



## Religious and Ethnic Tolerance for Nation Building: A Challenge for Nigerian Leaders

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**Abstract.** Nation building is a paramount issue that cuts across different facets of human society. It is a subject of interest among people of different ages, status, religious and cultural affiliations. It focuses on the available resources of the nation, that is, both human and material resources for the purpose of enhancing growth and development, which in turn, improves the well being of individuals in the society. Nigeria is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural nation with about one hundred and fifty million people amalgamated for the purpose of peaceful co- existence and nation building. Sadly, this has been a mirage due to religious and ethnic cleavages rooted in violence which have persistently threatened the very survival of the country as a nation. The article therefore examines how religious and ethnic tolerance can foster nation building in Nigeria for sustainable development. The study adopted sociological and historical approaches, and proposes that significant nation building can only be attained in a pluralistic society like Nigeria through religious and ethnic tolerance. The findings revealed that irresponsible leadership from among the political and religious ranks use religion and ethnicity as tools of oppression, rather than liberation. The work therefore recommended that for a meaningful realization of nation building, the religious leaders should desist from reckless acts of fundamentalism, embrace main values of tolerance, adopt a new approach of teaching, and emphasize those aspects of their beliefs that encourage peaceful co-existence in a pluralistic society. The Nigerian leadership must brace up with the challenge of spearheading the quest for nation building by being patriotic, not interfering in religious matters and sincerely cultivate a political culture that protects the rights of religious and ethnic nationalities. The paper concluded that Nigerian Christians and Muslims votaries together with the various ethnic groups should unite and tolerate one another irrespective of their differences for peace to blossom. Such act will promote unity in diversity and ultimate nation building and development.

**Keywords:** Religion, Ethnicity, Tolerance, Nation Building, Nigerian Leadership

### 1. Introduction

Tolerance is an indispensable human disposition in contemporary world crucial for national integration and nation building in multi-diversity societies. It is known to have affirmative outcome towards interpersonal relationships, social stability and harmony (Azmir and Nizah, 2014:1). Tolerance is an unavoidable mechanism for harmony and growth of Nigeria which is a multi-faith and multi-ethnic society. Mutual understanding will breed unity among religious and ethnic groups which would ultimately foster nation building. Since religion and ethnicity are unavoidably in every nation, tolerance is an adequate tool for managing religious and ethnic disturbances. Nation building is a paramount issue that cuts across different facets of human society. It is a subject of interest among people of different ages, status, religious and cultural affiliations. It focuses on the available resources of the nation for the purpose of enhancing growth and development, which in turn, improves the well being of individuals in the society.

Essentially, Nation-building is a conscientious continuous process; a vigorous progression which should be steadily nurtured to maturity and stability (Akande, 2008: 2). The amalgamation of the country in 1914, coupled with her independence in 1960, was geared towards the integration of diverse ethnic groups for peaceful co-existence, nation building and sustainable development (Ofili, 2021:105). Ironically, Egharevba, Suleiman and Iruonagbe (2015:41) assert that the merger is usually considered by the citizenry as the genesis of the malicious rapport between the two ethnically diverse regions in Nigeria. That is, the Northern region, mostly dominated by Muslims, and the Southern region who are largely Christians.

However, since the colonial era till date, religious and ethnic cleavages rooted in violence constitute a major threat to the very survival of the country as a united nation. Nigeria's incessant exploration for nationhood is reflective of the mendaciousness of the political and religious leaders who capitalize on the nation's religious and ethnic multiplicity to satisfy their selfish yearnings. Egharevba, & Iruonagbe (2015:41) rightly support this allusion by declaring that the quest for power and ineffectual leadership have grossly affected fair allocation of resources and chance making the politics of religious and ethnic segregation more attractive. Egwuanikwu & Egwuanikwu (2021:23-33) are of the view that the innumerable religious disturbances in Nigeria could be traced to religious chauvinism, discriminatory mind-set of some religious fanatics towards adherents of other religions, as well as some politicians who exploit religious sentiments for their selfish interest. Religion and ethnicity have very strong affinity due to the fact that most people from similar ethnic group or region tend to practice the same religion. For instance, while majority of the Igbos from Southern Nigeria are predominantly Christians, most of the Hausas and Fulanis from the Northern part of the country are adherents of Islamic Faith. In view of the above, it is usually easy for people from such groups to display religious and ethnic sentiments which are the foundation of the religious and ethnic cleavages that manifest through ethno-religious disturbances. This nefarious act negates nation building based on accusations and counter accusations of marginalization among others.

Tolerance is an essential virtue that guarantees peace in every human society for effective nation building and meaningful development. Ojo and Akolo (2021:64) remarked that peace among religions is the underlying factor for harmony within and among nations. Ebenuwa, Ejedimu & Okafor (2013:128) concurred that the Nigerian society can only remain inseparable when religious tolerance is embraced. Undoubtedly, peace is paramount for unity and development in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. Every nation on earth desires nation building that is achieved through national integration rooted in tolerance. But this is the responsibility of the leaders who conceive and implement the law for national development. Regrettably, incapable leadership is the bane of division which reflects in religious and ethnic cleavages resulting in ethno-religious crises, ethnic squabbles and ethnicity among others.

Against this backdrop, this study significantly aspires to scrutinize and interrogate the position of tolerance, mutual understanding and the responsibility of the

political leaders towards ensuring peaceful co-existence and nation building in Nigeria for sustainable development. The research adopted sociological and historical approaches. To address these vital issues, the paper will be structured into seven sections. The introduction is followed by the description of basic concepts, while section three is the challenge of leadership to nation building. Section four highlights the factors responsible for religious and ethnic intolerance in Nigerian society. Section five discusses religion and ethnic tolerance as key ingredients for nation building. The last two sections, six and seven are recommendations and conclusion respectively.

## 2. Description of Basic Concepts

For the purpose of clarity in this paper, some concepts will be defined and explained. They include: Religion, Nation Building and Tolerance.

### 2.1 The Concept of Religion

Religion is an obscure concept which makes it difficult to have a universally satisfactory description. It is imperative to emphasize in this discussion that these definitions may not be perfect. In consonance with this fact, Metuh (1987: 35) affirms that the reason is based on the fact that religious entities are invisible spiritual beings that are perceived in different forms by different people. Religion is a subject of interest to individuals from various fields such as anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, theologians and others; hence people define it according to their perception. Thus, several scholars have attempted different definitions of religion as it appeals to them. Etymologically, Religion originated from the Latin terms *Ligare*, which connotes 'to bind'; *Relegere* connotes 'to unite', or 'to link', and *Religio* means 'relationship' (Ibenwa, 2014: 9). Implicitly Religion depicts rapport, a bond that unites two personalities, the human being and the divine being believed to exist. Adogbo (2000:24) conceived religion as a feeling of total reliance on the transcendent being. Another meaning of religion which is the most famous is the belief that it is the sum total of people's way of life, belief system and the worship of the Supreme Being (Dadock and Tella, 2021).

Turaki (2008) on his part, construes religion as an instrument that infuses, patterns, and transforms the way of life, moral standards and belief system of individuals., Religion creates social and moral changes, stabilizes the society and holds the community as a social force from disintegration. It is

a social institution concerned with beliefs, actions and in actions of a society through which the values, norms, ethics and traditions are defined, embedded and expressed within the cosmology of the people. Adebirigbe and Aiyegboyin (1997:23) view it as a major factor that influences the activities of human beings. Okafor, Osajie and Okobia (2016:109) construed religion as a vital element which dictates the societal norms and values among humans. These definitions clearly indicate that religion is capable of influencing and remoulding people's moral values and characters positively to suit both the Supreme Being and mankind. This positive feature of religion would basically enhance tolerance and peaceful co-existence among religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria for ultimate nation building.

## 2.2 The Concept of Nation Building

The concept of nation building can basically be appreciated when the underlining word "nation" is clearly defined. The term "nation" originated from 'French'. But, its usage in modern period materialized towards the end of the 18th century and was described by Franco Americans as "political nation" with respect to geographical concern (Ojoajogwu 73-74). The Webster's New College Dictionary regards nation as an established traditionally civilized community of individuals within a region, financially viable, distinguished culture and a related language. Nations are integral aspects of contemporary society and in recent times, nations have replaced empires as the basic unit of human political association. A nation can therefore be defined as a collection of people with varied characters, principles, verbal communication, organization, and substantial formation that elucidate their past and ethnicity, establish and secure their current state, and ensure their future uniqueness and sovereignty. According to Echekwube (1999:3), nation building is simply related to the object of development. It is connected with the construction of fundamental requirements of the human beings such as feeding, clothing, housing and blissful existence. Nation building is a multifaceted and complex process that demands a collective effort of all Nigerians for self-reliance of individuals and the Government.

Furthermore, Ilega (1986:1) portrays nation building is portrayed as the endeavour headed for intellectual and efficient social order that is geared towards excellence. Nation building aims at building a national identity derived from the authority of the country. The essence is to unite the individuals, various ethnic nationalities and religious sects within

the nation for cordial relationship, political stability and viability. Nation-building can involve the use of propaganda or major infrastructural improvement to promote societal agreement and economic development. Basically, nation-building entails establishing a political structure which corresponds to a particular terrain, with respect to appropriate policies, standards, ethics, and united citizenship. It also relates to building institutions which represent the political organization. This includes: efficient administrative system, financial system, the judiciary, tertiary institutions, a municipal service, and civil society groups. Nation-building is geared towards creating a general feeling of oneness, a sense of mutual fate, a communal sense of acceptance. Nation-building is therefore about building the substantial and ethereal chain that collectively binds the nation and empowers it with a focal point. In this era of globalization and brisk intercontinental stream of individuals and information, building an effective nation is tantamount to attaining development. It entrenches sustainable structures and morals for collective community existence (Gambari, 2008:3). To build a nation is tantamount to building the citizens of that nation; hence finance, time, material and human resources are essential for such to be actualized. Individuals that make up a country are at the centre of nation building.

## 2.3 The Concept of Tolerance

Tolerance has gradually turned to a subject of interest in contemporary multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies culturally, ethnically, religiously and politically. It has been considered as indispensable ingredient for plural societies. The concept of tolerance was initiated in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was generated from patience and resilience. The term was used to illustrate obtaining acquiescence from authorities in 1530. According to Miriam's Webster Dictionary (2022), tolerance is the capability to undergo hurt or adversity; hence it depicts patience, determination and stamina. UNESCO (2021) defined tolerance as "the respect, acceptance and the appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms or expressions and ways of being human". Based on this philosophy of tolerance, the United Nations General Assembly in 1996 adopted Resolution 51/95 proclaiming 16<sup>th</sup> November as International Day of Tolerance. Ojo and Akolo (2021:66) opined that tolerance is an affirmative thought that conveys understanding with one another. It is the keenness to permit individuals act, declare or consider their desire without castigating or assaulting them.

Moreover, Daddock and Tella, (2021:99) reiterate that the object of tolerance is regarding someone on the ground of disposition, as against race, gender, sexual identity, religion, politics, and economy. With this, religious and ethnic tolerance accentuates leveraging the adherents of other religions and ethnicity to practice their beliefs, customs and traditions, without suppression or discrimination, irrespective of your contrary opinion. Inadvertently, tolerance entails awareness, indulgent, endurance, forbearance and fortitude in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic setting for lasting peace and nation building. It is also the capability to bear agonizing or horrid experiences coupled with the eagerness to acknowledge the reality of attitude or manners that you are opposed to. In a country that upholds tolerance, every citizen exhibits a sense of commitment and readily makes sacrifices for harmonious living. Thus, the realization that by nature, individuals with varied outlook, condition, language conduct and ethics have the right to be in peace and reflect their true personality.

#### **2.4 The Concept of Ethnicity**

Ethnicity is an abstract idea which underlines an implicit allusion to both collective and individual dimensions of an affair. Kyom (2021:337) posits that the root word for ethnicity is ethnic, which portrays a collective number of individuals that belong to the same nationality or tribe with similar and unique cultural identity. Smith defines an ethnic group as human populace identified with legendary familiar ancestry, mutual historical reminiscences, some rudiments of related tradition, a correlation with a mother country and a sense of cohesion (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996: 6). Chandra, (2012:69) cites Max Weber's to have defined, ethnic groups as that which is made up humans who claim a subjective belief in their traditions or both, or due to colonization or migration experience; this conviction is fundamental in the dissemination of group formation; notwithstanding the existence of objective blood connection. Milton (2000:49) describes ethnic group as a fragment of a larger society whose inhabitants are conceived of having a shared culture and in turn partake in similar functions where their extraordinary root and identity is showcased. Ethnic group refers to a set of individuals who share the same culture or lineage of such people who may or may not share this culture, but who classify themselves of having the same ancestors (Isajiw, 1992:4-6)

Megoran (2010:35) reiterates that ethnicity, ethnic nationality or ethnic affiliations became known in the 1980s in place of the previous expression, 'tribe'

used in colonial era to describe cultural cum linguistic entities. In his words, these communal groups with shared language, large population, related history and similar aspirations reside in a particular geographical location. Based on their huge population, some of them regard themselves as nations. Akwanya (2014:18) quotes Hofstede to have remarked that in recent times; a popular expression used in place of ethnicity is 'national identity', which is a conscious effort of segregation. Ethnicity has so pervaded the foundation of the Nigerian nation, thereby resulting to ethnic cleavage which threatens mutual co-existence among the populace. Nigeria, like other African nations comprises people from diverse races and cultures; hence it is a heterogeneous society. Each of these groups has cultural and sub-cultural alliance alongside their distinct mode of livelihood. Religion is an integral part of ethnicity since it is often linked to the origin of these ethnic groups. Besides, the recognition of an ethnic group is determined by a homogenous ideology amidst the indigenes. Obviously, people's world view shapes the understanding of their ethnic affiliations.

Interestingly, Umezina (2022:216) contends that ethnicity is the greatest factor that militates against the progress of Nigeria as a nation. Nigeria is a miscellany of over 250 ethnic nationalities, each of which is scrambling for recognition and significance in the political sphere. He traces the origin of ethnicity predicament to the integration of the Northern and Southern protectorate in 1914 by the British and affirmed it as 'ethno- linguistic affiliations'. Achebe (1985:19) expresses his thought on ethnicity from a perspective which reflects its negativity. He asserts that "ethnicity is a discrimination against a citizen because of his place of birth" Both the male and female genders are discriminated against based on the term ethnicity and tribalism often used interchangeably in contemporary Nigerian society. Okafor (1997:17) adumbrates that ethnicity depicts people's way of life, thought, characters and relationship with one another within and outside the group.

Besides, it is the underlining factor that shapes people's conception and behaviour towards others. Their notion of mutual cultural homogeneity, shared ethical values, behavioural pattern, and related source of income, increases their affinity and sensitivity among themselves. Going by these definitions, Ethnicity: ethnic groups, ethnic identity are terms often used interchangeably to refer to a group of people occupying a common geographical location with shared beliefs, values and culture. This belief in

common culture and descent is dependent on cultural practices understood as vital for the community, or on myths of historical related ancestry. Ethnicity is a general perception that unites nationalities distinguished by colour, language and religion; as well as tribes, races, 'ethnic groups, and 'social groups. It seems to cut across a number of social alliance, integrated by varied norms which includes common language, religion, historical and political associations, region or customs (Chrétien et Prunier, 2003: 7).

### 3. The Challenge of Leadership for Ethnic and Religious Tolerance for Nation Building

Leadership is very crucial for nation-building. It depicts the ability to execute a given task in accordance with organizational objectives and requirements for human and societal development (Ofili, 2012:106). The three categories of leadership that are essential for nation building are traditional rulers, religious leaders and politically elected leaders. A nation, whose leadership is interested in the affairs of the masses and is committed to the unity of diverse religious and ethnic nationalities in the country, is bound to develop. National integration remains the fundamental desire of every multi-religious and multi-ethnic nation because it promotes development and nation building. However, this can only be achieved through good governance. It has been a herculean task for Nigeria to have capable leadership that conscientiously visualizes and implements policies that support national integration and development due to religious and ethnic intolerance. Dawood (2015:1) posits that Nigeria is growing under the influence of bad leadership both in religious and political setting. Majority of the leaders are engrossed with ethnic sentiment and have no sense of commitment to development that will culminate to nation building. Ali and Ishaku (2021:155) lament that Nigerian leaders who assumed positions of authority after political independence, adopted neo-colonial economy and repression, rather than abolish it. They added that incompetent leadership is the bane of the nation's division which reveals itself in ethno-religious conflicts, ethnic wrangle; ethnic cleavages and so on,

The survival of every society is dependent on effective leadership which determines the realization of goals and objectives of that nation. It is the leadership that strategize plans, directs, organizes and pilots the activities of the organization. Leadership has been described as the capability to advise, supervise, instigate allegiance, manage conflicts and

inspire followers to be committed to their duties (Ebukelo, 2010: 15). From the foregoing, it can be presumed that leadership is a process which entails communication and control within a group context for actualization of goals. Since leadership is a call to service, it therefore requires sufficient training and devotion. Chinua Achebe (83:2) remarks that the problem of Nigeria is leadership malfunction which should be viewed from two perspectives: Lack of veracity, lack of dedication, insincerity, and incompetence on the part of the *individual* leaders at the helm of affairs which impede development.

For Nigeria to attain nation-building, the leadership must have a collective vision that goes beyond dependent on crude oil to harness the numerous natural resources located at different regions. Beyond that, they should possess the qualities of integrity, commitment, proficiency and accountability. The leadership must be patriotic, neutral, irrespective of ethnic affiliation, determine to unite the nation by demonstrating sagacity for fairness and democratic tolerance towards the multi-religious and multi-ethnic groups across the nation. Bearing in mind that religion and ethnicity are inter-related, the leaders should be attentive to the complaints of various ethnic groups in the country and ensure that their needs are urgently prioritized and solved. Obviously, this nation has been so overstretched by ethno-religious intolerance that it is at the verge of breaking. This therefore insinuates that the leadership should be purposeful and focused, devoid of religious or ethnic sentiment for effective nation building that will promote sustainable development. Since the political leaders belong to either of the two dominant religious sects in the nation, they should make deliberate effort to practice their religious tenets in the dispense of rule of law to avoid accusations and counter accusations by people from other religious and ethnic sects. Some of the ethnic and religious factions agitating for secession which includes the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB), Niger Delta Militant Group and others emerged due to the insensitive nature of the political elites on the seat of government. Be that as it may, Nigerians must not relent in their effort to elect competent and devoted leaders as it is the solution to entrenching ethno-religious tolerance and building an efficient and united nation.

Since 1960 which marked the political independence of the nation and end of colonial era, Nigeria has failed to integrate the differing religions and ethnic nationalities due to bad leadership. Kane (2006:9)) believes that integrity and courage are qualities of leadership and stresses that leaders' efficacy is

weakened when they lack sound moral justification within themselves which offers the bedrock for integrity. They had no vision or capability to move the nation to the next level, but were only interested in gaining power and the benefits associated with it. These greedy leaders are so corrupt that they manipulate elections. There is no policy of diversification of economy for the survival of the nation and sustainable development.

Apparently, unity and development have eluded this great nation for too long arising from morally and bankrupt leaders. Consequently, the economy of the country is in shamble with dilapidated infrastructures. The middle class is groaning under the weight of hyper-inflation which has drastically affected standard of living, insecurity is the order of the day, while the health and education sectors are at the verge of collapsing. Obviously, nothing seems to be working. Dawood (2015:16) observes that the political leaders reflect corruption and colossal deceit. It is quite unfortunate that after several years of independence, the political leaders have been unable to actualize reasonable and substantial development. The challenge facing the leadership of the country is their inability to translate proper dreams and aspirations to reality. The Chandler Good Governance Index - CGGI (2021) rated Nigeria as the third worst nation in the new global index. The index concentrated on seven pillars with regard to Government's abilities and achievements such as "Leadership and foresight; robust laws and policies; strong institutions; financial stewardship; attractive market place; global influence and reputation; and helping people to rise" (Ibe, 2021:7). It emphasized that the capacity to successfully deal with corruption was a major criterion for the ranking. Consequently, Nigeria was ranked 102<sup>nd</sup> position out of 104 nations that were assessed. What an anomaly! That is indeed a global embarrassment for the so called 'Giant of Africa'. Presently in Nigeria, there is scarcely any Human Index (HI) that is not indirectly connected to failure in leadership. There is no single policy in Nigeria in the last twenty years that has been effectively executed. Thus, the nation lags behind in almost everything apart from dishonesty. Although, Nigeria is the fifth chief oil manufacturer across the globe, she is lower in category than myriad non-oil producing countries. This poor ranking by the CGGI is ascribed to corruption, impunity and dishonesty of the leadership in the fight against corruption. Most leaders in Nigeria pay lip service to the fight against intolerance because they are neck deep into it. Evidently, the cause of Nigeria's under-development can be traced to leadership failure in every facade of the country- the executive, legislature and the

judiciary. For Nigeria to attain nation building, the leaders must be patriotic, encourage inter-faith and inter ethnic tolerance. Also, they should separate themselves from all manner of social vices such as corruption, egocentricity, politics of disunity and engage in projects that will impact positively on the Nigerian populace.

#### **4. Factors Responsible for Religious and Ethnic Intolerance**

Religious intolerance can be referred to as religious fanaticism. It can be described as antagonism against other religions coupled with the failure of religious devotees to synchronize between the assumptive and the pragmatic facet of religion in a multi-faith society like Nigeria (Balogun, 1988:166). Religious intolerance is the failure of the followers of a religious organization to recognize, accommodate, and allow the rights of adherents of other faiths to exist alongside theirs within the same nationality. Based on ignorance and indoctrination, religious fanatics recklessly ferment trouble in the bid to protect their religion, or exert power over other faith viewed as inferior. On the other hand, ethnic intolerance portends the inability of some ethnic nationalities in a given society to sustain cordial relationship with one another. This could be engendered by discrimination, marginalization and so on. Since, each ethnic group usually identifies with a particular religion; it becomes difficult to separate one from the other. Consequently, most religious turbulence have ethnic undertone. Salawu (2010:29) observes that ethnic intolerance occurs when the rapport between members of one ethnic group and another in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is bedevilled with lack of geniality, mistrust, fright and a propensity for vicious clash. Since religion is a latent component of ethnicity, most ethnic clashes have religious connotation. Agha (2004:24) concurs that in a situation where there is a major religious diversity among the people in dispute; ethnicity often takes the form of religious dimension and consequently tagged as ethno-religious crises. This underscores the fact some ethnic sects ascribe their origin to religion, and the recognition of an ethnic group is based on mutual relationship among its members (Garba, 2012: 21).

Anele (2012:8) opines that such behaviour is related to the belief that an individual's religious faith is the only channel approved by God for divine illumination and eternity. Inadvertently, religious fundamentalists are overly convinced that their faith is indubitably superior to other religions. They therefore regard adherents of other religious sects as

infidels who are unqualified for everlasting pleasure in heaven. Although, most religions, such as Christianity, Islam, among others, advocate peace and harmony with God and mankind, yet most nations across the globe are experiencing religious turmoil engendered by bigotry, hooliganism and extremism. Aniagu, Ayodele, Yakubu, Udoh, & Ahmed (2021:316) outlined the causes of religious intolerance and crises as: “clash of interest among the various religious bodies in the country; faulty organization of various religious sects; aggressive tendencies in the psychological makeup of the converts e.g. Muslim fundamentals; Ethnocentrism; incompatible value and benefits; competition and provocation.

On this note, Daddock and Tella (2021:99-100) admit that the underlying factor for religious violence is based on the assertion that one’s faith and dogma are the greatest, while others are inferior. This aura of superiority over others religious belief is the bane for lack of understanding, misinterpretation, warfare, mass destruction and outrageous cruelties perpetrated in the guise of religion. The sense of superiority of some of these religions over others is usually exposed through disrespect of the opinions of other religious adherents which equally degenerate to clashes. The common suspicions and dread of domination between the two prominent religions and the dominant ethnic nationalities –Igbos, Hausas and Yorubas - across the federation is the root of the contention (Metuh,1994:88-89).

Other factors responsible for religious and ethnic intolerance are leadership challenge as discussed earlier; lack of education which results in ignorance and indoctrination; coupled with lack of respect for fundamental human rights. For instance, some traditional rulers tend to encourage their subjects to vote candidates from their locality even when such a person does not have the capacity to deliver. The same is applicable to some religious leaders. Ethnic and religious sentiments often becloud their moral judgement. Obanure (2008:171-180) decries the intentional manoeuvring of religion by Nigerian politicians as the reason for violent clashes. Often times, when politicians are at the verge of losing their election bid, they quickly manipulate religion to attract sympathy, generate ethnic sentiment to cause chaos and consequently avert people’s attention from their inability to deliver good governance. This fact was emphatically buttressed through recent investigation by a collection of researchers in the Department of Peace Studies, Bradford University in the United Kingdom. In the quest to ascertain whether religion genuinely fosters peace or conflict,

the enquiry revealed that in the last one hundred years, very few religious wars have occurred. Conversely, most of the violent clashes usually presented in the media and other forums provoked by religious intolerance are actually wars connected to nationalism and emancipation of region of personal defence (Watchtower,2009:5). Obviously, this explains the fact that most of the conflicts ascribed to religion are ethnicity inclined. But this is not surprising considering the fact that religion and ethnicity are closely related, hence ethnic conflicts could have religious undertone.

Over the years, the Nigerian state has perpetually been unable to provide development for the populace. From 1970s till date, Nigeria has grappled with myriad ethno-religious conflicts which have grave consequences on the economy alongside other political, ideological and religious formations and connections. The desired progress of citizenry from the government has been endangered due to egocentric, myopic, horrific governance and others. The consequence of the leadership palaver is the methodical breakdown that bedevils the country presently, especially religious and ethnic intolerance. Moreover, the increasing rate of joblessness, poverty, corruption, illiteracy and several others have resulted to mistrust in the nation which has impeded advancement and discouraged diverse groups and communities. Sadly, these disadvantaged youths are often used as agents of destruction. Ojo and Ajolo (2021:70) posit that fraud and poor management of crude oil dealings have drastically affected the standard of living of Nigerian populace. They advance that about 89.9 million individuals are groaning in abject poverty, which is roughly 50% of the whole population.

Another vital factor is marginalization of some ethnic groups by the ruling government who happens to be affiliated to different faith and ethnicity. The result of religion and ethnic attitude is often discrimination and marginalization. Adekunle (2009:9) supports this assertion as he observes that resentment and prejudice are embedded in Government legislation and in the rate of societal antagonism encountered by other groups. Oboh (2017:15) remarks that ethnicity and religion have significant influence on Nigerians. Although the federal government often reiterate that the citizens should put national interest above ethnic and religious consideration, yet Nigeria politician who win elections with the support of the members of their ethnic groups often prioritize satisfying the yearnings of their ethnic race at the detriment of national interest.

Furthermore, politicization of religion creates ethnic and religious tensions in various societies. Basically, religion and politics are intertwined. Since religion flourishes in sentiments, coupled with some ethnic nationalities being affiliated to particular religions, political gladiators capitalize on that to manipulate religion in order to satisfy their selfish interests. Thus, Nigerian politicians and their colleagues in Churches and Mosques, manipulate religion based on its emotional tendency to suit their own purposes. Expectedly, this strategy adopted by political elites has always been devastating, and negatively affects the country's stability. In recent times, religion has become the apparatus for the manifestation of ethnic cleavages for socio-political expression and protest for the establishment of additional states and local governments. Over the years, the ethnic minorities within the country have ceased such opportunities to free themselves from the leadership of any Christian or Muslim to whom they were subjugated. Often times, this agitation assumes religious dimension (Metuh 1994:88-89). Besides, noticeable are the growing practice of globalization and egalitarianism, the heightened fiscal adversity and societal injustice, the birth of neoliberal philosophies, the quest for restructuring, market design among others, have stimulated the problem of the nation state mission in post-colonial Africa, especially Nigeria. These have hitherto aroused the appearance of diverse personal assemblages, namely: Maitatsine and Boko Haram factions, Niger Delta Militants, The Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) and so on.

##### **5. Religious and Ethnic Tolerance as Ingredients for Nation Building**

Tolerance is the pivot for nation building in every pluralistic society. It is an inevitable ingredient for peace which harmonizes differing religious and ethnic sects in a heterogeneous system. Aniagu, Ayodele, Yakubu, Udoh, Ahmed (2021:316) defined religious tolerance as the capacity to permit adherents of other religions to reflect and exercise their faith. Nigeria is currently bedevilled with the challenges of corruption, insecurity, failed Government and poor standard of living heightened by religious and ethnic rivalries. No country can experience significant growth and nationhood in an atmosphere of rancour. This precarious situation has created a line of divide and disarray across Nigeria, thereby retarding nation building. Pluralistic societies are tough and complex to control due to their heterogeneous nature which distinguishes their composition and function. Being an unpredictable force, religion is easily influenced in such society for personal ambition which is often overlooked, yet, with grave outcome.

To attain nation hood in a multifaceted nation like Nigeria, where followers of the two dominant religions - Christianity and Islam, have large population, with an aura of superiority over each other, it is expedient to focus on pragmatic tolerance and acceptance. This lends credence to the fact that tolerance is an indispensable implement for an enduring peace. Undoubtedly, the ability for people to tolerate one another, irrespective of faith or dogma, would create an atmosphere of peace. Presently, humanity across the globe, religious organizations inclusive, are desperately in search of peace, hence there is corporate effort to ascertain useful mechanisms to convert the vicious trend of schism, wars and others into prolific means of healthy living on planet earth. People must be made to understand and practice religion for genuine reasons, so that the desire for power and violence will become extinct (Ojoajogwu, 2014:73). Daddock and Tella (2021:101) identify corruption, irregular allocation of common wealth, mistreatment of the poor, delayed or denial of justice as the forces against nation building. Religious and ethnic tolerance is valuable machinery required to fight these societal ills and liberate this great nation from the quagmire of inequality, disunity and underdevelopment.

Another vital point is the need to convert the dysfunctional task of religion to functional one. In consonance with this truth, Gwamna (2010:167), emphasizes that religion is a force to reckon with in Nigeria based on its sensibility and wide practice. Unfortunately, some Christian and Islamic followers are not well-informed on how to relate with adherents of other religions. Consequently, the slightest matter that relates to their faith is blown out of proportion. In different parts of the globe, including Poland, the former communist nations, Asia, Latin America as well as South Africa, Philippine and Malawi; religion has been used as powerful instrument for the emancipation of individuals from oppression and tyranny (Daddock and Tella,2021:101). In the same manner, Nigeria, being a society with religious and ethnic affiliations across the nation, should utilize the positive aspect of religion to promote unity in diversity. Religion, especially Christianity is a stakeholder that will assist in nation building. In the area of education, there are mission schools from primary to university level in Nigeria today. Peoples of all ethnic group and faith benefit from it. Such schools should be used to educate people on the need for tolerance to enhance nation building. In the area of health, there are clinics and hospitals built by Christian organizations and they don't discriminate in attending to people. Likewise, there are provisions of

infrastructures such as borehole, orphanages, and homes for the elderly or infirmed.

Basically, religion has the propensity to resolve societal and political challenges when it is properly employed. Through dialogue, the misunderstanding and misinterpretation that stirs up strife would certainly be addressed. Having realized that most ethnic conflicts are rooted in religion, it therefore means that the constructive exploitation of religion would certainly quell the unending religious and ethnic intolerance that cuts across the nation. Ehusani (2002:27-38) unequivocally affirms that the pursuit for peace, unity, justice and solidarity across the globe would remain a mirage without the appropriate utilization of religion by humanity. Nigerians should desist from manipulating religion for their selfish benefits. Rather, the two world monotheistic religious sects should willingly shield their sword to embrace peace and unity by tolerating one another, notwithstanding their religious differences for ultimate development and nation building.

Moreover, tolerance and dialogue should be sought as permanent remedies in Nigeria due to her pluralistic nature. There's continuous interaction among various religious adherents and ethnic nationalities at different levels and through diverse means such as urbanization, social movements, fiestas, ceremonial events, games, among others which explains the impossibility of isolating oneself from people of other religious faiths. This interface therefore requires a conscious determination for tolerance to develop a soft and affirmative relationship. Considering the intricacy and eccentricity of Nigerian nation, the need to entrench tolerance as a means to foster stability and meaningful relationships cannot be overrated. Furthermore, mutual dealings and communication is a vital commodity for human development because no man is an island. Arinze (1997:14) avers that this is an era of free movement of individuals from one locality to the other. Even the communication network has made the world a global village, which makes tolerance non-negotiable. Salient realities which include: intermarriage, business, technology, education, employment, entertainment and so on, engender more rapid relationships; irrespective of creed and faith, which demands tolerance. On another ground, mistrust and dread of people of diverse religious and ethnic affiliations, should be eschewed and replaced with understanding and acceptance in a multi-faith and multi-ethnic society. Essentially, an atmosphere of fortitude and forbearance would foster friendship and unity for nation building.

Additionally, adherents of other religions and people from different ethnic nationalities should deliberately shun fanaticism, bigotry, radicalism and manoeuvring of religion and imbibe tolerance. When tolerance is properly ingrained, religious and ethnic superiority cum marginalization will be greatly minimized. Through such gesture, unity would be established and people from different religious and ethnic background would respect one another as one big family, which is the Universal Brotherhood of Man (Ojo and Akolo, 2021:74) for ultimate nation building.

Without mincing words, meaningful development will remain a mirage in Nigeria if tolerance is not embraced. Therefore, to attain nation building, intolerance which is accompanied by wanton destruction of lives and properties, underdevelopment, poverty, inability to harness the natural resources endowed on this nation by nature, must be discarded. This move will definitely produce the long-awaited development and nationhood, and subsequently project the Nigerian nation positively in global pedestal.

## 6. Recommendations

- The constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria should be restructured and reviewed to meet up with the challenges and the incident of ethnic and religious intolerance within the nation.
- Religious leaders should preach messages on religious tolerance, peace and justice to enable their members live in harmony with other ethnic and religious groups.
- The adherents of various religions in Nigeria should consciously inculcate the attitude of tolerance amidst hostility to enhance unity and national progress.
- Nigerian Government must imbibe the spirit of democratic federalism and all principles of good governance and that includes honesty, commitment, proactiveness, and accountability together with political and financial transparency.
- Employment should be provided for the country's teeming youths. When the youth are gainfully employed, it becomes difficult for disgruntled politicians to conscript them for ethno-religious struggles and other disintegrative issues.
- The political leaders should eradicate all manner of corruption, desist from the marginalization of some ethnic nationalities

and correct the imbalance in the distribution of amenities

- There is also the need for Religious Bodies to partner with the political leaders to provide social services, education, basic healthcare, job security and others to the populace in order to minimize ethno-religious conflicts.
- There's need to discourage the imposition of leaders by political godfathers in order to produce a patriotic leadership with vision, integrity, values, accountability, tolerance and the capacity to tackle security matters. Such leadership will satisfy the desire of the masses and achieve nation building and harmony.
- Government should endeavour to be neutral on issues that pertain to religion and ethnicity as a reflection of their determination to cater for the welfare of the entire citizenry, and entrench national unity and sustainable development.
- Nigerian Government should establish inter-religious and ethnic council and empower the body to checkmate the occurrences of ethno-religious crisis. The body should also call for regular national dialogue where grievances would be resolved.
- Various Personnel appointed as Government Advisers on Religious Matters should avoid being corrupted by politicians and offer genuine counsel to the Government.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that religious and ethnic intolerance together with bad leadership impedes national harmony. They pose great threat to corporate existence of Nigeria and its yearning to stimulate development and nation building. Religion and ethnic tolerance are potential ingredients for nation building in a multifaceted society like Nigeria. It is a well-known fact that religion and ethnicity are interrelated, hence an injury to one, aggravates nationwide tension which manifests through ethno-religious turbulence. However, the underlying factors are ignorance, indoctrination and prejudice on the path of the adherents of the various religious and ethnic groups. It is also associated with the activities of disgruntled politicians who appropriate religious and ethnic sentiment, coupled with corrupt and incompetent political leadership. These, among others are attributed to religious and ethnic intolerance that inhibit nation building in Nigeria. Today, the quest for peace, tolerance and dialogue has become paramount among nations of the world, Nigeria

inclusive. Essentially, religion and ethnic tolerance demands sincerity, courage, maturity and commitment to unite the citizenry. Besides, nation building should be regarded as a collective responsibility of all Nigerians, especially the leaders. Certainly, when there is a leadership with vision, ability, integrity and commitment, nation-building would be actualized.

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