

## **CURBING ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: ROLE OF DAWAH WORKERS**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

Nigeria is a nation of diversities-ethnic, religious and cultural etc. Every government has had to grapple with the problem of managing and Curtailing often conflicting demands from the different segments of our society. Emphasis on our religious and ethnic pluralism in the country has been so overwhelming that the socio-economic pluralism and imbalance which is a more criminal form of injustice is just beginning to come to the fore. One particular group that can be used to curb this menace is the Da'wah workers, who can either strain or calm the nerves of their listeners, through their preaching or sermons. It is this particular group that this paper seeks to explore by examining the ethics involved in their works. In Addition, the paper enumerates the ways by which they can contribute to curbing ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Few suggestions were given before conclusion

### **Introduction**

Da'wah, (pl. da'awat) according to Lewis et al, (1955: 168) is from the root da'a, meaning to call, invite, thus having the primary meaning-call or invitation. A da'wah worker is therefore the one charged with the responsibility of inviting people to the way of God. Conflict on the other hand, according to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English is defined as a state of disagreement or argument between people, groups, countries etc. the fact that Nigeria is made up of people of diverse religious and ethnic background, one may not be surprise that it is a pluralist ethno-religious state. However, because of inbuilt weakness in such a state, manipulator

tend to cash on such sensitivity to create confusion. More importantly, humanity's perceptions have passed through the filters of culture and history and sometime gives the appearance of incongruity. Since we do not have the same culture, religion and history, our perception and worldview differ and these can create conflicts. Conflict is therefore part of the human conditions found in all societies. It is against this background, that this paper attempts to examine the role of da 'wah workers in curbing ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria

### **Sources of Conflict**

Conflict often result from socio-economic, ethnic, religious, cultural, racial and gender differentiation within the context of scarce resources and struggle for their control by different groups (Alemika 2002). According to Pruitt and Rubin (1986:4), conflict occurs whenever there is "Perceived divergence of interests or a belief that the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously Tanko (2002) also believed that conflicts do arise over interests or over an issue or scarce resources or even over perceived deprivations. These interests, he affirms, do underlie positions and "people's feeling about what is basically desirable" based on his submission, he identifies the following four kinds of interests:

- Interests over resources (territory, money, energy sources, food e.t.c.and how they should be distributed),
- Interests over power (how control and participation in decision making are allocated),
- Interests over identity (where people believe they are treated with respect and dignity and whether their traditions and social positions are respected),
- Interests over values (particularly those embodied in systems of government, religious and ideology).

Buddhists speak of conflict in terms of the three unwholesome roots of action, namely: greed, hate and delusion. These according to them are responsible for conflicts and the psychological dispositions that perpetuate them. They believe that conflict, with all its messiness and pain is an opportunity for peace building because it challenges us to develop a peace process that engages the roots conflict.

### **Types of Conflicts**

Conflicts are often categorized in terms of their origin, domain of expression and issues or grievances that are canvassed. However, such categorizations are not mutually exclusive, because issues that are at stake in any conflict may transverse several domains, culture, ethnicity, religion, economy, politics, race and gender.

Nonetheless, it is common in the literature to classify intra-group or inter- group antagonism and aggression as class, political, cultural, racial, ethnic and religious conflict. Other ways of classifying- according to Alemika (2002:3-4) are Intra-group conflicts and inter-group conflict and conflict arising from vertical and horizontal diversity and distinctions.

Intra-group conflict are restricted to dissensions and oppositions within a relatively homogeneous group. Conflict associated with vertical distinctions refers to antagonism between groups that are hierarchically ordered or stratified, for example, as in caste and class conflicts. Underlying such conflicts is inequality based on social stratification. Conflicts associated with horizontal distinctions are derived from non-hierarchical differentiation and antagonism between groups at similar levels competing for resources within the same environment. They are conflicts derived from differentiation in terms of religious, ethics, residential, racial and gender identities, which may not be based on ranking of superiority and inferiority.

Nation-states characterized by multiple ethnic and religious identities operating a central political structure and economic control tend to generate conflicts among the constituent, ethnic, political and religious groupings.

### **Islam and Conflict**

The basic Islamic principles regarding human relations condemned all to forms of aggression and recommended fighting back only when attacked, Qur'an 2: 190 has this to say: "And fight in God's cause against those who fight against you, but do not commit aggression, for verily, God does not love aggressors". On aggression had been repelled and its causes eliminated, peace should immediately prevail. Allah says in Quran 2: 193: "And if they desist, no more attack is allowed, except against transgressors". In case of conflict between two Muslim groups, the relevant authorities should attempt mediation. If this failed and fighting continued, the party committing aggression should be fought until it is forced to see reason. Once it does, then an equitable settlement should be achieved. Qur'an 49: 9 has this to say:

Hence, if two groups of believers fall to fighting, make Peace between them, but then, if one of the two (groups) goes on acting wrongfully toward the other, fight against the one that act wrongfully until it reverts God's command: and if they revert, make peace between them with justice and deal equitably (with them): for verily God loves those who act equitably.

Within the Muslim society therefore, the overarching principle appears to favour peace with justice. When one considers the order of peace and justice together in a particular case the rule is that justice must prevail, even at the expense of peace, but once justice was restored, so immediately should peace be. Thus, if we compare Islam and Christianity for example, we find the latter advocating peace as a

paramount value, even at the expense of justice. The former, however advocates the sacrifice of peace to justice.

In inter-communal relations, the approach recommended was to seek peaceful co-existence. initially Islam offered the same advice as Christianity that aggression should not be fought back. Later permission was given to fight back Quran 22.39 says:

Permission (to fight) is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged, and verily, God has indeed power to succour them: those who have been driven from their lands against all right for no other reason than saying 'God is our Lord...

This remained the dominant principle. Aggression should be fought back with just enough force to repel it and cause the conditions of peaceful co-existence to prevail. The fight for justice rested on a permission to fight injustice given to those on whom it was directly imposed, coupled with a duty on the rest of humanity to come to their aid. If the enemy sued for peace, this should be accepted, even if treachery was suspected. Allah says in Qur'an 8: 61-62 that: but if they incline to peace, incline thou to it as well, and place thy trust in God: verily, He alone is all-hearing, all knowing. And should they seek to deceive thee (by their vow of peace) behold, God is enough for thee.

There is a lesson in this for the da'wah workers who rather than speaking the truth decides, to align with the oppressor either because of his affluence or power. They should stand for truth at all time speaking objectively in their sermons preaching's and discourse, so that the oppressed could be liberated and conflict minimized.

### **Religion and Ethnicity in the Nigeria Context**

If the truth must be told, only very few Nigerians can be described as successfully detribalized. Considering the fact that politicians-both civil and military have

consistently used tribal and religious sentiments to their advantage, it will be incomprehensible to them, to talk of a totally detribalized Nigeria.

Religion or its manipulation has become a very topical issue in Nigeria in the past few years. While some people may be genuinely religious, these are those who are simply looking for a means of easy livelihood through the manipulation of religion. With the increasing number of churches and mosques is obvious that our society is still far from being upright and more peaceful.

During one of the crises in Kaduna, the President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo accused religious leaders of being responsible for the crisis because they did not do enough to caution their followers (Tanko 2002). It must be observed though, that justice in the society is the primary duty of government to implement. A body known as the Supreme Council for Shari' ah in Nigeria accused the present government of being biased against the Muslims, claiming injustice to the Muslims in terms of appointment to the cabinet, appointment into the top hierarchy of the Armed forces, appointment of members into the recently concluded National Political Reform Conference (The Confab) among other claims. Where there is room for such and other related claims and counter claims, tension and violence become the norm. Religious leaders may point the way to peaceful co-existence to their followers but the government has the duty to ensure that justice, equity and fair play prevails because it has the instrument to ensure that this is so.

Be that as it may, the attitude of the missionaries who brought both Islam and Christianity into Nigeria, observed Tanko (2002), did actually sow the seeds for their subsequent politicization as some communities began to assert their superiority over others and as conversions ensured some sense of economic security. The pity he said, is that we have continued to water these seeds for every selfish reason. Certain churches within the same denomination or certain Muslim organization /bodies

within the same Muslim community are now being associated with particular ethnic groups to the exclusion of all others. These churches or Muslim organizations/bodies are sometimes used to strengthen ethnic allegiance the sowing of the seeds of prejudices against other ethnic groups. What gradually emerges with time is that those differences within Christian or Muslim communities have almost always become so fossilized and deep-rooted that the prejudiced built have now created avenues for opportunities to use those differences as means for political bargaining and differentiation.

Many scholars have suggested that some missionaries reinforced and sharpened these prejudices and have to date continued in one form or the other.

Kukah (1999) has argued that the British colonization was enamored with the Fulani whom they believed were imbued with leadership qualities. Many people, he observed, would argue that this thinking later took root in the minds of the Fulanis and made them unresponsive to the quest of other citizens for a place in the power ladder in Nigeria. This interplay of religion and ethnicity in the power equation of Nigeria has penetrated almost every segment of the society that it can be said to have become an incurable Nigeria disease.

Tanko (2002:292) cited for example that “in 1986, Alhaji Shehu Malami was addressing youth coppers in Sokoto and he took the time to remind them of the ethnic superiority of the Hausa race”. He also noted that in 1995, Alhaji Maitama Sule noted that “whereas different communities in Nigeria were endowed with gifts, the Fulanis had more leadership qualities over and above the other ethnic group.” These, he concluded are the type of statement that build up ethnic cleavages over and above national interests.

## **Consequences of Ethnic and Religions Conflicts**

The consequences of ethnic and religious conflicts as summarized by Alemika (2002:13-14) are:

- They are associated with loss of lives and property,
- They lead to displacement of population, and traumatic experiences;
- They lead to poverty as those displaced lose their economic resources and opportunities;
- Victims suffer diverse deprivations-epidemics, lack of access to educational and employment opportunities, and adequate housing, hygienic source of water;
- Victims are vulnerable to repeated attack by opponents security agents;
- Trust between groups and communities are destroyed, thereby rendering such communities to exploitation and oppression by security agencies, government and elite's of those areas
- Trust between and within communities are eroded, thereby undermining inter and intra-community co-operation and alliance that may promote democracy development and human rights.

In all these, women and children suffer most, the Conflict zones become desolated and desecrated. In the light of these serious negative consequences, there is the need for proper management of ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria.

### **Handling Disagreement and Conflict in Da'wah Work.**

The person conducting da'wah does not operate in vacuum. He/she interact with other Muslims, in the mosque and the community and possibly belongs to an Islamic organization or more than one. These organizations themselves interact with



members of other organizations and the wider society. Muslims of different views are therefore bound to encounter one another in the course of their da'wah activities, and this encounter may result in either co-operation for the common good or in disagreement, rivalry, conflict and disunity, depending on their approach to each other. The different views of some Muslim based on their school of jurisprudence (Madhhab) or their national or ethnic customs or their type of education (traditional or modern) and so on, are potential sources of disagreement and even conflict. Moreover, the way and manner in which a dai (a da'wah worker) carry on with his dawah activities, his utterances, his proclamations, his behavior, etc. are potential source of conflict. There are two types of religious crises. There are the intra-religious crises. This type of crises aimed at purifying the religion and is usually directed at members of the same religious faith. This type of religious crises is usually the result of violent efforts by some believers to impose their own views or interpretations the theological positions on others. These same people are usually referred to as religious fanatics. But as argued by Usman (1987:72)

To say that some person or organization is a religious fanatics in contemporary Nigeria, and in other parts of the world is to say virtually nothing about them. In fact it often gives the misleading impression that religion has something to do with their actions beyond the level of very superficial rituals and symbolism.

The second type of religious crises is the inter-religious crises. This type of crises occurs when members of different religions are engaged in a fight seemingly over the superiority of their faith or some related issues. Though, not necessarily the most violent, yet Inter- religion crisis has had the most damaging impact on inter-faith relations in pluralistic religious state like Nigeria.

The two tables below give summary account of the two types of crises in Nigeria.

**MAJOR INTRA-RELIGIOUS CRISES IN NIGERIA 1980- 93**

TOWN	STATE	DATES	NATURES OF CRISES
Kano	Kano	December, 1980	Maitasine sect versus government and people
Maiduguri	Borno	October, 1982	Maintasine sect versus the people
Kaduna	Kaduna	October, 1982	Maintasine sect versus the people
Yola (Jimeta)	Adamawa	February. 1984	Maintasine sect versus the people
Gombe	Gombe then bauchi	April, 1985	Maintasine sect versus the people
Katsina	Katsina	March-April 1991	Shi'ite Group versus the authority and people
Funtua	Katsina	January, 1993	Maintasine versus Authorities

Source: Ali (1993)

These crises were fuelled by “so called” da’wah workers and the crises were aggravated due to poor handling and management.

### Table II

Lemu and Radrigo (Eds) (1999), however, believed that to handle conflict successfully in da’wah work, da ‘wah workers should be interested in dealing with conflict individually and collectively for the following reasons:

- Muslims like any other people, change as they learn and grow, and change is a precursor to conflict, thus the need to manage change.
- Communication and globalization is bringing Muslims with different backgrounds and value into contact, therefore the need to understand, tolerate and accept their differences becomes vital.

- Dealing with conflicts equips the ummah and its leadership with the skill and ability to handle problems so that the ummah does not lose direction or degenerate, but rather becomes a stronger and more effective.

For effective handling of disagreement and conflict in da'wah work, constructive criticism should be employed, since it can be used to evaluate performance. It should be well intentioned and thus focuses on issues, not persons or personalities. Its appraisal of the issue and the recommendations should not be viewed as a personal attack. Similarly, da wah workers should be ready to receive criticism. It is often observed that most people are good at giving criticism but are unwilling to accept it. While managing conflict, a da 'wah worked should be ready to accept criticism even if people's intention to embarrass or humiliate him is very obvious. This goes a long way to show his maturity and noble intentions and it also enables him to review himself and make changes where and when necessary. Finally, he should know how to handle other people's anger. Criticism may engender anger from any side, and once emotions are high, it is practically impossible to resolve differences.

Lemu and Rodrigo (1999) also believed that in da' wah work, people should be allowed to enjoy the right to their opinion. They believed that it is unfair to accuse a person of "religious extremism" simply because he has adopted the "hard-line juristic opinion of certain fuqahq (jurists). They argued that if a person is convinced that his opinion is right and that he is bound by it according to shar'ah, he is free to follow it even if others think that the juristic evidence is weak. He alone is responsible for what he thinks and believed even if in so doing, he over-burdens himself, especially since he is not content with limiting himself to the categorical obligations required of him but also seeks Allah's pleasure through supererogatory performances. Thus, they concluded that it is not right to condemn another person's

choice of ijihad or following a particular madhahab (school of) Jurisprudence) because he differs from that which various scholars (especially in the contemporary world) expound or vice-versa. Example given in this regard are: difference of opinions concerning coverage of women's nudity- hand and face exposed and gloved; position of Islam on singing music, drawing, photography, apostasy, Jihad e.t.c caution they say, should be taken not to condemn any Muslim should he adopt a hard-line opinion based on juristic judgment through which he/she seeks Allah pleasure. We have no right to force him to abandon his opinion or ask him to follow a line of behaviour which is contrary to his convictions. The best thing to do is to appeal to him with wisdom, argue with him patiently and gently, and to convince him by citing evidence in the hope that he may change his mind and accept what is believed to be the truth.

### **Ethics of Disagreement in Da'wah Work**

It is believed that if the following listed basic ethics of disagreement in da'wah work is seriously followed by the da'wah worker, the differences of opinion that normally degenerates into one of the most critical and dangerous factors of disunity and internal strife among Muslims will be minimized:

- A da'wah worker should always be sincere in his argument;
- He should be humble;
- He should not allow his ego or selfish desire for psychological satisfaction to suppress all concern for truth (Qur'an 4:135;6:56;2:37;38:26;23:71 and 6:119)
- He should always assess the worthiness of an argument, is it worth the argument?;
- He should avoid disagreement as much as he can;
- He should be God-conscious and avoid personal whims;

- Adherence to Islamic norms of behaviours during argument such as politeness, amicableness, avoidance of vile and insulting language and willingness to listen to others' point of view;
- He should avoid hypocrisy and flattering as far as possible;
- Each disputant must have evidence or proof (dalil) to authenticate his argument, otherwise the argument is invalid;.
- It is a sin to allow any difference of opinion to break the solid wall of Islamic brotherhood;
- No one has the right to refute an interpretation of a text advanced by others as long as the interpretation can be sustained by the text and is not in conflict with other legal texts;
- It should be understood that most of the laws pertaining to subsidiary and practical matters formulated on the basis of ijtiḥād change with the passing of time. These laws may also vary according to the differences between individuals in proportion to their capacities and circumstances. This must be appreciated as part of the mercy of Allah to His servants which allows adequate scope for the exercise of analytical thought and judgement through logical process in the light of Qur'an and Sunnah. (Qur'an 22:79; 2:185 and 4:29).

### **The Roles of Da'wah Workers in Curbing Ethno-Religious Conflict in Nigeria.**

Da'wah worker by our definition at the beginning of this paper is a person who passes the message of God to other people. Imams, Islamic preachers, teachers of Arabic or Islamic Studies, members of Islamic organizations, clergy and even students of Arabic and Islamic Studies fall into this group called da'wah worker.

Due to the volatile nature of their work, they have a greater role to play in minimizing the scourge of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria.

In order to tackle one of the identified areas of conflict, it should be put on record that schools of jurisprudence (madhhab) are based on recorded works of juristic principles (usul) and methodologies of the different schools of thought in Islamic jurisprudence appeared in the period of the first two centuries of Islam. These Schools of jurisprudence were many but those that remain till today and whose principles are still employed in assessing issues and making legal judgements in sunni Islam are those of Abu Hanifah, Malik, Al hafi'i and Ahmad ibn Hanbal. It is important to note that the collections and recorded works of each of the schools of jurisprudence are not the effort of only one scholar but many scholars which are based on researches from the Qur'an,

the Hadith and their rulings under various situations and circumstances. None of these scholars claimed that he was infallible. For instance, Imam Malik said: "The word of any person other than the prophet is sometimes accepted and sometimes rejected." While Imam Shafi commented: "my opinion is correct with the possibility of error. An opinion different from mine is in error with the possibility of it being correct" (Ilemu - Rodrigo 1999)

The statement quoted from Imam Malik and Imam Shafie explained why there existed difference in opinion and legal judgment on certain issues not only among the scholars of the different schools of thought but even among those within the same school. With the passage of time, the Muslim masses stick to the teachings of only one school of thought and steer clear of the teachings of other schools of jurisprudence no matter how cogent they might be. Some scholars even claimed that

it was compulsory to follow the teachings of the four schools of jurisprudence. The consequence of such a stand is that it close the door for Ijtihad (independent reasoning) and created blind imitation. Independent reasoning withered and intellectual thought was abandoned. With the negative effect of refusing to accommodate difference of opinion, coupled with the increasingly complex nature of the society and the differences of opinion, moreover, coupled with the increasingly complex nature of the society and the emergence of various contemporary issues, there is need once again to make research in to Qur'an and Hadith with a view to proffering more appropriate solutions to some problems like ethno- religious conflict as well as answer some questions of relevance to the contemporary situation.

Above all, in order to tackle the menace of ethno- religious crisis in Nigeria, the dawa'h worker should be well familiar with the following causes of differences of opinion and their possible benefits, it is by so doing that he will be able to know his roles and limitations:

- Ignorance of text available else where;
- Certain texts or expression accommodate more than one interpretation;
- Difference of opinion is natural and good provided it does not exceed its limits,
- It is a law of nature that variety and difference will always exist among people.

Every where and at all times there have been diverse colours, tongues, customs, concepts, intellects and degree of knowledge. Allah says in Qur'an 30:20 that

And among his signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors: verily in that are signs for those who know.

- The external variations reflect internal variations, variation of opinions, attitudes and objectives as stated in Qur'an 11:118-119:

If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one people, but they will not cease to dispute, except those on whom thy Lord hath bestowed His mercy; and for this did He create them.

- The diversity mentioned in the above verse has among other meanings the diversity in abilities and dispositions, the choice of different professions, and this makes for stability in the world. There is in the creation of humans the propensity for variation in learning, viewpoints and feeling and this in turn leads to variation in wills and preferences, and in faith, obedience and disobedience.

- But for those endowed with Allah's mercy, they will be free from the control of desires and whims, will not fail to arrive at truth if they diligently search for it(Quran 30:30) and develop their concept of Fitra which is the inner disposition to truth.

- We should remember that to differ is not a sin. A scholar will be rather rewarded in the hereafter even when he errs in his judgments and will be doubly rewarded when he is right. This is a great incentive for scholars to exert themselves and reason out controversial issues with a view to suggesting the best available course for the community. This is a manifestation of the great wisdom of Allah.

## **Recommendations**

In line with the above discussion the following recommendations are hereby suggested to stem the bane of incessant ethno- religious conflict in Nigeria,

- Calling people to the way of God is a good thing yet it is not expected to be handled by non-professionals;

- The methodology of calling to the way of God as entrenched in the various religious books need to be strictly adhered to;



- Those hiding under the cover of religion to fight political and even economic battles in this country should be identified and they should not be supported in whatever way by the da'wah workers;
- Da'wah workers should be straight ward, objective and truthful in their preaching especially when there is the need for them to contribute to national issues:
- Da'wah workers should give constructive criticism to government and they too should be ready to receive criticism;
- Religious leaders especially those that are charged with the responsibility of disseminating the messages of their religion should give room for differences of opinion, mutual respect for each other, sincerity of purpose and above all fear of God

## **Conclusion**

The work of calling people to the way of God should be done with sincerity, without any ethnic undertone, they should know that they have a responsibility to discharge to the people of Nigeria irrespective of their faith or ethnic background above all they shall be questioned by God in the hereafter, with them lies the solution to solving the problem of ethnic and religious crisis.

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