

## **ETHNIC POLITICS AND RELIGION IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION**

**Babatola Adeleye Marcus**

Political Science Department, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *Ethnic religious crises in Nigeria are deeply rooted and is threatening the very survival of the nation. It has negatively impacted on the socio-economic and bureaucratic landscape of Nigeria. To the degree that a lot of issues that should have been resolved are unnecessarily ethicised. It is persistent that the grievances, which normally provoke ethnic religious are most often than not demonstrated through sectarian crises, tribal unrests, bitter political complaints usually stoked by political elites, incendiary media rhetoric reports and violent insurgents. The arguments in this study are reinforced through secondary source of data collection. Also, historical analysis of event is adopted due to the fact that Nigeria Society is better understood with reference to history. The study finds out that since the Colonial periods up till now, there have been ethnic and religious minorities that harbour grievance against the majorities. In view of the current events unfolding in the country the need has arisen for academic perusal on the issue in order to proffer enduring panacea to checkmate the disintegration that may be invoked by ethnic-religious palaver.*

**KEYWORDS:** Ethnicity, Politics, Religious

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria became independent in 1960. The country, from all indications, has not attained her set targets of unifying the diverse ethnic groups in virtually all facets-socially, economically, politically among others. A major contributing factor to this reality could be attributed to apparent lack of unity occasioned by ethnic politics and religion dichotomy. Ethnic politics started during colonial era and it has had cumulative effects on the third and fourth republics. For instance, in the first Republic, the Action Group (AG) as a party metamorphosed from a Yoruba Cultural Association i.e Egbe Omo Oduduwa; the National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) intimately linked with the Igbo Union and Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) was an offshoot of Jamiyyar Arewa. The leadership of these parties were drawn along ethnic cleavages with their ethnic colourations. The Action Congress (A.C) was led by late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a Yoruba and a Christian; the NCNC was headed by late Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe; an Igbo, also a Christian while the NPC was co-ordinated and led by Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, a Fulani and a Muslim. All these were products of the colonial administrative arrangement that propelled ethnic politics in that it divided Nigeria into three regions for effective administration; that is, West – Yoruba, North – Hausa/Fulani and East – Igbo. This division reflect the three major ethnic groups in the country. It is worthy of note that in addition to issue of ethnicity is the religious question which is becoming endemic and volatile, intruding into the political sphere of the country. Islam, being theocentric in its doctrine, opposes secularism which is constitutionally allowed in religiously pluralistic societies like Nigeria, has threatened the stability and development of the nation with a claim to numerical superiority (Ayantayo 2012:101).

On several occasions, political leaders who are either Christians or Muslims in the country have surreptitiously promoted their religious belief to the highest level of the country's governance. For instance, the elevation of the sharia into legal and political system, the issue of Nigeria becoming the member of organisation of Islamic countries (OIC) among others. There was also the formation of the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), which culminated in the birth of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) (Enwerem 2005:86). Furthermore, the challenges of political violence and apathy among Christians to political issues necessitated the birth of the Christian Social Movement (CSMN). This organ has been described as the socio-political wing of the Christian Association of Nigeria. The organ is saddled with the responsibilities of mobilising and conscientizing Christians on their religious and political rights. On its part, the traditional religion has the rare quality of accommodation and tolerance to other religions. It is not a proselytising religion in the sense that it does not go forth seeking converts neither does it pick offence when deserted by its adherents or assume that its object of worship is superior. (Onah, 2009:1)

The paper examines the perennial incidence of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria and its attendant impact on socio-economic and bureaucratic landscape of the country. This study finds out that in each of the regions since colonial times, there have been ethnic and religious minorities that harbor grievances against the majorities. These grievances are sometimes expressed through bitter political complaints, sectarian crises stoked by political elites and incendiary media rhetoric and violent insurgences. (Fatokun, 2012:20)

The data used to support arguments in the study was gathered through secondary method. Also, historical analysis of events has been adopted this is because to understand Nigerian society, one must be able to situate the uses of ethnicity and politics in the polity. (Korieh & Nwokeji 2005:1). Thus, with the current events unfolding in the country, and a sense of history at heart, the study therefore investigates the implications of ethno-religion and political violence for Nigeria's national integration.

## CONCEPTUALISING RELIGION AND POLITICS

Religion and politics are concepts that have been subjected to different definitions from various scholars of repute. As such, there seems to be no straight jacketed definitions of the concepts. Religion is an important aspect of life; it influences many great things. Religion is a belief system that uses symbols to allow people to explore their spirituality, ([www.credong.org/30/03/2014](http://www.credong.org/30/03/2014), 2:04pm/). Religions, many at times depend on symbols and narratives usually employed to offer a meaning to human existence and also to explain the indices for the creation of the universe. (Alamu, 2006:17). In addition, there are some religions that have ethical foundations indicating how their adherents should behave in any given society. This must have led Oluniyi to observe rightly that "religion is a source and guarantor of individual and societal peace" (Oluniyi, 2006:1). It is noted that one aspect of religion that is applicable in all instances is that it is a public process. The basic requirement is that the religion being a belief system must be held by a group of people who publicly share its doctrine. Religious beliefs are evident in religious dogma, creed, conviction, doctrine and principles. (Ayantayo:2009). Then religious practices encompass different religious activities such as worship, fellowship, communion, prayer, offering and almsgiving and so on. Adesina (2005:7) is of the opinion that religious ethics are the moral principles that guide religions and set the standard for what is and isn't acceptable behaviour from all indications, religious ethics covers

every aspect of man's life. It is revelational, decision oriented, scriptural; traditional, legalistic and life directed (Ayantayo: 2009).

Conceptualising politics, Harold Lasswell (1936:1) maintained that "politics is who gets what, when and how? Examining the position of Lasswell by citing using Nigeria political experience, one can submit that the politicians have been using various means including religion to hold on to power. Politics has therefore been used for the promotion of self-aggrandizement in the name of who gets what, when and how? Dell, (2002:8) sees politics as having to do with efficient organisation and judicious administration of the collective affairs of the organised human community. This however was the conception of ancient philosophers such as Plato (470:399BC), (354 – 322BC) about politics. Both thought of it in moderate and idealistic terminologies, as having to do with fashioning a structurally and functionally perfect human community that would be motivated at all times by the quest to promote justice and happiness for her citizens. (Imaekhai, 2010:12). These early views emphasized what politics ought to be rather than what it actually is. Furthermore, politics is the science or the art of the management of public affairs (Olaleye, 2008:35). In the contemporary period, a breed of people called politicians have emerged who claim to have the necessary qualifications for the efficient management of public affairs except in totalitarian state where sectarian views and ideas are regimental or forcibly suppressed. These politicians in addition, naturally form themselves into groups called parties each with different ideas of its own and divergent methods of realizing those ideas. Kolawole (1998: 25) holds the view that in a democratic society, citizens entrust their representatives with the management of affairs by voting in candidates of their political choice. This therefore connotes that for national integration to be attained, politics must be fairly played to accommodate the verdict of the electorates. In addition, the programmes and manifestoes of each political party and of individual candidates canvassing for votes on the platform of such a party must be made known to the people which will enable them to choose leader. (The Nation 14th May, 2009: 9). However, Awolowo contends that for politics to engender national integration, the popular misconceptions of "Politics and Religion do not mix" should be erased. He opined that "politics is essentially materialistic and religion is so fundamentally spiritual". Therefore, it may be difficult for a man to be a successful politician and good Christian or Muslim at the same time. (Awolowo, 1980:183). In actualizing the integrative effort of man in ensuring national development, Stich (2008:8) advised that the agencies of politics and religion must work in close and harmonious co-operation. This is only attainable in a situation where politics without bitterness is played. It can be argued that politics and religion that could have been forces promoting national integration have failed completely in achieving same as shall be seen shortly.

## **ETHNIC POLITICS AND EFFECTS ON NATIONAL INTEGRATION**

Nigeria party politics has been characterised by ethnic chauvinism. This is one of the major challenges confronting the advancement of liberal democracy in Nigeria since independence. To the extent that ethnic sentiment is fully introduced in virtually all areas of Nigerian political system. Indeed, low productivity and inefficiencies currently experienced in the country can be attributed to ethnic sentiment. The major focus of this section is to examine ethnic politics and effects it has had on national integration. Based on lingual classification, Nigeria is said to have about 250 ethnic groups. A federal government demographic survey in 1976 identified 394 language groups, one put it as high as 400 with the highest density of languages in Taraba and Adamawa States. ([www.thenationonline.net](http://www.thenationonline.net)). This therefore suggests that Nigeria is

multi-lingual and multi-ethnic in nature. These tribal differences have given room for diverse nature of the Nigerian State. Hence, the paradox “unity-in-diversity”. This further indicates that though housed in one country, the ethnic groups do not have identical needs, objectives and aspirations. Ethnic politics has become a formidable force in the political life of Nigeria. Most often, ethnic sentiments are used in place of merit and skills. For instance, in the case of appointment, round pegs are no longer found in round holes. Ethnicity has been one of the major factors that have seriously dampened the image and glory of Nigerian party politics. The first evident to justify this is the adoption and practice of federal character principle. The “federal character” principle, which has been enshrined in Nigeria constitution since 1979, seeks to ensure that appointments to public service institutions fairly reflect the linguistic, ethnic, religions and geographic diversity of the country. (Adamolekun, et.al, 1991:75). By this definition it follows clearly that federal character is a tool for ensuring fairness in public service over professionalism and goal attainment. The total systemic collapse in Nigeria’s socio-economic and political environment can be attributed to the federal character practice. (Justcash, 2010:1). The imbalance in the literacy rate between the South and the North of Nigeria has made it impossible to have qualified people in sensitive government positions. For example, the North would rather let an Arabic “Alamijiri” teacher from the north to be the minister of education, than allow a southerner to play the role, all because of a perceived need for proper representation in the name of federal character principle which has been ethnicised. It is observed that parties now adopt the principles of federal character as a means of gaining credibility which goes along with ethnic colouration. People’s Democratic Party (PDP) resorted to a zoning arrangement for its political positions in order to reflect a federal character, one of such consequential effects of the zoning arrangement was the eventual victory of Umar Musa Yar’Adua. It simply shows that “Federal; Character” does not engender development in the face of ethnic politics. <http://www.nairaland.com/464612/federal-character-curse-nigeria4/23/2014> 5:53am Still within the purview of federal character which has been negatively affected by ethnic politics is the fact that merit has not been achieved at the altar of federal character principle (Aliyu, 2012:2) argues *“for one, there is always a minimum requirement for appointment into any post within the federal civil service, Armed Forces, the police any other agency of government. I never heard of any situation where minimum requirement for any particular post was dependent upon the candidate’s ethnic, religious, geopolitical or state circumstances”*.

However, due to the influx of ethnicity into the principle, it has accelerated the promotion of incompetent and ineffective civil servants, military, paramilitary officers, even top government functionaries. For instance, the case of former Aviation Minister Oduah is still fresh in Nigerians’ minds. The inappropriate application of federal character creates mediocrity, inequality, corruption, lack of transparency and above all tribal dominance by the major ethnic groups. (Nasiru, 2008:1) and (Chukwuemerie; 2013:3) <http://dailypost.ng/2013/06/12/checkwesemerieldu>. Besides, to indicate the extent to which ethnic politics has adversely impacted on national integration, the leading ethnic groups have exploited the available constitutional provision to their benefits in the areas of contract award, infrastructural development and appointment into strategic government institutions. Such actions create a few rich and powerful individuals; increase poverty, ensures uneven regional development and high incidence of gratto (Nasiru 2008:1) for instance, the eight (8) years of president Obasanjo’s supremacy depicted the exercise of ethnic politics in establishing the new gas plant at the boundary between Ondo and Ogun State by depriving the people of Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers of economic development, taxation and job opportunities in spite of the environmental impact

that gas exploration wreak on these communities. (Aliyu, 2012:3) Another area where national integration has been affected negatively is the area of privatization and sale of companies and properties. The deprived poor states like Niger, Kogi, Ekiti, Katsina just to mention a few have been robbed off of the economic benefit that should accrue to their citizens. Not only that, one would have expected Obasanjo to have reflected the existing six geo-political zones in the award of new gas plant and the privatization cum sale of companies exercise, doing this would have promoted the spirit of integration and unity within the country. <http://www.fousnigeria.com/federal-characterihtn/23/4/20145:45am>

The above, well supported with the views of former minister of Science and Technology, Gen. Sani Momah (rtd) who opined that *“federal character as it is currently practised in Nigeria tends to inculcate cheating rather than emphasise hardwork, settleness and nation-building, the core values which our founding fathers lived by”* (Momah, 2013:1). The demand and desperation for the creation of states and local governments in the country have been informed by ethnic sentiments and marginalization. For example, the Idoma which is a minority ethnic group in Benue State has been complaining of marginalization by Tiv which is the majority ethnic group in the state. It is apparent that Tiv has been producing civilian executive governors notably, Chief Aper Aku, in the first republic, Moses Orshio Adasu in the third republic, George Akume, in fourth republic and now Gabriel Susiwan. The the Idoma now feels that the only solution is the creation of “Apa State” (Suberu, 2006:15). This is just a case out of many calls by the minority ethnic groups of neglect and marginalization stoked by ethnic politics. The impacts of ethnic politics could also be noticed in the area of the allocation of national resources. For instance, in the first republic due to the fact that the control of government was in the hands of the North such opportunity was used to allocate much funds to the Northern parts at expense of the south.

This is indicated below:

Year	Northern Region	Western	Eastern
1960 – 1961	£13,742.087	£6,905,153	£10,639,928
1961 – 1962	£15,883.229	£7,980,715	£11,514,427
1962 – 1963	£16,880.556	£8,158.291	£12,381,302
1963 – 1964	£17,876,906	£6,079.699	£13,780.873
1964 – 1965	£24,632.836	£14,699.196	£18,081,945

Source: Via Google:- Nigeria: ethnicity@www.mongaby.com-1182.pdf./04/01/2014/2pm

From the table, the indication is that right from the first Republic, the issue of ethnic politics had been in force employable by Nigerians as tool to attain their desired aspirations especially among the majority ethnic groups. Indeed, this has not abated, till now. It could be argued that ethnic politics might have precipitated majority of civil unrests in the march towards the attainment of consociational democracy in the country. This, of course, must have informed the thoughts of Imobighe (2003:14) and Alebo (2006) thus: *“Ethnic politics and inter-communal conflicts have been become so pervasive that there is hardly any part of the country that has not been affected. More revealing still, hardly does any month pass without some form of civil disturbances which have become defining characteristics of the return to civil rule...”*

Besides, ethnic politics has had effect on the Nigerian polity because it heightens political struggle and competition in electoral contest. This is well substantiated for using the activities of the Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC) in the First Republics when the north insisted that its



candidates must win at all cost, to actualise this, some northern candidates were returned unopposed even before the commencement of the general elections <http://www.alsadiq.lecture.pdf/>. It is obvious that the current political impasse in which case the north is making frantic efforts to install any candidates from the region points to the impact of ethnic politics in Nigeria. Even the result of general elections conducted in 1993 between Social Democratic Party SDP and National Republic Convention NRC was annulled based on some factors among which ethnic politics was one, Abiola was then precluded from becoming the executive president in Nigeria. In fact, the election was well rated to have been very free and fair both in conduct and organisation.

## RELIGION POLITICS AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION

Nigeria is a country blessed with a triple religious heritage. Her religious landscape have been dominated by three major religious groups. The adherents of the traditional religion, the Muslims and Christians. Indeed, by the period of Nigeria's independence in 1960, the country was divided along religious zones of influence, notably, the largely Muslim North and the Christian South. The latter was later split into the predominantly catholic east and the west having the same numerical strength of Muslims and Christians (Kukah, 2009:15). The traditional religion as mentioned elsewhere in the study, appears to be un-proselytised religion because it does go forth seeking converts neither does it pick offense when deserted by its adherents nor assume that its object of worship is superior. It has the rare quality of accommodation and tolerance to other religions (Kukah, 1999:16). This section takes a look at the impacts of religion on national integration. In doing that, some questions may arise. Thus, to what extent has religion promoted national integration? Has religion had any meaningful impacts on country's advancement and development or has religion been used as tool of national disintegration in order to actualise the selfish aspirations of some Nigerians? Efforts shall be intensified to answer these questions.

It must be argued that religion has contributed adversely to the disintegration of Nigeria. The first justification for this assertion can be attributed to the regime of Babangida when Nigeria became a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). Although Babangida government claimed to have taken the decision for economic reasons: to be able to access the loans available to OIC member countries at a time Nigeria was direly in need of finance. Christians, however, viewed this as an attempt to Islamise Nigeria. (Simon, 2014:2) This of course was the beginning of Christian Versus Muslim open confrontation in Nigeria.

This paper finds out that the first major religions riot occasioned by ethnic politics was the one that pitched Muslims and Christians against each other in Kafanchan, old Kaduna State in March 1987. The following month, the usually peaceful Ilorin, Kwara State, also witnessed a skirmish when some exuberant Christian youths held an Easter procession in a thickly Muslim neighbourhood, pointing at houses and singing: "Jesus dey here? "He dey..."! (Asemota; 2013:1). The tension went on and on, with Zaria, Tafawa Balewa, Zango Kotaf, Kano and several other areas in the North Catching fire one after the other, THIS DAY LIVE, 24th Thursday April, 2014:2 <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/religion-and-politics-in-nigeria/1...>

Another area where it is discovered that religion politics has devastated the integrative efforts of Nigeria could be found when the embattled former Central Bank Governor Mallam Sanusi

Lamido Sanusi was suspended due to financial misconduct and replaced by Godwin Emefiele, a Christian, who was yet to assume office as at the period of this study. Only for some groups in the North to start using ethno-religious justification for the removal of Sanusi Nairaland Forum 23rd Monday, 2014. The president of the senate, Senator David Mark raised the alarm over the antics of some desperate persons using politics and religion to destroy the unity and peace of the Nigerian nation. [www.bellanaija.com/2014/03/26/senate-appoints-new-cbn-governor-godwin-emefiele](http://www.bellanaija.com/2014/03/26/senate-appoints-new-cbn-governor-godwin-emefiele). David Mark Warns: *“To sponsor or promote violence, destruction and uncharitable utterances in the name of politics or religion is totally unacceptable and must be condemned in the strongest terms...the current and political confusion are avoidable distraction we certainly do not need now”*. Leadership, February 10, 2014. He (Mark) concludes by saying he observed that most people tend to use politics and religion for the wrong reasons, stating “what we need now is to embark on serious political and inter-religious dialogue with the spirit of frankness, honesty, openness, acceptance and understanding in order to move forward” <http://leadership.ng/news/34423/dont-destroy-nigeria-name-politics-r...>

Besides, religion politics had been used in the past to undermine the unity and the integrative efforts of Nigeria. Sheikh Abubakar in October 1987 could be used to sustain this postulation. He said: *“The two-party system of government will not be south against North but Islam against Christianity. Once you are a Moslem, you cannot accept to choose a non-moslem to be your leader. If Christians do not accept moslems as their leader, then we have to divide the country. Nigerian unity is to try to convert Christians and non-moslems (to Islam) until other religion become minority and they will not affect our society”* This Day live Thursday 24 April, 2014. Commenting on the impact religion and politics have played on national politics of Nigeria, Senator Babafemi Ojudu points to the fact that because of religion politics and others, Nigeria is becoming “field for suicide bombers”. He maintains “we are becoming another Iraq and Afghanistan. You know, today it is bomb blast, tomorrow, it is people are killed in Maiduguri, bomb factory is discovered in Yobe” Vanguard February 09, 2014:1[http://www.vanguardngs.com/2014/02/pdp-dangerously-introducingrela ...](http://www.vanguardngs.com/2014/02/pdp-dangerously-introducingrela...) 4/24/ 2014 6:00am.

This paper also finds out that the national integration of Nigeria as country is already being impaired. This is justifiable with the Muslim’s call for autonomy flies in the face of Nigeria’s secular tradition. The constitution does not at all elevate any religion to a state religion. Yet, this principle was violated when governors in the Northern state issued authority to Islamize public life. In Zamfara, the first state to introduce a strict form of Sharia, the government claimed that its religious reform was bringing about major changes, whereas all spheres of public life were being transformed into Islamic oriented institutions. <http://carefronting.org/the-return-of-religion-into-politics.4/24/2014> 6:18am. This state-sponsored islamization affected non-Muslims as well, they were subjected to some sharia proscriptions like the ban on alcohol and the gender separation in hotels and restaurants, in buses and taxis (Asemota, 2013:3). All these have adversely hampered national integration of Nigeria even in terms of economic development. Because foreign investors might not be interested to site their industries in a crisis ridden country. The tendency of religious groups to politicize religious activities has made the country more difficult to govern. In some sects, political matters are viewed with the spectacle of religious, appeal to religious sentiment as a potent weapon which invariably makes the integration of Nigeria to be in shamble. (Wilson, 2012) For example, in March 2006, a protest against the cartoons satirizing the Prophet Muhammed in the north overlapped with anti-third term protest, which was supported by the

former Presidents (Predominant from the north) and the estranged Vice President of Nigeria in person of Atiku Abubakar. Following this, dozen of Christians were killed, sparking revenge attacks in the south, especially at Onitsha. The Observer March 6 2010:2. It is worth recalling that the greatest harm which religion politics can inflict on the economy is total retrogression instead of rapid growth as magnanimous loss of lives are usually experienced. Asemota (2002) puts it “for example, between 1980 – 1992, a total of twenty religion riots were recorded and death toll put at 6,775, official figures”. Equally, a chronicle of religious crises in the country were put together by Christian Social Movement of Nigeria reveals that twenty four riots occurred between 1993 – 2006 with causality put at well over 5000 lives. Christian Social Movement (2006:10). It is not only that lives are lost at each religion riot, but many are usually maimed. Scores of children are rendered orphans at tender age and these constitute socio-economic problems for the national integration of the country. The current insurgency of Boko Haram is worthy of mention here which had started long ago as a unit of Islamic sect now metamorphosed to giant destroyers of lives and properties. The fact that religion politics hampers economic integration of Nigeria can be illustrated by citing President Olusegun on assumption of office in 1999, he made it the priority of his government to attract direct foreign investment into the nation’s economy. However, at every forum where he tried to woo investors, one issue was a recurrent decimal – the international community would not invest in the country as long as violence persisted. (Awowede, 2000:20)

Another adverse effect religion politics has had on the country’s integration is the promotion of culture of corruption. Virtually every aspect of society is corrupt and religion that should have been a tool of correction has failed in this regard. Majority of the Pastors and Imams have aided and abetted corruption in that their followers have been tasked to look for money at all cost ‘to help God’. Whereas, the Holy books (both the Bible and Quaran) have not taught them that. The effect of the foregoing is that religious ideals is expected to regulate the political activities. However, majority of political office holders who would have impacted positively on the national integration given the genuine teachings by their religious leaders have failed to do so because the truth have not been preached. Religion politics has nevertheless precipitated various religious conflicts. Notably among them are the Maitatsine riot of 1980 in Kano and Skirmishes between the Izala and Tijjanyya in Gombe in 1987 (Larkin, 2009:126). Also, the Bulumkutu riot of October 1982, the various Kaduna riot of 1987, 1988, Jigawa riot 2001 and Lagos – Idi-Araba, 2002. As though these were not enough, another riot erupted on 22nd November, 2000 about 200 people were reportedly killed, and property worth million of naira were destroyed. This was believed to have been caused due to “blasphemous publication” against the Islamic sect. This happened on the day when “Miss World Beauty Contest” was scheduled to hold in Abuja. Tribune, 26th November, 2002.

Arguments have also been generated among the members of National delegates who are currently holding conference in Abuja over the dominance of one religious sect. On 1st April, 2014 as indicated in the Nigerian newspapers especially The Punch where the adherents of the two religions engaged in debate over the dominance of Islam in the 1999 constitution without any mention of Christianity. As the two delegates representing Christianity namely Bishop Kafanchan Diocese of Catholic Church, Joseph Bagobiri and Pastor Emmanuel Bosun (Ogun State) raised the issue which they described as unfair treatment of Christians and Christianity in the country. This of course angered their Muslim Counterparts who opposed their submissions. The Punch, 2nd April, 2014:P 1.



In the submission, Pastor Emmanuel Bosun argued that the conference must address religion imbalance in the country. He argued emphatically thus: “*in the 1999 constitution, shariah was mentioned 73 times, Grand Khadi 54 times, Islam 28 times, Muslim 10 times and there is no single mention of Christ, Christian, Christianity or church. So what are Christians doing here, 100 of our churches were burnt down, Christians are being killed. In fact, it has reached the stage of genocide.*” The Punch, 2nd April, 2014:1 He substantiated his argument further by citing a particular example of Plateau State. He pointed thus: “*in one denomination in Plateau State, the women’s Fellowship as at 2001 had 500 registered widows whose husbands had been killed by religious sect during riots. By 2008 they had increased to 900 registered widows and by February 2014, they had reached 2500 registered windows*”. The Punch, 2nd April, 2014:2 From the foregoing therefore, can national integration be attained in the face of all these carnages and killings? This calls for concern of all Nigerians.

## CONCLUSION

Ethnic politics and religion have impacted negatively on the development of the nation in many fronts namely socially, politically, economically and bureaucratically. It is a cancer requiring attention and sincere commitment with sacrifice from all Nigerians. In order to proffer lasting solution that brings about peace and engender proper national integration, the opinion leaders vis-a-vis religions and political leaders must begin to emphasise the need to embrace peace at all cost. As the country remains multi-religions and ethno-linguistic pluralism, secularity is the best option that can uphold peace and harmony. It is possible that if Nigeria was not colonized, the entrenchment of ethnic sentiment among the different ethnic groups would have been very impossible. The federal government should strongly discourage the spirit of indigene-settler phenomenon in the country. Federal character principle must be strictly implemented both at the state and local levels of government. Fanaticism in religion must be de-emphasised in order to pave way for re-designing Nigerian Society.

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