

# **Reviewing the Manipulation Thesis: The Northern Nigerian Experience**

*Joseph Salihu*

## **Abstract**

The thesis which propounds that the manipulation of religion in Northern Nigeria is responsible for violent conflict is a dominant one and has shaped the analysis of conflicts in the region. It is taken for granted that politicians manipulate religion for their obnoxious ambitions. Consequently, whenever there is a conflict religion is usually not given due consideration in the process of analysis. It is simply taken for granted that it is not a causal factor. This thesis is shaped by the social scientific outlook, which readily dismisses religion as an influential factor in moulding public opinion. Another thesis exists that addresses the reason why religion is subject to manipulation and is also contributory to violent conflicts. This thesis, shaped in the field of humanities, contends that religion remains relevant and does indeed engineer conflicts. The evidence for this assertion is readily available in the upsurge of religious fundamentalism. This article attempts to highlight the latter perspective. While accepting that politicians manipulate religion, it is important to note that religion is not an innocent bystander. The actors in violence and the politicians seek legitimacy from religious texts and religious leaders. The research subtly brings out the role played by religious leaders and counsels the need to take religion more seriously to sustain our corporate co-existence. Three areas are relevant in this respect. We need to focus our search light on religious leaders, balance religious freedom and religious responsibility, and redefine the concept of secularity to make it true to actual practice.

## **Introduction**

The cause of the violent conflicts which have come to characterise Northern Nigeria is highly contested. There is, however, a conventional consensus that religion is not the cause of these conflicts. It is now

customary that in the aftermath of a conflict, religious leaders, politicians and members of non-governmental organisations usually constitute a think-tank to explore the situation. They often come out with the conclusion that there is nothing religious about the conflict. Surprisingly, even politicians come out to blame themselves for the violence. They insist that it is part of politicians' effort to manipulate gullible people to realise obnoxious ambitions. For example, after the reprisal attacks in Kano resulting from the Shendam-Yelwa massacre, Atiku Abubakar, the then vice-president, in a remark on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) on May 12, 2004, blamed politicians for the unrest. Ironically, the rioters converged at Umar Ibn Khattah Juma'at Mosque before embarking on the 'peaceful' demonstration, which left the loss of lives and properties in its wake (Anthony, 2004). The quick exoneration of religion from the situation is problematic, I believe, and blurs meaningful analysis. We need to examine guilt or innocence of religion with regards to violent conflicts in Northern Nigeria before any genuine acquittal. The most important question to ask in this regard is: Does religion cause violence? Answering this question is indispensable for adequate analysis of violent conflicts in the region, which is necessary for a lasting solution. Interestingly, the question of the relationship between religion and violence is a global one. The fruits of our analysis will therefore be relevant for application in other contexts.

We shall begin by examining the background of the debate regarding religion and violence, rooting it within the framework of secularity, which considers itself relevant to douse the tension of religious co-existence. After which, we shall then consider two significant analyses of the maiden interreligious conflict in Northern Nigeria of contemporary times, christened the Kafanchan riots. We shall attempt to show how the mindset of the two analysts informed their conclusions. This will lead us to examine the concept of religious fundamentalism, especially its evolution in Nigeria to show how religion provides the foundation for violence, deliberately or otherwise. We shall postulate the implications of the relevance of religion for our corporate existence as a nation and then draw a conclusion.

### **The debate in perspective**

A consideration of the relationship between religion and violence underlies the basis of the liberal nation state as a peacemaker. The

persistence of religious warfare was sufficient enough to stimulate the movement towards secularisation. Keeping religion out of the public square was a way of accommodating the different religions that share the same space. The nation state was to become liberal, outside the influence of any particular religion (Cavanaugh, 2006:13). Religion thus banished from the public square becomes the private business of the individual. The presupposition is that religion is too volatile an issue to be admitted into public discourse. Put simply, religion causes violence and should not be visible in the public space.

William Cavanaugh (2006: 6) takes this issue head-on, maintaining that religion is not the only source of violence. However, he did not exonerate religion from violence. In fact, he insists that: "Given certain conditions, Christianity and Islam, and other faiths, can and do contribute to violence." What he vehemently challenges, however, is the conventional wisdom that takes it for granted that religion is more prone to violence than secular organisations and institutions. He believes that this mentality is rooted in the misguided attempt to separate religion from other spheres of life, regarded as secular, in order to make it a scapegoat of violence. He is of the view that though the attempted distinction may obtain in the West, it is non-existent in many non-Western traditional societies. He argues, strongly, that the attempt to relate religion to violence is driven by an agenda meant to blind us to violence perpetrated by secular organisations on the guise of restoring peace in places where religion has caused violence. This is especially the case when we are reminded, as we often are, that the liberal society evolved to douse religious conflicts. Referring to this presupposition, Cavanaugh sarcastically asserts: "Their violence is religious, and therefore irrational and divisive. Our violence, on the other hand, is rational, peacemaking, and necessary. Regrettably, we find ourselves forced to bomb them into the higher rationality." Cavanaugh opined that the distinction between 'secular' and 'religious' violence is irrelevant because it is "...unhelpful, misleading, and mystifying..." (2006:12). Cavanaugh attempts to show that the source of violence, especially in traditional societies, is multifaceted.

Another person who joins in this debate is John Teenan (2010:145-147). He refers to the popular distinction often made in defence of religion. It is traditionally put forward that there is a difference between religion and the use of religion, which constitutes its application in different spheres on behalf of the religious community. He maintains that, "...this

approach to religious violence may be understandable but it is ultimately untenable and prevents us from gaining any useful insight into either religion or religious violence (Teenan 2010:147). He credits religion with being a source of morality. He, however, maintains strongly that just as religion is a source of morality, violence also springs from religion. Consequently, violence done in the name of religion is not its perversion but flows naturally from the moral logic inherent in religion. Any attempt to cast doubt on his assertion must take note of the fact that perpetrators of violence often draw from religious texts to legitimise their action. It is pertinent to note that every religion contains soft and hard aspects and believers are drawn to it differently according to their favoured perspective.

If religion contributes to violence, why is it easily dismissed as a factor? The difficulty of appreciating the role of religion in violence is rooted in the Enlightenment programme. Evident in the presuppositions of social scientists, this programme dismisses religion as a nonentity in any meaningful discourse and treats it as something destined for extinction and, therefore, irrelevant. But religion simply refuses to go away. Any attempt to discount religious influence in the activities of the agents of violence is also an attempt to show that religion is simply a private affair and has no capacity to influence public opinion. Analysing political transformation in the light of religious fundamentalism, which he argues should be seen within a trans-political framework, Bruce Lawrence (1995: 6) maintains:

The concern of the social scientists is with the observable instances of behavior which is modified by religious belief, whether at the psychological or political sphere. But for the former, the cause of the behavior is more significant than the consequences. And this is rooted in the interplay of scripture, tradition and charisma.

Consequently, the social scientist will be concerned with the effects of the interplay between religion and violence, while the humanist will be concerned with the factors that make the interplay possible in the first place. And for the latter, these factors are rooted in religion itself.

Both positions are tenable in the analysis of religious violence. In reality, they are two sides of the same coin. No doubt, politicians manipulate religion for their ungodly purposes. However, if religion was not relevant in its own right such manipulation would not be possible. Unfortunately, the narrow focus on politicians has exonerated religious

leaders who are the key actors in the game of religion. The reality of politics in Northern Nigeria has clearly revealed that even politicians are at the mercy of religious leaders and, during electioneering campaigns, have to seek legitimacy from them.

All factors considered, religion causes violence alongside secular factors. Not to take this thesis seriously will amount to having a partial picture of the situation, leading to the evolution of inadequate solutions. Philip Quinn makes this significant observation:

Of course, religion is not the sole cause of violent conflict in many of these cases. Unscrupulous politicians manipulate religious animosities to serve their own purposes. Class differences and ethnic divisions also play causal roles. But religion makes a real causal contribution to violent conflict in the present as it has in the past (2005: 394).

While Quinn's analysis is rooted in global observation, the situation in Northern Nigeria motivates one to take the argument further and to insist that religion is not just a cause among other causes but the principal cause of violent conflict. Our review of the analysis of the Kafanchan riots will highlight this claim.

### **Analysis of the Kafanchan riot and its aftermath**

These riots which took place in many cities in Kaduna State in 1987, and are well documented, can be considered the mother of all interreligious riots in Northern Nigeria. The riots are significant in many respects. First of all, they were widespread. Starting in Kafanchan, the southern part of the state with a predominant Christian population, they spread like a 'harmattan' fire to many northern cities in the state, with Islamic preponderance, claiming many lives and properties. Secondly, being the maiden interreligious riots so much resource was invested in analysing the remote and immediate causes. Thirdly, the response it elicited from both Muslim and Christian camps suggested the future direction of Muslim-Christian relations in the region. Finally, it provided the opportunity for comprehensive and rival analyses of the factors that would continue to engineer future conflicts in the region. We shall now concern ourselves with these analyses.

So much attention was given to the Kafanchan riots, examining the situation leading up to them and their aftermath. Two scholars stand out

in this regard. Matthew Kukah (1992) comes to the issue with the social scientific framework and draws the logical conclusion that it was an instance of the manipulation of religion by the Northern establishment that seemed to be losing grip of power in the region. Roman Lomeier (1997) approaches the issue within the humanist's framework and logically concludes that it is part of the religious reforms in the region. It is interesting to note that Kukah regarded the involvement of religion in the conflict to be merely accidental, if not the result of conscription. He wondered: "What is of great interest to us here is that we were now witnessing a very important shift in identities. The various ethnic affinity of the various groups as categories of political expressions were now being asked to give way to a Christian identity, a superior form of identity...." (Kukah, 1992: 197). It is as if religion was simply drafted into the conflict.

It is pertinent to state that religion was not an innocent bystander and that the riots were part of the growing awareness of religious differences in the region. Kukah had earlier observed that during the roll-call of the representatives of the different religions, the Muslims acknowledged their presence with "*Allahu-Akbar!*" with the Christians opting for "Praise the Lord!" He concluded that the mere presence of religious representatives at the Donli Panel was a source of tension (1993:191). But considering the role religion played in the crisis, how wise would it have been to keep its representative out of the panel sitting? With the growing sense of religious identity, which is still prevalent, was it possible for these distinguished representatives to set aside their religion in the process of the deliberation?

Loimeier (1997: 294-295) based his evaluation of the Kafanchan crises within the context of Islamic reforms, which aimed at uniting Muslims and bringing about the progress of Islam in Nigeria. The height of this process was the formation of the Council of *Ulama*, which had already presented a shopping list to the federal government demanding the full membership of Nigeria in the OIC, the acknowledgment of Islamic festivals as public holidays, the revision of Nigeria's foreign policy which was considered Western-oriented; the acknowledgment of Friday as a work-free day and the posting of security personnel to their states of origins, ensuring that non-Muslims do not work in Muslim areas. In a nutshell, there was an emerging Islamic ideology before the crises in Kafanchan, which only served as a laboratory to test the strength of Islam. Loimeier's analysis involved religion from the beginning and it is

easier to see how growing religious awareness would have been responsible for the violent conflict in the first place.

It is interesting to note that both Kukah (1992:186-9) and Loimeier (1997: 295-7) agree that the immediate cause of the riots had to do with a religious programme organised by the Federation of Christian Students (FCS) in the College of Education, Kafanchan. The Muslim Students Society (MSS) were irritated with the banner on display that read: "Welcome to Jesus' Campus". The banner was removed at the instance of the authority but a more upsetting situation occurred. The guest preacher, Rev. Bako, who happened to be a convert from Islam, was purported to have insulted the Prophet Muhammad. The Muslim students reacted, leading to a fracas and the campus was closed down. Further eruption of violence took place on Sunday when it was alleged that some Muslims were caught attempting to burn down a church. This led to the death of many non-indigenes of Hausa-Fulani extraction, who were Muslims. The situation boomeranged to the Northern parts of the state with a predominant Muslim population, where Christians constituted the casualties. Kukah wondered at the reactions to the violence in cities far removed from Kafanchan and even questions the possibility of those reacting having any relations schooling in Kafanchan. Here again, Loimeier comes to the rescue. According to him the media, particularly Radio Kaduna, was able to cast the crises in a religious light. It referred to the crisis as a Crusade that Christians were waging, resulting in the loss of the lives of Muslims. It was no longer a conflict between Hausa-Fulani and their host community but a religious war in which Muslims were slaughtered in their hundreds. In addition, the station claimed that the name of the Prophet had been insulted and copies of the Qur'an desecrated (1997: 296).

This clear appeal to religious symbols would not have had any impact if there was no growth in religiosity at the time. This religious awareness was evident in the marked solidarity shown by the Muslim communities to Muslims alleged to have been involved in the crises, their treatment by the security forces and their trial at the Karibi-Whyte Tribunal. The slogan of these demonstrations, which were widespread, was: "Allah is our aim, the messenger is our leader, the Qur'an is our constitution, *jihad* is our principle" (Loimeier, 1997: 297). Whichever way it may be considered, the Kafanchan riots and the events that attended it had a thick religious colouring that cannot simply be swept under the carpet. The growth in religiosity and the attendant awareness of religious

differences ignited the flame of the crisis, even if other factors were later drafted to further worsen the bad situation. To understand the shift in identity that took place among Muslims and Christians in the region, which occasioned the Kafanchan riots, we need to explore a global phenomenon, which sometimes defies analysis: religious fundamentalism.

## **Religious Fundamentalism**

The violent conflicts we are experiencing in Northern Nigeria relate to the global phenomenon often referred to as religious fundamentalism. This phenomenon which was baptised within conservative Baptist circles was confirmed with the Iranian Revolution in 1979 that brought Ayotollah Khomeini to power. The event reasserted the relevance of religion in public discourse and violently woke moulders of public opinion to the fact that religion has simply refused to vanish contrary to secularist speculations. An understanding of the agenda of fundamentalists is important to unravelling the sometimes complicated marriage between religion and non-religious factors in constituting the foundation of violent conflicts.

Lawrence (1995: 1) maintains that Fundamentalists, "... do care about political power, economic justice, and social status. But they are above all religiously motivated individuals, drawn together into ideologically structured groups, for the purpose of promoting a vision of divine restoration." It is this desire for divine restoration, however, that provides the basis for dabbling with politics and economics. Once religion becomes ideology it is no longer contained within the sphere of the sacred but mingles with other spheres in an attempt to transform them. What is otherwise private religion becomes public religion and competes fiercely with other meaning defining agencies in the society. The re-emergence of religion into the public scene is replicated globally and cross-culturally, forcing sociologists to coin the term "fundamentalism" in an attempt to study these different socio-religious movements within the perspective of family resemblances.

Fundamentalism is about the formation of faith communities along religious lines, to confer religious identities to individuals within, with the determination to exclude those who do not belong; even their co-religionists who are not considered serious enough qualify for exclusion.

Within the Nigerian context, religious identity became relevant for obvious reasons. According to Mu'azzam and Ibrahim (2000: 89) the harsh economic regime, which the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced coupled with government tolerance of the scheme of things, pushed individuals, particularly the youth, to adopt new religious values and orientation. This identity became a means of self-assertion in the absence of 'civil modes of identification'. In this process religion provided a means of coping with the anomie created by the SAP regime and government's unstable and contradictory policies. It is pertinent that:

The level of corruption exacerbated by SAP and the skewing of the spoils of office for only those in the corridors of power made many people retreat back to the mosques and churches as alternative modes of economic survival and political expression of opposition and protest. This, however, was not done in any systematic or organised way (Muazzam and Ibrahim, 2003: 89).

Muazzam and Ibrahim further maintained that it is the turbulence in the religious scene that spilled into the political arena; it is an interpolation of fears over political domination and religious freedom. Muslims were uncomfortable with what they considered the dominance of Christian values in Nigeria, particularly the perception of the state as secular. On the other hand, Christians were concerned with what they perceived to be an agenda aimed at the systematic Islamisation of Nigeria, expressed in imposition of Shari'a and the state's subsidization of Islamic activities (2003: 85).

Even though the SAP regime intensified the level of religious awareness, the rising tide of religious fundamentalism in Christianity and Islam in Nigeria had been evident from the mid-70s. Enwerem (1995) roots religious fundamentalism within the context of the post-war era.

Two organizations were instrumental to revivalism in Islam: the Muslim Students Society (MSS) and *Izala*. Interestingly, MSS was founded by a group of Yoruba Muslim students in Lagos. The *Izala* was the pet name for a Muslim group which referred to itself as 'The People for the Removal of Innovation and the Erection of the *Sunna*'. Its name, no doubt, reveals its radical stance. While the first group was mostly confined within educational institutions, with students as its constituents, the latter attracted a following even from among the

northern-educated elite. Both groups were clearly reactionary characterized by opposition to moderate Muslims and refused to accept the Nigerian Constitution or recognize the authority of the Federal Government. Rather they envision the ultimate transition of Nigeria into an Islamic state, as was obtained in Iran.

Christianity also witnessed tremendous revivalism, especially within the new religious movements, often referred to as Pentecostalism. Religious figures like Benson Idahosa and William Kumuyi dominated the scene. Within the Catholic Church, the Charismatic Renewal Ministries emerged. Except for the Charismatic Renewal that remained within the confines of its mother Church, many of these other movements metamorphosed into independent Churches, leading to the proliferation of churches and its attendant consequences. These Pentecostal churches possessed an aggressive evangelical character and were not self-contained, quite unlike the traditional mainstream churches (Enwerem, 1995: 89-90). In the words of J. H. Dandura: "I must say that we have done so much to injure (Muslim) feelings by making tactless utterances [about] their faith.... Much open-air preaching had been devised against the other religion, rather than preaching Christ crucified and its demands on Muslims" (Enwerem 1995: 91). It is only to be expected that within a matter of time this would escalate into actual violent conflicts.

The socio-economic ills of the country were diagnosed religiously. As far as fundamentalists were concerned, the ills of the country were occasioned by moral bankruptcy, which results from people not living according to the fundamentals of their faith. For Christian fundamentalists, these ills could only be ameliorated if Nigerians, Muslims and Christians, made an individual and collective surrender to the person of Jesus, hence the tag: 'I Found it'. A rival Islamic slogan also existed at the time: 'Islam Only'. Muhammad Gumi, the ideologue of the Izala group, not only advocated a return to Islam but went a step further to maintain that Muslims who were interacting with Christians in the guise of ecumenical dialogue or political expediency were desecrating themselves (Enwerem, 1995: 91).

The growing fundamentalism within Islam and Christianity led to the gradual polarisation of the two communities. This is not surprising because the isolation of those who do not belong is one of the features of identity and community formation. John D'Arcy May maintains this

thesis and states that, "It has been proposed that the primordial social act of forming a community and asserting its distinctive identity is the primordial act of violence" (2003:125). He draws support from Regina Schwartz who asserts:

...that imagining identity as an act of distinguishing and separating from others, of boundary making and line drawing, is the most frequent and fundamental act of violence we commit. Violence is not only what we do to the Other. It is prior to that. Violence is the very construction of the Other.... Ironically, the Outsider is believed to threaten the boundaries that are drawn to exclude him, the boundaries his very existence maintains (May, 2003:125).

The process of differentiation is what makes violence possible in the first place. Those who are excluded from the community, thus formed, are demonised and made to look less than human. This is what makes it possible for them to become victims of violence; since those who attack them no longer perceive them as fellow human beings. Thus employed, religion becomes ideological and seeks to isolate instead of unite disparate people. At the time of the Kafanchan riots, which was explored above, the Islamic and Christian communities had been so polarised. The level of religious awareness was such that one is either a Christian or a Muslim. Even these identities were further qualified into 'true Christians' and 'true Muslims' against those who merely profess to be so. Religion thus conceived has the capacity for violence.

The situation is only getting worse. According to John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge (2009) Northern Nigeria is one of the many religious battle fields. They assert that: "Evangelical Christians, backed by American collection-plate money, are surging northward, clashing with Islamic fundamentalists, backed by Saudi petrodollars, surging southward" (2009: 297). They went further to point out the intra-religious conflicts between Sunnis and Shias on the one hand and the peaceful but fierce battle between Catholics and Protestant Evangelicals on the other (2009: 297-298). The growing religiosity is evident and encompasses the broad spectrum of life in Northern Nigeria, striding social, economic and political life, as everything is given religious interpretation. Unfortunately, the hurry with which we dismiss the contribution of religion to existing conflicts is accountable for our inability to adequately analyse the situation.

## The implication of taking religion seriously

The purpose of this study is to establish that religion is a cause of violent conflicts in Northern Nigeria. In other words, most of the conflicts we are witnessing have underlying religious causes, even if religion mixes with other elements in the process. Even though this goes against the tide of conventional opinion, it is not farfetched based on our exposition so far.

We could consider three factors, in our context, which define religious violence and distinguish it from secular violence: it is motivated by religion, people are targeted for their religious beliefs and religious institutions, and symbols are destroyed in the process. The purpose of this analysis is not to demonise religion but rather to take it seriously as a moulder of public opinion and to ensure that its role in conflicts is clearly delineated. This will aid the evolution of preventive measures against future conflicts. The position I have taken in this paper has many implications for students of religion and society.

First, the conventional blame directed at politicians needs reassessment. Politicians have their agenda, which is to remain relevant on the national landscape and to win elections. They simply examine societal values and strive to embody them in order to create the image that sets them apart as the champions of the causes of their immediate constituency. They hardly generate public sentiments but key into already existing sentiments. Take the case of Barak Obama, who keyed into the ailing United States of America's economy to win the elections in 2008. No one can blame him for making the economy fail simply because he benefitted from the situation. Those politicians in Northern Nigeria who benefitted from the introduction of the *Shari'a* simply studied their society and keyed into what they felt was popular sentiment at the time. We seem to give politicians more credit than they deserve in this regard. They no doubt fan the flames of sentiments but someone needs to ignite the flame in the first place. This, in my opinion, is the business of religious leaders. Sanusi (2001) presents the tension between the Ulema (religious establishment) and the Northern Governors, which resulted in the introduction of the *Shari'a* sometimes to the displeasure of the latter.

Secondly, Baruch Spinoza advocated that religion should be placed under regulation by rulers of the secular state (Buruma, 2010: 10). This

would seem to be a dangerous proposition since it could lead to the abuse of religious freedom. Government should in no way interfere with the religious or the collective freedom of individuals. This is what Section 38 of the Nigerian constitution seeks to protect. In any case, religious freedom must be balanced with religious responsibility to stem the tide of religious fundamentalism and protect our co-existence as a nation. We live in a time of religious revivalism, whereby religious leaders attract followers based on the intensity of their preaching. The number of followers they are able to attract is inversely proportional to the degree of their radicalism. Consequently, the pulpit in Nigeria is oftentimes reduced to a platform for preaching sermons and homilies that seek to demonise those that do not belong to the 'fold'. A pertinent observer needs only to listen to some of these 'hate sermons' to wonder why there has not been a religious war in Northern Nigeria. Fundamentalist preachers take on even their coreligionists, labelling them as children of the devil simply because they do not conform to their religious standards. Preachers should be held accountable for their utterances, particularly those that threaten our corporate existence as a nation. If a preacher publicly declares that he will not abide by the Nigerian constitution and urges his followers to act in a similar fashion, should he not be arrested for treasonable felony? Hence, religious leaders, not only politicians, are among the people we should be concerned with when dealing with violent conflicts in Northern Nigeria. If all our religious leaders insist that peaceful co-existence is valued in our religions, politicians will simply follow suit in order to attract more votes.

Finally, the secular nature of the Nigerian state needs to be reassessed in a way that its multi-religious nature will be adequately accommodated. The constitutional stipulation that no state of the federation should adopt an official religion underlies the secularity of the Nigerian state which seeks to accommodate all religions, without discrimination. The reality is, however, different. Usually, when there is a gap between principle and practice the situation needs to be reassessed. The principle here is that religion is a private affair in Nigeria but all evidence points to the contrary. The state is involved in religious activities; sponsoring pilgrimages, donating to churches, building mosques and Islamic and Arabic schools. This involvement implies that religion is not a private affair in Nigeria and rather than being a secular state, Nigeria is a multi-religious state. Although Ilesanmi (1997: 256) maintained that the

current constitutional arrangement that separates the state from religion must be upheld, it has been argued, earlier in this article, that the term 'secular' is value-laden, encumbered with a lot of baggage such that religious people are wary of it. Onuoha (2005) is of the view that Section 10 of the Nigerian Constitution, which prohibits the state from adopting any official religion is not explicit enough. He explores the possibility of expanding it to prohibit states' involvement in religious activities. I think reality dictates that the section should be reviewed to regulate the involvement of the state, rather than expunge its involvement altogether.

## **Conclusion**

This study undertakes to explore the thesis that religion is a causative agent of violence in Northern Nigeria. Our exposition of the background of the debate revealed the ongoing dialectics that seek to account for violence without taking religion seriously enough. These dialectics are part of the Enlightenment project that was so confident that religion would vanish into thin air. Ironically, religion, rather than vanishing has re-emerged with venom, expressed in the cross-cultural and global movement popularly termed religious fundamentalism.

We have also seen what informed the manipulation thesis, which though true to reality is only part of the picture. Those who suggest that religion is innocent in this whole picture need to admit the fact that religion is subject to manipulation because it has something to offer in the court of public opinion. Those politicians who manipulate it are simply seeking relevance to clinch tickets to lucrative offices.

If we are going to proffer a lasting solution to the conflicts that have become part of the landscape of our nation, we need to begin to take seriously the fact that religion contains elements that could ignite the flames of violence. This has been done in the past and it will remain part of our future if religious leaders who ferment hatred and division are not held accountable for their actions. That religion is a source of peace is not in doubt. However, its capacity to engineer conflicts is equally not in doubt. This is because religion is relevant. In the words of Karen Armstrong (2000: x): "Religion has once again become a force that no government can safely ignore.... It is now an essential part of the modern scene and will continue to play an important role in the domestic and

international affairs of the future.” We simply need to take religion more seriously in our appreciation of the conflicts that litter our global and domestic horizon.

## REFERENCES

- Anthony, T. (2004). “Nigeria: How Ethno-Religious Crisis Shattered Kano Again” at <http://allafrica.com/stories/200405170446.html>
- Armstrong, K. (2000). *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. London: Haperscollins Publishers.
- Cavanaugh, W. (2006). “Does Religion Cause Violence” A Paper Delivered at the University of Western Australia.
- Buruma, I. (2010). *Taming the Gods: Religion and Democracy on Three Continents*. New Jersey: Princeton University.
- Enwerem, I. M. (1995). *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria*. Ibadan: IFRA.
- Ilesanmi, S. O. (1997). *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*. Ohio: Ohio University.
- Kukah, M. H. (1993). *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Press, Ltd.
- Lawrence, B. B. (1995). *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age*. San Francisco: University of South Carolina Press.
- Loimeier, R. (1997). *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- May, J. D. (2003). *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions*. New York: Continuum, 2003.
- Micklethwait, J. and Wooldridge, A. (2009). *God is Back: How the Global Rise of Faith is Changing the World*. London: Penguin Books.
- Mu'azzam, I. & Ibrahim, J. (2003). “Religious Identity in the Context of Structural Adjustment in Nigeria” in Jega, A. (Ed.) *Identity Transformation and Identity Politics Under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria*. Kano: Clear Impressions Ltd.
- Onuoha, E. (2005). “Religion and State in Nigeria”, at <http://www.ihcu.org/node/1759>.
- Quinn, P. L. (2005). “Religious Diversity” in William J. Wainwright (Ed.) *The*

*Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, 392-417. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sanusi, L. S. (2001). "Sharicracy in Nigeria: The Intellectual Roots of Islamist Discourses" at [http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/sarticles/shariacracy\\_in\\_nigeria.htm](http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/sarticles/shariacracy_in_nigeria.htm).

Teehan, J. (2010). *In the Name of God: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Ethics and Violence*. Blackwell Public Philosophy Series.