

## THE ROLES OF MEN OF GOD IN NATION BUILDING AND QUEST FOR A BETTER TOMORROW IN THE TRIAL OF UNEASY PAST

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### INTRODUCTION

**N**igeria is a Nation greatly blessed and endowed by God with both human and natural resources. By now, we are supposed to be one of the leading countries not just in Africa but in the world. However, this is not the case; several crises have characterized the experience of our beloved country.

Almost every day comes with threats on lives and property. Insecurity and fear are in the minds of most people especially our beloved brethren staying in the Northern part of the country; millions killed, many disabled, children left without parents and parents have lost their precious children. Several millions are living as refugees in their own country. Property worth millions of Naira lost because of the various crises that have struck Nigeria.

The Boko Haram Insurgence is the most recent of all these. This has caused enormous havocs across the northern part of Nigeria; it has launched attacks on government offices, the United Nations building, several churches, mosques, schools and colleges, to mention but few. This has greatly threatened the peace, unity as well as the development of our Country.

This situation must not continue, there must be a paradigm shift which will channel a course towards building the Nation today and having a better tomorrow. This, I strongly believe is the passion for this timely clarion call to everyone of here seated. It is very true that everyone has a role in the promotion of peace, progress and stability in Nigeria. Without these development with be very minimal.

This paper has as its focus, the roles of men of God in Nation Building and a quest of a better tomorrow in the trial of our uneasy past. The writer will briefly approach this thus:

A quick extermination of ;

- The trial of uneasy past in Nigeria
- The History, Nature and Causes of uneasiness in Nigeria
- Effects of uneasiness in Nigeria
- The Quest for a better tomorrow.
- The Roles of Men of God in Nation Building.
- Conclusion

#### THE TRIAL OF UNEASY PAST IN NIGERIA

The name Nigeria was coined by Flora Shaw (who later married Baron Lugard). The origin of the name is actually traced to the Niger River that flows through the country.

Nigeria is a greatly blessed nation. In spite of all the obnoxious occurrences in the country, Nigeria is still highly blessed with both natural and human endowments. Nigeria is often referred to as the "Giant of Africa." This is basically because of her large population and vast economy.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is located in West Africa and shares boundaries with the Republic of Benin, in the west; Guinea in the south, along the Atlantic ocean; Chad and Cameroon in the east.

and Niger Republic in the North. With a land mass of 923,768km<sup>2</sup> and an estimated population of about 175 million. This stands Nigeria as the most populous nation in Africa and the seventh most populous in the world.

Nigeria has over 500 ethnic groups with Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo being the three major ones. There are three major religious groups; Christianity, Islam, and the Traditional Religion. As at 2014, Nigeria had a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of over \$500 U.S. placing her as the largest in Africa and 26th in the whole world.<sup>13</sup> No doubt, Nigeria is a great Nation. The Nation is rich in crude oil, coal, Silver, Tin, Lead, diverse agricultural products, such as cocoa, palm oil, groundnut, and many more too numerous to mention.

#### **THE HISTORY, NATURE AND CAUSES OF UNEASINESS IN NIGERIA**

Nehilgbinijesu (2013: 13) opines that "Nigerians have had to experience some of the most sordid tragedies arising from difference of opinions and distrust." According to him, there are five major causes of uneasiness or conflicts in Nigeria, which he identified as tribalism, resource control, religion, land disputes and trade related disputes."

However, several scholars in the efforts to identify the root causes of unrest in Nigeria have traced the history of the Nation and have pointed out several other causes of conflict as the Nation develops.

Katy Hughes (2012: 4) says "The creation of the country called Nigeria by Britain in 1914 has led to over forty years of conflict and bloodshed." She sternly opines that "The instability and confusion of this region can only be understood by starting at the beginning of the story. This is not as it would seem, 1960 when Nigeria was granted independence from Britain. In fact, many of the conflicts which rage

today have their roots in the events which took place whilst Nigeria was under British Colonial rule."

In total agreement with the above stand, Yusuf Turaki (2013; p. 4) points out that "It is not possible for us to solve contemporary... clashes, riots conflicts and violence in Nigeria without correcting the inherited primordial, religious and cultural, and colonial structures and Negative values... Legacies...."

Building on the above trusted premise, this paper wastes no time to trace the causes of conflicts that have so rocked and wrecked the great Nation, Nigeria.

### **Nigeria, Pre-colonial Period**

The country called Nigeria never existed at this period. However over the huge vast land, were diverse tribes and communities scattered all over the territory now called Nigeria.

These different and varied people group with different languages, cultures and political practices were all artificially brought together under the British rule. This artificial Nation was governed by the British Administrator for over fifty years as against their former traditional form of leadership.

However, before the independence, the Nation had two major protectorates, the Northern Nigeria protectorate and the Southern Nigeria protectorate. These two existed separately until their amalgamation in 1914. Even after the amalgamation, the two protectorates were administered separately with very little interactions between them. Since the two protectorates were brought together at independence, the result has been incessant conflicts that have almost collapsed the Nation.

Several issues have generated from the above situation and have continued to cause conflicts in the country. Some of these are;

**1. Political issues as Cause of Conflicts:**

The views of some Scholars is that the mismatch of the two strange regions at amalgamation and consequently at independence was the birth of political conflicts in Nigeria.

All through the over 50 years of Nigerians' independence, the Nation has faced different kinds of politically induced conflicts. Barely six years after independence, precisely in 1966 January 14/15, Nigeria had her first Military Coup: Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi became the Head of State. Tafawa Balewa and other prominent Nigerian leaders were killed. The imagination will definitely picture a strong political tension in the newly born country.

Just few months after, on July 29, 1966, Aguiyi-Ironsi was also killed during the second Military Coup and Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon became the Head of State. This generated further chaos in the Nation. Several Easterners staying in the North were killed. Some fled their abode back to the Eastern region.

Consequently, this prompted another conflict for the Nation so much that on May 30 1967, Ojukwu who was the then Military Governor of the Eastern Region, declared the Eastern part of the Nation as a Republic, separate and independent. This was the Republic of Biafra. It was tenaciously fought against. Exactly on July 6, 1967 as a reaction to this, a Civil war broke out in Nigeria. About 1.5million people were killed. The political stability of the Nation was threatened and tragedy loomed over the Nation, and there were no developments, till January 15, 1970 when Biafra finally surrendered.

The sad story continued in 1976, February 13, when Col. Dimka

attempted to take over power, Murtala Mohammed, the then Head of State was killed. 1986 saw another coup attempt by Gen. Mamman Vatsa. This failed and the coup plotters were killed.

The political instability and conflicts continued basically with the military in power. With the intervention of foreign bodies, an election was conducted in June 12, 1993 where Abiola won over Tofa. Painfully, on June 23 1993, the then Head of States, General Ibrahim Babangida nullified the election. This led to serious upheaval and great conflict on the political scene of the Nation. To add to the existing conflict was the action of the president elect, Abiola in June 12, 1994 who declared himself the president of the Nation. He was arrested and put in prison and on the 7th of July, 1998 where he later died.

In 1995, a coup d'etat was again attempted but failed. 40 persons were imprisoned. On November 10, 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others activists were executed. They were demanding justice and fair treatment from the Government for the Ogoni people, whose land had been taken over by the government for crude oil drilling and polluted, without adequate compensation for the owners of the land. Needless to say, this erupted a fresh dimension of conflict for the political leadership. This initiated the coming into limelight of the Niger Delta militant group which is a major actor in the political discomfort of the Nation.

## 2. Ethnicity as Cause of Conflicts.

Nigeria has over 500 ethnical groups. Though there are three major tribes but much more than the three are others. There have been several ethnic clashes in Nigeria; the nation has had several intra-ethnic group conflict as well as inter-ethnic group conflicts.

Nehi (2013) observes that "from as early as the 1950s, the desire to favour members of one's tribe surfaced among the ruling

class of Nigeria.... Politicians and top civil servants flavored their kith and kin when it came to appointments, contracts awards and National politicking. Merit seemed to lose appeal in the face of ethnocentrism when decisions bordered on overall national interest."

The political conflict that erupted in 1967 and the civil war that followed when Ojukwu declared "Republic of Biafra" had its roots premised on ethnic bias. The declaration was because of the maltreatments given to the Easterners living in the North. The Igbo people were severally singled out in the Northern part of Nigeria and killed. This degenerated very bad blood between people of the two ethnic groups.

Several "ethnic militant groups" were formed to defend the rights of their ethnic groups; e.g. Odua People's Congress (OPC); Arewa Youth Forum (AYF); Bakassi Boys, the MASSOB, and several others. O'Neil, (2004: 14) notes that "These sectional groups engaged security forces in armed confrontation, leading to the casualty and destruction to property."

All these have not helped to keep Nigeria peaceful. The situation has further divided the Nation into conflict zones.

### **3. Economy as Cause of Conflict.**

Nigeria is heavily blessed by God. It is noted that Nigeria should not have any economic challenge. "Nigeria is expected to become one of the world's top 20 economies by 2050." The country has a steady growth in economy. The oil reserves are enough to feed the nation, however, there are several other avenues of wealth for the Nation which are not maximized e.g. Agriculture, other mineral resources like tin, gold, silver, lead etc.

Knowing that the Nation is enormously blessed, Nigerians find it

difficult to harmonize in their mind why in spite of the wealth Nigerians are still very poor. Skilled personnel have no employment, those employed are poorly paid. Those who have served the Nation under meager allowances could not get their entitlements at retirement.

These economic contentious issues have caused several industrial conflicts as a protest against the economic policies of the government. Unfortunately, as Ola (2004:2) puts it, "the government, even under a democratic dispensation, lacks proactive strategies and skills in managing such crises until they escalate unto uncontrollable violent...."

On the 23rd of February, 1966, AdakaBoro with other militia group gave a protest as Niger Delta Volunteer Force against the government because of resource control.

Several Ogoni activists in the quest for resource control lost their lives in November 10, 1995. This was the reason for the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth of Nations in 2001.

On the other hand, financially many of the youth are very low. Those behind the Nigerian conflicts prey on this using the opportunity to use the youth for their goals. If the youth are financially empowered, those involved in conflicts for financial reason will not risk their lives. Anyone who is gainfully employed will not be involved in such national menace.

#### **4. Land/Region as Cause of Conflicts**

In spite of the vast mass of land Nigeria has, land dispute as one of the major causes of conflict in the country. Across the country there have been several land disputes.

The land dispute between the Aguleri and Umuleri people is



Anambra state; the conflict between the Brass and Nembe communities of Bayelsa and River states, the May 1992, ZangoKataf, in Kaduna State started a communal conflict and even the international land dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon are notable land issues that have caused conflict in the nation.

Different individuals, ethnic group, community and region protect their land with such passion that is somehow strange. Some have expressed a desire to rather die than part with their parcel of land. People have done dangerous things to protect or recover their territories. It should be noted that several people have been killed, and several valuable property destroyed because of land disputes. This uneasy situation can not call for Nation Building.

#### **5. Religion as a Cause of Conflict.**

A religious person is supposed to be a person who fears God and has regards for God and the things He created. It is expected that religion should promote peaceful coexistence among people but the story is different for the Nigerian context. Religion has been a strong ground of uneasiness in Nigeria. Basically, Nigeria has three main religions; Christianity, Islam and the Traditional Religion.

There has been several conflicts on religious ground especially between the Christian and the Islamic group. These conflicts have also led to the destruction of lives and property worth billion over the years. This should not be so.

Notable among the religious conflicts is the December 1980 Kano Riot erupted by the Maitatsine sect, where sadly not fewer than 4,177 people were reportedly killed. The same sect also initiated conflict in Maiduguri, Borno state between 29th and 30th October, 1982 which left 118 people dead. From February 27 to March 5 in 1984, in Yola, 568 people were killed. The sect also killed 105 people in Gombe, Bauchi state between the 26 and 28 of April, 1985. Several

churches and mosques were burnt, Christian programs disrupted and property wasted. My beloved Nigerians, this is not a healthy atmosphere for Nation Building.

Consequently, religious issues became a major topic of national political debates, with each religious community pushing increasingly adversarial agendas to prove a point. Whenever a negative response is given by the government to agenda a conflict erupts. In Northern Nigeria, clashes between Muslim groups and the Christian have almost become a monthly affair, with devastating consequences. In such a tensed and charged environment people live within the tension and carefully mind what they say and how they say it, what they wear and how they wear it even what they eat what where they eat it. The atmosphere is extremely volatile.

### **EFFECTS OF UNEASINESS IN NIGERIA**

The implications, effects and cost of conflict across the Nation, Nigeria are not just multi-dimensional but also multi-faceted. Conflicts have affected all parts of human life of the people of Nigeria.

Conflict has touched all aspects of the Nigerian Nation. It has greatly affected all that Nigeria is and stands for. This paper among several others effects, highlights the following as the major effects of conflict in the prevailing situation of Nigeria.

#### **1. Loss of Human Lives:**

The soul of man is precious. However, several millions of lives have been lost as a result of conflict in Nigeria. The civil war that started in 1967 which lasted three years claimed not less than two million lives.<sup>29</sup> Nigeria has lost great minds, intellectuals, business gurus, young and promising individuals who would have been of a blessing not only to Nigeria but also to the whole world.

The Maitatsine conflicts alone claimed several thousands of lives. People die almost on daily basis as a result of one conflict or the other. The people that have died as a result of conflicts are more than what natural death has killed in Nigeria. Some individuals believe that the situation is like a war situation. This must not continue

## **2. Economic Effects:**

Several billions of Naira have been lost as a result of conflicts. Properties worth billions were destroyed during conflicts. Government's revenue generation is often greatly affected negatively during conflicts. Adeniyi et al, (2005:21) quoted by Afagbua, says that the industrial strike of 1993 by civil servants across the nation cost the Nation about 720 million Naira.<sup>30</sup> The Nigerian government loses revenue whenever there is a crisis. Ajakaiye (2000:21), points out that whenever there is conflicts, tax charges and rates that are levied on local governments cannot be collected. This means a great loss of revenue for development. The revenue generation capacity of the government is being greatly affected.

The individual capacity to generate revenue is also affected during conflict thereby consequently affecting the nation.

Loss of human lives also has great implications for the nation's economy as the killings have reduced man power and expertise. The Niger-Delta conflicts robbed Nigeria of hundreds of lives who were oil workers and expatriates. (O'Neil, 2004).<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the above, Conflict is a great discouragement for Foreign Investments. No investor will desire to invest in an area where insecurity, instability, uncertainty and an area that is prone to incessant conflict.

## **4. Political effects**

Nigeria has known no political peace since independence. Several

factors have been responsible for this. The different ethnic, social-cultural groups, different religious groups, different regional and ideological differences have continued to affect the political view points of the nation.

Several political decisions are based on the above platforms and not on merits or competence. The nation on this note has experienced political instabilities. Every political decision is an opportunity to vent anger and revenge. Several political issues are turned to either religious, ethical or regional issue and thereby disallowing political stability.

The question in the minds of most Nigerians is, with all these factors, can we have political peace in Nigeria?

#### **5. Educational Effects.**

Education is the bedrock of any Nation's development. The various conflicts Nigeria has experienced have left negative impacts on the educational sector of the Nation. In the course of the repeated conflicts, several academic activities have been affected, properties belonging to Schools and Colleges have been destroyed. Several brilliant individuals have been killed. Some of these are lecturers at the Universities.

The 2014 abduction of over 200 girls in Borno state has made several parents in the Northern part of the country to withdraw their children/wards from school. Those who still attend school, do so with great fear and many concentrations on the safety of their lives much more than academic excellence.

#### **THE QUEST FOR A BETTER TOMORROW**

I wish to at this point appreciate the organizers of this program especially on the choice of this topic, and particularly this phrase

quest for a better tomorrow. That speaks hope to me. For our elders, this shows that their labours of past will not go down the drain, for our youth it is a signal of hope, a sign that Nigeria is on the move. There are great treasures ahead, there are great prospects in the future, Nigeria has great heights to cover, our best is yet to come. This phrase is a strong indication that the youth of our great nation is not losing hope, not given up the fight, we are optimistic that the future ahead of us will be better than yesterday and this we know by what we are doing today.

Quest for a better tomorrow, tells of a hunger, a desperate yearning, a deliberate search for, a careful hunting, ardent pursuit, a resolute purposeful expedition or journey whose goal or focus is nothing other than seeing Nigeria, our beloved country a better abode than what we have today. This quest is definitely in the mind of the planners of this meeting and they strongly feel it is a beautiful thing to spread this lofty passion among the lovers of our dear Nation.

It therefore means that all of us that have been invited to this great gathering, have a stake in this quest; all hands must be on deck to preach and spread this great news. The best of Nigeria is yet to come. Our Nation will yet rise into glory and beauty. Nations of the World will look up to Nigeria for leadership, Britons and Americans will send their children to Nigeria for education. Amen. Yes, with man, how can this be? But don't forget that with God all things are possible.

I stand here this day to sternly say that for the beauty and the glory of this Nation to come into lime light, we need God. The Bible without mixing words says, "***Except the LORD builds the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain***". Psalms 127:1. There is no doubt about this, Nigeria needs God at this point in time.

However, as much as we know we need God and we all know that He alone can lead us to that promised land, "a better tomorrow", God will not come down to do this for us. He has given us His representatives, "The men of God", who are the ambassadors of God on earth. God is willing and ready to use them to lead this Nation to a greater and a better tomorrow.

Permit me therefor to quickly highlight the salient roles of the men of God in Nation building especially as it regards a quest for a better tomorrow for our great Nation, Nigeria.

### THE ROLES OF MEN OF GOD IN NATION BUILDING

Men of God in this context are the Christian clerics.

- The man of God is that person who has personal relationship with God, the creator.
- The man of God is that person who is called and ordained by God for God's purpose and assignment on earth.
- The man of God is that person who does not work for the belly but for the building and edification of God's people.
- The man of God is that man/woman who is ready to adequately represent God before the people and represent the people before God.
- The man of God is that person that sees situation the way God sees it.
- The man of God is that person who is ready to carry out the mandate of God,
- The man of God is that man/woman ready to promote the cause of God, the mind of God on earth, to bear the mind of God at any time in any situation for a better situation.
- The man of God is that person who knows the way to a better future and he is ready to take the lead in the way.
- The men of God of old actively participated in Nation building.

What then is the role of this man of God in nation Building towards a better tomorrow for Nigeria?

### 1. Promote Peace. Preachers of peace

It should also be noted that peace suggests a sincere attempts at reconciliation, the existence of healthy, interpersonal, intergroup, intercultural and interreligious relationships.

Epicurus, a highly regarded philosopher strongly concludes that the most important need of a man is undisturbed peace. Peace is the mother of inspiration and innovation, peace aids developments, peace is needed by everyone, every society and nation. No meaningful achievement can be attained without peace. God is said to be the God of peace and Jesus Himself knowing the importance and value of peace did not leave the world without leaving peace for His followers.

This paper strongly believes that for this Nation to be built, peace is obviously needed to have its course in Nigeria. There can't be Nation building without peace. To have peace, the men of God have a major role. They must be at the vanguard of the push for peace.

This paper strongly believes that the men of God, who are the representatives of God, have enormous tasks and duties in promoting peace. The men of God should through their actions and words promote peace in this country.

### 2. Spiritual Approach:

It should be noted that the spiritual world controls the physical world, nothing happens in the physical except it has first happened in the spiritual world. We should therefore know that the impacts of the spiritual in nation building cannot be over emphasized.

Nigeria needs the Mercy of God. The Bible says in II Chron7:14

*"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."* The healing of Nigeria must start with a cry for God's mercy which this paper believes can better be handled by the men of God. We are to pray for the peace and progress of our Jerusalem.

The word of God is powerful. The men of God must teach the people of God His mind which is contained in His word. The word of God must be introduced into the system and structure of the nation. This definitely will change the behaviors of a Nigerian which will affect the future of our Nation.

- Watch our lives. We must live exemplary life. (1 Tim. 4:L12) Do what they teach. Live the life of peace as you preach peace, live the life of holiness as you preach holiness, and live the life of brotherly love as you preach same. The man of God must live what they preach.
- Encourage active participation of members in Nation building by getting involved in politics.

### 3. Educative Approach:

Men of God have access to multitude of Nigerians. This, I see as a great opportunity. Men of God should organize seminars, lectures, teachings that will create awareness among Nigerians for the need and the how of a better tomorrow for Nigeria. Awareness must be created, the media should be used to promote peace, print of flyers to educate believers on their roles in Nation building. Churches should be encouraged to use their various platforms, the pulpits to preach a better tomorrow for Nigeria which must of course start with the men of God.

In their educative campaigns these among others must be



passionately taught,

- Teach that Christians must shun violence and unhealthy rivalry.
- Teach that believers must shun tribalism, and ethnicity. We are one, unity must be promoted among adherents.
- Believers must engage in fruitful service that will develop the Nation. Diligent and productive service at all time.
- Must teach religious tolerance among the different religious groups in the Nation.
- The men of God must teach obedience and respect for constituted authorities (Tit 3:1) "*Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,*"
- The men of God also have the responsibility to educate political leaders and all rulers on the mind of God concerning leadership.

#### 4. Financial/Material approach:

The men of God must be ready to commit money into the quest for Nation building. To promote this course, it will cost money, we should not be deterred or dissuaded because of money. Print, media, awareness campaign, organizing lectures and seminars will obviously cost money. We should know that the prize is worth the price, the gain is worth the pain. We need peace for Nation building; the children of peace must also be ready to spend money to secure peace in this Nation. Men of God should preach this, that Nation building is a worthwhile investment. Wealth and riches are only important when there is life. When there is no life these are meaningless.

#### 5. Psychological approach:

Several of the uneasiness in the Nation are traceable to youth who have wrong upbringing, wrong exposure, peer influences, and

because of these they have psychological issues. Majority of them in the bid to ease their mental tensions stir up issues among fellow youth. This has led to several conflicts in the Nation which are part of the trials of uneasiness in the past record of this Nation. Most of the conflicts in our Tertiary Institutions, which have slowed down the Nation building processes, are born out of issues similar to the above. Creating a psychologically conducive environment for young people will go a long way to alleviate such situation. The men of God stand better chance to help counsel our youth through God's word.

#### **6. Moral approach:**

The men of God must take a revolutionary stand for peace and pass on same to incoming generations. Every Nigerian must live a life of honesty, integrity, purity, and peaceful coexistence. We must live a sin-free life. Sin is a cancer that will not allow a Nation to grow. The Bible says in Proverb 14:34 "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people". The men of God must run away from all forms of sin and teach their followers to do same. We must all spread the gospel of purity.

#### **7. Political approach:**

The men of God should participate and encourage members of their churches to positively participate in politic. This paper recommends that all Nigerians should actively participate in politic. Christians are sternly commended to obey constituted authorities and be honest and faithful models when given opportunity to lead. Men of God should encourage active participate in all activities that will build this great nation. Innovations should be encouraged, from the lowest level to the point of implementation or application to Nation building.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Nigeria is a great Nation and greatly blessed by God. Nigeria

cannot attain full greatness or fully enjoy all the God given endowments in the midst of uneasiness and chaos. It is only in the situation of peace that Nigeria can attain greatness and enjoy her God given blessings. The men of God have been given the responsibility to impact peace into their world by being at the forefront of activities that will build Nigeria and must preach same. This paper passionately appeals to all men of God everywhere in Nigeria to be part of the contributions to Nation Building and securing a better tomorrow for our Nation, Nigeria. May the uneasiness of the past be lessons for us today and the challenges of today teach us the path to better tomorrow, thanks and God bless you all.

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