



Pauline Concept of Agape: Its Implication for Religious Peace and Harmony in Africa: The Nigerian Situation

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Abstract. This paper is titled “Pauline Concept of Agape: It’s Implication for Religious Peace and Harmony in Africa.” There is an unhealthy tension among different religious groups in Africa today. This tension is much more pronounced between the Christians and Muslims. Religion is being used as an instrument for destabilizing the unity, peace and progress of some nations in Africa especially Nigeria. Recently, there were incidences of religio-political conflicts in Nigeria and other nations in Africa. These conflicts have led to destruction of lives and properties. Fear, anxiety and suspicion have been created through it. The African Union at different times have set up panel of enquiry to unravel the remote causes of these conflicts and suggest lasting solution that would bring sustainable peace to the polity. But unfortunately, nothing tangible has been achieved from the panel of inquiries set up to find lasting solution to these problems. The results of religious intolerance are the breaking down of law and order, killing of innocent citizens and destruction of properties. Religious intolerance has led to hatred, social deprivation and injustices among various religious groups. One of the reasons why religious conflicts have not been controlled in Africa is because the government is not sincere in its approach to solving the problem and people are not ready to practice love for their neighbor. The practice of love is what Paul called *agaph*. *Agaph* is a common term in the Greco-Roman world which Paul borrowed and used as technis termini in his writings to the Corinthian church. A study of *agaph* and its application from the letters of Paul is timely for such a pluralistic and diverse society as ours in Africa. The ultimate aim of *agaph* is to create an

atmosphere of peace, justice and unity among different religious groups especially between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

The thesis of this paper is that love is imperative and it should be practiced in order to achieve peace and harmony in Africa and most especially in Nigeria where religious bigotry and intolerance predominate.

The method used in this paper is eclectic. It is a method that combines historical-grammatical method in an intercultural hermeneutic. The paper is divided into five sections. Section one begins with the etymology of the term *agaph*. Section two exegetes 1Cor. 13:4-10 while section three deals with overview of ethno-religious crises in Africa using Nigeria as a case-study. Section four discusses the implication of *agaph* for ethno-religious peace and harmony while section five concludes with recommendations for the African state.

ETYMOLOGY OF THE TERM AGAPH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The word '*ahab*' is used in a broad sense in the Old Testament to mean love.¹ It is the most common word for every range of its meaning. In the Old Testament, love, whether human or divine is the deepest possible expression of the personality and of closeness of personal relations.² In the non-religious sense '*ahab*' is the most commonly employed of the mutual urge of the sexes, in which there is no restraint or sense of uncleanness for its most sublime expression.³ Palmer notes "it is also used of a multitude of personal and sub-personal relations which have no

¹ W. E. Vine Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words ed. By Merrill F. Unger Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2000), 141. See E. M. Good "Love in the OT" *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 166-168

² F.H. Palmer "Love, Beloved" in *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 710.

³ Palmer, 710.

connection with the sexual impulse.”⁴ Fundamentally it is an inner force which impels to performing the action which gives pleasure (Pr.20:13) obtaining the object which awakens desire or in the case of persons to self sacrifice for the good of the loved one (Lev 19:18; 34) and unswerving loyalty (1Sam. 20:17-42).⁵ The word can also represent God’s love for men or in another usage to mean a religious duty towards God, men and even oneself.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT⁶

The word *agaph* is unique to Paul. It is a common word in Greco-Roman world which Paul adopted into his theology.⁷ The first considerable use of the noun *agaph* occurs in the letters of Paul, who so fills it with content and makes it so central that it virtually becomes a technical term. According to Johnston, Paul depended little on Old Testament teaching on love. He notes that the primary source of Paul’s concept was history rather than scripture⁸. The word involves “a sacrifice one displays in order to help a community.”⁹ Paul adopted this term to mean “divine love” demonstrated by Jesus on the cross for humanity.¹⁰ Jesus paid

⁴ Palmer.

⁵ Palmer.

⁶ Love language is much less common in the New Testament than one would expect. Statistically Act has one example, Titus has none. The verb is more frequent than the noun, of which there are no occurrences at all in Mark, Acts, James or I and II Peter. Distribution among the users of the term is approximately as follows: Jesus ten percent; Paul twenty eight percent; John thirty-three; Sub-Pauline thirteen percent and the remainder sixteen percent. It is thus significant that John who accounts for the tenth of the NT, provides one third of the references to love.

⁷ R. Mohrlang “Love” in Dictionary of Paul and His Letters. (England: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 575.

⁸ G. Johnston, “Love in NT” Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 171

⁹ Johnston, 175

¹⁰ Johnston, 176

the price of sacrificing himself on the cross. It is a kind of love demonstrated to humanity which God expects us to demonstrate to all people. . The word *agaph* is being grossly abused by people who consider it in terms of the emotion between persons of the opposite sexes. Unlike the Greek distinction between the four types of love,¹¹ the English word 'love' is used for all types. Often this creates confusion of terms. As a result, *agaph* is not fully appreciated in its depth and theological peculiarity, particularly in relation to its true practice in religiously pluralistic societies as Africa.¹² *Agaph* is referred to as God's love. It is the kind of love God demonstrates to humanity, which every human being should demonstrate to one another.

1. *Agaph* means God's love for Christ:

The relationship between the Father and the Son is one of love. The word beloved *agapetos* carrying with it a strong sense of 'only-beloved' is employed in the synoptic only of the Christ, either directly or by inference¹³

2. *Agaph* means God's love for humanity

God's love is his free and good disposition towards human beings for the purpose of sustenance, salvation and good fellowship. It is a love that is devoid of human

¹¹ Other types of love recognized by the Greeks are *phileo*, *eros* and *storge*: *Phileo* is the alternative to *agapao*, it is more naturally used of intimate affection and of liking to do things which are pleasant. *Eros* is love that borne out of passion. It is erotic in nature. It is love that fades over time. *Storge* is blood love. It is that kind of love that exists between blood relations, for example between brothers and sisters.

¹² D. F. Asaju "Pauline Conception of *Agape*: Its Challenges for Religious Peace and Progress in Nigeria" *Journal of Arabic and Religious Studies* vol 6 December 1989:47:56.

¹³ Palmer, 710 See *Exegetical Dictionary of New Testament* CD-R 2007

inconsistencies, social limitations of race and class.¹⁴ God's love was revealed from creation to the time Jesus resurrected from the dead, the result which led to the salvation of all men. God loves human being because it is his nature to love, this is *agaph*. All other forms of love is natural and caused but *agaph* is Divine and uncaused and spontaneous. Paul sees *agape* as the only basis for the mission of Jesus and his gospel on earth (Rom 5:8). This kind of love is enjoined to be reflected in people's practical lives.¹⁵ The truth of God's absolute and universal love is beyond human comprehension. It is the basis for understanding the revelation of God's power, opposition to evil, hatred to sin, judgment and salvation.

God's love is demonstrated both on the cross and in the specific calling and choosing of believers Eph. 1:4-5, so when Paul speaks of Christians as the elect or chosen" the idea of God's undeserved love is clearly implicit.¹⁶

3. *Agaph* means our love for God

Paul usually uses *agaph* to describe the relation of God to human being while the term 'faith' is usually employed to describe the relation of human being to God.¹⁷ Perhaps this is accurate in this usage because human being can never love God in the sense in which God loves.¹⁸ When human being loves God, it is the immediate

¹⁴ Asaju, 47-48

¹⁵ Asaju, 48.

¹⁶ Mohrlang, 576.

¹⁷ Mohrlang, 576.

¹⁸ G. Quell and E. Stauffer, 'Love' in G. Kittel, Ed., Kittels *Bible Key Words* New York: Harper and Brothers 1951; 1995 editions), 56.

reflection of the love which flows down from God himself. Paul describes people who love God as the elect. In Rom. 8:28

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.” The interpretation one can derive from this verse is as follows:

1. With those who love God, they enjoy God’s cooperative ability.
2. For those who love God all things cooperate for good. Paul has been accused of evolutionary optimism in the case of the later but this cannot be substantiated because Paul believed that Christ had overcome and therefore good must necessary be the ultimate of whatever experience any Christian undergoes.¹⁹ The “love of the world” which is antithetical to the love of God implies human passion for material well-being and pride of life which is antithesis to Paul’s idea of agape that calls for total dedication and commitment to the service of God.²⁰ Nygren’s explanation is that agaph is proper to man’s response to God, because is unmotivated. Man’s devotion must therefore be called ‘faith.’ Nygren further notes that “if we ask why Paul can use agaph for brotherly or neighborly affection, the reply is that through the invasion of the Holy Spirit, God free dynamic love flows from the believer towards the neighbor.²¹

¹⁹ Asaju, 48.

²⁰ Asaju, 48.

²¹ A. Nygren *Agape and Eros* n.p. 1953

3. **Agaph means our Love for others:** This is expressed in the saying of Jesus which says love your neighbor as yourself. This kind of love should be the ideal human relationship. Jesus corrected contemporary Jewish thought in two ways:
- a. He insisted that the commandment to love one's neighbour is not a limiting ordinance Lk 10:29 as in much rabbinic exegesis of Lev 19:18 but rather means that the neighbor is to be the first object, because the nearest, of the love which is the characteristic of the Christian heart.
 - b. He extended this demand for love to include enemies and persecutors Mt 5:44; though none but the new people of God can be expected to have this attitude for the demand belongs to them which involves supernatural grace Paul also emphasize this in Rom. 12:9-10 *Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another. For Paul loving others is the single most characteristic of the Christian life and the heart of Christian living. Everything one does is to be an expression of love. Paul speaks of this love as the epitome and essence of the entire OT moral law (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14).*

EXEGESIS OF 1CORINTHIANS 13:4-10

Contextual Analysis of I Cor. 13:4-8

Apostle Paul uses the whole of chapter twelve to deal with the issue of *charism* in

the Corinthian Church. He reminded the church that the possession of the charismatic gifts was one of the gracious acts of God, which distinguishes them from pagans.²² The Apostle Paul teaches that these gifts have a common origin and that they were given for the benefit of all Christians and for the edification of the body of Christ. He illustrates all these points by a reference to the human body (I Cor. 12:12ff). There was however, one thing that is more important than any of these gifts, without it all gifts would be of no value on the long run. This one thing is the foundation upon which all religious activities are based. Paul refers to it as the greatest of all, the greater gift (v. 31a) and the most excellent way. That is love. He devotes the whole of chapter 13 to this unique subject that is crucial to Christian peace and faith.

First Corinthians 13 falls into an immediate context of Paul's teaching about spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12:1ff). Ben Witherington III believes that this chapter is an epideictic showpiece and highly rhetorical in form.²³ He sees this chapter as being used by Paul to exhort the Corinthians to let love be their guiding principles in all that they say and do and more specifically, he stresses the manner in which these gifts should be used.²⁴ Gordon Fee sees this chapter as a digression but which is fully relevant to the context and without which the succeeding argument would lose much of its force.²⁵ Other scholars like Guthrie and Gundry however, see this chapter as an insertion by an unknown editor who interprets this chapter into the context in order to make a point. Herring holds that chapter

²² See "Charismata in First Corinthians 12:1-10: It's Implication for the Church in Africa" A Paper Presented at the 40th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies Conference in Memphis, USA.

²³ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 264.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gordon Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Press, 1987), 626.

13 of First Corinthians interrupts the beautiful discussion on spiritual gifts and the two sentences added at the beginning and the end by the editor are in fact typical examples of editorial linkages.²⁶ However, he concludes that love is to be placed above any gifts, which is what chapter 13 is all about.²⁷ The Corinthian Church is well known for their openness to the manifestation of God's presence and power but at the same time they endorse immorality, greed, idolatry and licentiousness to freely flow in their midst. They lack Christian conduct that is based on love.

In this chapter, Paul points to the fact that love should be the basis of their actions toward God and towards one another. He begins by setting forth various spiritual gifts especially those cherished by the Corinthian Church – “speaking in tongues,” faith and knowledge. He sets forth love as a guiding principle and as the foundation upon which all charismatic gifts are built. To Paul, love is essential. In verses 4-7, he points out the character of love which has already been demonstrated in the Lord Jesus Christ. From verses 8-13, love is eternal. When gifts fail, love continues. Any other virtues that are needed in this present world cannot be compared with love. It is only love that will endure forever. Love is primary because it has already been given a concrete expression in Christ. To Paul, love is not an idea but a behavior. It is action and anything short of it is not acceptable to God.²⁸

Character of Love (13:4-7)

The Apostle Paul having explained in clear terms the ethical worthlessness and

²⁶ Jean Herring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth Press, 1962), 134.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 647

unproductiveness of the one who displayed *charisma* and performs religious activities without love, now depicts the character that consists of just this one indispensable virtue.²⁹ Beginning with verse 4 comes a change of style.³⁰ Verses 4-7 constitute a form critically independent section.³¹ The subject is now **αγαπη**, love in personifying style.”³² While other scholars see verses 4-7 as love hymn, Conzelmann sees it as didactic³³ which belongs to a Jewish paranectic tradition.³⁴ He posits that the nearest parallel is Testament of Issachar IV. The parallels show that no specific definitions of love are to be sought here either.³⁵ There are fourteen descriptive statements in pairs. The first pair of characteristics is positive while the other four pairs are negative.³⁶ Paul expresses the character of love in series of verbs, the active character of which may not be fully indicated by the crisp adjective in the RSV.³⁷

v. 4 **μακροθυμει** means to have patience, to be long suffered.³⁸ It is endurance of suffering without giving way. It is patience of injuries without paying back.³⁹ It is the

²⁹ Ibid., 292.

³⁰ Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 223

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid..

³⁵ Ibid, 223. Citing Gerhard Von Rad, *The Early Lasting of the Four Categing of I Corinthian 13:47*

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Clarence T. Craig, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians: Introduction and Exegesis,” *Interpreter’s Bible* in 2 volumes, Vol. X (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 172.

³⁸ Robertson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 292.

³⁹ Conzelmann, 234.

opposite of **οξυσθυμια** “quick or short temper.”⁴⁰Patience is one of the fruits of the spirit which God expects every Christian to have. Impatience is not a good virtue it makes one to lose favor and mess things up. It is imperative for Christians who are walking in love to imbibe the spirit of patience. God expects people to be patient with one another. Nearly all religions preach patience and endurance. **χρηστευεται** meaning “kind in demeanor,” plays the gentle part, to show oneself kind, occurs only in Christian literature.⁴¹ **η αγαπη ου ζηλοι** meaning love does not envy or jealous, i.e. love knows neither jealousy nor envy. To covet good gifts is right. But to envy gifted persons is wrong; for envy and jealousy lead to division and strife⁴² **ου περπερευεται** “does not play the braggart (**περπερο**); Late Greek and not elsewhere in the Bible. The word is explained by Hesychius as meaning vaunt oneself.⁴³ **ου ζητει τα εαυτη** Does not seek its own advantage. It is not self seeking. **ου φυσιουται** Does not puff itself out.

v. 5 ουκ ασχημονει Is not rude or ill mannered. Love is tactful and does nothing that would raise a blush.⁴⁴ **ου παροξυνεται** Does not fly into a rage, does not yield to provocation. It is not embittered by injuries whether real or supposed.

ου λογιζεται το κακον Love does not keep record of evil or wrongdoing. Love does not register the evil done to him. The language here is close to the LXX of Zechariah 8:17, “Do not plot evil against your neighbour.” In other words, do not think evil. Love does not devise evil against someone else.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Robertson, 292

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Conzelmann, 224.

⁴³ Robertson, 293.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

v. 6 ου χαρει επι αδικια having reprimanded the Corinthians of wrong doings in the preceding chapters Paul now tells them that love ου χαρει επι αδικια. Love does not rejoice or take pleasure at wrongfulness. It takes no pleasure at war, religious violence, women trafficking, suppression or marginalized.⁴⁶ It does not sympathize with what is evil.⁴⁷

v. 7 Gordon Fee posits this verse as the concluding section of verses 4-7. He opines that in each case the verb is accompanied by the object “all things” a rhetorical repetition which here comes very close to an adverbial use (“in everything” or always).⁴⁸ Love always protects in the sense of concealing or excusing the faults of others, instead of gladly disclosing them. Love always trusts, i.e. it does not doubt the integrity of people until they prove otherwise.⁴⁹ Love always hopes, i.e. it hopes for the best with regard to all men. Love always perseveres, like a soldier who sustains the assault of the enemy. Hence the word “persevere” means to express the idea of sustaining the assaults of suffering or persecution in the sense of bearing up under them and ending them patiently.⁵⁰ Following the nature of agape in verses 4-7, Paul brings his argument to its conclusion with another set of contrast: love is “the way that is beyond comparison, love is eternal, it is grounded in God.”⁵¹ This love when it is practiced will bring peace and harmony to the world.

⁴⁶ Fee, 639

⁴⁷ Thiselton, 224

⁴⁸ Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 639.

⁴⁹ Charle Hodge. *A Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust Publications, 1983), 271.

⁵⁰ Fee, 639.

⁵¹ Fee, 639.

3. Eternal Durability of Love Verses 8-10⁵²

From the earlier discussion in verses 4-7, one sees that love is not an optional thing. It is not something that is borne out of emotional experience or that excites one for a moment and vanishes away. Love is indispensable. It is the foundation upon which religious activities and display of spiritual gifts are based. Besides, this love is eternal. It is durable and it endures forever. Laurin says, “Love is not a passing emotion, it is not something to be felt and forgotten.” It leaves behind it a strength and beauty of character that all of us need.⁵³ Spiritual gifts are temporal they cannot endure forever. There will come a time when they shall all cease. Love prevails. Love never fails. This is what Christians need today and always. It is the highest goal of Christian attainment.⁵⁴ It is the greatest thing a Christian can experience.⁵⁵

v. 8 This paragraph begins with the famous line “Love never fails.”⁵⁶ Literally means, “Love’s flower petals never fall.”⁵⁷ It never loses its place. According to Fee, the combination of the adverb ‘never’ and the present tense of the verb in one hand, suggests that it stands in continuity with the preceding lists, bringing the whole discourse to its conclusion.⁵⁸ On the other hand, he posits that several items indicate that it serves as the beginning of the present paragraph.⁵⁹ The repetition of the subject of $\eta \alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$ suggests in a

⁵² Thiselton, 229

⁵³ Roy Laurin, *Life Matures: An Exposition of the First Corinthians* (Wheaton, Illinois: Van Kampen Press, 1950), 241.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 642.

⁵⁷ Laurin, “Life Natures.” 241

⁵⁸ Fee, 643.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

strongest way that, it is no longer part of the preceding series.⁶⁰ The **δε** and repeated **εἰτε** (coordinate conjunction) before the three gifts, indicate that these are intended to be in contrast to this sentence.⁶¹

The verb **πιπτει** is standing in apposition to the verb **μενει** which concludes the paragraph.⁶² Love is always present and will always prevail. The three *charismata* mentioned in this paragraph are among the most highly cherished in the Corinthian Church. And Paul said they will cease or render passive, inoperative or inactive at the time when perfection comes (v. 14).⁶³ Fee explains that these gifts are manifestations of the Spirit for the Church's present eschatological existence in which God's new people live, i.e. between the inauguration of the end through the death and resurrection of Jesus with the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit and the final consummation when God will be all in all.⁶⁴ He opines further that the basic verb chosen to describe the temporary transitory nature of the *charismata* is an eschatological one used elsewhere in the letter to refer to the "passing away" of what belongs merely to the present age.⁶⁵ This choice of verb which recurs in verse 10 is already the indicator that the

⁶⁰ Robertson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 286.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Fee, 643.

⁶³ F W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: W m. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 208.

⁶⁴ Fee, 643.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

contrasts in the passage have to do with eschatology not with maturity of any kind as some scholars posit.⁶⁶ Paul says tongue and prophecy shall vanish away. They shall cease when the necessity for them ended. The need for this tongue was to edify believers and thus at death or at the *parousia* their uses will cease. What affects tongue and prophecy affects all other gifts. They shall all be vanished away.

vv. 9-10 “For we know in part and we prophecy in part but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will be done away.”

Conzelmann sees the tone in verses 9-10 as apocalyptic.⁶⁷ **ἐκ μερους** (in part) refers to what is not complete or at least not complete in itself.⁶⁸ The phrase itself does not carry the connotation of temporary or relative that comes from the context and the language “now” because it belongs only to this age which is but the beginning not the completion of the end.⁶⁹

Conzelmann and Fee agree that those gifts have to do with the edification of the Church as it eagerly awaits the *parousia*. They both agree that the word perfection (το τελειον ερχομα) points to the *parousia* and not maturity in this context.⁷⁰ It has to do with the *eschaton*⁷¹ and not some form of maturity in this

⁶⁶ Ibid., 644.

⁶⁷ Conzelmann, 255.

⁶⁸ Fee, 646.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Conzelmann, 226.

⁷¹ Fee, 646.

present age.⁷² Fee goes further to say that at the coming of Christ the final purpose of God's saving work in Christ will have been consummated and at that point, these gifts now necessary for building up the Church would disappear because the complete would have come.⁷³ Robertson notes that "this passage does not mean that charismata will cease in this life because they are useful for building the body of Christ but what Paul asserts is that these things i.e. *charismata* will have no use when completeness is revealed and therefore they are to be exercised in love.⁷⁴ In Paul's mind agaph is the real thing and not gifts so, for the community to progress every member of the community should walk in love towards their neighbor and to those outside.

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN AFRICA: THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

Introduction

Nigeria is the largest nation in black Africa. It has the largest concentration of black people in the world. It has a land of 924, 000 square kilometers. It is divided into thirty-six states with the federal capital territory at Abuja. The population is currently estimated to be 140million, made up of over 400 people groups speaking over 500 different languages. Since independence, English remains the lingua franca. Other languages that compete among themselves for supremacy are Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbo. In Nigeria, religious beliefs are diverse and most profound. About 15% of the entire population adheres to traditional religion. Islam has about 36% of the entire population. Christianity claims a

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Robertson, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, 287.

national followership of about 42%.⁷⁵ The recent Statistical survey reports put the statistics as follows:

Christianity 48.2%

Islam 50.4%

Others 1.4%

Using this statistic as a projection for 2011 was computed as follows: Christianity 48.7; Islam 49.2; Others as 2.1%

The proportion of the Nigeria population that is Christian is divided among 140 denominations which predominantly are in the southern and middle belt regions of the nation. There are also a growing number of indigenous independent churches such as the *Aladura*, Celestial church and the Cherubim and Seraphim church.⁷⁶ In the North, Islam lays claim to the domination of the region and also claims a significant followership of the faithful in recent times.⁷⁷ The Government tends to tilt in favour of them.

Except for the civil war which dominated the middle sixties and early seventies in Nigeria, there is no other religious confrontation until 1980. The policy of the colonial masters hinged on a foundation for inter-religious hostility in Nigeria. Someone once said “if anybody had said that religion would become an issue in Nigeria I would have said Nonsense! Muslims and Christians have lived together for years; husbands being Christians, wives being Muslim or the other way round.”⁷⁸ Nigeria of the sixties lived

⁷⁵ 1983 Census collated from the Federal Ministry of Statistic, Lagos.

⁷⁶ Ayegboyin and Ishola *African Indigenous Religious Movement: Historical Perspectives*. (Lagos: Greater Height Publishers, 1993), 29.

⁷⁷ Ayegboyin and Ishola, 29-30.

⁷⁸ Tai Solarin’s comment was carried by the Nigerian Tribute on April 23, 1988. Ohi Alegbe, “Before Nigeria Burns” *Africa Concord: Special Edition*, 4 No. 11 5 February 1990): 31

together in harmony, hardly one finds a family where Christians and Muslim and even traditional worshippers were not intermarried. In those days religion was not a factor but shortly after the civil war, in spite of Gowon's post war economic and political agendas of reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation⁷⁹ on the administrative canvas, religion was becoming tenuous between Christians and Muslims so much so that it was threatening to lead the nation into the brink of bloodshed and collapse.

That the two religions preach peace has become a mere statement devoid of honest meaning and commitment. The earliest adherents of both Christianity and Islam soon discovered that they were not at peace with their own kith and kin.⁸⁰ Christians particularly soon discovered that their own people were not only exposed to public ridicule alone but in addition they were persecuted to no end.⁸¹ But as years gone by and the existence of Christianity and Islam became a force to be reckoned with the adherent of the two religions became suspect of each other. The government being dominated by the northerners supported the suppression and marginalization of Christians in every stratum of the society. Attempt by the Christians to protest this injustice was counteracted by religious violence. One of the prominent Islamic leaders once said "if Christians do not accept Muslims as their leader, we have to divide this country ... once you are a Muslim you cannot accept or choose a non-Muslim to be your leader."⁸²

This is the situation in Nigeria.

⁷⁹ Isawa Elagwu Gowon: *The Biography of a Soldier-Statement* (Ibadan: West Books Publishers, 1986), 140-152.

⁸⁰ A.O Olademo "Theological Response to Religious Crises in Nigeria." A Paper Presented at the Post Graduate Fellowship of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho on May 15, 2011.

⁸¹ M. F. Akangbe. "Religious Crises in Nigeria: A Historical Survey From 1980-2009" A Paper Presented at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary on Feb 25, 2010.

⁸² Olademo



Political Map of Nigeria.⁸³

⁸³ <http://www.mapsofworld.com/nigeria/nigeria-political-map.html> This Map shows the 36 states of Nigeria. In the middle of the map is Abuja which is the capital of Nigeria. The capital was moved from Lagos, which is the biggest commercial city to Abuja because Abuja is more centrally located. Two rivers flow through the middle of the country and meet together in Lokoja. These are River Niger and River Benue. The places above the rivers are

II. OVERVIEW OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISIS FROM 1980-TO 2011

As an eye –witness to the crises that have bedeviled the nation since 1980, the incessant destruction of lives and property have caused a set back to the progress of the nation since the time religious riot began to raise its ugly head in the nation. Between 1980 and 1988 there were more than six religious conflicts which occurred as either an outgrowth of internal riot among the different Islamic sects or outright disturbances between Muslim fundamentalist and Christians in the Northern part of the country.⁸⁴ The properties and lives that have been destroyed by the religious fanatic cannot be quantified. It is overwhelming. There are many reasons that have been attributed to this monster that has claimed lives of innocent people or maimed them. These crises usually started as mere disagreement borne out of inability to accept or respect each other’s opinion, the fall out usually snowballing into destruction of lives and property. For example in 2002, a reporter for a popular Nigerian newspaper, *This Day* wrote an article suggesting that the Muslims should stop protesting against Nigeria hosting Miss World contest in Kaduna because if the Prophet Mohammed was still alive he *would probably have chosen a wife* from among the contestants. This statement which was a comment from a reporter not representing the Christian faith and from a newspaper that is neither Christian nor represents Christian theology, ignited a

called “North” and those below the rivers are considered to be the “South.” There are also certain regions which are neither in the North nor South and these are called, the Middle Belt.

⁸⁴ Olademo

wave of violence between Christians and Muslims, leading to a loss of over 200 lives.⁸⁵

Olademo in *Theological response to religious crises in Africa* presented a table of crises between 1999 to date (See appendix 2).

Religious fanaticism, hatred and intolerance have been accounted for 80% of religious crisis in Nigeria.⁸⁶ People are up in arms against their fellow brethren simply because of disagreement in religious views. This development was first noticed in Kano in 1980 when Mohammed Marwa took up arms against his fellow Muslim brothers to correct their erroneous way of worshipping Allah. This campaign left many people dead and properties worth millions destroyed. In March 1897 seven years after another religious crisis took place in Kafanchan where some misguided Muslim youths in swift response to the testimony of one Rev. Abubakar Bello, a Christian convert in the fellowship of Christians at the federal college of Education unleashed terror on the Christian community on the allegation of Bellow extolling the virtues of Jesus at the detriment of Mohammed. The crisis claimed no fewer than 25 lives while several others were injured and several churches and three mosques including many vehicles were destroyed in the ensuing crisis.

Poverty, mass unemployment and inability of the government to remain secular have also been accounted for perennial religious crisis in Nigeria. The recent bombings in Jos, Bauchi and Maiduguri and the recent bombings of the Nigerian Police Force Headquarters and the United Nations Headquarters in Nigeria are few

⁸⁵ Irit Back, "Muslims and Christians in Nigeria: Attitudes towards the United States from a Post-September 11th Perspective", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. Vol.24.1 (2004), 214.

⁸⁶ Olademo

examples of the monumental nature these religious terror attack has turned to in recent times (See the photograph). I need to also bring to our notice the recent reformation that is going on in North Africa especially in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia and also in the middle East in Syria, Bahrain and Yemen. This perennial religious unrest have had direct effect on the socio-economic life of the citizen.

The religious conflict in Nigeria has assumed a new dimension in the last three years. The abysmal rise in the level of religious fundamentalism and extreme religious intolerance resulting into numerous cases of religious violence.⁸⁷ Bishop Kukah notes that religious crises pose serious threat to the stability of the Nation.⁸⁸ Much disturbing is the fact of utter disregard for human life with attendant killings and spilling of human blood through spears, sword, daggers and guns. Sadly, there seems to be approval by certain segment of the religious sphere of wanton destruction of life and maiming of fellow humans under the guise that there will be rewards in heaven for the number of people killed during the religious violence on earth.⁸⁹

IMPLICATION FOR RELIGIOUS PEACE AND HARMONY IN NIGERIA

The atmosphere in Nigeria does not support the kind of fellowship Paul is longing for. Paul wanted love to reign among brethren, he wanted peace and harmony so that tribes and other ethnic groups might co-habit peacefully. The traditional African setting is a

⁸⁷ Olademo

⁸⁸ Olademo

⁸⁹ Olademo

communal setting where families lived together and have so many things to do in common. The contemporary individualistic tendencies among the people are foreign to the Africans.⁹⁰ In Africa especially in Nigerian society whatever experience a family is going through is shared by many others in corporate sympathy. The late Leopold Senghor of Senegal could boast of the Negroes as possessing higher qualities of love, brotherhood and dialogue than other races in the world.⁹¹ In the traditional setting, it is a misnomer to fight against one another or to cheat another person talk less of shedding innocent blood. Blood shedding is a taboo and would not be excused by the society. Tradition forbids the shedding of innocent blood; it is widely believed that whosoever that shed innocent blood will be killed by the sword.⁹² Mbiti observes that in African setting love is usually demonstrated in practical terms through sharing of meal and eating together in the same bowl.⁹³ This is in principle a replica of love feast as practiced in the Graeco-Roman world.

Asaju notes that

The vital thrust of the foregoing is that a proper understanding, appreciation of and adherence of Paul's teachings of agape by Nigerian Christians as it relates to peaceful co-existence with people of different or varied callings could help in restoring to Nigeria communities the peaceful and harmonious community lifestyles for which they were known and praised.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Olademo

⁹¹ Asaju, 51

⁹² Yemi Elebuibo Interview on 95.5 FM October 2, 2008

⁹³ Mbiti 45

⁹⁴ Asaju 52

Paul indicates that the love of God for man is unconditional; therefore Christians should exhibit the same love towards others regardless of their religion and creed. Roman 13:8 says owe no man anything except to love. The only obligation one holds against is neighbor is love. No matter the charismatic gifts one may exhibit or displayed, if it is done in love amounts to exercise in futility. The most excellent way to exercise charismata is love. Love must be the governing principle of all spiritual manifestations and religious activities. Therefore, until agape is imbibed in to the religious culture of the people peace will continue to elude them. One must follow the way of love and eagerly desire peace in order to help, comfort and bless others.

Those whose life are filled with religious activities yet lack Christ- like love and righteousness are nothing in God's sight. In God's judgment their spirituality and profession of faith are void and empty and they have no place in God's kingdom. What is essential for every true Christian is love expressed through an ethics that does no harm to others and perseveres in loyalty to Christ and his word. One should remember that at the end of the age all spiritual manifestations would cease. That time is desirable as "when perfection comes" (v. 10) when the believers' knowledge and character become perfect in

eternity. Until then the presence of the Holy Spirit is vital in lives and churches. Above all, the greatest thing everyone should desire is love. God exalts Christ like love more than religion, ministry, power, faith or any other things. The greatest people in God's Kingdom are those who are great in inward godliness and love for God and humanity, not those who are greatest in outward accomplishments. God's love poured out within our hearts is always greater than anything else. Let us live in love and let love be the great motivating factor for doing God's service and for bringing every religious group together.

CONCLUSION

From Paul's explanation of the subject of love, one notice that love is not fulfilled only by positive commands but also by negative ones. In Romans 13:8 he says, "Let no debt remain outstanding but to love one another for he who loves has fulfilled the law. For the whole law is fulfilled just in one sentence, love your neighbours as yourself." Throughout Paul's teaching, he emphasizes on the need for all Christians to love themselves. Therefore, if the society will progress today, there must be genuine love for one another. Religious leaders must desist from preaching anything that will bring hatred, jealousy, divisions, ethnic rivalry and tribalism into the society, so that people can live in peace, harmony and tranquility among themselves. Religious leaders must continue in their selfless worship and service to God and humanity and encourage their adherent to do the same. When the attitude of every one portrays love for God and for one another the result will be that all adherent of religions will be more committed to their God, therefore peace, harmony and progress will prevail in our society. Then the ultimate concern of Paul for in the society will be actualized.

An attempt has been made in this paper to examine Paul's concept of agape in 1 Cor. 13:1-10. The paper provided an exegesis of the chapter in question and a brief overview of

ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. The paper identifies that except agape is imbibed by all religious adherence be it Christians and Muslim it will be difficult to achieve a lasting peace in the nation and continent in general. All religions must imbibe agape culture if not others imbibing it would be at the receiving end therefore while these paper recognized the complexity of religious crisis and the responses they elicit, I wish to advocate that Christians should apply wisdom within the sphere of agape in all situations

RECOMMENDATIONS

The followings are recommendations for religious peace and harmony in Nigeria

1. Unification theology which teaches that all religions are essentially the same and should be syncretized is equally unhelpful in this regard. Thus Asaju notes that the road towards religious peace and harmony is therefore basically sociological rather than religious or spiritual. It is dependent on Nigerian's recognizing the equal rights of fellow Nigerians in the society as stipulated by the constitution.
2. The truth of each religion may be preached by their respective propagators without such a compromise that can lead to syncretism, complacency and apostasy. In this regard, an ideal perspective in the current debate on inter-Religious harmony in Nigeria should be for such religion to teach their truths absolutely but should be disciplined and understanding enough to allow for the freedom of adherents of other religions to propagate in the same way without clashes or questioning.
3. The culture of retaliation and revenge should be replace with Paul's injunction in Romans 12:17-21 which says:

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto

wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Violence will continue to beget violent therefore, all religious groups should value life and desist from retaliating any evil against them.

4. A loving spiritual approach should also be adopted. Divine love is uncaused and unselfish. Love between people of different religions could prohibit their antagonizing or hurting each other. Rather they could be challenged to cooperate for the collective good of all. This free spirit would not give room for unhealthy competition and rivalry of religions for dominance over the others. It is noteworthy however that this ideal may appear utopian and may not be taken for granted especially in contemporary Nigeria where the inter-religious gap is widening with time.
5. The dialogue of life ⁹⁵ is an important tool in addressing the Nigerian situation. This form of dialogue is about loving-relationships. Muslims and Christians engaging freely in social interactions is an important form of dialogue. This form of dialogue has been very successful in the South-West of Nigeria where some households are comprised of Muslims and Christians. We learned to tolerate each other and over time, we never looked upon each other with suspicion. We saw in ourselves not people with religious differences but people who share a common identity as Nigerians and a common belief in a Supreme Being, Olodumare, Chukwu or Allah or God.

⁹⁵ Dialogue and Proclamation (www.vatican.va, 1991), 42

This form of dialogue between the Muslims and the Christians is fundamental to the peaceful coexistence of both religions in the country. This is because this dialogue takes place in the grassroots' level. Our proposal is that the government of Nigeria as well as religious organizations and non-profit organizations interested in Muslim – Christian relations should establish or sponsor social programs that will bring Muslims and Christians together. For example, establishing a community gym or amusement park would draw both Muslims and Christians together as they come to share the facilities.

6. Given the deplorable state of Nigeria, Muslims and Christians have opportunities to engage in programs that will alleviate poverty, advance the freedom of the citizens of the country. The dialogue of action is an important means of curbing religious violence in Nigeria. Both Islam and Christianity preach peace, social justice, and charity. These are areas where both groups can join forces to fight a common goal. By doing this, the people are informally in dialogue. This is because the workers have informal conversations with each other on the job and during breaks. Our proposal is that Nigerian Muslim and Christian groups should organize mission trips in which young people from both faiths can work in a specific place for at least one week helping the poor. Also, both religious groups can establish social institutions that cater for the needs of both Muslims and Christians. All these can be achieved if *agaph* is put into practice.

7. The theological exchange form of dialogue is necessary in Nigeria. In this form of dialogue, scholars and thinkers gather to compare and discuss the finer points of their intellectual traditions, and the conversation generally proceeds in fairly abstract theoretical terms.⁹⁶ It is not apparent that any of such dialogues is already going on in Nigeria. It is not obvious from our research that the three Nigerian groups involved in Muslim – Christian relations, earlier mentioned in this essay, are engaging in theological discussions. Engaging in theological discussions is important because it is only then we begin to chisel and present our doctrinal teachings in ways that would not be offensive to the dialogue partner. Our proposal here is that the Islamic Council of Nigeria and the Christian Association of Nigeria should appoint eminent scholars from both traditions and form a group, Nigerian Muslim – Christian Dialogue Commission (NMCDD).
8. In both the Muslim and Christian tradition, there exists a deep spiritual heritage. Dialogue can exist at this level. Muslims and Christians can share their religious and mystical experiences with each other. Muslims can learn from Christians as well as Christians learning from Muslims. This will help to clarify the false positions held by both Nigerian Muslims and Christians: the Muslims in Nigeria would say Christians bow and worship images; and Christians accuse the Muslims of bowing and worshipping a stone. Our

⁹⁶ Charles B. Jones, *The View from Mars Hill: Christianity in the Landscape of World Religions* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2005), 168.

proposal is that, both Muslims and Christians should be open to receive each other in their places of worship.

9. Muslim – Christian relations in Nigeria is a very complex set of relations given the many Islamic and Christian sects in Nigeria. The history of the country as well as the history of the religious groups is complicated. This work is in no way exhaustive but a reflection on some of the major events in the history as well as the major issues involved in a discussion of Muslim – Christian relations in Nigeria. As Muslims and Christians continue dialogue towards peaceful coexistence in Nigeria, these words from my former professor of Islam and a worldwide Islamic scholar, Joseph Kenny are very important to keep in mind: In interreligious relations we need two eyes: one with the wisdom of the serpent to know that there are enemies of peace, tolerance and religious freedom, the other with the simplicity of the dove, recognizing the good will and commitment to peace and progress within both the Muslim and the Christian folds.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Joseph Kenny. “Interreligious Dialogue in Nigeria: Personal Reminiscences of 40 Years”, in, Anthony A. Akinwale (ed.), *All that they had to live on. Essays in honor of Archbishop John Onaiyekan and Msgr. John Aniagwu*, (Ibadan: The Michael J. Dempsey Center for Religious and Social Research, 2004), 191.

APPENDIX ONE**A DIARY OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CLASHES IN NIGERIA SINCE
1980-2011**

S/N	TOWN	STATE	DATE	NATURE OF VIOLENCE
1.	Kano	Kano	1980	Maitatsine riot

				Intra-religious crisis
2.	Maiduguri Balin kutu	Borno	1982	Muslim/Christian crisis
3.	Kaduna Tundunwada	Kaduna	1983	Muslim/ Christian crisis
4.	Yola	Gongola	1984	
5.	Kafachan	Kaduna	March 6-10 1987	Muslim/Christian crisis
6.	Kafachan	Kaduna	March 6-10, 1987	Spill over ofKafachan crisis
7.	Zaria/Katsina Funtua Kaduna	Kaduna	March 12, 1987	Spill over of kafachan crisis
8.	Kaduna	Kaduna	March 1988	Muslim/Christian riot at Kaduna Polytechnic
9.	Bauchi	Bauchi	June 1990	Muslim/Christian riot over place of worship
10.	Bauchi	Bauchi	April 2, 1991	Demonstration

11.	Tafawa-Balewa	Bauchi	April 19-26, 1991	Sayawa-Fulani riot
12.	Toro-Ninji	Bauchi	April 22-26 1991	Muslim- Christian riot
13.	Zango-Kataf	Kaduna	May 6, 1991	Kataf-Hausa riot
14.	Kano	Kano	October 14, 1991	Muslim-Youth riot against Reinhard Bonnke's Crusade in Kano
15.	Jalingo	Taraba	March 1992	Jukun /Hausa riot Guardian Aug 9, 1992
16.	Ife/Modakeke	Osun	June 1999	Ethnic clashes
17.	Imosan	Osun	Nov 9, 1999	Hausa/Fulani Muslims vs Cult members. It started as ethnic clash and ended up in a religious clash
18.	Warri	Delta	Nov 11. 1999	Ethnic clash

				between Itsekiri and Urhobo
19	Ishaga/Onipaanu Ikorodu	Lagos	Nov 27, 1999	Hausa/Fulani Muslims vs Yoruba Tribe and Christians
20.	Ilorin/offa	Kwara	Dec 9, 1999	Hausa/Fulani Muslims vs Vhristians
21.	Abia/Umuahia	Abia	Feb 28, 2000	Reprisal violence on Hausa-Fulani Muslims
22.	Port Harcourt	Rivers	March 18, 2000	Eleme
23.	Katsina	Katsina	April 7, 2001	Religious clashes
24.	Jos	Plateau	Dec 29, 2001	
25.	Kaduna	Kaduna	Nov 22, 2002	Muslim vs Christians Protest over Miss world Beauty competition
26.	Abuja	FCT	Nov 23, 2002	Muslim vs

				Christian over an offensive publication in the Newspaper
27.	Kano	Kano	Dec, 2004	Muslim vs Christians riot over Miss world beauty competition
28.	Onitsha	Anambra	22 Feb, 2006	Reprisal attack on Muslim community in Onitsha
29.	Jos	Plateau	28 Nov 2008	Muslim vs Christian
30.	Maiduguri	Borno	April 2010	Boko Haram
31	Katsina, Kaduna, Bauchi and other major towns in the north	Katsina	April 2011	Electoral violence turned religious

32	Jos	Plateau	June, 2011	Bomb Blast
33	Jos	Plateau	August 2011	Berom Youth attack Muslims
34	Damaturu	Yobe	November 4, 2011	Boko Haram Bomb Blast that left 90 people dead and several people injured.
35	Maiduguri	Bornu	November 5, 2011	Boko Haram killed 25 people and burn't down a block industry

APPENDIX TWO

A PICTURE DIARY OF RECENT RELIGIOUS RIOT IN NIGERIA



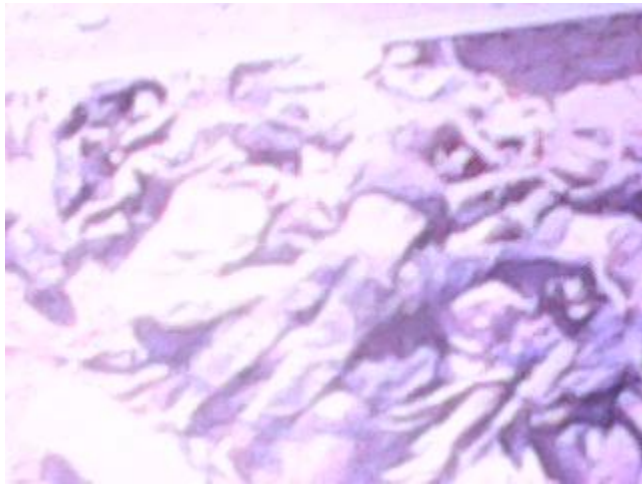


MOHAMMED YUSUF THE LATE BOKO HARAM LEADER ARRESTED BY THE SECURITY OUTFIT BEFORE HE WAS KILLED



UNITED NATION BUILDING RAZED DOWN

CHARRED BODIES OF THE VICTIMS OF BOMB BLAST IN ABUJA





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