

# APOTHEOSISATION OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE AND CRIMINALITY: ITS IMPLICATION FOR CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** Religious violence and criminality are increasing on daily basis in Nigeria. The involvement of the young and elderly in criminal activities is worrisome as it keeps presenting an atmosphere of threat to national peace and harmony. The height of this is that the government tends to be in a helpless situation that she has been unable to curb the mayhem. Despite the various constitutional punishment meant for various crimes being committed, criminality and religious violence continue to thrive. Discovering this misnomer in the Nigerian society and the promptness of its spread in the country, it becomes expedient to examine the major factors that contribute to the spread of this form of violence which is religious apotheosisation. This paper, therefore, engages the evaluation approach to engage the discourse in light of its impact on the practice of Christianity in Nigeria. The work concludes that, apotheosisation has contributed to spreading the violence and as such recommends that, religious leaders are to perceive themselves first as agents of peace and tranquillity which will then lead to how they encourage their adherents to live peacefully with members of the society.

**Keywords:** Apotheosisation, Christianity, violence, criminality, peace, insecurity, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

Nigeria from north to south and west to east is plagued by religious violence and criminality (Amaechi-Ani, Onwuama, Okolo & Okafor, 2020). From Nigeria's independence until now the country's story is coloured by conflicts, violence, warfare, and turbulence. Generally, there have been claims by all major religions in Nigeria to have had messages of peace as centre of their belief system, yet extremist and some committed adherents who hide their sacrilegious misdemeanour behind religious faith to foster religious violence and criminality in the light of fighting just course and in the believe to have being carrying out God's mandate, with habitual act of backing violence and criminal act with scriptural assertions resulting to apotheosisation of violence and crimes calls for thorough assessment and necessary curbing, in order to clarify the position of scripture on the concept of Religious violence and criminality.

Consequently, Christianity cannot be left out in the process of thorough scrutiny in order to define their correct standing when it comes to apotheosizing religious violence and criminality, because of the intense contributions that religious movement have contributed in fostering religious crisis Nigeria (Rowley, 2014). Deification of violence and criminal act in Nigeria is very rampant among major faiths, thus, understanding scriptural stands on violence and criminality is necessary; this will give clear views on how religious violence and criminality are apotheosised rightly and wrongly. Therefore, analytical inquiry to know the visible factors that has triggered deification of religious violence and criminality in the country need to be carried out.

Also, Ralph (2007) opinionated that, identification of immediate and visible drivers of religious violence and criminality in Nigeria is necessary, in order to evaluates and made clarifications of religious violence that is reasonable and religious criminality that is deify wrongly in the country under the disguise of interpretations of scriptural injunctions. Therefore, making recommendations to the various religious communities in Nigeria as well as the Nigerian state on appropriate strategies for managing religious violence and criminality is proposed.

## **Conceptual Clarification on Religious Violence and Criminality**

In order to coerce and intimidate societies in the pursuit of generally religious and political goals, religious violence mainly refers to the use of

religious authorisation measures to arrogate superiority complex against others who hold different beliefs, creating a threat that instills phobia.

Religious violence is a phenomenon in which violence is either directed against or directed at religion (Wellman & Tokuno 2004). This is advanced further by Rowley (2014) who detailed that, religious violence is specifically defined as violence that is inspired by religious scriptures, teachings, or precepts. Violence against religious organisations, individuals, and property is referred to as religious violence. Acts done by secular groups against religious groups are also included in the definition of religious violence, which does not only refer to acts carried out by religious groups.

The spread and distortion of theological assertions and scriptural injunctions is the primary cause of religious violence committed by individuals whose motivations and goals are heavily influenced by religion as opined by Cavanaugh (2009). Therefore, it may be due to extreme forms of delusion that can change reality and make a person or a group of people feel less secure and vulnerable while pursuing religious goals and objectives that are thought to lead to liberation and the fulfilment of a just path.

Criminality is the trait or behaviour of someone who does an illegal conduct it is an activity that is completely against the law (Croall, 1995). It can also be seen as an ethically repugnant participation that could endanger the peace and harmony of the community. In this case, the act is completely illegal. The main way that criminality manifests itself is through violence and extreme fury, which typically leads to property destruction and the oppression, victimisation, and humiliation of weaker members of society.

Actions that incite fear are considered religious crime. These ideas are consistent with the experiences of people who have fallen prey to this threat rather than the perpetrators, who mistakenly think that they are supported by a religious motive, rationale, structure, or worldview (Croall, 1995). As a result, while victims of attacks view religious activists as terrorists and criminals, the course they represent praises them for their religious enthusiasm and brevity and views them as freedom fighters and true believers.

According to this premise, it is particularly problematic to try to imply moral judgement when evaluating religious violence that is expressly just and what constitutes religious criminality because it is considered religious violence if

one identifies with the victim of the attack, but it is considered heroism if one identifies with the perpetrator. It is crucial to pay close attention to the outcomes of acts of religious violence because that is the state in which one will be if one is on the level of defending the actual terms in the context of religious violence. To be honest, the act may be considered criminal if it causes other individuals who are the target to suffer from victimisation and brutality.

### **Apotheosisation**

Apotheosisation is derived from Greek word apotheosis, meaning "making into a god." (The prefix "*apo*" simply means "quite" or "completely," and "*theos*" is the Greek word for "god"). According to Conlan (2016), apotheosisation is an act of hero-worship, it also means elevation of something to divine status and placement of an act or something on a very high pedestal. Apotheosisation is an act of deification, it means to offer honour or respect to someone or something which is believed to have possess divine power and commands great authority and respect therefore it calls for applauding and setting on highest pace or position.

Therefore, on this light of the concentration of this work which major on apotheosisation of religious violence and criminality in Nigeria, a practice which has advanced in modern times and reveals the act of showing aggression in the sense of serving and being zealous for God, such as physical violence against persons with the intention of harming them in a warlike manner.

### **Religious Violence and Criminality in Nigeria**

Going back to the memory line of religious violence and criminality in Nigeria showed evidence of the menace to have been an untamed issue till this present moment (Egwu, 2001). Most of the religious violence and criminal act that have been perpetrated in Nigeria is between the two major faiths (Christianity and Islam) due to the persistence of unhealthy relationship and hostility between Christians and Muslims orchestrated the magnitude of religious violence and criminal experience up to date.

The lukewarm attitude to proffer meaningful solution to religious problems has led to several errors, even at the level of international relation, there have being a lot of havoc so far, for instance in the second republic, amidst the programme of making religion to play vital role in politics of National Party of

Nigeria (NPN) Pope John Paul II during his visit reminded Nigerians of the need to respect the multicultural nature of the country. However, just ten months after, and six months interval of the foundation laying of Christ Anglican Church in Fagge, Kano, there was religious riots of October 1982 which reawakened the suspicion that Muslims were still after their programme of Islamization in Nigeria (Eniola, 2010).

There are also several cases of religious conflict saga in one of it is that of Bauchi Progmo (1990-1991) due to the complaint made by Christian girls on water wastage by their Muslims colleagues during ablution due to the scarceness of it, but eventually led to a regrettable conflicts outbreak among ten schools that cause numerous causalities. On a lighter note, the conflict would have been managed and resolve adequate explanation and supposing the authorities take swift measure in collaborating with the law enforcements to curb the menace (Eniola, 2010).

Kaduna Sharia Crisis 2000 is also one of the notable religious conflicts that sum-up due to resistance on the introduction and elevation of Sharia Law in some of the Northern states which include Kaduna led to massacre of people putting mutual co-existence between Muslim and Christian questionable and untrue. Likewise, in 2001 there was a conflict on this aforementioned note in Nassarawa and Bauchi among the Tivs who are majorly Christians and Afrelist and Azeris mainly Muslims which left masses of people homeless and many dead (Mustapha, 2004).

Miss World competition riot, November 2002, this incidence is one of the most obvious agitations in the face of religious crisis in Nigeria so far, the Muslim opposed the competition because of the exposure of woman's body which was immoral, especially when organisation collided with Ramadan which was frowned at. Hence, its end result left at least 100 people dead and so many churches were burnt down (Mustapha, 2004). Therefore, this raises a lot of question not only in the country but international communities as well regarding the magnitude contributions on religious hostilities in Nigeria their profess readiness to promote peace, reconciliation and economic growth. Religious polarization is a real challenge in Nigeria, and it has likely increased. The government has been unable to destroy Boko Haram or end the local conflicts in the Middle Belt. Further, the economy remains in the doldrums, and the country now has the most people living in extreme poverty in the world.

### **Apotheosisation of Religious Violence and Criminality in Nigeria**

Both Christianity and Islam have specific intellectual beliefs. Each has a number of literatures which contain historical materials with which the validity of the doctrines is connected to ancient Israel whose history dominate the Old Testament and it also serves as its modes of propagation. Therefore, wrong notion of apotheosisation of religious criminality in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. However, owing to lack of in-depth understanding, outright ignorance, misinterpretation or cheer mischief, scriptural texts have been given whimsical and capricious interpretations towards predetermined ends and this as most led to numerous criminal act that have been perpetrated as divine. Such actions have often sparked off emotional responses and violence among the adherents of the various religions in Nigeria (Nayak, 2008).

Religious fanatics have wrought violent and unreasoning religious enthusiasm; religious fanatics show excessive irrational zeal to defend their religions in Nigeria consequently become destructive agents of religious disharmony in the society (Sulaiman, 2014). The adherents of Christians and Muslims are at one stage or another influenced by fanaticism to result to violent confrontation.

Although there are some cases of religious violence expression on the premise of self defense and to instill justice, thus, it cannot be taken as criminal act however, it should be done rightly and reasonably. Therefore, apotheosisation of religious violence is right when it's totally base on correct scriptural assertion, but when it negates the position of fostering peace then it is wrong and this can be viewed to be region criminality which is not scriptural and it will be wrong to exonerate such act.

### **Implication of Apotheosisation of Religious Violence and Criminality for Nigerian Christianity**

It has become so glaring that Nigeria's stability order has suffered greatly as a result of religious violence and criminality; the extent of the damage that religious violence has inflicted to the nation is incalculable. Christians have suffered greatly as a result of the frequent conflicts that result from acts of religious violence, including the destruction of churches and the loss of lives. Although religious violence has various repercussions, the most evident one is the

death toll, which is thought to have been caused by Islamist extremists acting in the name of God or Allah (Dauda, 1993).

Religious violence tends to damage the nation's reputation abroad in addition to threatening the stability order. Due to the regular occurrence of religious uprisings, some nations have been forced to issue travel warnings cautioning their citizens against visiting Nigeria due to the potential for sudden and violent religious tensions. For example, the U.S. State Department cautioned its nationals about the risks of visiting Nigeria in December 2003, citing a purported revival of violence issues (Bashir, 2002).

Another implication to this menace is the way at which many adherents that intend not to contend in brutal attacks with the aim of fostering peace instead of war mostly become victims of terror because of their religious beliefs, the magnitude of religious violence and criminality is well spelled out in Nigeria, such as that of the ancient Israel that does things that have to do with violence in old testament that can be for various factors but putting religion at the pinnacle to have being the driving force, resulting to an act of giving credence to God (Brueggemann, 2009). Therefore, it makes it a twisted case to really justify the claim of fostering peace which the religion stands to exalt due to major agitation and retaliation that have that are triggered by religious differences.

Therefore, since it is very true in most cases, that Christian adherents are mostly victimized during religious violence (Avalos, 2005). Thus, carrying out some protecting measure and self defense that is lawfully justifiable is necessary; however, great care must be put in place so that the act did not tend towards religious criminality and religious violence that is totally against the correct interpretation of the bible.

### **Prospects for Peace Actualisation against Religious Violence in Nigeria**

The Hebrew term 'shalom' has a much broader meaning than the English word 'peace', with which it is usually translated (Chester 1989). In the prophetic texts (Isa 2:2-4 and Mi 4:1-4) it denotes a time of cessation of warfare and the onset of universal harmony (Chester, 1989 p.471).

Having synthesized the understanding of the actual and crucial stand of Old Testament that what it tends to apotheosize is peace and totally refute it records of violent act, therefore, the concept of religious violence calls for stability order in Nigeria, it is necessary to make some recommendations which the

following antidotes which are expected to go a long way in combating the phenomenon.

The Constitution must be strengthened and respected. This includes the respect for the rule of law, respect for the fundamental human rights, independence of the judiciary and respect to all democratic norms and values. This is the running of Government affairs in a positive and progressive manner that will be beneficial to the Governed by following due process and the rule of law.

The issue of faith is the concern of every individual. Thus, man has the choice and freedom to follow whichever religion he or she thinks he can find solace and tranquillity in (Bashir, 2002). Also, every person should be free to invite others to consider his or her religion of choice without any harassment whatsoever. In doing this, the principles enumerated by different religions on how to invite people to the way of God should be employed reasonably and peacefully. Invitation of another person to one religion should not be done in an aggressive manner; the invitation should be done with wisdom and discretion.

Furthermore, religious leaders should preach the genuine teaching of their respective religion about peace to their followers. All religions could promote peaceful and harmonious co-existence among people if only their teeming followers are informed of the erroneous consideration of anyone outside their faith as an antagonist. The Biblical injunctions are germane for promoting love and religious peace in contemporary Nigeria.

Furthermore, at the levels of education in Nigeria, Students and their Lecturers should constantly reflect on the value of religious tolerance in a mixed community of religious believers. In all tertiary institutions; symposia, lectures and conferences should be frequently organized on this topic (Lederach, 1995). Experts on dialogue with different religions should be invited to present leading papers that will promote meaningful dialogue. Enlightenment campaigns should also be organized for the members of the public on religious peace.

The need for inter-religious dialogue in a religiously pluralistic state like Nigeria is equally expedient (Alanamu, 2005). The aim of dialogue should not be to obliterate the identity of a participating religious group. Rather its objective should be to discuss the various aspects of the problem that pose as threat to the peaceful co-existence between different religious groups. The promotion of inter-

religious dialogue in Nigeria, will therefore contribute a great deal in averting religious violence.

Lastly on this note, there is the need for the development of an early warning system for raising alarm on the imminent eruption of religious uprising. Such warning system will enable the law enforcement agents to intervene promptly in religious tension before it escalates into violent out-burst. The pluralism on religious matters and ethnicity call for sincerity when relating with people of different faiths, we must be truly tolerant of each other especially where the practice of religion proves divisive. Since all religions preach peace and love and since we are children of one God; all efforts must be geared towards unity. Any country that is divided by religious conflicts finds it hard to recover. Christian and Muslim preachers must carefully guard their utterances so as not to wound people's sensibilities.

### **Conclusion**

Considering the concept of violence in the Bible and Nigeria, this research has shown that there are those who perpetrate violence for their selfish aim in the name of God and set of dogmas resulting apotheosis of religious violence and criminality which is in most cases irrational. They argue that the act of violence is the only way to obtain peace (Ojie, 2004). Others see it in the reverse that violence has no good to offer to lives and property.

Wars and misunderstanding took place in the Bible just like in Nigeria where insecurity rocks virtually every community. Some major causes of this religious criminality have been from human side. To forestall further religious unruly violence and criminality in Nigeria cannot be solved by violence, because of their intractable and explosive nature (Olukorede, 2003). Therefore, religious violence can be resolved only through dialogue and negotiation. Political solutions alone is not sufficient, it is necessary to apply the Christian principle which goes a long way to seek healing reconciliation and peace

As upheld by Yahaya (2009), that the church must be seen to be involved in an active struggle against injustice, ethnocentrism and oppression. Where there is fairness and equity for all ethnic and religious groups in respect of employment, political appointments, school admissions and all normal amenities in any of our communities, there should be greater willingness to accept people from other

religious groups. Thus, promoting justice is the greatest avenue for reducing religious violence and criminality in Nigerian.

### **Recommendations**

The discourse in this paper focuses on apotheosisation of religious violence and criminality in Nigeria, which has grown over the years to be a menace, validating criminality in Nigeria. This study recommends the following to salvage the situation:

- i. Religious leaders are to play frontier roles in being catalyst for peace and orderliness in the society by desisting from inciting words to their religious adherents
- ii. The government is to bring criminals to book regardless of their strong religious affiliation.
- iii. Teachers, parents and various instructors in the country are to ensure that the value of life and sanctity is taught for people to value the life of others regardless of their affinity.

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