Follow After Peace with All Men" (Hebrews 12:14) in Light of Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria

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Abstract : Peaceful co-existence is essential in promoting the development and growth of societies.However, this has become a mirage in Nigeria because of continuous unresolved social, economic and religious menace within the Nigerian society. Scholars have treated the significant role of Christian education and religions in achieving peace and social integration in Nigeria through its teaching on peace, reconciliation, forgiveness, love and prayer. Nevertheless, these scholars have not paid attention to the "follow peace with all men assertion of Hebrews 12:14 in light of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper exegetically analyse the "follow peace with all men" assertion of Hebrews 12:14 in light of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. The paper employed the grammatico-historical method of biblical exegesis through diachronic approach. The study revealed that there are many conducts antithetical to peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. The word "εἰρηνηνδιωκετε" (seek peace) with all men is without any exception. Thus, the call for Nigerians to build up a peaceful relationship with one another that disregards social, economic and religious differences. All parochial and self-centered thoughts should be discarded for peaceful co-existence.

Keywords: Conflict, dialogue, Nigeria, peace, peaceful co-existence

Introduction

Peace is an indispensable foundation of the harmonious existence of any healthy community. Nearly all human beings want peace and mutual coexistence in their communities. There must be peace, and harmonious relationships amongst the people and groups that make up a country to achieve meaningful development. Peaceful co-existence is an essential factor in the promotion of the development and growth of societies. Peace is an action that breaks down social barriers, creates harmony, and promotes social and economic stability and national unity. Nigeria is made up of people

of diverse religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, one may not be surprised that it is a pluralistic country. Sequel to this, a manipulator tends to cash in on the sensitive nature of religion, culture and ethnicity to create confusion and disrupt the peace in the society by promoting violence and war. The daily occurrence of crisis and conflict in every nook and cranny of Nigeria makes one feel that the word peace is a mirage in Nigeria. There continue to be reports of daily occurrence of conflicts, insecurity and violence in every nook and cranny of the Nigerian society. Lives are being lost, resources are being wasted and the youths are finding solace in migrating to other nations through the "Japa" syndrome (Okunade and Awosusi, 2023).

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society, affected by outlooks, backgrounds, religion and other cultural norms are different. This is hoped to encourage peaceful co-existence and ensure that every Nigerian sees one another as brothers who have been placed together under one God to enjoy a good life under one entity. But this code has not been accepted and practised to the fullest as enshrined in the constitution. This then forms the basis of the negation of peaceful co-existence. Therefore, Christian education has played a significant role in the past in achieving peace and social integration and still occupies a significant place in achieving stability in the nation through its teachings on peace, reconciliation, forgiveness, love and prayer (Reni, 2023). Research made by Nkem argues that peaceful co-existence and national unity can only be achieved in Nigeria if sanctity of life, love, respect for human values and dignity, hospitality, contentment, kindness, patience and self-control taught by religions, are held by all citizens (Nkem, 2022). However, the aforementioned studies have not sufficiently explored the command to "follow peace with all men" (Hebrews 12:14) in light of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper exegetically analyses the "follow peace with all men" assertion of Hebrews 12:14 in light of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. The aim is to examine the relevance and application of this verse in promoting peaceful relationships and co-existence within Nigerian society. With Nigeria's diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural landscape, the article delves into the significance of fostering peace, understanding, and mutual respect among individuals and communities to build a harmonious society.

This study guides Christian leaders, theological educators, and individual Christians in responding to the issue of peace in contemporary society. It helpsto educate Christians about the biblical andcontemporary view of peace. It aids in fostering the understanding of better relationships amongst people for a peaceful co-existence in Nigerian society. To achieve these tasks, the paper employs the grammatico-historical method of biblical exegesis through a diachronic approach to ascertain the meaning of significant Greek vocabularies used in Hebrews 12:14 which are essential for understanding the passage. It attempts to unravel the intended meaning of the passage in the context of his original readers. Contextually, the study is restricted to exploring

"follow peace with all men" (Hebrews 12:14) in light of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. To achieve the aims the paper does the following: (i) General Overview of the State of Peace in Contemporary Nigeria, (ii) aGrammatico-HistoricalAnalysis of Hebrews 12:14 in Relation to the Concept of Peace, (iii) The Command to Earnestly Seek After Peace, The "Follow After Peace with All Men" Assertion in Hebrews 12:14 and Achieving Peaceful Co-existence in Contemporary Nigeria, (iv) Recommendations and (v) Conclusion

General Overview of the State of Peace in Contemporary Nigeria

Nigeria as a nation-state place so much premium on acceptable codes of behaviour that can help in achieving good governance, industry, political participation and better life for her citizens. Most of all is the achievement of peace and how this peace can help in bringing the various ethnic groups together in peace and harmony for the overall development of Nigeria (Bature, 2018). The 1999 constitution (as amended) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which is the Supreme legal code of conduct document for her citizens has outlined codes that must be adhered to and practised for a peaceful co-existence. Chapter two, section 24 talks of acceptable national ethics, Discipline, Integrity, Dignity of Labour, Social Justice, Religious Tolerance, Self-reliance and Patriotism. Also, section 17 (1) of the same chapter states that the state order is founded on ideals of Freedom, Equality and Justice (1999 Constitution (as amended)). However, this code has not been accepted and practised to the fullest as enshrined in the constitution (Maya, 2022). This then forms the basis of the negation of peaceful co-existence.

Looking at the above, it can be succinctly asserted that Nigeria has identified codes that help in managing the Nigerian society to achieve the desired peace in a multi-ethnic society where outlooks, backgrounds, religions and other cultural norms are different. This is hoped to encourage peaceful co-existence and ensure that every Nigerian see the other as brother who has been placed together under one God to enjoy good life together under one entity. What is paramount in these accepted codes help in managing and enforcing good conduct in the Nigerian society. Maya (2022) opines that "as Africans, it is believed that what is accepted is morally good and can benefit the society; most especially in peace building across Nigeria." Gbenda (2006) corroborates that "what is morally good is that which benefits a human being, it is decent, it brings dignity, respect, contentment, prosperity, joy to man and the community." This therefore is the gamut (extent) of Nigeria struggle for a peaceful co-existence in multi-ethnic Nigeria.

Motunrayo (2012) states that meaningful development cannot be achieved in an atmosphere of resentment and chaos. Societies devastated by war, conflict and civil strife are therefore more likely to experience lagging and stagnation than progress and development. It can only be achieved when people live together peacefully, regardless of their religious beliefs. The features and importance of peace are hereby discussed. Peace

is fundamental to community development, personal growth and national survival. It promotes productivity and a meaningful life. Peace promotes social stability and sustainability. Peace enhances the quality of life. It is the fabric of the society, because the survival of individuals depends on it. Peaceful co-existence is necessary because people need each other to succeed in life. Peace makes people act well, argue well, and function well. It promotes health and longevity (Nkem, 2022).

It is good to live together in harmony because it is an essential element of human life, arising from both the mind and the spirit. This allows one to understand society better, reach consensus, solve problems more easily, and move forward together (Sabater, 2020). To ensure harmonious co-existence, an agreement is needed, a word of goodwill and a peace treaty which requires human commitment and willpower (Rojas 2019). The issues related to the lack of peaceful co-existence are anxiety and loss of life, stagnation and lack of progress, disorder and lack of discipline, administrative violations, disagreements and misunderstandings, tribalism, prejudice and hatred (Tansi, 2020).

Nigerians have worked toward achieving this either covertly or overtly. In a bid for citizens to live well, some may be morally good citizens while others may be bad, morally (Dzurgba, 2016). It then connotes that a good number of citizens have the country at heart and work towards achieving good for peace to reign. Others are those that work for a chaotic Nigeria where there should be no peace; explaining the fact that peace is good for those who want it and war for those who want it. Therefore, there are many conduct antithetical to peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. These are corruption, the nature of the Nigerian state, ethnicity, religious conflicts, criminality, proliferation of violence and so on. All these are the postulations of Dzurgba. Agule (2006) also avers that social injustice is the challenge for a peaceful Nigeria. Social injustice to him is in various forms such as social, political, economic profligacy, ethnic parochialism, bribery and corruption, social unrest and insecurity, moral decadence, gender inequality and so on. All these have been the bane of peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

One can adduce that the character and nature of the Nigerian state is that of mistrust right from the colonial days. The colonial masters did not trust a good section of Nigerian ethnicities. By so doing, they militarised the people even during the colonial period and handed over a militarised society to the people. The colonisers established a colonial government in Nigeria as an apparatus of violent repression to perpetually subjugate, dominate and exploit the land economically and otherwise. To achieve this purpose, arbitrary powers were used to control the colonial enclaves. The violent nature of colonial rule put it on a permanent state of war against the people of Nigeria (Tor-Agbidye, 2012). Ethnic inclination, recognition, chauvinism and parochialism have continued to work against peaceful co-existence in Nigeria (Ngbea, 2022). It is no more news to assert that Nigeria, as a creation of colonization has been hedged together with

many ethnic groups. With the advent of colonization, some ethnic groups in Nigeria were seen to be superior in their organisational structures and were adopted as such by the colonial masters. They failed to make in in-depth study of the Nigerian people, hence encouraging ethnic tension.

Ethnicity has caused a lot of unrest and suspicion to the point that each and every ethnic group feels marginalized by the other (Shishima, 2022). Others who are advantaged make a mockery of others by shouting out that they are marginalized, whereas they are the one marginalizing especially when they are in control of the government. Parochialism has affected the Nigerian psyche and has caused ethnic tension that affects peaceful co-existence (Nkem, 2022). Quoting Alani, Agule expounds that throughout the country's history, some ethnic groups have been seriously marginalised, exploited and suppressed by the major ethnic groups, and the interface has been ethnic antagonism and separatist agitations (Agule, 2006). Ethnicity which leads to ethnic chauvinism and parochialism can degenerate to ethnic feelings of superiority thereby instituting the culture of ethnic violence as a result of which peaceful co-existence is trampled upon.

Chia quotes Iman (2004:17) as he states that ethnicity produces ethnic violence as its culminating stage where it causes havoc to the peace of the society such as politics, illiteracy, ignorance, prejudice, suspicion, hatred, discrimination, intolerance, fanaticism, selfishness, greed, repression, corruption, lawlessness, bigotry, narrow-mindedness, parochial interest and indiscipline are some of the sources of ethnic violence (Chia, 2011). These and many more can affect the peaceful co-existence of Nigeria's multi-ethnic society if allowed to flourish.Religion has continued to play both positive and negative roles to Nigerian society, especially in the peace process and building. Many of these religious bodies have peace as a central point in their teachings. African religion has been passive in its drive to achieving life issues as far as regards multi-ethnic relations. The African Traditional Religions have never been adventurous in their conversion and propagation approach like Christianity and Islam. In this context, religious violence and conflict appear to be the exclusive reserve of Christianity and Islam. One then asks: if these two religions claim peace as their focal point to gain salvation, what then makes them engage in violent acts that usually break the peaceful fabric of Nigeria's existence? The answer is what is preached is not what is practiced in all spheres of life (Dzurgba, 2016).

The security situation in Nigeria today, has been on a precarious position. The polity has housed all manner of social unrest. According to Nkem, we are witnesses to military coups and counter coups since independence which had always ted to uprisings that most often ended in bloodsheds or in disrupting the governing of the country. Suffice it to say that outside of the civil war, there are a lot of ethnic and religious

insurrections with loss of lives and property. In most cases, the evolution of these conflicts is from simple arguments, which culminate into religious, communal or ethnic dimensions (Nkem, 2022). This is an ugly trend that is a major bane in the achievement of a peaceful and just Nigerian society.

A Grammatico-Historical Analysis of Hebrews 12:14 in Relation to the Concept of Peace

Literary and Historical Context of Hebrews 12:14

Larry and Lawrence posited that the author of Hebrews demonstrated the superiority of Jesus over the Old Testament system, which foreshadowed His ministry. Jesus is superior as a revealer of God. Jesus' priesthood is far superior to the priesthood of the Old Testament, just as the covenant. He makes his superior to the Old Law Covenant which came through Moses. And Jesus has offered a superior sacrifice- Himself- which purifies the worshiper and deals once for all with sin (Larry and Lawrence, 1987). This book is a theological letter written to a Jewish Christian audience to encourage them in their faith and it highlights the supremacy of Christ and the continuity between the Old and New Covenants (Gundry, 2012). The book has excellent theological and purposeful themes. Chapter 12 follows a discourse on God's discipline and the need for endurance and perseverance in the face of trials and challenges. The passage aligns with the overarching themes of the book, such as Christ's mediation and the importance of faith. Thus, in Hebrews 12:14, God enlists two (2) yardsticks (follow peace and live in holiness) which are sacrosanct to seeing him and one of them (live in peace) is the subject of discussion in this article.

The Text

ειρηνην διωκετε μετα παντων και τον αγιασμον ου χωρις ουδεις οψεται τον κυριον (Heb. 12:14)Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14 NIV)

Textual Analysis of Hebrews 12:14

The word Εἰρήνην(noun accusative feminine singular common from εἰρήνη) primarily means peace, but could be synonymously used as harmony, tranquility, health, and welfare(Guthrie, 1970). It is the expectation of God that people live, relate, involve and connect symbiotically with one another in an atmosphere of serenity, collectedness, trustworthiness, and godly co-habitation as there are lot of verses in the bible that say that God dislikes otherwise (Baker, 2008). The word διώκετε(verb imperative present active 2nd person plural) is from διώκω. Amongst other meanings of the word

dioko(persecute, pursue, seek after) which is the root word for Diokete (you pursue). The author of the text made it known with the employment of this word (Diokete) that peace is not going to be achieved on the easy platter but has to be stricken for. It is imperative. It is a must (Allen, 1972). Almost all the communities of the world are heterogeneous in one way or the other. Therefore, the achievement and implementation of peace and its policies are not just going to be a walk over in any gathering. It calls for utmost dedication, sheer determination, impeccable understanding and unadulterated godliness to achieve (Desilva, 2004).

The wordπάντων(adjective indefinite genitive masculine plural no degree from πᾶς) means all, every, each and absolute. It is an adjective used to qualify the word implied men (people). It is the intention of the author to inform his targeted audience that the Lord wants his people to build up a peaceful relationship with one another that disregards tribal sentiment, religious differences, academic inequality, political gulf and societal imbalances. It must involve all men without reservations and must be enshrined by all men across all boards (Douglas, 1988). Maintaining peaceful co-existence with all people gives one unfettered latitude to be connected and accessible to seeing the Creator. So also, by implication, he will see and be with him hereafter.

The Command to Earnestly Seek After Peace

Mounce (2006) explains the word εἰρήνη (eirēnē), as peace, harmony, tranquility; in certain contexts, seen in the OT concept of the Shalom, that is., welfare, health (Matthew 10:34; Mark 5:34; John 14:27; 16:33; 20:19, 21; Romans 1:7; 5:1; 15:33; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 2:14; Philippians 4:7, 9; Colossians 3:15; Romans 10:15), freedom from worry (Galatians 5:22). Werner Foerster (1964) says that the Old Testament word shalom was used in both greetings (Genesis. 42:23; Judges 6:23; Isaiah 57:19) and farewells (Exodus 14:18; Numbers 6:26; Judges 18:6; I Samuel 20:42; 2 Kings 5:19). It was meant to act as a blessing on whom it was spoken. Several passages in the Old Testament likewise denote shalom as a relationship rather than a state (Genesis. 34:21; Judges 4:17; I Kings 5:4, 26; I Chronicles 12:18) and it is an element in eschatological expectation- the expectation of a final state of eternal peace. Furthermore, Beck and Brown say that shalom's usage in the Old Testament is often indicative of a comprehensive kind of fulfillment or completion, indeed of a perfection in life and spirit which quite transcends any success which an individual is able to attain even under the best circumstances (Beck and Brown, 1976).

Okanlawon indicates that the biblical concept of peace (shalom; eirēnē)indicates inner satisfaction, contentment, serenity, and fulfilment contingent upon a harmonious and integrated relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This concept of peace is deeper than the English conception of peace which conjures up a passive attitude- the

absence of conflict, hostilities and violence. It is therefore suggested that to have order in our world and harmonious relationship with others, which engenders peace and security, individuals must be at peace with God and possess inward peace evidenced by satisfaction, contentment and serenity (Okanlawon, 2015).

The verse begins with a command διώκετε,a verb imperative present active meaning to run after, pursue, strive for, seek after, run, follow, press on, hasten. What does it mean to seek? To "seek" means to actively search for, pursue, or strive to find something. It involves intentional effort, curiosity, and a determined mindset. To seek peace therefore, implies a purposeful engagement in exploring and acquiring peace or state of tranquility. This highlights the active and intentional nature of pursuing peace. It implies dedication and diligence in cultivating these qualities. In the same way, Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, comment that "seeking is pursuing one goal that is, peace; do not rest until you have attained it. When spiritual life flourishes in the family circle and in the congregation, peace holds the members together" (Kistemakerand Hendriksen, 2001).

πάντων is an adjective genitive masculine plural meaning every, every kind of, all sorts of, any, all people, everyone. The command to seek peace is with all people; hostile or friendly. Westcott (1920) comments that the use of διώκετε marks the eagerness and constancy of the pursuit and πάντων (all people) must not be limited in any way. T. W. Manson rhetorically asks 'what the words all men mean? Do they include enemies? According to Jesus' teaching, the answer is yes. Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44–45). And they who are called sons of God are the peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) (Manson, 1950).

According to Ellingworth and Nida (1994), some commentators think that with everyone means "with all the members of the Christian community," as in 13.24. However, this is not what the Greek means, and there is no convincing evidence to show that the letter is addressed to a divided community. The deeper, positive meaning of peace is in the writer's mind, not just the absence of quarrelling. The word "εἰρηνηνδιωκετε" (seek peace) to give peace a chase as if in a hunt with all men is without any exception. The command is not restricted to Christian community or friendly people alone (Robertson, 1997). Louis H. Evans and Lloyd J. Ogilvie explains that this is a guideline not only for those we love, but for all people with whom we are in relation, including those we designate as enemies or opponents. The exhortation is clear throughout the Old and New Testaments. Isaiah counsels us to seek peace (1:17) through justice. The psalmist instructs us to "seek peace, pursue it!" (34:14). Jesus tells His disciples that the forgiveness of God is limited to those who in turn forgive their neighbors (Matthew 6:14)" (Evans and Ogilvie, 1985).

In the same vein, Donald Guthrie (1970) analyze "διώκετε" as a very emphatical word signifying an "earnest pursuit:" it is the eager chasing after something which flies from one, being used of hunters and hounds after game. A recurring refrain in the Old Testament as in the New is the command to live at peace with one another. David exhorts the Israelites, "Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it" (Psalms. 34:14; 1 Peter 3:11). In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul stresses the pursuit of peace twice: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (12:18) and "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace" (14:19). Peace is attained through close communion with Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6; Colossians. 3:15) (Kistemakerand Hendriksen, 2001). The Christian is to spare no effort to live amicably with all men, and no matter how contentious and unfriendly they may be, he is to strive and overtake that which seeks to flee from him (Pink, 1954). It then means that believers must not wait to be shown peace by others before they replicate it, as matter-of-fact believers are commanded to show and express peace even in a hostile environment.

The "Follow After Peace with All Men" Assertion in Hebrews 12:14 and Achieving Peaceful Co-existence in Contemporary Nigeria

The Greek word διώκετε (pursue) as explained above means to diligently and conspicuously go after peace with other people. Literally, the word means to seek after eagerly. There is an urgency to seek peace with everyone. It is one thing to keep the peace, but it is another to "purse", "seek", "follow after". This is not a passive issue but something that Christians must "pursue." For peaceful co-existence to come reality in Nigeria, there needs to be action taken. Peaceful co-existence will not be achievable in Nigeria when individuals are sitting on their hands. The main thrust of the command to "seek peace with all men" is that Christians are to seek or pursue peace with eagerness; that is, every effort should be made to achieve peaceful co-existence. The Christian is to spare no effort to live amicably with all men, and no matter how contentious and unfriendly they may be, he is to strive and overtake that which seeks to flee from him. It then means that believers must not wait to be shown peace by others before they replicate it, as matter-of-fact believers are commanded to show and express peace even in a hostile environment.

The Greek word Εἰρήνην(peace) indicates contentment. The state of contentment of the individual who possesses such peace gives no room for any external struggle with others that can create chaos and disorder in the society. It is the lack of contentment that sometimes gives rise to rivalry, competition and disorder which in turn leads to the disregard for the other human constituent of the society. Contentment is the fruit of a spiritually minded attitude (Romans 8:6), while serenity is the natural effect of letting the "God of peace" rule the human heart (I Colossians 3:15). More so, this kind of peace

positively thrives in the midst of adversity and trouble. Contentment if possessed by Nigerians will go a long way reducing bribery and corruption if not totally eradicated that is waging war against peaceful living in Nigeria.

The phrase "follow peace with all men" as exegetically analysed above is a guideline not only for those we love, but for all people with whom we are in relation, including those we designate as enemies or opponents. Jesus tells His disciples that the forgiveness of God is limited to those who in turn forgive their neighbours (Matt. 6:14). By implication, forgiveness is a virtue to be possessed by all for peaceful co-existence. An individual with a forgiving spirit will pursue peace with all men as such individual heart is receptive for reconciliation. Thus, giving room for peaceful living and relationship. Jesus while teaching his followers on the concept of forgiveness emphasized the need for forgiveness for a peaceful living among them as he ask the question on the number of times one has to forgive his offender. The reply was seventy in seven times. By implication, it implies that one's offender should be forgiven as many times as he offends. In a society where this is practicable, there will be tranquility and peaceful living.

In addition, the command to follow peace with all men in Hebrews 12:14 in light of peaceful co-existence in contemporary Nigeria can also be achievable through the following:

a.   Education and Awareness Programmes on Peaceful Dialogue

The level of education in Nigeria and many African countries is improving compared to some years back. The education we give to all persons should be used as instrument of peaceful living rather than for violence and destruction. The teaching of peaceful living in the schools is not put of place at all (Ayandokun, 2012). Dialogue is simply defined as formal discussion between two groups or individuals. Religious dialogue is not a modern time initiative; it is rather a phenomenon of old that had been established since the coming of messengers of God to the world. In Christianity, dialogue dates back to the time of Jesus Christ himself. Though he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house Israelites (Matthew 15:24), he nonetheless spoke with a Samaritan woman, admired the faith of the Roman centurion, and affirmed the wisdom of the Queen of the south. The Qur'an(16:25)encourages dialogue with the adherents of other religious (Abass and Uthman, 2012).

Nigeria as a nation is dominated mostly by Muslims and Christians, it safely said to be a multi religious society particularly with the presence of many other ones and the allowance accorded all to operate. Out of the lot, Christianity and Islam are the only ones officially recognized by the law of the land and both generally enjoy government support

at all levels. Therefore, to justify the gesture accorded them, they should seek for the understanding of each other to create conducive atmosphere for the entire citizenry.To facilitate dialogue between the two, Abass and Uthman remark thus; Common areas to the two should be emphasized in order to promote sense of belonging for the two adherents. Both should endeavour to learn the contents of the holy Book of the other and speak about it with respect. For dialogue to be meaningful, both should try to forget the injustices of the past. Causes and effects of these injustices could be discussed with a view to avoiding such in future. The two should allow forgiveness to prevail. A joint statement should constantly be issued to correct the ills of the society. Both should encourage a religious society where equity and fairness will reign supreme and where the tide of brigandage will be seriously stemmed if not totally eradicated (Abass and Uthman, 2012).

b.   Interfaith and Interethnic Dialogue Initiatives

In terms of conflicts, religion and politics can initiate and champion dialogue for settlement, reconciliation and peace in Nigeria. Religious and political leaders owe it as their duty to do that noble work of the nation. According to MammanDaudu, Dialogue will help to create religious tolerance, understanding and peaceful co-existence. Dialogue will lead to forgiveness and national reconciliation among the people of diverse ethno-religious and political backgrounds and groups in Nigeria (Daudu, 2004).

In managing ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, Salawu is of the opinion that government at all levels must encourage, in their domains, effective and functional platforms for ethno-religious leader so that through them it would be possible to establish a network for conflict prevention and management (Salawu, 2010). This proposal is necessary because in Nigeria, the various political, religious, traditional and ethnic leaders in most areas of conflict hardly sit together to discuss the causes of ethno-religious violence and how to prevent future conflicts. The various longer-term efforts to advocate for peace in local and national contexts are organized and sponsored by both the Nigerian government and transnational organizations, for example within West Africa, and global Islamic organizations.

c.   Strengthening Social Integration and Inclusion

Social integration is understood as a dynamic and principled process of promoting the values, relations and institutions that enable all people to participate in social, economic, cultural and political life on the basis of equality of rights, equity and dignity. It is the process in which societies engage in order to foster societies that are stable, safe and just-societies that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as respect for and value of dignity of each individual, diversity, pluralism, tolerance,

non-discrimination, non-violence, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons (DESA, 2009). Social integration is an essential relation between and among people and groups of people called Nigerians (Oyekanmi, 2012).

Social inclusion on the other hand, is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society- improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity. To create and sustain inclusive societies, it is critical that all members of society are able and motivated to participate in civic, social, economic and political activities, both at the local and national levels. A society where most members, if not all, feel that they are playing a part, have access to their basic needs/livelihoods, and are provided with the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives, is a society that will best foster principles of inclusiveness (DPSD/UNDESA, 2017).

Recommendations

From the foregoing discussion, the paper recommends that:

- Nigerians should see themselves as equal before God as the constitution says. All parochial and self-centered thoughts should be discarded to allow for altruism. Doing this will encourage Nigerians to see themselves as their brothers' keepers.
- Inter-religious dialogue is still an effective tool to create the right atmosphere for peace, social integration and understanding among diverse people. Such dialogue should not be limited to the leadership of religions only but rather be made to cover all levels of human endeavour. With sincerity of purpose, the required commitment and support from government, the goal of religion may be achieved in no distant future.
- Christian religious institutions such as churches and church-related organisations should foster unity, a sense of respect for others, peaceful co-existence, and social concern for others through teaching and preaching.
- Government at all tiers should promote a conscious agenda that produces patriotic citizens.

Conclusion

Nigeria as a nation has identified codes that help in managing the Nigerian society to achieve the desired peace in a multi-ethnic society where outlooks, backgrounds, religion and other cultural norms are different. This is hoped to encourage peaceful co-existence and ensure that every Nigerians see one another as brothers who have been placed together under one God to enjoy good life together under one entity. However, this code has not been accepted and practiced to the fullest as enshrined in the

constitution. This then form the basis of the negation of peaceful co-existence. This article thus examined "follow peace with all men" (Hebrews 12:14) in light of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. This is a guideline not only for those we love, but for all people with whom we are in relation, including those we designate as enemies or opponents. It is the intention of the author to inform his targeted audience that God wants his people to build up a peaceful relationship with one another that disregards tribal sentiment, religious differences, academic inequality, political gulf and societal imbalances. It must involve all men without reservations and must be enshrined by all men across all boards.

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