

LAW AND ISSUE OF BLASPHEMY IN NIGERIA: HARVEST OF VIOLENCE

By

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E-mail: jimohlasisiayanda@gmail.com; Phone Number: 07037979166**Abstract**

Cases of blasphemy and their attendant violent reactions by religious faithful, through jungle justice, arresting the attention of international communities, are recurring at alarming rate in Nigeria. The objective of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria of 1999 as amended, to forestall the incident of blasphemy and its rupturing effects on the individual and the nation at large, has not been achieved. The same Constitution, even though of dual nature, (customary and shari'ah) that criminalizes blasphemy, guarantees citizens' right to freedom of speech or expression as enshrined in the human rights international Charter. Some people abuse their right and infringe the right of others by insulting their religious feelings and belief advertently or inadvertently and such actions, in most cases, had resulted to violent attacks which in some quarters, were described as "terrorist attacks." This paper, therefore, investigated blasphemy as a causal factor of violence in Nigeria and the stance of the law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Descriptive method of research was used and we relied heavily on the existing literatures, news items on current affairs (print and electronic) and internet to elicit information. The research found out that: blasphemy was committed advertently and inadvertently irrespective of the restrictions and cautions of the law and such commissions met with disrupting streams of violence. The paper finally recommended that the state should embark on regular orientation of the citizens on their rights and limit to the exercise of the right and the religious authorities to preach tolerance and unconditional love as basic requirements for peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Blasphemy, Violence, Constitution, Religion, Freedom of Expression.*

Introduction

Human society is ethno-religious and heterogeneous. It then requires that people who are diverse in terms of ethno-religious affiliations and backgrounds have to co-exist. The path chosen by the stakeholders determines the nature of existence either of peace or conflict. Understanding, respect for the right of others, tolerance and endurance are the essential recipes needed by who

co-habits in this type of human society to create and engender peace in an attempt to usher-in development. Among the volatile incidents that spark lethal religious violence in the world today and to be specific in Nigeria, is the incident of religious blasphemy. Lives and valuable properties estimated in millions of Naira have been lost to the horrendous and blasphemous actions bordering on religion.



Blasphemy is not peculiar to Nigeria. It is a global phenomenon. The ripple effects and unsavory consequences of incidents of religious blasphemy are monumental and inestimable especially when gauged. If blasphemy is met with intolerance, the attendant discomfort and consequence are always overwhelming and devastating. Intolerance can breed blasphemy and reactions may be overzealous due to intolerance. According to Talabi (2009), intolerance is blind and fixated mental and psychological negative attitude towards religious beliefs and practices that are contrary to one's cherished beliefs and practices which manifest themselves in violent riots that spill over to the political and economic lives of the citizens. Ilo (2009) attributes religious violence to fanaticism and describes it as devilish, resulting to barbaric protest and leading to willful destruction of lives and properties in the society.

It is important to note that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic-religious state, whose citizens cannot afford but co-exist peacefully. The adherents of Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion need to imbibe the culture of peace and tolerance for the development and survival of Nigeria as a nation state. Mbiti (1969) submits that religion permeates all aspects of human life and thus, it is indispensable for the survival of the people and cannot be divorced from the corporate existence of the people as we can see in the case of Nigeria. Still, efforts need to be intensified in the aspect of its management and engineering to suit the purpose of existence devoid of rancor and

conflicts. It is in this direction that we have thought of religious blasphemy in relation to Nigerian legal document- Law. The constitution is the official state instrument governing and regulating the actions, businesses transactions and activities of the citizens in a given state.

Secularity of Nigeria is not an object of doubt but at the same time, its constitution does not shirk away from the formidability and indispensability of it among the citizens of heterogeneous ethno-religious tendencies. It consequently provides a free religious atmosphere by right and does not adopt or declare a particular religion as a state religion. The constitution presupposes that the religious belief should, under no circumstance, influence any public government decisions and that an individual has freedom to practice religion of his/her choice without any form of government interference. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has Criminal Code Act bothering on offence of blasphemy and public nuisance by way of precaution and control. Sections 234 of the Criminal Code Act, as well as sections 183 and 194 of the Penal Code Act prohibit Public Nuisance. But today, some religiously intolerant individuals would want to dubiously hide under the fundamental right to freedom of expression to insult other's faith. Sections 38 and 39 of the Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantee the rights of citizens to freedom of thought, conscience and religion including the freedom to change their religion or belief and the right to freedom of expression. The religious faithful

according to Sampson (2012) need to realize the fact that religious tolerance and harmony are both legally sanctioned and socially inevitable.

The word 'Religion' is mentioned in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria of 1999 as amended. Blasphemy is not exclusively peculiar to any particular religion or a region or country. It could be interfaith or intra-faith. In March 2020, a 22year old Muslim gospel musician, Yahaya Sherif Aminu was arrested and was sentenced to death by hanging by a Kano State Upper Shari'ah Court on the 10th of August for the offence of blasphemy against Prophet Muhammad saying in his song which he circulated on WhatsApp that Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, the Senegalese founder of the Islamic Tijaniyyah sect, was greater than Prophet Muhammad (BBC NEWS bbc.com 10th August, 2020). Similarly, on the 16th of October, 2020, Samuel Paty, a 67year old History teacher was beheaded by an 18year old Moscow born man in a street in Paris for showing a satirical carton from the newspaper Charlie Hebdo of Prophet Muhammad as part of an obligatory moral and civic education course. Paty was killed and the pictures of his killing were circulated on the social media by the bigot killer (www.businessinsider.com).

Blasphemy is peculiar to all divine faiths even though, its repercussions speak volumes against what religion essentially stands for in providing succor to the society.

1.1 Religion and Blasphemy

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines blasphemy as behaviour or language that insults or shows a lack of respect for God or religion. So, to blaspheme means that one speaks about God or the holy things of a particular religion in an offensive way. Religion has no universally accepted definition but various attempts have been made to define religion. Religion is an expression of faith in God and commitment to Him in service and devotion, acceptance of His supremacy and submission to His Will. Mac (2007) describes religion as a system whereby God and man communicate through worship, obedience and reverence. It needs be admitted that religion is not a new invention because it is basically as old as the existence of man. Professor Max Fuller, cited by Deedat (n.d), submits thus;

Religion is not a new invention. It is, if not as old as the world, at least as old as the world we know. There never was a false God nor was there ever a false religion, unless you call a child a false man. All religions, so far as I know them, had the same purpose. All were links in a chain which connects heaven and earth, and which held, and always was held, by one and the same hand.

Religious blasphemy implies a sort of mishandling religious identities inadvertently or deliberately. If it is committed advertently, it is with an intent and in most cases, insulting cartoons published in the name of freedom of expression to degrade, denigrate undermine, disrespect or discomfort the religion/ adherents

against whom the offence is directed. In Islam, a variety of behaviours, actions, gestures and speeches can constitute blasphemy. Insulting Allah and Muhammad, mocking the beliefs and customs of the Muslims, desecration of the glorious Qur'an and places of worship, criticism of the holy personages of Islam, rejection of Prophet Muhammad and his teachings, leaving the Muslim community and returning to atheism (*ridda*) and the likes, constitute blasphemy in Islam. According to Khalid and Munawar (2015), blasphemy ranges from apostasy to cursing or slandering Allah the Most High and Exalted and the Prophet and expression of religious opinions that are at variance with normative Islamic view irrespective of whatever is the intention behind such act because intention is an excuse and not law. Drawing offensive cartoons, tearing or burning of the literature books of Islam, creating or using music to mock or painting of video or novels or criticize Muhammad, are examples of blasphemy in Islam.

In the history of Islam, attempts according to Imam (2006), have been made through apostasy and blind criticisms to discredit and disprove the originality and authenticity of the Qur'an. Some fake prophets according to Adebayo (2005), rose and claimed to have received revelations from Allah which accounted for the battle of apostasy against Musaylina al-Kadhab who hailed from Yamamah, Sajjaj bint al- Harith- a Christian woman from Banu Tamin of Yamamah, Tulaykha ibn Khuwaylid of 'Asad tribe and Al- Aswad al- Ansi from Ansi tribe (Seriki 2008). It needs

be emphatically stated that, blasphemy was never punished during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Evidences of blasphemies committed against the Messenger himself, against the Qur'an and Allah by non-believers and the hypocrites abound in the Qur'an and the Prophet did not order any physical punishment against the blasphemers. Blasphemy in this sense is seen as a moral and unethical behaviour which would be punished not physically in this world but blasphemers would be chastised severely in the hereafter. The Prophet was addressed as someone not reasonable, he was mocked (36:30), addressed as insane (15:6, 23:70), called a poet (16:102), a liar (17:48) but the Prophet was instructed not to retaliate and not to follow the unbelievers and the hypocritical entities but should disregard their annoying talks (33:48). It says

And be not compliant to the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and leave disregarded their annoying talk, and rely on Allah; and Allah is sufficient as a Protector.

In Suratuh al-Ahazab (33:56-58), Allah consoled the Prophet, assured him of divine blessing and informed him that blasphemers would be faced with severe chastisement in the hereafter.

Surely, Allah and His angels bless the Prophet; O you who believe call for (Divine) blessings on him and salute him with a (becoming) salutation.

Surely, (as for) those who speak evil things of Allah and His Apostle, Allah has cursed them in this life and the hereafter, and He

has prepared for them a chastisement bringing disgrace. And those who speak evil of the believing men and the believing women without their having earned (it), they are guilty indeed of false accusation and a manifest sin.

As much as Islam frowns at blasphemy, Christianity also similarly does the same. Blasphemy is not seen or handled with levity in the Christian theology. It is considered to be a crime, a crime of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God or a religion and its doctrines writings. Blasphemy is tantamount to profanity in Christianity and therefore is not condoned

(<https://www.merriam.webster.com>, <https://www.crosswalk.com.>faith>). The book Mark chapter 3 verses 28 – 30 condemns blasphemy in a strong term thus:

Verily, I say unto you, all sins shall be forgiven unto the sins of men, and blasphemies wherewith so ever they shall blaspheme. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost never has forgiveness but is in danger of eternal condemnation. Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.

Furthermore, it is prohibited in Christianity to misuse or take the name of the God of Israel in vain or using same to perpetrate evil. Desecrating the name of God, according to the Bible, is an eternal or unforgivable sin punishable by death. This is clearly established in the book of Exodus chapter 20:7 thus:

Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him

guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

The synoptic Gospels Mark 3:28-29, Mathew 12:31-32 and Luke 12:10 condemn blasphemy against the Holy Spirit by recommending death as deterrent punishment against the culprits.

Islam and Christianity prescribe stern punishments against blasphemy to purify the society and to serve as deterrent for other prospective blasphemers. The two religions prescribe capital punishments for blasphemers. In Christianity, the punishment for blasphemy is capital punishment through stoning to death or by hanging. The book of Leviticus chapter 24 verses 13 – 16 submits thus:

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Bring out of the camp the one who cursed and let all who heard him lay their hands on their head and let the entire congregation stone him.

Islam condemns blasphemy and discourages Muslims from falling victims. Though the Qur'an does not explicitly mention any worldly punishment for blasphemy, it even prepares ground for tolerance and non – committal of blasphemy against other religions and their objects of worship thus:

And do not abuse those whom they call upon besides Allah, less exceeding the limits they should abuse Allah out of ignorance. Thou have We made fair seeming to every people their deeds; then to their Lord shall be their return, so He will inform them of what they did. (An'am 6:108)

The Islamic jurisprudence prescribes punishment for blasphemy in categories; different punishment for Muslim blasphemers (men), different punishment for Muslim blasphemers (women) and different punishment for blasphemers who are non-Muslims. The Islamic jurisprudence according to the Sunni Madhabs (schools of Islamic jurisprudence) i. e Hanafi, Maliki, Hambali and Shafi'i have declared different punishments for the crime of blasphemy. The Maliki holds death as mandatory punishment for Muslim men and arrest followed by detention for Muslim women until they repent failure of which they would be left in custody until they die. As for the non-muslims, Maliki school holds that the blasphemers against Islam must be punished but not by death and can escape punishment by converting and becoming devout Muslims. The Shafi'i school allows the repentance of the blasphemer irrespective of being a male or a female, Muslim or non-Muslim but in the case of failure to repent, then, death sentence is applicable. (LWiederhold n.d).

The Hanafi holds that a blasphemer, like an apostate, should repent, failure of which he faces death sentence in the case of a male Muslim. The female Muslim that blasphemes should face imprisonment till she repents and returns to Islam. If it is in the case of non-Muslims, the punishment should be by *tazir* i.e discretionary. It could be arrest, caning or death. The Hambali School of Islamic jurisprudence holds that death is mandatory for Muslim blasphemers, irrespective of sex and repentance is not accepted. What we

can infer from the foregoing is that Shari'ah, if to go by the juristic positions of the four Sunni Schools, is softer and liberal on non-Muslims than it is on Muslims. In Islam, before anybody could be adjudged to be a blasphemer, it is a matter of informed process of litigation in the competent court of law and not through uninformed and reckless jungle justice.

In Islam, the law of blasphemy exists and according to Khalid and Munawarar (2015), the law applies to Muslims and non-Muslims as it was applicable during the time of the Prophet. Islamic Law is a Divine law and it is no respecter of anybody. The duo gives the instances of people who were punished because they committed blasphemy during the time of *Rasulullah* as listed below:

- Prophet Muhammad ordered his companions to kill Kab ibn Al-Ashraf, a jew
- Prophet Muhammad sent Abdullah bn Ateeq to kill Abu Rafay, a jew
- Umar bn Khattab killed his sister for committing blasphemy and the
- Prophet declared that her blood had no value.
- Asma bint Marwan was killed by Umar bn Adi and Prophet Muhammad approved of it e.t.c.

Today, the Prophet is no more in our midst and as such, the prerogative of passing death sentence devolves on competent Court of Justice. In Nigeria, sections 275 and 279 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria devolve power on the states to establish their own Shari'ah Court

to adjudicate on civil matters but the twelve northern states introduced Shari'ah Penal Codes and Criminal Procedure Codes based on Islamic legal principles.

(www.naja.org/english/book/18/1.htm . accessed on the 28/4/2015). The plan was suspended due to strong condemnation of such plan across the globe. The Sunni Scholars of al-Azhar University in Cairo issued a statement warning of dangerous consequences if copies of Qur'an were burned in the early August, 2010. The then U.S President, Barack Obama also condemned the plan as announced by Terry Jones and observed that the plan would endanger the lives of the U.S troops abroad (The Gospel of Jesus Christ is Good News. Burning the Qur'an is Bad News. World Evangelical Alliance, September 8, 2010. <https://www.worldevangelicals.org/news/article.htm?id=3074&REFA> , July 2012).

The most recent was Samuel Paty- a History teacher in Paris who was killed in the street by an 18year old Moscow man for displaying a satirical cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad during a class lesson, in October 16, 2020 (businessinsider.com). In Nigeria, Yahaya Sharif Aminu - 22years old and Omar Farouk Edewor- 13years old, were sentenced to death and ten years imprisonment with menial labour for committing blasphemy respectively.

1.3 Cases of Mob Attacks on Ground of Blasphemy against Islam in Nigeria

Nigeria, no doubt, has had a long history of inter and intra religious

conflicts and in most cases, the actions and reactions of the adherents of the two popular religions in Nigeria generally make a monster of the religion as a phenomenon. Islam and Christianity, assessed by what they stand for, are supposed to have solid and practical peace architecture which will succeed in creating safe, caring and harmonious spiritual environment to engender development. Interfaith dialogue and peaceful relationship are inevitable recipes for living in an atmosphere free of bickering, rancor and conflicts. The tragedy of religion and its divisive roles in Nigeria have made some people to become disenchanted about religion or to form a bad opinion about it. Soyinka (2012) opines that 'religion is innately an enemy of Humanity, if not indeed of itself a crime against Humanity.' This is borne out of the fact that Nigeria has not been faring well based on experiences of religious catastrophes since the period of independence in 1960.

Religion has become the instrument of oppression and violence in the hands of Muslims and Christians of this country. The unpatriotic, insincere and dubious politicians even take religion as hide-out for them to carry-out their sinister agenda. We observe that religious understanding, sincerity and tolerance are lacking among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria coupled with the fact that religious leaders shirk their responsibilities but rather explore and exploit religious avenues for commerce and survival.

We need to put on note that violence or mob attacks on ground of blasphemy have been rampant in the



northern part of Nigeria. It is not that incidents of blasphemy especially against Islam, are not noticed in the southern part of the country but such incidents were not violently reacted to by Muslims in the area. It is not that Muslims in the South-West are not knowledgeable, chicken-hearted or not religious enough but tend to handle situation in a more civilized, matured and informed manners. Taking to an uninformed jungle justice in this matter would not help the situation but would rather avail the propagandists hunting Islam to rout their ways on the media and internet. In the recent past, the following mob attacks on the ground of blasphemy against Islam are on records.

- 14/6/1999, in Raudail, Kebbi State, one Abdullah Umar, a Muslim, was beheaded by a group of Muslim protesters on the allegation of blasphemy against Prophet Muhammad (Nigeria Blasphemy Issue Surfaces in Legal Tensions, Compass Direct News. 2 May, 2008, en.m.wikipedia.org. Retrieved 30/7/2009).
- 20/4/2002, Christian and Muslim mobs rampaged in the cities of Kaduna and Abuja occasioned by an article in a daily newspaper, "This Day" opinionating that Muhammad would have approved of a Miss World Pageant taking place in Abuja and that he would have taken a wife among the contestants. The columnist- Isioma Daniel that wrote the piece disappeared. Lives were lost, churches and mosques were burnt when Christians confronted the Muslim protesters. (Mbachu, Dulue, 22/11/2002), 100 killed in

Nigeria Riots Triggered by Miss World Pageant. The Washington post. en.m.wikipedia.org.

- In February, 2006 in Bauchi State, one Florence Chukwu, a Christian teacher confiscated a copy of Qur'an from a pupil who was reading it during an English Language lesson. The teacher was accused of mishandling the holy book, the action of which provoked the northern Muslims. Florence Chukwu disappeared and could not wait for the reaction of the aggrieved mob. That resulted to riot, two killed and two churches were burnt (Minchekpu, Obed, 29/3/2006). Teacher Accused of Blasphemy in Nigeria Disappears, Compass Direct News. en.m.wikipedia.org. Retrieved 30/7/2009
- On 21/3/2007, Christianah Oluwatoyin Oluwasesin, a teacher at Government Secondary School, Gandu in Gombe State was beaten to death on accusation of defiling the Qur'an (Minchakpu, Obed, and March 2007) Muslims in Nigeria Club Christian Teacher to Death, Compass Direct News. en.m.wikipedia.org. Retrieved 30/7/2009.
- In October 2007, a Shari'ah Court convicted Sani Kabili, a Christian, to three years jail term over the crime of blasphemy against Prophet Muhammad but in February 2009, the judgment was overturned by the Appeal Court and Sani Kabili was freed (Blake, Daniel, 16 February, 2009), Nigerian Christian freed after false imprisonment for blasphemy,

- Christian Today, en.m.wikipedia.org. retrieved 30/7/2009.
- On 28/9/2007, a Christian student drew and displayed a picture of Prophet Muhammad at Tudun Wada village in Kano. The action instigated riot that led to the death of Muslims and Christians. Houses, shops and churches were burnt.
 - On 9/2/2008, there was a riot in Sumaila, a village in Kano over the allegation that Christians were distributing leaflets that allegedly slandered Muhammad. The riot claimed lives including that of a police inspector while vehicles of the police and their station were set on fire (Nigeria Christians killed in Riot Over Blasphemy: Dozens Injured, BOSNewslife. 13/2/2008. en.m.wikipedia.org)
 - On 9/8/2008, a Muslim mob in Kano State beat Ibrahim Yusha'u, a fifty years old Muslim to death over the allegation of blasphemy against Muhammad (en.m.wikipedia.org)
 - Of recent in Nigeria, Mubarak Bala, a human right activist and President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria (HAN) was arrested by Kano State Police Command on 28 April, 2020 over the allegation that Bala insulted Prophet Muhammad and since, he has been held in remand despite entreaties of UN human rights experts (https/humanist/detained/2020/Mubarak Bala). Also, on 4 March, 2020, protesters burned down Shariff Aminu's house in Kano and consequently upon the allegation of blasphemy for which Sherif Aminu was found guilty,

the Kano Upper Shari'ah Court sentenced him to death sentence on 2 August, 2020 although, the judgment had been appealed <http://www.bbc.co.uk>. In the same vein, Umar Faruq, a 13year old Nigerian was sentenced by the same Kano Shari'ah Court to 10 years imprisonment with menial labour on the offence of using foul language against God during an argument with a friend. The decision of the Court on Umar Faruq was trailed by reactions and condemnations from UN human rights experts most especially that he is a "minor." Hawkins (2020), www.dw.com, www.voanews.com/africa.

1.4 Blasphemy and Nigerian Law

Nigeria is a State where freedom of religion is guaranteed and no particular religion is endorsed or adopted as the state religion. The aspect of the constitution that discusses religion emphasizes freedom to practice without infringing on the religious rights of others bearing in mind that Nigeria is religiously heterogeneous. Section 204 of Nigeria's Criminal Code Act of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended (Nigeria Criminal Procedure Act, Cap C41 LFN 2004), prohibits blasphemy and thus considers it a grave and punishable offence. The section 204 is entitled 'insult to religion' and it provides thus:

Any person who does an act which any class of persons considers as public insult on their religion, with the intention that they should consider the act such an insult, and any person

who does an unlawful act with the knowledge that any class of persons will consider it such as insult, is guilty of a misdemeanor and is liable to imprisonment for two years (Criminal Code Act, Chapter 77, Law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

Furthermore, the Constitution seeks to give and protect the citizens' inalienable right to religious belief and teachings without being infringed upon. Section 38, (2 & 3) and 39 of the Constitution grants religious freedom in terms of belief and instructions thus:

No person attending any places of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own or a religion not approved by the parent or guardian.

No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination (Section 38 Sub-section 3 of the amended Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999:44).

Sections 38 and of the Constitution responsively guarantees the rights of citizens to freedom of thought and religion.

Looking at the constitutional provisions above, the constitution has precisely provided a legal framework to forestall and curb all acts or behaviours that can spark or instigate blasphemy and possible emotional/sensational reactions which manifest in imbroglio despite the fact that the nation is a secular state. The constitution presupposes that an individual has freedom to practice religion of his or her own choice without government and other religious community's interference.

As we can see, some countries of the world specifically and extensively put Blasphemy Laws in place to properly regulate such actions that constitute insults and disrespect to the beliefs of other people and to strongly guarantee freedom of religion to citizens without any form of belligerence and infringement. Countries like Pakistan, Algeria, Sudan, Malaysia, Yemen, Saudi-Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, Kuwait, Jordan e.t.c have expansive laws on blasphemy which Nigeria can take a queue from since the Constitution is always in the process of amendment.

1-5 Freedom of Expression and Blasphemy

It is a misconception to equate blasphemy with freedom of speech or expression. The freedom to express oneself is not a blanket freedom. Such a right as presupposed is not to be exercised without limits because it should not be exercised to the detriment or infringement on the right of others. Freedom of expression has limit which according to Khalid and Munawara (2015), vary from state to state. Defamation, incitement to

hatred, to violate and discriminate against a person, a group or a community, to make caricatures, films, cartoons of the prophet in Islam, are acts of blasphemy and they are sources of hurting the sentiments and emotions of millions of Muslims all over the globe.

As much as the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression, it also guarantees the right of every citizen to be respected and his feeling or sentiment not violated. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria outlaws blasphemy and considers it a crime.

1.6 Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria has had sufficient heart-throbbing incidents of uprisings and mob attacks on the ground of blasphemy. The picture we have been having has proved religions working against the beneficial purposes they are expected to serve. Usman (1987) submits that interaction within religious groups of Islamic faith and Christian faith did indeed show evidence of one religion trying to outdo the faith of the other through aggressive conversion into political association and religious practice. Both Islam and Christianity detest and frown against blasphemy and ordinarily, it is morally and ethically bad and anti-social. Though Nigeria is not a Theocratic state, it still accommodates certain laws to promote religious freedom and interfaith peaceful co-existence. The provisions of the Constitution on blasphemy are held in disdain by many Nigerians and thus, the

provisions have not produced the desired positive impact. We also noticed from the foregoing that the Islamic law on blasphemy is never rigid and even to say the best; no Qur'anic injunction backs it up. Rather, the Qur'an enjoins the Muslims to leave the physical punishment aspect solely to the Divine in the Hereafter. This may be the reason why Gabriel (2013) suggests that blasphemers should be handed over to God for judgment since God is capable of defending Himself.

We actually deserve and desire religious peace in Nigeria based on the past horrendous experiences. In a bid to realize religious peaceful co-existence in Nigeria, the former Head of State, General Babangida Ibrahim Badamosi once remarked thus;

It may be a theological question whether God reveals Himself or he reveals religion through His messenger, His prophet or His son, irrespective of the position one takes on this issue, one should be reasonable enough to know that God, like the father of any household, can never be satisfied with members of the family who quarrel, fight, undermine and sometimes kill one another in His name (Babangida, 1992).

The Federal Government needs to intensify campaign and orientations through the National Orientation Agency and other relevant agencies on the danger of religious violence and the need to embrace peace to protect the sanctity of human life and national entity. The nation has to improve on our legislation to enhance



peace and stem violence while the judiciary should live up to judicial expectation of justice, impartiality and fairness. Our religious leaders need to re-define their perception about religion in a way to accommodate and tolerate people of other religions through sincere understanding. The laws of the nation should be respected and citizens need to familiarize with constitutional provisions, especially on sensitive matters like religion. It is then that the essence of religion in the society, to better lots of the people, would be achieved.

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