

**GREED AND GRIEVANCES IN THE NAME OF RELIGIOUS
FUNDAMENTALISM: THE *BOKO HARAM* EXAMPLE**

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Abstract

Scholars of various traditions agree that conflicts of interest range from religious, social, political and ideological have been the major source of conflicts in Nigeria. Against this backdrop, this paper posits that most of the driving forces behind the various conflicts in the world at large and Nigeria in particular is rooted in religious fundamentalism. This is anchored on the greed of one religious sect over the other. The greed as observed is often portrayed as a means of showing grievances in Nigerian society. It shows this with reference to the activities of religious fundamentalists which are more pronounced in the northern part of Nigeria. This is done with contemporaneous reference to the discriminatory and debacles of the Boko Haram in Nigeria. The paper having considered the manner in which this religious sect is perpetrating its evils concluded that its action is being motivated by greed in the guise of demonstrating their grievances against responses of people to their religion at large. The paper, therefore, calls on the Nigerian government and various religious groups to adopt doctrines of non-violence and tolerance in addressing their differences. On the whole the government should embark on positive education awareness for religious adherents, such that the populace will come to tune with the fact that religion is not a tool for division but unity.

Key Words: Greed, Grievances, Religious fundamentalism, Boko Haram

Introduction

The nature of the Nigerian society made it prone to religious fundamentalism. This is, because, Nigeria is a multi-religious entity. The multi-religiosity of Nigeria is not receiving the necessary tolerance that supposedly needed for peaceful co-existence, this is not unconnected with the presupposition of religious chauvinism being displayed by virtually all religious adherents and coupled with their iconoclastic tendencies believe that that their own religion is the best and one that better their counterparts. The struggle for leadership is not an exclusion of the major ingredients for religion fundamentalism. This is vehemently experienced since Nigeria as a nation returned to civil rule in 1999 when some State governments like Zamfara introduced Sharia Law.

It is arguable that Nigeria is a secular state. However, the way and manner in which this operates is not justifiable. Our contention is that Nigeria is a society that is religiously,

culturally and socially heterogeneous. This presupposes that each citizen should be allowed to practice his/her religion, culture, social activities in any part of the nation. Reverse is the case in Nigeria, especially in the northern part of the country. For instance, when Sharia law was introduced, non-Muslims were made to live by the tenet of Sharia law in states where such is in practice. What an irony of integration. It is within this purview that this paper locates the prevalence activities of *Boko Haram* representing religious fundamentalism in Nigeria as a mere display of greed and grievance. It is hinged on this relative fact that their activities are motivated by politics of self-centeredness, because, it is believed that; “there exists an intricate link between greed and grievances and that most conflicts are driven by greed and not grievance, as they appear or as conflict actors’ claim.”¹ This reality of *Boko Haram* sect as a medium of expressing grievances is well captured by Hussain Solomon. He writes:

Boko Haram was a response to local grievances in Nigeria, a representation of a deep and popular dissatisfaction with deteriorating living standards in Nigeria, a disaffection with a corrupt political elite that is not responsive to people’s needs, and an alienating Nigerian state that has reinforced sectarian divisions and is unable to articulate a notion of Nigerian citizenship transcending divisions of language, ethnicity, religion, and region over the years.²

Oyeniyi, reflecting on Solomon’s position argues that “this very apt description lent credence to the view that terrorism found fertile ground in northern Nigeria because of many other factors, in addition to religious reasons.”³

Religious Fundamentalism in Perspective

Fundamentalism is one of the events which take place in the universe. It is one of the perennial problems that rattle human society. It comes in different ways such that scholars have identified it with capitalism, politics and religion among others.⁴ Fundamentalism as used here, describes any demand for a rigid adherence to orthodox belief or practice as a way to ensuring continuity and accuracy in the belief or practice. This is in spite of any changes or contemporary understanding of such belief or practice.⁵ For Charles Ryerson, fundamentalism is a “bastard child.”⁶ And to Kepel, fundamentalists are “true children of our time: unwanted children, perhaps bastards of computerization and unemployment or of the population explosion and increasing literacy.”⁷ From these definitions, it is evident that “fundamentalism actually constitutes a protest at a more primal, structural alienation from the same conversation, rather than a refusal to engage in one.”⁸ At this juncture, one will therefore ask, what is religious fundamentalism? By religious fundamentalism, we meant a rigorous pursuance of the tenets and doctrines of such religion by the adherents. The pursuance, however, could be positive or negative. It is positive when it doesn’t deny other religious adherents their rights

and negative when it fails to tolerate the principles and doctrines of other religions. Religion fundamentalism has a singular capacity to reveal the ills of the society.⁹ This rendition is in tandem with the characteristics of religious fundamentalism as outlined by Luca Ozzaro. He identifies nine characteristics of religious fundamentalism *inter alia*:

Reactivity to the marginalization of religion, in which case fundamentalists believe that aspects of their religion are being eroded and that they must be protected; selectivity, here, fundamentalists select aspects of their religion and thus stand “for special attention, usually in the form of focused opposition.” The third is moral Manichaeism by which the world or society is dualised into good and bad forces in constant warfare with the belief that the good will overcomes the evil. Others are: absolutism and inerrancy; millennialism and messianism; elect, chosen membership; sharp boundaries; authoritarian organization; behavioral requirements: “The member’s time, space, and activity are a group resource, not an individual one.”¹⁰

Religious fundamentalism from Ozzaro’s argument as mentioned by Igboin could “be better grappled with from national dimension rather than global frontiers.”¹¹ The closest example within the Nigerian context is the revolutionary religious violence in the name of religion in 2009 as championed by the *Boko Haram* sect under their erstwhile late leader Mallam Mohammed Yusuf. Their activities are a reflection of an opposition to western ideologies. Thus, their game plans and antagonistic tendencies to rejecting anything that wears western outlook reveals some observations as articulated by Igboin. He observes that:

Islamic fundamentalism or Islamic liberation theology and other forms of its political nationalistic resistance provide some pertinent observations: one, it is perceptibly anti-Western and anti-imperialist. Two, it forms a formidable opposition to Western policies foisted on the world through its agencies such as World Bank, IMF, etc. It is also believed that Islamic fundamentalism fills the gap left open by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Three, Islamic fundamentalism espouses values that are not just of partisan interest but also nationalistic. Four, it has provided the most bellicose resistance to Western domination. In relation to Africa which has become the battlefield for testing the potency of the opposing views – Western and Islamic – fight for freedom becomes urgent.¹²

It is however instructive to mention here that religious fundamentalism as demonstrated by this sect seems to be motivated by greed and grievance rather than religion beliefs. This position is considered viable considering the circumstance and situation in which the group sprang up. It is informative and important to bring to bear that their first appearance in Nigeria polity was shortly after the Federal government of Nigeria declared Amnesty for the Niger-Delta Militants.

This action of the government seems not to go down well with the northerners. The last straw that, however, broke the camel's back was the emergence of Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as the president of Nigeria. This possibility is a long expectation that the minorities has been looking for. When this eventually happened the northerners with sense of history and in their greediness saw it as an aberration which must not see the light of the day. This assumption is apposite with reference to the belief of their founding fathers. For instance, Uthman Dan Fodio once posited that "this New Nation called Nigeria should be an estate of our great grandfathers."¹³ In a similar vein, Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto shortly after Nigerian independence in 1960 was quoted to have said that "We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We use the minorities in the North as willing tools, and the South, as conquered territory and never allow them to rule over us, and never allow them to have control over their future."¹⁴ Following the same trend, Bala Garba posited that, "The conquest to the seat is now in sight. When our god-send Ahmadu Bello said some years ago that our conquest would reach the sea shores of Nigeria, some idiots in the South doubted its possibilities. Today, have we not reached the Sea? Lagos is reached. It remains Port-Harcourt. It must be conquered and taken."¹⁵ Given these positions, one is perturb to argue that the northerners have merely reduced Nigeria nation to the estate of their forefathers which they must protect and hold on to tenaciously.

In view of the foregoing, one will not be more than correct arguing that religious fundamentalism as currently expressed in Nigeria cannot be disconnected from the introduction of Sharia Law in some northern states. The current *Boko Haram* traumatic activity is an offshoot of the Sharia Law which herald religious intolerance in the present democratic dispensation. Religious intolerance is a show of greed and grievances far beyond religious fundamentalism. This is because religious intolerance manifests:

Itself as a deliberate and violent move, to stamp out, what the members of a given religion believe to be an error in the religious thought and practices of the adherents of other religions within their geo-religious environment. It is the blind refusal to study and observe as well as respect the views and tenets of other religions. It is a blind and fixated mental and psychologically negative attitude towards religious beliefs and practices that are contrary to one's cherished beliefs and practices.¹⁶

Thus, religious intolerance properly understood is motivated by greed and some sense of retaliation than fundamentalism when its operation is examined within the Nigerian context. This could be substantiated with Igboin's position that; "... the case of *Boko Haram* is instructive. This is one level among others politicians in Nigeria use religion as a smokescreen to achieve their selfish political agenda. The vulnerability of their adherents to political maneuvering has continuously ensured that peace does not reign especially in the north."¹⁷ The point is clear here that the manipulation of religious beliefs in attaining self-interest is nothing short of greed.

The analysis so far is to present to the reading public a better understanding of our adoption of what religious fundamentalism is. Religious fundamentalism, therefore, in this context connotes "a set of strategies by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinct identity as a people or group in response to a real or imagined attack from those who apparently threaten to draw away into a syncretistic 'areligious, or irreligious' cultural milieu."¹⁸ The preponderance of what religious fundamentalism is in the north presupposes that the activities of *Boko Haram* sect in the northern part of Nigeria is beyond the assumption that they are fighting a religious cause as nobody or group is attempting any real or imagined attack on them before their reaction. All that is happening as a reaction to their activities is rather a reflection of the scientific postulation that to every action there is always a reaction. It is within this perspective that Igboin's argument that "fundamentalism is intricate that many temperaments has been associated with of which its scope has defied a readily graspable proportion that can reduce it to a statement of definition,"¹⁹ is considered instructive as our working template.

Conceptualizing *Boko Haram*

This attempt at conceptualizing *Boko Haram* is done within our little understanding of Hausa language. *Boko* in Hausa language means 'education' while *Haram* means 'forbidden.' The permutation of these two words by implication translates 'education is forbidden.' The question that readily comes to mind from this literal interpretation of *Boko Haram* includes, what kind of education is forbidden? For whom is such education forbidden? Where, when, why and how is such education forbidden? Answering these questions is beyond the scope of this paper; nevertheless, one will not be biased by assuming a conclusion that anybody who is arguing for termination or eradication of education in any form in the 21st century is bereft of ideas and ought not to belong to this generation where the whole world has been reduced to global village, courtesy advancement in western education. This position hinges on the fact that, "the Koran and the Prophet teach men to seek knowledge, how can Muslims says that a particular branch of education should not be tolerated (permitted)."²⁰

Mathew Hassan Kukah, however, gives etymological clarifications of *Boko Haram* by analyzing the key words. To him, *Boko* and *Haram* are two different nouns which merely describe rather than define what you might call a system of beliefs. What is more, the words have no theological meaning and could not in themselves become a set of beliefs as such... In

the mind of the Muslim, every act is either *Halal*, permissible or *Haram*, impermissible. So, from within this context, while *Ilimin Islamiyya* was considered *Halal*, permissible, *Ilimin Boko* was *Haram*, impermissible. Against this backdrop, anyone getting Western education was therefore a sinner, carrying out an impermissible act.²¹ The coinage *Boko Haram* according to Oyeniyi is informed by the teachings and attacks of Western education by the sect. Thus, he argues that, “Owing to its teachings and attacks on Western education, it was nicknamed *Boko Haram* by inhabitants of Maiduguri - a Hausa expression, which literally means, “Western Education is religiously forbidden” for Muslims.²² The vilification of western education in the north is not a new practice, only that it wears a new outlook with the advent of *Boko Haram* sect. The northerners for long have been demonstrating their un-acceptance of western education with some of their songs which often aimed at derogating western education. Kukah presented one verse of such songs *inter alia*:

*Yan makarantan boko
Ba karatu, ba Sallah
Ba' a biyar hanya Allah
Sai yawan zegin Mallam*

The translation of the song is:

Children of western Schools
You don't study, you don't pray
You don't follow God's path
You only abuse your teacher.²³

Upon critical reflection on this song, it behooves us to posit that the antagonistic worldview of the *Boko Haram* sect against the Western education is not unconnected to their traditional prejudice towards Western education. The import of this is considered necessary considering the latter part of the song which one may assumed lack moral instinct, that is, the concept of abusing the teachers. But, how viable is this? Is a question that begs for the answer? This is imperative as the activities of the *Boko Haram* sect which replicate our working definition of religious fundamentalism in this paper gives credence to the viability of Professor Tunde Babawale's lamentation in the *Guardian Newspaper* when he decries that “religion, which perhaps should save souls... has left people badly divided and deeply embittered towards one another”.²⁴

Just as there is no effect without cause, and the belief of this assumed reality, *Boko Haram* insurgent is not without some identified aims and purposes. For Yusuf, Muslims were duty-bound to wage unrelenting war against Western (secular) education.²⁵ This is reflective in the wordings of his sermons, where he argued that, “as long as Western education brings anti-Islamic socialization, it is religiously forbidden for Muslims. He stated that any education that impacts knowledge different from the Qur'an and Sunna should be rejected.”²⁶ Yusuf drawn some instances to drive home his argument with reference to advances in the sciences—medical, technological, communication, human security, and so forth that are not found in

either the Qur'an or the Hadith are forbidden, even if such knowledge was nonexistent during the time of Prophet Mohammed. A few examples from Yusuf illustrate the issue. This is well captured in one of his sermons, where he argued that modern science taught that rain falls through condensation and saturation of vaporized water, a teaching that contradicts Qur'an chapter 23 verse 18, which says: "And We sent down water from the sky according to (due) measure, and We caused it to soak into the soil; and We certainly are able to drain it off (with ease)."²⁷ Yusuf, in his outright rejection of this scientific explanation, explained that Prophet Muhammad in the Hadith noted that whenever it rained, he would go outside and touch the rain because it was fresh, that is, created a new by God. Without as much as citing the specific portion of either the Qur'an or Hadith to support his teaching, Yusuf also condemned the view that the earth was spherical. Similar to his view on rainfall, he also condemned the time scales that measure the age of the earth and the various deposits within it. As against scientific claim of four billion years, Yusuf called attention to Qur'an chapter 41 verses 9, which states that God created the earth in just two days. In addition, he noted that Allah, in chapter 50 verse 38 of the Qur'an affirmed that God created the universe in six days as against one billion, six hundred million, three minutes, and one second years, as claimed in the big bang theory.²⁸ On human creation, Yusuf faulted Charles Darwin's evolution theory by asserting that Qur'an chapter 23 verse 12 holds that human beings were made of clay and not evolved from lower forms of life and are still evolving. In yet another teaching, Yusuf countered chemists' claim that energy is not created and cannot be destroyed. He called attention to the Qur'an chapter 55 verses 26 and 27 that only God is eternal and uncreated. He went further to assert, "Everything/everyone on earth perishes. Only the face of your Lord of glory and honor endures."²⁹

The activities of the *Boko Haram* sect seem to be a true reflection of Ahmadu Bello's position that, "what kind of trouble have we let ourselves in for, by associating with these southern people. Lord Lugard and his amalgamation are not for us. We shall set up our own and cease to have anything more to do with the southern people."³⁰ The implication of this, if reflected upon along with the activities of the *Boko Haram* sect, one will not be far from being factual by arguing that their activities is beyond religious fundamentalism. This therefore presupposes the official existence of *Boko Haram* such that "President Goodluck Jonathan also admitted that not just members of the security operatives but also members of the National Assembly and Federal Executive Council are members and/or supporters of Boko Haram."³¹

Boko Haram: Beyond Religious Fundamentalism

This section is set to attempt a critical reflection on the activities and agitations of the *Boko Haram* sect with a view to showing it as a mere display of grievances and greed. This is better understood with reference to the position of their heroes past as established in the previous aspect of this paper. The on-going religious outbreak in Nigeria cannot be understood unless it is linked to the formation of Nigerian nation. Ani Kelechi gives an insight to this when he digs into the historical foundation of Nigeria from where he argues that:

Before the debut of independence, the colonial government had not only laid the foundation of religious conflict in Nigeria, but it had also created permanent mistrust and suspicion amongst the different people and ethno-religious groups in Nigeria. It was that mistrust and misconceptions that often created the conflict situations, which explodes into religious violence.³²

Ani's observation is instructive to show that the activity of *Boko Haram* sect is beyond religious fundamentalism. It further establishes our initial position in the sense that, it is in a way a representation of the demand of the northerners before independence as requested by Sir Ahmadu Bello who has equally expressed a wish and made a special demand as far back as 1952 to the colonial secretary, Oliver Lyttleton as follows; "if you want us (the north) to be part of this Nigeria you have in mind, then we want 50% of the membership of the National Assembly."³³ In the same manner, Tafawa Balewa one of the Nigerian heroes and a northerner in particular did not have any trust in Nigeria entity. This is fundamental to his contribution to the business of Nigeria such that he posited that, "there is no basis for Nigerian unity. It is only a British intention for our country."³⁴ All these are pointers to the fact that the *Boko Haram* sect is not religiously motivated rather they are using religion as a means of achieving the end, earlier canvassed for by their legends.

Following the trends of happening especially the activities of the *Boko Haram* sect one may not be wrong giving credence to Taniya Odidere's submission that "the events, since 1960 flag 'independence' have confirmed that Nigeria is a Sultanate."³⁵ He argues further that "efforts of the other ethnic groups, especially in the southern part of the country, to be masters of their own destinies have been flagrantly undermined and frustrated using minorities in the north as the tools over and over."³⁶ The reality of this is indisputable with reference to recent development in the north, particularly after the 2011 general election in Nigeria. The crises that glue the election result that produced Dr. Goodluck Jonathan as the president of Nigeria are a living testimony to this.

The agitation of *Boko Haram* sect to Islamize Nigeria is nothing but a rehearse of the possibility of greed earlier conceived by Sir Ahmadu Bello who boastfully stated in the *Daily Times* in 1960 that "I'm set and fully armed, to conquer the Action Group, AG, in the same ruthless manner as my grandfather conquered Alkalawa, a town in Sokoto province, during the last century."³⁷ One is therefore perturbed to suggest a logical conclusion that the boisterous agitation of the *Boko Haram* sect far from being religious fundamentalism is a bid of attaining the political greed of their founding fathers under the guise of religion sect.

The call for the Islamization of Nigeria as suggested by the activities of the *Boko Haram* sect is an aberration of the multi-religious nature of Nigeria nation. This contradicts the binding contract of Nigeria that does not permit the dominance of one religion over others. This is clearly spelled out in section 10 of the 1979 constitution, that "the government of the Federation or of the State is prohibited from adopting any religion as a state religion."³⁸

Furthermore, section 38(1) state that “every person shall be entitled to the freedom of thought, consciousness and religion or belief in worship, practice and observance.”³⁹ This portends Nigeria as a secular state, but going by the argument of *Boko Haram*, it is evident that this ideal could not be absolved because to them any claim to secular operation is considered “to be anti-God and obstructive to the full realization of Muslimhood or Muslimness.”⁴⁰ This reasoning is further demonstrated in one of their standing order as echoes by Agbo:

We want to reiterate that we are warriors who are carrying out jihad in Nigeria and our struggle is based on the traditions of the holy prophet. We will not accept any system of government apart from the one stipulated by Islam because that is the only way that Muslims can be liberated. We do not believe in any system of government, be it traditional or orthodox, except the Islamic system and that is why we will keep on fighting against democracy, socialism and whatever. We will not allow Nigerian Constitution to replace the laws that have been enshrined in the Holy Quran. We will not allow adulterated conventional education (*Boko*) to replace Islamic teachings⁴¹ (Agbo, 46-7) (Igboin, 1).

Though, one may want to argue that, Agbo’s position could no longer hold water tight and could not be taken to represent the mindset of the majority of Muslims in Nigeria. This position hinged on the fact that the Muslims in politics today will not key in to this ideology. It is within this possibility that the demand of the *Boko Haram* sect, therefore, becomes worrisome considering the tenability of the fact that “no human society, no matter the level of development is self-sufficient makes it imperative for societies to relate with others in order to progressively attain the scarce resources needed for the good life of the citizenry.”⁴²

In a bid to show their grievances, and to demonstrate that *Boko Haram* is beyond religious fundamentalism; Shekau after the death of the Yusuf, the founder of *Boko Haram* sect turned the sect to a terror group to agitate for the release of their members and to see that government yield to their dictate as such, following Yusuf’s death. It can be argued that while Yusuf made *Boko Haram* a fundamentalist Islamic religious group, Shekau made it a terrorist group. According to Johnnie Carson, US Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of African Affairs, *Boko Haram* is now composed of “at least two organizations, a larger organization that is focused primarily on discrediting the Nigerian government and a smaller and more dangerous group that is becoming increasingly sophisticated and increasingly lethal.”⁴³ Peter Pham also noted that *Boko Haram* has evolved into a transnational threat with links to other terrorist and violent extremist groups in North, West, and East Africa.⁴⁴ A clue to this view is the group’s February 2013 kidnapping of seven French tourists from a wildlife reserve in neighboring Cameroon. Although without any evidence, Nigerian intelligence services reported that some members of *Boko Haram* sect were recruited and trained in a southern Algerian camp as far back as 2006 by one Khaled Bernaoui, an Algerian.⁴⁵ Aside this, is the

recent abduction of over 200 students of Federal Government School, Chibok through Sambisa forest in Borno State. This has resulted in the sect demanding for swapping of its members captured by the government for the release of the students. By implication, their latest request contravened the initial aims and objectives of the sect. Hence, their aim at in this instance is incidental. This might have been responsible for Oyeniyi's submission that "While the original objectives describe the group's objectives of rebirth in Islam and the Islamization of Nigeria through the Sharia, the incidental objectives relate to such objectives as the release of members and justice for its slain leader. It is pertinent to ask at this point what qualifies as objective grievances between *Boko Haram*'s original and incidental objectives."⁴⁶

Thus far a call for the *Islamization* of Nigeria is an act of injustice towards other religions and their adherents. The injustice as demonstrated so far by the *Boko Haram* sect is nothing short of Thomas Hobbes' postulation of injustice as that in man which "manifests in aggressive wars caused by competition, defensive wars caused by fear, and agonistic wars caused by pride and vanity. He noted that human beings would constantly be at each other's throats save for the civilizing effect of government."⁴⁷ In a manner reminiscence of their brutality, the leader of the sect, Shekau, remains resolute. This is preponderance in his assertive statement as obtained in one of the videos obtained from Shekau by the AFP, Shekau noted, "let me assure you that we will not enter into any truce with these infidels. We will not enter into any truce with the Nigerian government."⁴⁸ Despite this assertive statement, some northern elites and political class are still of the view that the sect is not out to *Islamized* the nation. Some of their argument as articulated by Emeka Omeihe runs:

The same suspicious tendencies can be gleaned from the posturing of some northern elite on the war against terrorism. Even when *Boko Haram* insurgents have made it clear that their target is to institute a theocratic state, you find the same apologists inventing spurious reasons to point to the contrary. They will point to the killing of moslems and destruction of mosques to dispute this point as if they are on image laundering for the insurgents. But they must have been shamed by the forced conversion of abducted Christian school girls from Chibok to Islam. These negative and sectional promptings have also been very evident in the utterances of some leaders of that zone among them serving governors. The same predilection accounts for the avowal of northern senators to oppose further state of emergency in that part of the country despite the precarious stage of the battle against *Boko Haram* now. Unless such people and interest groups part ways with old prejudices and place national interest above all considerations, this country may never know peace.⁴⁹

Beyond this, the activity of the *Boko Haram* sect is condemnable considering the template of religion upon which their argument is built. This fact is essential for “religion is the conscious and unconscious worship of a transcendental Being. It is the body of truths, laws and rites by which man is subordinated to the transcendental Being.”⁵⁰ If this position is taken as a replica of what religion connotes, then the bias defense of the religious fundamentalist act as practiced by the *Boko Haram* sect in Nigeria is questionable. This is because they seem to have eschew the tenacity of truths, laws, and rites by which man is subordinated to the transcendental Being as they claim to defend the transcendental Being (God). The question is can they fight for God? If God is conceived to be All-sufficient, then their activity is in negation of the ideal God who is All-loving and the creator of all that exist in the universe. By and large, we want to make it known to the public that the activity of *Boko Haram* sect is a demonstration of greed and grievances rather than being religious fundamentalism. This radical departure is informed by the fact that religion of which they base their struggles is conceived to symbolize peace and harmony, by this, “all those who are fighting are not fighting for religion but politics. There is something... they exploit. It is certainly not religion but politics.”⁵¹ This politics to us is beclouded with greed and grievances in the name of religious fundamentalism.

It is therefore herculean to argue with reference to several denials of the activities of *Boko Haram* sect by some Islamic scholars as anti-Islam in nature. That they have tend to turned the acclaimed religion of peace to religion of war and violence with its attendant phobia such that Igboin argues that, “it is noticeable that young Muslim people are involved and that Islam as a religion has received a negative public image leading to ‘Islamophobia’, radicalization of the religion and a reinforced, deliberate or inadvertent interest in the debate on the symbiosis between religion and politics as well as global insecurity.”⁵²

The success of the *Boko Haram* however has been ascribed to a number of factors. These factors as outlined by Kukah are not unconnected with lack of formal education. He states that:

The lack of formal education for many children has provided space for itinerant teachers to promote a form of Quranic literacy. Such education is usually given to children for between five and six years. The teachers are not paid but depend on the proceeds from begging by their pupils. It is these thoroughly indoctrinated pupils that constitute the reservoir for recruitment into *Boko Haram*. The curriculum of the Qur’anic schools is purely on recitation of the Quran and hatred for the western style of education.⁵³

Kukah seems to be right in his observation; however it is high time Nigerian government explore the opportunity that is being advance by the Qur’anic schools teachers to build a virile society that is devoid of religious sentiment. This is because it is not only in Nigeria that we have Qur’anic schools, it cut across the globe.

Antidote to Religious Fundamentalism

Challenges are part of human society. It is ubiquitous. Man encounters it in all facets of life. Thus, challenges could be social, economic, political, religious or otherwise. These challenges have their roles in human development, and these roles could be positive in one hand and negative on the other hand. However, to every challenge in life, there is always a remedy. This remedy often serves as antidote to reoccurrence of such challenges. Religious fundamentalism as obtained in the activity of *Boko Haram* sect in Nigeria pose a challenge to the stability of Nigeria and this to some considerable extent has taken Nigeria sway such that the country is nearing doldrums. This does not mean that it has defied solution.

In a bid to solving the problem engendered by religious fundamentalism in the Nigerian society, it is high time Nigerian government and various religion groups adopted the doctrines of non-violence and tolerance in addressing their differences. Prescribing non-violence as a way out of the predicament of religious fundamentalism as operates in Nigeria anchor on the fact that non-violence as doctrine of resolving crises “does not only resist evil but, if it is properly practiced, it resists evil more effectively than violence ever could.”⁵⁴ This is considered an appropriate antidote to the challenges pose by the *Boko Haram* sect because history has shown that non-violent resistance to evil is more strategically successful than armed coercion.

Tolerance will equally go a long way in ensuring social order in Nigeria society in the face of religious fundamentalism if adopted. In this sense, tolerance is considered to be an important ingredient of attaining peaceful co-existence. Tolerance as advocate here is two way directional, such that if religion A is tolerating religion B, religion B must also as a matter of necessity tolerate religion A. This is adequately elaborated by Kurtz when he states that:

The principle of tolerance does not necessarily mean that we ought to approve of the beliefs, values, or conduct of other individuals or groups, nor does it preclude us from criticizing them or attempting to persuade them to modify their beliefs, values, or conduct. It only says that we should not suppress or deny them their right to their beliefs, values, or conduct, nor should they do so to ours.⁵⁵

Tolerance so conceived should be a major factor that needs be adopted in curbing the challenges pose by religious fundamentalism as seen in the activities of the *Boko Haram* Sect in Nigeria. The essence of adopting tolerance is inevitable. This is more viable with the conception of fundamentalism as “effect, a bastard child in avid search for its paternity.”⁵⁶

Tolerance if adopted can help in curbing the evil being perpetuates by the *Boko Haram* Sect in Nigeria under the guise of religion. If Nigeria government and Nigerian could embrace tolerance, the challenges it is experiencing in the hand of *Boko Haram* Sect could be addressed as individual will in their rationality embrace peace, and by so doing social order shall be

attained. Absence of tolerance may hamper the social and human development. Thus, while tolerance is two way dimensional, the danger of intolerance is multidimensional such that it can consume the whole of humanity if it is not jealously guided. Godfrey Igwebuike Onah⁵⁷ gives an analogy to explain the danger that absence of tolerance can cause. He illustrates: Once upon a time, a squirrel sat on a palm tree, eating palm fruits with gusto. He was so delighted by the meal he was having that he sang loudly and cracked the nuts very noisily. Under the tree, a python was trying to get some rest. Unable to sleep because of the noise the squirrel was making, the serpent called out to his little friend, asking him to be more reasonable. "My dear friend," said the python to the squirrel, "could you please make less noise. Look, you have disturbed my sleep with the noise you are making up there." To which the squirrel replied: "Why are you so intolerant? If you are sleeping, it is because you have had your fill. Now that I want to put something in my little stomach, you are already complaining." "This is not a question of intolerance, my dear," the python continued. "I am only asking you to be considerate of others. Nobody denies you the right to eat. But that does not mean you have to disturb everybody else while eating. Besides, the noise you are making could put us in some trouble." "Listen to that!" shouted the squirrel as it burst out laughing. He laughed so vigorously that he nearly fell from the palm tree. Then he continued: "I am here above, you are there below, and you tell that what I am doing up here could put you in trouble down there. Come on, do not make yourself ridiculous." There was also a cocoa-yam plant nearby. It had only one leaf. At this point the cocoa-yam leaf joined the discussion and said to the squirrel: "Yes dear, the python is right. The noise you are making could be dangerous for us all." The squirrel, visibly irritated, shouted: "Won't you keep quite there? Who called you into this? If you guys want to climb up here, feel free to do so. There are enough fruits for us all. Otherwise, you should let me eat my meal in peace. Whatever I do here is *strictly my business* and should there be any danger, it would be only for me, not for you. Period!" Thus, the squirrel continued to enjoy his favourite meal of palm fruits, singing louder than ever before. At that very moment, a hunter who was passing by was attracted by the noise that the squirrel was making. Looking up, he saw the little animal, lost in his meal, oblivious of the world beyond the palm fruits. The hunter drew nearer the palm tree, took aim and with a single explosion from his gun, the squirrel came tumbling down to the bottom of the tree. As the hunter bent down to pick his game, he saw the big serpent lying nearby. He drew back sharply and with the agility of a good hunter, he quickly drew his sword and killed the python. The sudden sight of the python was sufficiently scaring even to this daring hunter. It made him perspired. While cleaning the perspiration from his brows, he thought of how to carry the dead animals, since his hunting bag was too small for the two. Then he caught sight of the large cocoa-yam leaf. With a smile of relief, he cut the leaf and with it made a neat parcel of the squirrel and the python. So it was the noise that was made by the squirrel that caused the death of all the three: the squirrel, the python and the cocoa-yam leaf.

Onah's analogy as quoted above launched the relevant and need for tolerance in ensuring social order in human society. As it is observed from the illustration, the inability of the squirrel to tolerate and listen to the wise counsel from the python and the cocoa-yam leaf caused the death of the trio at the end of the day. This as well can be replicated in the Nigerian

society if adherents of different faith failed to tolerate one another in their dealings, especially when there is a perceived injustice. Beyond tolerance, another fundamental fact derivable from the above story is the need to adhere to precaution when it comes from neighbours. The precaution, however have to be acculturated in the individual so that as they developed such will be imbibed in them. It is in this sense that the Yoruba adage: *bi ara ile eni ba n je okun, ti a o ba so fun, kurukere e o ni je a sun l'oru* meaning if one's relative is eating millipede, it is necessary that such relative is warn as the aftermath of such might cause others their peace meaningful, is germane in this direction.

Despite the clamouring for tolerance, it is important to state here that “the government reserves the right to rein in *Boko Haram* (or any group with similar objectives) in the interest of other citizens, especially as *Boko Haram*'s stated objectives breached the nation's constitution. Given these two positions, the clamping down on the activities of *Boko Haram* by security operatives in 2009 or at any other time cannot be termed meddlesomeness, but a step in ensuring national security.”⁵⁸

Conclusion

This paper has tried within its scope to argue that religious fundamentalism using the *Boko Haram* sect as a reference point in Nigeria in the real sense does not represent the true value of religion. The paper within its working definition of what religious fundamentalism is and a brief conceptualization of *Boko Haram* vis-à-vis their activities and the positions of the founding fathers of northern Nigeria posited that their demand is motivated by greed or demonstration of grievances towards Nigeria.

The agitation for the *Islamization* of Nigeria and Nigerians as opined by the *Boko Haram* sect is considered a negation of the social contact (constitution) that keep Nigeria as an entity. However, in a way of solving the preponderance of the challenges pose by the activity of the *Boko Haram* sect under the guise of religious fundamentalism, the paper recommended that non-violence means of resolving crises should be adopted and that religious adherents should tolerate one another. It is however sufficient to note that religious fundamentalists under any guise have to embrace the words of John F. Kennedy who in one of his addresses to American sermonized thus:

So, let us not be blind to our differences - but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.⁵⁹

One may argue that what Kennedy says is basically relevant to American situation, but the contemporary situation in Nigeria is more similar to issue Kennedy rose in America. It is so much relevant because human life is considered paramount. Of what importance is the killing of others all in the name of God? The sanctity of life is a universal doctrine and it must be made sacrosanct irrespective of any religious affiliation or religious belief. But the issue seems to have gone beyond religious matter, the *Boko Haram* as we experience in Nigeria seems to be more political than religious. It is however pertinent to suggest that those who under political interest seems aggrieved because of their assumed denial of their political relevant should equally realize that human life remain sacred. The paper, therefore, conclude that the activities of *Boko Haram* representing negative religious fundamentalism in this discourse as reflect in Nigeria situation is driven by greed. This, is, because, greed rather than grievance is underlying factor underwriting most conflicts and wars. If not, how could the member of the *Boko Haram* sect be calling for *Islamization* of a secular state? This is a question to ponder on.

Endnotes

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