high today, while the national cake is in the hands of a few opportuned individuals. CAN wants to address this endless list of societal problems in Nigeria.

### **Organizational Structure of CAN**

The 2004 edition of CAN's constitution serves as basis for the discussion of the organizational structure of CAN here. The constitution has spelt out clearly the branches and organs of the association. CAN has a national body and under it

are zonal branches made up of a few states in a given area. Presently, there are six zonal branches and the zones follow the political zoning of the country. Under the zonal branches, there are states and local governments with their administrative organs.

In CAN's organizational structure, the National Assembly is the highest policymaking organ of the association. It is made up of 50 members from each church block, a representative from each state and the Federal Capital Territory, national officers of the association, past presidents and general secretaries as honorary members and the presidents and general secretaries of Youth Wing and Women Wing of CAN.

Next in rank of authority is the National Executive Committee (NEC) which comprises ten representatives from each church group, a representative from zonal and state branches, National officers of the association, and the chairman/chair person of youth wing and women wing of CAN. NEC meets at least twice a year and is responsible for the decisions of National Assembly, which meets only once every three years. It has the power to set up boards, committees and sub-committees, appoint the general and assistant general secretaries, and approve annual budget and financial reports.

After the NEC is the Zonal Assembly. The Zonal Assembly meets once in two years but has an executive that meets at least twice a year to enable it discharge its responsibilities effectively.

The Zonal Assembly is made up of 30 members from each church group, zonal officers and past chairmen and secretaries as honorary members while, the Zonal Executive is made up of 10 representatives from each church group, Zonal officers and one representative from each state within the zone.

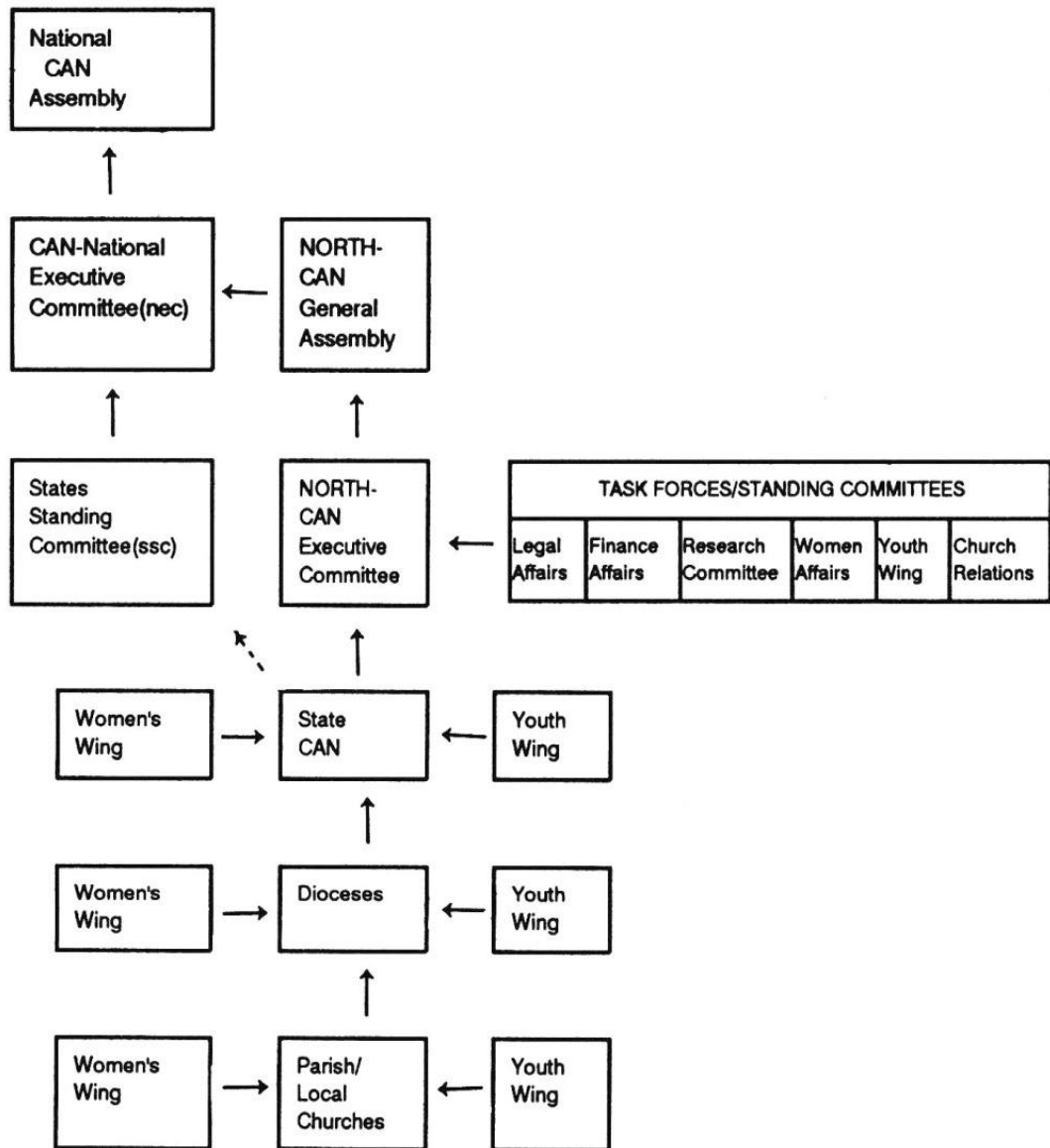
Next to the Zonal Assembly is the State Assembly. The State assembly has 20 representatives from each church group, two from each local Government branch, state officers, and the past chairmen and secretaries as honorary members. The State also has an executive body that is made up of 10 representatives from each church group, the state officers, and one representative from each local government.

The third level is the local Government Assembly and Executive Committee. At the Local Government level, each church group has ten representatives who together with the ten local Government officers make up the local Government Assembly. This is the constitutional requirement. However, the composition may differ from one State to another. In States where it is not possible to get all the church groups represented, may be because such church groups do not have churches there, the branches concerned use their discretion.

The issue of how representation is to be spread among member church groups has been a problem over a long time. The representative issue and the qualification for admission into CAN have created a feeling that CCN and the Catholics want to dominate CAN. It is a fact that CCN, Catholics and other mainline protestant groups were afraid of fundamentalist tendencies of the less orthodox churches. The dominance of the Catholics and CCN manifested in the representative numbers that were allotted to them. In the previous constitutions, the percentage of representation was 40-40-20 for CCN, CSN and others respectively. Enwerem commenting on why other groups accepted the 40-40-20 percent noted that:

It must not be forgotten that the bulk of the national financial and administrative burden of CAN have been carried by the Catholics and the CCN. Aware of the political structure which the Catholics and CCN have acquired over the years, and having known that CAN without them would have little political clout in the country, the other groups had to accept 40-40-20 ratio of representation. The 2004 constitution has provided for equal representation. This is a new development in CAN.<sup>7</sup>

Administrative Structure



Sources: CAN Website

## Endnotes

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6. Constitution of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Art. 8
7. *Ibid*
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## CHAPTER THREE

### CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (CAN) IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE BUILDING IN EXERCISE

#### **Introduction**

Despite the political differences between the various ethnic groupings in Nigeria, religion has also become a source of friction between the Muslims and the Christians. Violence against Christian Igbo immigrants in the Muslim north was a key factor during the Nigerian Civil War, and even after the war, the trouble between Christians and Muslims, especially in the northern part of the country, intensified.<sup>1</sup> The use of religion as a tool for achieving political ends has contributed immensely to the problem of religious conflict in Nigeria. Some politicians in Nigeria are known to engage in reactionary recourse to religious fervour as a means of either holding on to power, or as an instrument for political ascendancy.<sup>2</sup> It should be reiterated that religious conflicts are fast becoming a common feature of society, in spite of socioeconomic development coupled with the gains of democracy. Many scholars have attributed the causes of conflicts between and within various religious groups in Nigeria to a number of factors, such as ways of propagating the religions, selfishness, intolerance, mistrust and suspicion between the followers of the various religious groups.<sup>3</sup>

## **Religion and Conflict in Nigeria**

Within the Nigerian state, many governments and international organisations are suffering from a legitimacy deficit, and one can expect a growing impact of religious discourses on Nigerian politics. Religion is a major source of soft power.<sup>4</sup> It will, to a greater extent, be used or misused by religions and governmental organisations to pursue their selfish interests. Religious tension in different parts of the country has threatened the survival of the Nigerian state, and the federal government is slow in stemming the religious violence that engulfs the country. When a government fails its people, they turn elsewhere to safeguard themselves and their futures, and in Nigeria at the beginning of the twenty-first century, they have turned first to religion. Here, then, is the truth behind Takaya's assertions with respect to religion and state control. He argues that outbreaks of violence result not simply from a clash between two powerful religious monoliths, but from tensions at the most vulnerable edges where they meet zones of desperation and official neglect, and then faith becomes a rallying cry in the struggle for state control.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of this early trend, the issue of religion did not come to the front burner as a critical issue dividing Nigerians until 1999. When military rule ended in 1999, democratic politics provided a perfect platform for corrupt and cynical politicians to play on religious fears to gain votes. The major event that opened

the floodgate of religious antagonism was the decision of the Zamfara State government to introduce the Sharia penal code in the state.<sup>6</sup> This move was seen by Christians as a ploy to turn Nigeria into an Islamic state against the spirit of secularity of the Nigerian state as enshrined in the constitution. The introduction of the Sharia legal system has added another dimension to religious dissension. This singular action of Alhaji Ahmad Sani (Yerima Bakura), the executive governor of Zamfara State, marked the epoch of intractable inter-religious violence in Nigeria. This religious imbroglio continued even in some states where Sharia was not introduced and this was as a result of the inability to categorically distinguish the place of politics and religion. The incessant religious crises erupting across the polity since 1999, when the military handed over power to a democratically elected government, negates Adigun Agbaje's optimistic thesis that 'Nigeria under a democratic dispensation would likely witness a lessening of tension over religion and politics'.<sup>7</sup>

The nascent democracy is witnessing increasing religionisation of politics and politicisation of religion due to the resolve of some northern state governors to adopt the islamic Sharia as the penal and criminal codes in their states. With Zamfara State blazing the trail, eleven other northern states have followed suit. Takaya also identified centrifugal factors that gave rise to the politicisation of ethnic and religious identities in Nigeria, which include the existence of two or more religious groups with sufficient numerical strength that can significantly

affect the outcome and direction of a democratic political process. Then follows the instrumentalisation of ethnicity and religion as a legitimising tool of hegemony when the interests of the political class are under threat. He further reiterates that the society is characterised by political, social or economic hardships which have caused alliances along ethnic and religious fault-lines and these have resulted in the politicisation of religion in Nigeria.<sup>8</sup>

It should be reiterated that before the military handed over power to the civilians in 1999, the country had already witnessed a series of religious crises, and scholars have argued that the long years of military rule increased the gap of distrust as the politicians deliberately employed state power to heighten primordial sentiments, thereby increasing intolerance in Nigeria. The current political and religious sentiments are thus fuelled by some religious fundamentalists and individuals who benefit at the expense of the state.<sup>9</sup> In 1990 a Muslim-Christian crisis broke out in Bauchi and in 1991 another religious riot exploded in Kano after a German fundamentalist Christian announced a campaign to bring his Good News Revival campaign to the city.<sup>10</sup> Also in 1992, a violent clash broke out in the northern town of Zangon Kataf, this development brought about a fierce confrontation between the Christians and Muslims in the community. In that incident, the mostly Muslim Hausa and the predominantly Christian Kataf ethnic group fought over the relocation of the community's main

market in Zango Kataf, and from there killings spread to other parts of Kaduna State.<sup>11</sup>

### **Religious Clashes in Nigeria**

Some of the religious conflicts that have captured national and international attention in the last ten years (1999 to 2009) in Nigeria include: The Kaduna anti-Sharia crisis on 21 February 2000; the clashes followed a march by tens of thousands of Christians to protest the proposal to introduce Muslim Sharia law as the criminal code throughout Kaduna State. Between February-May 2000 over 1,000 people died in rioting over the introduction of Sharia in Kaduna State alone. On 28 February 2000, hundreds of ethnic Hausa were killed in reprisal attacks in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> In 2001, over 2,000 people were killed and thousands displaced in religious violence that spread across the Middle-Belt states of Benue, Plateau, Taraba, and Nasarawa.<sup>13</sup> The outbreak of a religious crisis in the town of Jos, the capital of Plateau State and a city surrounded by beautiful hills, created pandemonium in the Middle Belt geo-political zone. The ironic thing is that Plateau State calls itself ‘The Home of Peace and Tourism’ in Nigeria. On the other hand, everyone in Nigeria is familiar with the fierce animosities that exist between the various religious groups in Jos. A week of violent clashes left at least 1,000 people dead and many more displaced in Jos. Soldiers and police kept vigilant watch on vehicles entering town, hoping to curb any potential reprisals. In

every household, church and mosque, people blamed followers of the other religion with planning and executing the attacks with a vitriol that does not bode well for the future of the city.

Plateau State has the highest number of displaced people as a result of clashes between Christian and Muslim communities there. Subsequently a low intensity conflict spread to the surrounding countryside, where the mainly Christian farmers clashed repeatedly with the predominantly Muslim livestock herders. Over 500 people died in these skirmishes, which forced several thousand people to abandon their homes.<sup>14</sup> Most of the clashes in Plateau State have been portrayed as being between Christian and Muslim communities, but have often assumed an ethnic dimension. The predominantly Christian Tarok farmers consider the mostly Muslim Hausa cattle herders as outsiders, and accuse them of stealing land and trying to usurp political power.

Again in 2004 another sectarian clash between Christians and Muslims broke out in Jos. Some Fulani herdsmen were believed to have brought weapons into the city and an army search triggered riots which led to the deaths of many innocent citizens. In that crisis, churches and mosques were destroyed and whole communities killed or driven out. This led to the burning down of 72 villages, and in the densely populated residential area of Jos, dozens of homes laid crumbling,

and blood splatter stained floors, walls and the large peach-coloured boulders between homes.

In a reprisal attack, about 30 people were killed in Kano, the largest city in northern Nigeria with a population of about eight million. Religious violence erupted with a Muslim protest demonstration on 10 May 2004, as a protest against the killing of over six hundred Muslims in the small town of Yelwa in Shendam Local Government area of Plateau State.<sup>15</sup> Again over 1,000 people were injured after mobs of youths armed with clubs, machetes and jerry cans of petrol roamed the streets in Kano, attacking suspected Christians. An estimated 10,000 Kano residents, mostly Christians fleeing from their homes in troubled parts of the city, took refuge at the main military and police barracks on 11 May 2004. At least 57,000 people fled their homes following sectarian violence involving Christians and Muslims in northern and central Nigeria. More than 30,000 Christians were displaced from their homes in Kano, the largest city in northern Nigeria. Also over 27,000 displaced people had sought refuge in Bauchi State following a massacre of Muslims by Christian gangs in the neighbouring Plateau State earlier in May, 2004.

2002 in Kaduna and Abuja. Violence surged when a columnist wrote that the Holy Prophet Mohammed would likely support the pageant, an event some Muslims felt was indecent. The 'blasphemous' article suggested that the Prophet

Mohammed would have liked to marry a Miss World beauty queen.<sup>16</sup> Some islamic fundamentalists perceived this as an insult to islam and it eventually led to further riots in which many people lost their lives. More than 2,000 people died in the rioting that followed in Kaduna and Abuja.

In 2006, riots over Danish cartoons depicting Prophet Mohammed led to the deaths of nearly 200 people in several Nigerian Northern cities, more than in any other country that experienced violence in the global backlash against the cartoons.<sup>17</sup>

Then came the sudden insurgency of a violent islamic sect in the Northern part of the country. Known as Boko Haram, the fundamentalist grouping aims to overthrow the federal government of Nigeria. The sect's leader, Mohammed Yusuf, is believed to have formed Boko Haram (meaning western education is a sin) in 2002 in the restive northeastern city of Maiduguri with the intention of imposing a strict version of islamic law. He declared total Jihad in Nigeria, threatening to islamise the entire nation by force. The group attacked a police station in the northern state of Bauchi on 26 July 2009. The incident led to a four-day armed struggle between state security forces and members of the militant group, spreading to three other states (Yobe, Kano and Borno) and leaving over 800 people dead, many of them members of the sect. The militant attacks, which followed the arrest of several of its members, targeted mainly police stations,

prisons, government buildings and churches in the four states. Since the completion of a military attack that sought to break up the sect, no more violent outbreaks have occurred. Borno State and its capital city Maiduguri – the stronghold of the sect – were most affected.<sup>18</sup>

Religious clashes are relatively common in Nigeria and are likely to persist in the future. However, many of these clashes include a much stronger political dimension than is often suggested, concerning more the uneven distribution of power and wealth, rather than religion per se. While those crises have remained localised in the past and have not had the potential to turn into a full-scale national crisis, the destructive effects on the communities are immense.

The various religious conflicts have brought about economic and political instability, despite the abundant natural resources in the country. The losses in human capital due to the direct and indirect effects of the religious conflicts are of inestimable dimensions. Taking into consideration the level of destruction in the various religious conflicts, and coupled with incessant religious fundamentalist insurgencies, the Nigerian state cannot sustain the economic and human losses. Prevention and resolution of conflicts are, therefore, critical priorities in the nation's socioeconomic development. It is for this reason that peace making has become a key objective on the agenda of the federal government and other relevant non-governmental organisations.

In sum, this Nigerian case shows that when interfaith dialogue is skilfully organised and pursued it can encourage erstwhile religious enemies, including those who have personally been involved in conflict, to work together towards peaceful accommodation. This does not necessarily mean, however, that religious conflicts more generally are dealt with via such initiatives. This may be because conflicts that appear to focus on real or perceived religious differences, as in Nigeria between Muslims and Christians, are also concerned with human development issues, such as poverty – and these of course would require sustained and devoted attention from government in order to resolve them.

### **CAN and Peace building**

Two broad methodological approaches seem to characterize CAN's peace building over the years, at the national, NORTH-CAN, or state levels. The first is what could be described as the 'politics of quiet diplomacy' or the 'politics of persuasion' — a continuation, more or less, of the pre-CAN approach to the government by the churches. This involves collective and/or individual actions like sending delegations or writing letters and memoranda to the government, aimed at persuading it to grant the churches their particular request. This approach implies, however, that church leaders should, as far as possible, avoid making public statements regarding the particular interest they are pursuing; and, should such statements be necessary, they should not project the government in a bad

light. The leadership of His Eminence, Dominic Cardinal Ekandem, CAN's first National President, epitomized this method.

The second broad method adopted by CAN is what could be described as 'militant politics'. It has largely come into use since 1987, but more especially since 1988 when the more fiery Archbishop Okogie took over the leadership of CAN. In his judgment, the first method 'has been tried and we saw that it did not work; probably we got about, say, between 20-30 per cent success'. There was, therefore, the need to try another method, the prelate concluded. Grounded on a confrontational spirit and openness to a diplomatic route, the second method was executed in three inter-related ways. The first, according to Okogie was 'to go to the Press'. Here, he continued, 'we make sure that as many papers as possible carry whatever we say'.<sup>8</sup> This aspect of CAN's method, as we shall see later in the chapter, appeared to have achieved a greater success than the earlier one. Yet some church leaders, in preference for the quiet diplomacy approach, denounced the current militancy as 'a barking through the Press'.<sup>9</sup> In so doing, they revealed one of the major problems within CAN.

Okogie highlights the second aspect of CAN's militant method. In executing this method, the approach is to work through individuals; and, according to him, this is the method 'that is really working'.<sup>10</sup>

Thirdly, CAN's militant politics involved the use of the courts. While the results of this approach could be unpredictable, given the nature of the legal system, CAN, nevertheless, uses it mainly because of the national or local publicity it brings to the Association. In addition, such an approach is CAN's dramatic way of educating its constituents on the need to fight for their rights when such rights have been trampled upon by those in power.

We now turn our attention to how these forms of militancy have been put into practice by CAN. In doing so, we shall take note of what we consider to be the two major factors which shaped these approaches to politics by CAN. These are: (1) the Northern or, to be more precise, the Kaduna factor, and (2) the emergence of a militant leadership.

As is discernible from its constitution, especially with regard to its aim to mobilize its constituents, CAN's major activities ought to be at the state level. In practice, however, these activities happen mostly in CAN's Lagos office and in the northern states. Nowhere is this epitomized more than in Kaduna State — thanks to the Kaduna-based NORTH-CAN Secretariat. In close collaboration with the Kaduna State CAN where it is currently housed, the Secretariat has made Kaduna, CAN's most dynamic centre in the country. A number of reasons, most of which depend on its location and experiences, explain the uniqueness of CAN's presence in Kaduna. First, Kaduna is one of the very few states with a full-fledged

CAN secretariat with paid staff. Second, Kaduna, in comparison with other cities in the country, is the home of a high proportion of important personalities with strong connections with the government. Dan Ochala explains the reason for Kaduna State CAN's uniqueness:

Kaduna State CAN's uniqueness is rooted in the fact that it is located right at the 'battle front' and therefore naturally receives the bullet, so to speak. This is besides the fact of its experience of persecution, quite unlike other States. Given Kaduna State's unique position in Nigerian politics — for, as it is generally believed, the one who controls Kaduna controls Lagos, so to speak — CAN's Kaduna State branch, in very close working relationship with the Secretariat for the eleven Northern States, has to play a vanguard role not only for the eleven Northern States but also for the entire nation. Thus, oftentimes, problems from other States are brought to CAN's zonal Office in Kaduna for advice. Kaduna State CAN's vitality and dynamism are the envy of other State branches of CAN, so much so that at one Benue State CAN meeting, the Secretary there prayed that what happened in Kaduna may happen in Benue State so that Christians there may wake up to the threat of Islam.<sup>8</sup>

Three cases, each of which generated a great impact on the country, are indicative of the militancy with which NORTH-CAN is associated. The first case was the October 10, 1987, 'launching of a sixty million (N60 million) naira church Rehabilitation and Development Fund' by the zone.<sup>4</sup> This was followed by a well-publicized five million naira litigation which the zone took against the northern-based and pro-Islamic newspaper, the *New Nigerian*, for failing to honour its contract with the Association to advertise the launching.<sup>84</sup> Despite the newspaper's action, the launching was reported to have been successful.<sup>5</sup> What is

of interest to us is not so much the outcome of the launching, or even of the litigation against the New Nigerian, but to uncover the deep level of political action that CAN was engaged in.

Both the launching and the subsequent litigation were effective utilization of the media for political exposure. Following the country's entry into the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) in 1986, and the acrimonious debate it generated, culminating in the March and June religious riots of that same year, CAN wanted publicity in order to promote its mission. Besides, it used the opportunity to remind Nigerians of the government's inability to rid the nation of various forms of injustice. Hence, the advertisement for the launching read:

[Members of CAN] are happy to announce to our nation that the FIRE that burnt our churches has also WELDED us together for good. Hopefully we shall be more useful, to ourselves, to our neighbours, to our nation, and to our God. We delight in joining hands with our Governments in fighting the good fight — replacing wrong with right, evil with good, ungodliness with righteousness, religious sentiments with TRUTH, injustice with justice, and 'hate' with love! We shall survive.<sup>9</sup>

This statement ended on a note resonant of the song, 'We shall overcome' — reminding Christians of the victory that lies ahead if they, like the members of the American Civil Rights Movement, could remain 'welded' together irrespective of their differences. For, although the launching was supposed to be a NORTH-CAN affair, the invitees were an array of Christians within the corridors of power across the country. The failure of the New Nigerian newspapers to

honour their contract with CAN gave the latter an opportunity to attract even more attention. Besides, CAN also used the opportunity to demonstrate to Christians the need to fight for their rights and to alert them to the consequences of a divided Christianity.

The success of the peaceful demonstration and the wide exposure it brought to CAN encouraged its planners to more militant activities. Thus, not long after the successful demonstration, it then occurred to NORTH-CAN's leadership, according to Salifu, that there were retired military personnel (ex-servicemen) among the members of the Christian churches in the North.<sup>98</sup> Efforts were therefore made towards the formation of an 'Ex-servicemen's Christian Fellowship' with the primary purpose of mobilizing these retired soldiers in 'a permanent arrangement' for the training of the Christian Youth on how to resist future attacks on Christians and their churches by Muslim fanatics.<sup>10</sup>

### **CAN and Conflict Resolution**

CAN's principal focus was to fight for and defend the rights of Christians in a polity gradually tilting towards "islamicization." However, largely based on recent rhetoric, CAN has claimed that it is principally and actively involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Nigeria. CAN stated that one of its mediums of achieving this is through dialogue, recently upgraded to a technique called "progressive religious dialogue." Through this medium, CAN engages

other religious leaders from Islam, individuals, and faith-based organizations from a variety of religious backgrounds and affiliations. The CAN currently has a specific department saddled with the responsibility of building peace and resolving conflicts – the Department of Inter-Faith and Ecumenism. What the CAN does is slightly unusual in Africa and globally – it brings all Christian bodies in the country together under one umbrella. In addition, the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), one of the components of the CAN, also has a department with a major focus on dialogue and peacebuilding. The department, known as the Department of Mission and Dialogue, has created a forum for dialogue between Catholic women and Muslim women. The department has also initiated dialogue between Catholic and Muslim.<sup>19</sup>

CAN claims that one of its key objectives is “to promote understanding, peace, and unity among the various peoples and strata of society in Nigeria...”<sup>20</sup> listed CAN as an upcoming FBO in conflict resolution in Nigeria when they tried to answer the question, “Who is keeping the peace now – and how?” CAN maintains its presence in conflict resolution in Nigeria through a technique recently upgraded to “progressive religious dialogue.”<sup>21</sup>

CAN, the largest faith-based organization in Nigeria, has over the years been a stakeholder in inter-faith relations and conflict resolution in Nigeria. It has

embraced dialogue as the primary form of resolution to disruptions and religious crises in particular. CAN retorts that its,

Consistent policy of religious dialogue was based upon the fundamentals of our [Christian] faith which exhort us to ‘follow peace with all men’ and also we unequivocally subscribe to Article 18 of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration on Human Rights which states that, ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.’<sup>22</sup>

The elements of CAN’s progressive religious dialogue are in line with what Appleby believes must be in conflict resolution endeavours for them to be successful. Appleby opines that conflict resolution efforts must: have an international or transnational reach, must consistently emphasise peace and avoidance of the use of force in resolving conflict, and must have good relations between different religions in a conflict situation, as this will be the key to a positive input from them.<sup>23</sup> The progressive religious dialogue is also in accordance with the “multilevel” characteristic of conflict resolution described by Ramsbotham et al.—“Since human conflict is a worldwide phenomenon within an increasingly intricate and interconnected local/global cultural web, this has to be a truly cooperative international enterprise, in terms of both the geographical locations where conflict is encountered and the conflict resolution initiatives deployed to address them”.<sup>23</sup> CAN has therefore called on religious bodies,

international governments, and organizations to partner with them to find a lasting and peaceful solution to the real and present conflicts in Nigeria.

Another means that CAN contributed to conflict resolution in Nigeria, is humanitarian aid. In order to show this act of peace and love, CAN created a Fund for Boko Haram victims irrespective of their religious affiliations. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) national body has made arrangements to raise funds for displaced persons and victims of terrorism and other related conflicts in the country. Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, who is the then CAN President issued a statement in Lagos on Thursday. He said that Christendom was pained by the level of suffering Nigerians were going through as a result of the boko haram insurgency. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) national body has made arrangements to raise funds for displaced persons and victims of terrorism and other related conflicts in the country.<sup>24</sup> Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, who is the CAN President issued a statement in Lagos on Thursday. He said that Christendom was pained by the level of suffering Nigerians were going through as a result of the boko haram insurgency. The CAN President said that the fundraising will be collected in all churches next Sunday and will be known as Special Distress Offering. He called on Christians to respond positively in their various churches on Sunday. He added that we must assist those in distress. Director of National Issues and Social Welfare of CAN, Mr. Sunday Oibe stated that funds will be sourced through the five blocs of CAN. He said “We expect huge response from

the brethren across the five blocs of CAN so we can meet the needs of the people especially from the North-east.”<sup>25</sup> Obie said the monies collected will pass through the State Chairmen of CAN before getting to the Zonal Chairman who will lodge it into the bank accounts allocated for it.

Religious organisations are rich sources of peace services. They function as a powerful warrant for social tolerance, democratic pluralism, and constructive conflict-management. They are peace-builders and peacemakers. Inter-faith religious organisations contribute to peace-building by empowering the weak, influencing the moral-political climate, developing cooperation and providing humanitarian aid.

The resolution of religious conflicts in Nigeria has been a major concern for the well meaning Nigerians. There are efforts made so far to bring the incessant religious conflicts in Nigeria to an end yet all to no avail. It is worrisome to note that a lot of lives and property have been lost as a result of religious conflicts in Nigeria. Religious dialogue is not a good option for the resolution of religious conflicts in Nigeria considering the peculiar nature of Nigeria but it can be used after appropriate orientation is done among the religions in Nigeria.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CHALLENGES FACING CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (CAN) IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

#### **Introduction**

The ascendance of the Christian Association of Nigeria in the country's contemporary political terrain was bound to generate a reaction within the society. A number of critics have articulated various challenges of CAN towards Conflict Resolution. This chapter examines the challenges facing CAN in conflict resolution from the purview of these critics and assesses the quality of its activities. Attention will be paid to secularism and tolerance — two broad areas — into which reactions to CAN can be set. The objectives here are premised on the understanding that, whatever may have been its limitations, CAN'S involvement in national politics had a remarkable impact on the country's future.

#### **Religious Rivalry among Christians and Muslims**

Religion is one of the main sources of conflict in Nigeria. Religious conflict occurs over religious beliefs, doctrines, practices or interpretation of scriptures between individuals or groups. Rivalry between Muslims and Christians has obviously ignited violence in Nigeria, especially with regard to the adoption of strict Islamic law (Sharia) by states in the predominantly Muslim

North like Zamfara State. Some Christians, who are in the majority in the South, have perceived this as a threat of Islamization, and in flashpoints such as Kaduna in the North and Jos in Central Nigeria this has been a source of Christian – Muslim violence.

The CAN has also its challenges such as lack of authoritative president, the blocs protecting their interest, political bigotry, corruption, hatred, envy, and similar vices. In order to overcome these challenges, it will be imperative to have a kind of “federation of churches”<sup>1</sup> whose membership would be voluntary in their official capacity rather than blocs, and each church retaining its freedom and independence in the management of its internal affairs, but all recognizing one another as sisters with equal rights, and co-operation in general enterprises. Such co-operation will include the spread of the gospel at home and abroad, the defense of the faith against terrorism, and infidelity, the elevation of the poor and down trodden or the neglected classes of the society.

### **The Problem of Ethnicity**

The occasional feeling of *yan arewa* (sons of the North) among the Christians in the North, was mentioned especially with regard to the ethnic identity of the CAN leadership — an obvious problem in CAN, so much so that B.P. Tanko remarked that, ‘when push comes to shove, the feeling of [Northern identity] becomes obvious’.<sup>2</sup> To drive the point home, someone who went to

school with one of the incumbent church leaders from the North recalls how this particular leader used to champion the Sardauna's 'Northernization policy'.<sup>3</sup> My informant claims to be baffled by the leader's current stand on 'the old North' but is not surprised, however, at his support of a son-of-the-soil mentality within the Catholic Church in the North. So strong is this feeling that it is reliably believed that it was partly because of this that the Vatican refused to go along with the northern bishops' support for the creation of Bauchi, Kano, and Kafanchan dioceses on the grounds that these places do not have their own sons-of-the-soil to be appointed bishops. For, as the argument goes, there is nothing that makes an indigenous priest from, say, Southern Zaria any more indigenous to Kano than a priest from the South who may have been born and raised in Kano and speaks the Hausa language, just as there is nothing that makes someone from the Jos area any more indigenous to Maiduguri than someone from the South.<sup>4</sup>

The problem of ethnicity in CAN is not evident in the Catholic Church alone; it also exists in the non-Catholic church groups. For instance, most of the Protestant Churches in the north have their church congregations identified with one ethnic group or another. Even the more northern-based evangelical church groups like ECWA and TEKAN have a similar identity among the different ethnic groups in the North.<sup>5</sup> In the South, Christians identify themselves more with their ethnic origins than their religious affiliation, as is exemplified in the on-going dichotomy between the Yoruba and Igbo speaking peoples.

## **The Problem of Denominationalism**

The problem of ethnicity in CAN may not be as pronounced in the Igbo speaking areas as in the North. The East, being almost entirely Christian, the ethnic identification, as far as CAN is concerned, gives way to denominational rivalry. It is not surprising to note that, of all the states in the Federation, sixteen years after the birth of the Association, it is only in the 'old' Imo State — an area almost entirely Christian — that the state's branch of CAN is yet to be inaugurated.<sup>66</sup> The reason for this is 'the leadership tussle' which, as recently as March 1992, was still going on among the member-bodies of CAN in the State, so much so that 'the President and the General Secretary of CAN have been urged to move in and resolve it'.<sup>6</sup>

Rev. Akagha was therefore right when he observed that a major weakness of CAN is the uneasiness of members when they come together. This, according to him, is because of their different theological backgrounds and unsettled thorny issues bordering on political interest. Catholics and Protestants, he continued, would like their candidate to be voted into political office. Therefore, in this atmosphere, there is little trust among CAN membership as each constituted group reads sectarian motives into the statements or actions of the other.<sup>68</sup> To buttress Akagha's point regarding the difference in theological background, Bishop Ganaka, while commenting on the weakness of CAN, especially in the

North, talked about what he perceived as ‘the educational imbalance between the Catholics and the Protestants’;<sup>7</sup> as a result of such an imbalance, he continued, CAN is saddled with ‘some emotional and inexperienced leaders who, often, are looking for cheap media attention’. Since the Bishop did not identify who these leaders were, it would be conjectural for us to make any attempt in that direction; the same applies to identifying in favour of which church group ‘the educational imbalance’ is tilted. But, given the prevalent biases and rivalry within the Association — especially in contrasting the Catholics with the other members of CAN — it is easy to imagine who and what the bishop may have had in mind.<sup>8</sup>

Part of the problem of denominationalism in CAN is fundamentalism. As Rev. L. Burke observed: ‘CAN is at the mercy of the new Christian churches like the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship’, which typifies for him the newly formed pentecostal churches. These, as we noted in the preceding chapter, are largely characterized by fundamentalism. But fundamentalism in CAN is not limited to the pentecostal church groups; it can be found also even among members of the other mainstream Christian groups. The problem fundamentalism poses for CAN is that, according to Rev. Burke, ‘it is hard to reason with Christian fundamentalists, and often they play on the emotions of the people — their fears, sorrows, aspirations, etc.’ So the possibility exists that fundamentalist members of CAN even the moderates among them could hinder CAN's unity.<sup>9</sup> Fundamentalism apart, the element of conservatism, especially as regards the

attitude towards change, is, perhaps, the biggest problem in CAN today. The veracity of this assertion will become clear as we examine CAN'S response to the gender and the political issues.

### **Ambivalent Place and Role for Women in CAN**

There is a women's wing of CAN at the national level, albeit in affiliate-membership status. Yet, the role and place of women in CAN remains nebulous, if not an on-going bone of contention: some church leaders consider the whole idea of women's leadership as almost sacrilegious. For instance, the leader of the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim, Godfrey Otubu, himself a member of CAN's National Executive Committee, insists that there are biblical inhibitions such that women 'cannot head the church or any of its branches or conduct prayers when male officers are available'.<sup>10</sup> CO. Williams, CAN's National Secretary-General, appears to be against the formation of a women's wing, blaming the 'feminist trend throughout the world' for women agitating for a special position in CAN rather than accepting the all-male leadership of CAN, which is 'perhaps what God intends it to be'. Williams contends that women are already part of CAN through their individual church groups, and if their churches so desire, they can be representatives at CAN meetings. While stating the Catholic Bishops' position, which appears to go along the same line as Williams', Rt. Rev. Onaiyekan explained:

We said: what do we need a women's wing for, because the already existing CAN is not a men's Association, and there is nothing in the constitution that precludes women's participation. Therefore, we felt that the best solution is that the various churches, when they send delegates to the CAN meetings, should make sure that they are representative of both sexes so that they can work together.<sup>11</sup>

The argument against the formation of a women's wing as articulated by the Catholic Bishops can hardly be faulted on the grounds of logic. The church leaders, however, missed the point. It is not so much whether women should participate in CAN as whether their participation should be equal to that of the men, including the chance to hold positions of leadership. The Bishops were silent on this, which exposes the gender problem in CAN: the dichotomy between theory and practice. The CAN leaders value the women and their contributions but deny them the chance to live out their potential to the fullest. This dichotomy is also evident even in the North where support for a women's role in CAN is greatest and where Christian women have a history of great achievement in the churches. There, the women are recognized as a force to be reckoned with, but their participation in CAN remains subsidiary to that of the men. Nowhere does one see a woman holding the kind of top position their male counterparts enjoy within the Association.

### **The Lack of Political Clarity and Identity**

One major problem confronting CAN hinges on the irony that while CAN is engaged in political activities, it is unable to extricate itself from the apolitical

mindset in which Nigeria's kind of Christianity has been enveloped since its introduction into the country by European missionaries. This attitude is widespread among the various member bodies of CAN. For instance, every one of the church leaders interviewed insisted that CAN is not a political organization: that is, that it is not a political party or even politically partisan. Yet most of these church leaders also insist on CAN's right to struggle for the welfare of Christians, as if 'struggle' is not a political act or is not partisan<sup>12</sup>. This is a dilemma for CAN how to be political without being in politics one cannot eat one's cake and have it! This dilemma reveals a number of political weaknesses in CAN.

To begin with, there is a weakness arising from CAN's equivocation regarding its political identity and intent. Here we call to mind that CAN is pulled by two forces, namely, one that wants it to remain purely the ecumenical (religious) association it was supposed to be initially, and another that wants it to engage more in politics. It is in this dilemma that one locates the underlying reason for the obvious lack of agreed strategy in CAN.

The Association appears to have generally opted to be neutral: that is, to be a combination of non-violent militancy and openness to dialogue. This may be CAN's best option, given the context in which it is operating. What is worrisome, however, is that, in adopting this option, CAN has not been and perhaps may not want to be intellectually, ideologically, and publicly honest, since it premises its

option on the fact that neutrality supports a side, in this case, a particular social class in society. The same CAN that speaks against the limitations placed on people's religious, civil, and human rights, turns around to deny, or at best to support the limitation of such rights for new religious sects and for women's full and unconditional participation in every facet of church affairs.<sup>13</sup>

In summary, CAN has been successful in its attempt to counter Islamic politics in the country. In the process, it has brought into sharper focus the dangers inherent in the disregard for tolerance in a religiously pluralistic polity. Whether CAN offers us a meaningful avenue for resolving the country's quest for national development is another matter. Here our verdict on CAN is negative, not on the grounds of the issues it has raised but on the basis of its internal contradictions vis-a-vis the need to go beyond the status quo. Its incapacity to resolve these contradictions adequately disqualifies CAN as an avenue for real social change in the country. As Bishop John Onaiyekan stated: 'CAN must define what it is politically, its means of operation, and its vision'.<sup>14</sup> Until then, its militancy notwithstanding, CAN remains at best a protest group bound by the limits of Nigeria's peculiar historical context. In fact, it could be argued that, given the lack of autonomy and coherence in CAN, its very existence appears to be clearly dependent on the persistence of a supposed Islamic threat. As for CAN's avowed claim to speak for the masses — even if for the Christian masses

— this remains mere political rhetoric. Hence, as the saying goes, the healers must first heal themselves.

## Endnotes

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2. *Ibid.*, p.26
3. Alhaji Yahaya Bawa, Secularism, atheism synonymous, *New Nigerian*, January 23, 1987, p. 12.
4. *Ibid.*, p.13
5. *Ibid.*, p.12
6. Monthly Time, Vol. 4, No. 12, December 1987, p. 9.
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8. Abdulkadir Orire, Is religion a personal affair?, *Haske*, November 1968, p. 10.
9. Abraham Sulaiman, *The Islamic State and the Challenge of History: Ideals, policies and operation of the Sokoto Caliphate* (London: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1987), p. 34
10. The Research Department, *Nigeria and religious question* (Kuru, Jos: NIPSS, 1984), pp. 30-33
11. C.S. Momoh et al. (eds.), *Nigerian Studies in Religious Tolerance*. Vols. I-IV (Ibadan: CBAAC & NARETO, 1989), p.10
12. *Ibid.*, p.8
13. E.P.T. Crampton, *Christianity in Northern Nigeria*, (Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation, 1975) pp. 132-149.

14. M.H. Kukah, Religion and politics in northern Nigeria since independence, Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1989, p. 192.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

CAN have a major impact on inter-religious and communal conflicts. The Nigerian state cannot survive without trust and religious tolerance. Religions play a major role, as parties in violent conflicts, as passive bystanders, and as active peace-makers and peacebuilders. Religions have a major responsibility in creating a constructive conflict culture. They will have to end conflicts fuelled by religion, stop being passive bystanders, and organise themselves to provide more effective peace services. Religions and religious organisations have an untapped and under-used integrative power potential. To assess this potential and to understand which factors enhance or inhibit joint peace ventures between the Muslims and Christian religions is an urgent research challenge.

The role of faith-based organizations like CAN in helping to resolve conflicts and build peace is a crucial component in helping to achieve human development more generally. This is relevant especially in a Nigerian polity where it is believed that Nigerians are highly religious and in fact see themselves first and principally as Christians or Muslims before identifying themselves as Nigerians. This is seen in the way the Christians for instance through the Redemption Camp in millions during the monthly meetings of the largest church in the world, The Redeemed Christian Church of God. This is a pointer to the fact

that in Nigeria, religious actors are well-respected in certain situations than political leaders. Therefore, when channelled along the right lines and maximized, religious actors and faith-based organizations like CAN can help create progress in conflict resolution efforts in Nigeria. However, CAN has a lot to do if it must play this pivotal role in Nigeria. At the moment, CAN's conflict resolution efforts are not robust enough.

Whilst it is commendable that CAN's efforts are currently geared towards conflict resolution, a lot still needs to be done if CAN must play this pivotal role in a country laden with diverse challenges. For instance, CAN does not have enough trained personnel and adequate capacity. It also does not have an emphatic presence in conflict resolution like the Inter-Faith Mediation Centre (IMC), a FBO with a strong record of involvement in conflict resolution in Nigeria.

CAN can play a special role in the Nigerian polity but its conflict resolution programs do not need to be confined to addressing religious conflict only. CAN's conflict resolution role should be diverse, ranging from high level mediation to training and peacebuilding through development at the grassroots.

In each development and peace building context, questions can be posed with regard to religion. In secular states such as Nigeria this becomes even more urgent and concrete, since religions, religious institutions and organisations are

often relevant players in the political game play at the national, state and local levels, where the government is often failing to resume its responsibilities. Based on their legacy of invoking social trust, religious agents are often the only ones capable of securing some social cohesion. Religion typically affects all of these efforts, whether as a constructive force or as a source of concern.

Finally, to build a robust conflict resolution unit, especially in religious conflicts in Nigeria, CAN needs to develop its manpower, professionalize what its Department of Faith and Ecumenism does and move beyond war of words as a conflict resolution mechanism to rock solid actions which seek to tackle root causes of conflicts in Nigeria. No doubt, in line with its motto, “that they all may be one,” CAN as the largest faith-based organization in Nigeria has a role to play for peace, unity, and tranquility to reign in Nigeria.

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