

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Almost in all societies of the world, religion has become a key index that catapults the socio-economic, cultural and political structures either for good or for bad. Like any multi-cultural society, Nigeria has a number of religious movements and practices viz: Islam, Christianity and indigenous religion. Before the intrusion of the colonial masters into the hitherto peaceful Nigeria, our ancestors were staunch adherents of the African Traditional Religion (ATR). The ATR was a system of belief and worship that was totally devoid of acrimony, hate and conflicts.

For administrative convenience, Fredrick Lugard conceived a merger of northern and southern protectorates. In 1914, an entity called Nigeria emerged, bringing about 250 ethnic groupings together into one political and administrative entity. Today ironically, the merger became a bane of peace, progress and stability of the Nigerian nation. Although Nigeria has witnessed some pockets of religious conflicts over the years, it assumed an alarming proportion when Nigeria assumed democratic ideals. As a multi-ethnic and religious entity, Christians and Moslems (the two major religions in Nigeria) have over the years tried to outwit each other in terms of belief, adherence, structure and growth viz-a-viz the Nigerian nation. Consequently, a dimension of fanaticism was introduced into the religious practice. Unfortunately, the so-called religion has become a source of strife, anarchy and bloodletting in Nigeria in recent time.

Today, there is a sharp deviation from the core values of religion, occasioned by the alarming nature of religious crisis in Nigeria, leading to destruction of lives and properties. Rather than entrench peace, unity and stability, religion has somewhat threatened the whole essence of Nigeria's nationhood. Religious dichotomy in Nigeria has been much pronounced in the largely Moslem dominated north. There was Muslim– Christian conflict in Gombe and Bauchi States; Religious riot in Kaduna, Kaduna State between the Christians and Muslim in 2022, Bauchi riots disrupted the National Sports Festival holding in Bauchi State then. It was the realism of these religious conflicts in Nigeria that prompted former military dictator, Gen. Babangida to describe one of such religious riots as “civilian equivalent of coup” in a national broadcast. The quest to entrench Islamic faith led to the enforcement of Sharia legal code in Zamfara, Bauchi, Sokoto and

Kaduna States. This singular factor further worsened the already strained relationship between the two dominant faiths in Nigeria.

Suffice to state that religion has been the bane of most societies of the world, particularly in the Middle East and parts of Asia. Africa has experienced her own share of religious conflicts over the years. In Nigeria, the Christian south wants Christ preached everywhere while the largely dominated north wants Nigeria Islamized. Although religious leaders still believe the unity of Nigeria hinges on religion, other social critics believe it is tearing Nigeria apart. It was in reflection of varied religious crises and their attendant tolls on our collective lives that made Maduagwu (2020) to say that religious war is the most dangerous and tragic experience, and any country that engages in it scarcely survives. Religious intolerance has increased in geometric proportion, while tolerance maintains arithmetic amplitude. This has consequently attracted the attention of mass media of communication, print media in particular.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The fact that religious differences produce hatred and intolerance is never in doubt. Over the years, religious crises have been a reoccurring decimal and every effort to promote unity, peace and progress in a multi-ethnic and religious society like Nigeria has defied all known solutions. One important function of the Press in any society is that of correlation, where media coverage ought to be streamlined for uniting divided ends, but this seems to not have been the case in Nigeria. Besides, there are allegations from various quarters that the media (especially the print) have been sensational and biased in the reportage of religious crises in the country. Various religious crises in the past were actually reported by the news media, particularly the print media. Be that as it may, the growth of the Nigerian media, as well as their coverage of religious crises may not have yielded desired ends after all over the years, particularly between in 2022 when religious crisis attained its peak in Nigeria. There seems to be this theory that connects religious crises with media coverage, but the link remains undefined in past studies. The pattern of media coverage, and the extent to which the news media (newspapers in particular) have helped in curtailing religious crises in Nigeria are problematic areas in socio-communication research, which prompted this study in the first instance. Therefore, the researcher sets out to find the roles of the broadcast media in the fight against religious crisis

1.3 Research Objectives

The general objective or main objective of this study is to investigate the roles of the broadcast media in the fight against religious crisis. The specific objectives are:

- i. To determine role of broadcast media in fighting against religion crisis
- ii. To identify the benefits of media reportage to the society.
- iii. To examine the media challenges of crisis reportage.
- iv. To understand the prevalence of religious crisis in Nigeria
- v. To determine the causes of religious crisis in Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

The following are some of the questions which this study intends to answer:

- i. What are the causes of religious crisis in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the benefits of media reportage to the society?
- iii. What are the challenges facing media reportage on religious crisis in Nigeria?
- iv. What is the prevalence of religious crisis in Nigeria?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research will set the tone for the media to embrace national integration and religious tolerance as the core functions of the modern day Nigerian media. Through this investigation, therefore, both the print and broadcast media in Nigeria will understand their shortcomings and subsequently drive a synergy aimed at curtailing religious crises in Nigeria. The result of this research will entrench professionalism in the coverage of religious-related conflicts in the future. Also, this research will significantly bring to the fore the media/religious crises theory, by defining the extent to which media reports could fuel or exacerbate religious crises in Nigeria. Therefore, the study will strive to unbundle the theory for other scholars to replicate or possibly refute. More importantly, this research will contribute significantly to literature that will be useful to communication teachers, social workers, scholars and researchers in various fields of learning, particularly those embarking on similar studies in the future.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This research will cover newspapers coverage of religious crises and the consequential effects of such crisis in the socio-economic and political fortunes of Nigeria. It involves a critical and evaluative analysis of religious crises in Nigeria as well as newspapers coverage of same, particularly as it concerns direction of reports, balance, use of pictorial illustrations, space allotment and prominence of coverage within the study period.

1.7 Definition of Terms

The following terms were used in the course of this study:

Crisis: Francis defines crisis as the pursuit of incompatible interest and goals by different groups. In this research, it is a crisis of belief system and faith of Christian and Islamic religion, as well as Christian and traditional religious differences.

Media: Newspaper organizations in Nigeria that engage in daily publication of news. In the context of this research, *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The Sun* and *The Nation* newspapers were chosen because they are national in their publication, daily and privately owned.

Media Coverage: Newspaper report of events published daily.

Religious Crises: A blind and fixated mental and psychological negative attitude towards religious beliefs and practices that are contrary to ones cherished beliefs and practices.

