

State ‘Control’ of Religion as an Antidote for Radicalisation in Nigeria: An Analytical Proposal

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Abstract:

Interpretations of religion to suit violent tendencies and religious intolerance have remained a major bane on the Nigerian nation. Therefore, scholars adjudged Nigeria as the country that witnessed the highest number of religious related violence in the world, due to the frequent occurrences of clashes that are rooted in religious convictions. Nigeria has experienced two major sectarian crises that have devastating effects on its wellbeing, including the loss of thousands of lives, displacement of millions of people and have consumed billions of government revenues. These crises are the Maitatsine crisis of the 1980s and the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast. The crises are rooted in erroneous discernment of religious ordinances and doctrines. This paper examines the secularist’s theory of government non-interference in religion, and the Islamic theory of religion as the primary objective of the State, by identifying the negative socio- economic consequences of government’s non-interest and non-interference in the activities of religious groups, and how these affect peace and development of Nigeria. Thus, the paper proposes government participation and monitoring of the teachings of religious groups, to prevent cropping up of radical tendencies. The methodologies of the paper include hermeneutics and historical approaches, the analysis is descriptive and analytical.

Key words: Islamic Studies, Political Thought, Nigeria, Radicalism, Secularism, Maitatsine, Boko Haram, Religious Violence

Introduction:

Religious affiliations are major determinants of events and activities in the public and private spheres of life in Nigeria, while religious interpretations and connotations based on prejudices of sympathy or antagonism are attached to government policies, socio-economic and developmental issues. This phenomenon tends to correspond with the African world view as John Samuel Mbiti described an African in the opening of his work *African Religion and Philosophy* as being “notoriously religious”.¹ This supposes that the life of an African is religiously based, and that religion permeates into all his affairs. The *notoriety* in the religiosity of an African makes him to take his religion wherever he goes. A farmer takes his religion to the field in sowing seeds and in the harvesting period, a scholar takes his religion to the school and a politician makes his religion to creep into his political engagements.² On this basis, experts on African Christianity believe that this world view influences the practice of religion in Africa, and this is responsible for the fusion of religion into all spheres of life. They also draw parallel with the practice of Islam in Africa to have same influence.

However, this assertion may not be true concerning Islam, since Islam means a total submission to the will of Allah, and it entails total change in worldview and adherence to the Islamic principles in all endeavours. A Muslim is expected to act at all times in accordance with the laws of Allah, and his religion should be his first priority. The dictate of the *Shari'ah* supersedes any worldly or temporal benefits. The promotion of religion is a basic responsibility of the state in the Islamic worldview and political theory. Thus, religious principles must be safeguarded by the state against heresy, and it is the responsibility of an Islamic State to ensure a proper practice of religion. On the other hand, secularism promotes the separation of religion from statecraft. The Nigerian State is at the crossroad over state control of religion and secularism. The constitution clearly says that “the Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion”,³ the Nigerian political system however, has much recognition for religion. The Christians promote secularism⁴ and find it compatible with their religion, because the whole system of government is founded on a Western-Christian style, which was inherited from the British colonialists. Nonetheless, the Calvinist denomination of Christianity have some reservations about secularism.⁵

As it has been alluded to, religion is a force to be reckoned with in Nigeria, and it has caused Nigeria a lot in terms of security, wellbeing and development. This author observes that government's negligence and the rise of new religious movements led to radicalisation and insecurity which the country is witnessing in the present time. This paper, therefore, examines the Islamic theory of state control of religion as a panacea to the current radicalization in Nigeria for the sole purpose of achieving the security of lives and properties, which is a prime goal and objective of the *Shari'ah*.

The methodology of the paper is both hermeneutics of the religious texts and analytical-comparative and historical approaches to determine the workability of the approach in curbing religious extremism and radicalisation in other Muslim and pluralistic societies.

Theoretical Framework: Secularism, State Control of Religion and the Islamic Political Theory.

The thesis of this paper which proposes state regulation of religion goes in contrast with Western secularism, whereas, it is in agreement with the Islamic political theory. The environment of Nigeria raises obstacles for the implementation of secularism because of the religious nature of Nigerians, and government patronage of religion and sponsorship of religious activities. On the other hand, the non-Muslims in Nigeria are fond of resisting any government patronage of any policy or activity that will favour Muslims or have an Islamic origin even if it is beneficial to the nation. They resisted *Shari'ah* implementation for the Muslims for instance, on the pretext that Nigeria is a secularist state, they however, ignore the argument for secularism when the government sponsors Christian pilgrimages or build Christian ecumenical centres.

Another example is the establishment of Islamic banking system, it was also an issue of tensed debates in Nigeria, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) fought the process, and called it a process to Islamise Nigeria. This segment of the paper intends to examine secularism as a concept and theory as well as contrasting it with the Islamic political theory and the proposal of this paper, that government should regulate and control religion in Nigeria as a precautionary measure to prevent propping up of religious ideologies that are of detriment to national security and stability.

Secularism: Concept and Theory

The term “secular” is used to mean disconnect from religious matters. *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* describes secularism as “the belief that religion should not be involved in the organization of society, education, etc”.⁶ Holyoake defines secularism as “a series of principles intended for the guidance of those who find theology indefinite, or inadequate or deem it unreliable”.⁷ One characteristic of the term is that the atheists and the non-atheists, including the Church claimed and adopted it. It was considered as a natural alternative to terms such as freethinking which are considered controversial by the Church.⁸

Experts traced the history of the term to the 17th and 18th century social and political situation in Europe. The term was coined by George Jacob Holyoake in 1851,⁹ though according to Meacham, Holyoake first used the term in 1871 in his book *Principle of Secularism Illustrated*.¹⁰ The concept emerged as a result of the conflict between the

Church and the State.¹¹ Therefore, the term is basically Christian.¹² The Church from its early days struggled with the State before the conversion of Emperor Constantine who made Christian belief the official religion of the State. The Church did not allow the idea of religious liberty or toleration in the Middle Ages, it forced and imposed its belief system. Secularism therefore, came with the notion of religious liberty and freedom of conviction after enlightenment. This came with the advancement in science. The American Revolution also led to the establishment of secularism as an order.¹³ While the Soviet revolution had an anti-religious thrust due to the Marxist conception that describes religion as an opium of the masses.¹⁴ Parmar further describes secularism as “a movement founded with the intention of providing a certain theory of life and conduct, without reference to religion, having its antecedents in the political situation of Europe and also in the philosophical schools of the utilitarians”.¹⁵ Secularism therefore, entails the decline of the influence of beliefs in the supernatural and religion in the social realm. It entails differentiation of the economy, science and the state entirely from religious beliefs and restraints.¹⁶ This corresponds with *Encyclopaedia Britannica's* definition of secularism as separation of state from religion.¹⁷ In fact, Parmar mentions that J.C. Benet describes secularism as “life organized apart from God and thought God did not exist”.¹⁸ Louay M. Safi makes an interesting clarification on a secular state in the Western conception of it, as a state that disallows an organized religion to take charge of public institutions by solely controlling them. It is not aimed at undermining religiosity, or precluding religious communities, it however, aimed at preventing the imposition of a particular religion's values on others in a multi-religious society.¹⁹ This corresponds with Wilfred Cantwell Smith's position as quoted by Parmar, that a secular state is designed to accommodate and to win the loyalty and allegiance of all citizens regardless of being religious affiliates or not.²⁰

Thus, it is clear from the foregoing that secularism and Islam are in terms of difference of two extreme contrasting ends. Furthermore, the political system of Nigeria cannot be out rightly described as secularist, if secularism is considered to be non-recognition of the laws of God in governing the State.

Islamic Political Theory and State Control of Religion

In the Islamic State, ultimate sovereignty belongs to Allah, He has the perfect architecture of how a society should be constructed. On the other hand, the secular state gives sovereignty to the people. The Islamic State is governed by the *Shari'ah*, while a secularist state is governed by manmade laws, rooting from human reasoning and experience.

Islamic political theory is rooted in the foundation and the fundamentals of Islam. This means that the whole system of Islam is harmonious and coherent with its basic principles. Al-Mawdudi²¹ accurately traces this root of Islamic political theory in the

primary message of Islam and the mission of prophets. He affirms that the act of worship and religious conviction in Islam cannot be isolated from social life. He posits that had that been possible, there could have been no confrontation and disagreement between prophets of Allah and their various communities, because the message of monotheism is recognized even by the polytheists, Qur'ān in Sūrah al-Mu'minūn 23/84-89 and al-Zukhruf 43/87 attest to this. The point of disagreement therefore, was the requirements of acceptance of the message of Islam, which repudiates man's recognition of deities than Allah in whatever form, whether through the worship of nature or "the domination of man over man". Thus, Allah should be recognized as the only "*Rabb*(Lord) and *Ilāh* (Master and Law-Giver)". In the Islamic system, Allah is the only Law-Giver, and man cannot appropriate that to himself. Islamic system rejected the philosophy of popular sovereignty and places its society on the foundations of the sovereignty of God and the *Khilāfah* (representation) of man.²²

In the Islamic system it is the responsibility of the government to cater for the religious wellbeing of the citizens and the public interest. The Prophet (s.a.w.) was the head of state and at the same time the *Imām* and over saw all functions of both offices.

Al-Māwardī's description of the purpose and functions of government in an Islamic State as enumerated by Abdul²³ can summarily be outlined as follows:

1. Safeguarding the teaching of Islam, defending the faith against heretical teachings and enforcing what is right and forbidding what is evil.²⁴ The Qur'ān puts this in the following way:

*“(they are) those who, if We establish them in the land, establish regular prayer and give regular charity, enjoin the right and forbid wrong: with Allah rests the end (and decision) of (all) affairs”*²⁵

This verse categorically tells about the first responsibility of believers whenever they are saddled with position of authority; is that they should establish religion and ensure adherence to its tenets.

2. Dispensation of justice in accordance with the *Sharī'ah*.
3. Maintenance of law and order to ensure peaceful coexistence.
4. To safeguard fundamental rights, and enforcement of criminal codes.
5. Securing the state against foreign encroachment and protecting lives and properties of the citizenry.
6. Fighting *Jihād* against the opponents of the state and crushing rebellion.
7. Collecting *zakāt* and taxes in accordance with the *Sharī'ah* for the benefit of the citizenry.

8. Welfare of the needy and the distribution of *ṣadaqāt* (charity) and state wealth in accordance with the *Sharī'ah*.
9. Appointment of trustworthy officials to run the activities of the state and its finances.
10. The head of state is saddled with the responsibility of supervising public affairs and the activities of officials.

The safeguarding of human rights as advocated by Islam are summarily encapsulated in social security which gives all citizens rights to the property of the state and its funds. The fundamental human right as enjoined by Islam also entails social justice which accords every individual with equality and liberty as natural rights, accords individual equal opportunities to achieve aspirations without hindrances, to grant individual their due in whatever way and to make individuals contribute to the moral value and welfare of the society and to regulate his relation with the society in a way that will benefit the society and will not harm it.²⁶ The human rights advocated by Islam promotes equality of all, and the assurance of individual freedom.²⁷

Al-Mawdudi explains the above points in his discussion of the purpose of an Islamic State based on the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. He expresses that *Sūrah* al-Ḥadīd 57/25 symbolizes a political power which assures social justice as enunciated in the Qur'ān and which instructs on a well-disciplined way of life. Other verses of the Qur'ān that inform on the purpose of Islamic state include al-Ḥajj 22/41 and Āl-'Imrān 3/110, and their basic teaching is that the objectives of the state are not restricted to preventing exploitation of man by man, ensuring liberty and protecting the territory of the state from foreign aggression, Islam also aims at developing a balanced system of social justice, purging the society of evils and encouraging virtue. The machinery of the state will be used to achieve these goals.²⁸

From the foregoing, it is clear that the Islamic political system takes religion and moral well-being of the society as the primary responsibility of the state, which is in contrast with the two dimensions of secularism, the first exhibits total abhorrence for religion and promotes atheism. The second dimension of the conception of secularism is that religion should not have influence in the public sphere. In Islam, religion must not just be promoted by the government, but it must ensure that it is properly practiced, and the government must combat heretical movements that are of adverse effect to the peace and well-being of the state.

It is worthy of note that there exists a dissident opinion among Muslims that Islam does not promote a definitive political system, scholars like the Egyptian 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq promote secularism. He was called "the first Muslim secularist" he held that the *Sharī'ah* has no place in the state affairs. The thesis of his work, *al-Islām wa Uṣūl al-Ḥukm*, is the rejection of the Islamic models of statecraft and the caliphate.²⁹ There are others with such

minority view, many Muslim modernists also have such view. This is also the view of the Aḥmadīs. Mirza Tahir Ahmad wrote that “no political system is mentioned in Islam as the only valid system against all others.”³⁰ He holds that it is not logical for a universal religion to adopt a single system without taking the diversities of the world into consideration.³¹

This writer agrees with majority of Muslim scholars that Islam has a political system. Nevertheless, he also agrees with the views of the likes of Opeloye who sees it as not adequate to canvass for total implementation of the Islamic system of government at the Federal level in the present situation of Nigeria, giving to the fact of the country's religious pluralistic nature, so that it will not be forced on the non-Muslim citizens.³² It is however, practicable in the Muslim dominated states of Northern Nigeria, who for centuries had experienced the Islamic system, and still have some of its remnants.

1. Sources and Roots of Religious Radicalisation

The thesis of this paper is to reduce the problem of religious radicalism. The term in recent times has come to be associated with ‘Muslim radicals’ whom the West has been linking with global terrorism, militancy and extremism. It is nonetheless, important to state that there are radical elements in the Nigerian Christians, although there are no “recognised” violent groups tracing their radicalism to Christianity or its doctrines, there are violent Christian communities that have attacked and killed thousands of Muslims, particularly in some parts of Northern Nigeria like Plateau, Taraba, and Kaduna States.³³ This is because of the phobia for Islam and religious bigotry.³⁴ Many Christian religious functionaries have promoted forms of extremism among their followers, and have incited people to violence.³⁵ Barkindo and Bryans even mentioned that Christians were arrested fighting alongside the Boko Haram.³⁶

Literally, the term radical is used to mean the most basic and important aspect of an issue, it also means what is new, different and capable of having a great effect. It also implies having inclination towards thorough political and social change. If the term is used as a noun, it means a person who has a radical political, social or religious opinion. While the dictionary describes radicalism as “belief in radical ideas and principles”.³⁷

Religious militancy in the present times is more often associated with Muslim revivalist groups, this is because, many international terrorist organizations and local terrorist groups claim affinity with Islam, or assume that their own understanding of Islam is the authentic and in accordance with the teaching of early generation of Muslims. The majority of Muslims however, see these groups as outlaws who do not represent the true teaching of Islam. Many researchers made efforts to trace the root of radicalism among Muslims. These include some non-Muslims who believe that militancy and violence are sanctioned by the teaching of Islam, thus violence in the name of Islam is a religious duty. This category of people are using this to dent the image of Islam.

Nevertheless, in spite of the difference in objective between the adherents of this view and the militant groups among Muslims, their understanding of Islam is the same.

On the other hand, the majority of Muslims believe that the view of the above groups does not represent Islam and that it is a distortion of the religious texts, their misrepresentation and misunderstanding. A better interpretation of the Qur'ānic ordinances and the prophetic traditions is therefore, pertinent in ameliorating the problem of religious radicalism, since some radicals have the means of twisting the contents of the scripture to suit their extremist tendencies.

This is responsible for the view of some non-Muslims like Joseph Kenny, that "there is a history of ambiguity about violence in Islam".³⁸ The ability of radicals to twist the content of the *Sharī'ah* and the possibility of interpreting it in accordance with peaceful coexistence and non-violence made Kenny to suggest that Muslims should engage in doctrinal *ijtihād*, since Islam does not have a magisterium like the Catholic Church which tells what is Catholic and what is not.³⁹

Islam has witnessed radical tendencies since its first civil war when Khārijism emerged as a dissident radical movement in *Islamdom*. This group holds that disobedience and grave sins are equivalent to unbelief, and this leads to the killing of such a perpetrator of grave sin, as he is regarded as a *murtad* (apostate). To this group, faith entails loyalty and commitment to the believing community which it assumes to be, therefore, anybody that is disloyal to that community or does not belong to it, is a non-believer, and spilling of the blood of such a person is considered lawful and a meritorious act. The group was responsible for the killing of the forth caliph of Islam, Ali, and committed many heinous acts of violence.⁴⁰ This Khārijite ideology has had a course of resurface in different times throughout the history of Islam.⁴¹ And most global Muslim radical movements in 21st century have a similar Khārijite ideology, despite having different names. The Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Maitatsine movement of 1980s and the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria have traces or features of the Khārijites ideology. A Faction of Boko Haram, Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP), for instance, has branded the Shekau's faction as a Khārijite movement due to what it considers as excesses.⁴² D.B. Macdonald also supports the thesis of the resurgence of the Khārijite ideology at different times in the history of Islam, despite its crumbling at different times.⁴³

The resurgence of radical ideologies such as the Khārijites, is due to the interpretations of the scripture to suit and justify violence, and to recruit mercenaries.

2. The Nigerian Experience of Religious Radicalism

The two radical movements that Nigeria has experienced since independence, that have much devastating effects are the Maitatsine movement of the 1980s and the Boko Haram insurgents.

2.1. Maitatsine:

The Maitatsine crisis of the 1980s was said to have been responsible for the death of between 4,000 and 6,000 persons and the destruction of properties worth millions of Naira.⁴⁴ The movement was founded by Muhammadu Marwa a light-skinned Cameroonian⁴⁵ who moved to Nigeria in the early 1960s. In 1962, the emir of Kano ordered his arrest, imprisoned him for three months, before he was eventually deported.⁴⁶ He was said to have been born in 1927 according to his Hajj passport of 1971, which gives his name as Muhammadu Mai-Tafsiri.⁴⁷ He was a Qur'ānic teacher who also possessed mystical powers that attracted prominent businessmen and politicians to him. The status of those who patronized him made his group to flourish.⁴⁸ His return to Nigeria after deportation in 1962 was characterized by mystery, so as how he was able to mobilize large followership that became a security threat to Nigeria.⁴⁹ The group was characterized by “intolerance, intransigence and stubbornness” and its members were extremely fanatical.⁵⁰

The Maitatsine movement had members from neighbouring African countries. The group preached against all “indices of modernization” such as TV, radio, cars, bicycles etc.⁵¹

The belief system of the Maitatsine sect was summarily given by a journalist after the defeat of the group uprising in 1980 as: consideration of Maitastine as a prophet like Muhammad, having the same belief system with the Ibadīs, who are the remnants of the aforementioned Kharijites and upholding concealment about group belief system like the Druze of Syria and Lebanon.⁵²

The Maitatsine uprising started in December 1980, this led to the death of law enforcement agents and members of the group. When the police could not contain the uprising; the military comprising the army and the Air Force, were involved in the operation and the group was subsequently defeated. The leader sustained injuries that latter led to his death at Rijiyar Zaki on the 31st of December, 1980.⁵³ Further uprisings ensued involving the Maitatsine followers in 1982 at Kaduna and Maiduguri, at Jimeta in 1984 and Gombe in 1985.⁵⁴

2.2 Boko Haram Insurgency:

This is the most deadly radical insurgency that Nigeria and West Africa has ever witnessed. It is a sophisticated terrorist organization. It called itself *Jamā'atahl al-Sunnah li al-Da'watiwa al-Jihād*, which can be translated as the community of Adherent of tradition (*Sunnah*) for the propagation of Islam and *Jihād*. The group declared allegiance

to a Middle Eastern terrorist organization, the Islamic State (ISIS and ISIL) in March 2015.⁵⁵ The group is responsible for killing of thousands of innocent citizens of Nigeria, bombing of mosques, churches, schools, market places, motor parks, United Nations office and public institutions. The group is also responsible for the kidnapping of 276 school girls of Government Girls Secondary School Chibok in 2014 and more than 100 school girls from Dapchi in 2018. The group became violent and more radicalized in 2009 after the government clampdown on the members of the group, and the extra-judicious killing of its leader, Muhammad Yusuf.

Boko Haram ideology is described by scholars as a “*Jihādīst Salafī*” tendency (*al-Salafiya al-Jihādiyyah*), which regards other non-Salafis as non-Muslims. According to experts on the group, the sect broke away from the Salafī milieu in Nigeria which consist mostly of the reformist Izala movement and the graduates of Islamic University of Medina.⁵⁶ Muhammad Yusuf, the founder of the group, was once a member of Yan Brother and follower of Ibrahim Zakzaky,⁵⁷ before joining the “*Ahlu-sunnah*”, he became a prominent student of the late Salafī preacher, Ja‘afar Mahmud Adam in Maiduguri, and was well celebrated as a salafī preacher through radio and TV programmes.⁵⁸ He was said to have taken his insurgence, anti-government ideology and military training from the Algerian insurgent in the Sahara. Thus, he adopted pronouncement of the Algerian insurgents prohibiting militants from attending schools or working in government establishments.⁵⁹ Therefore, Muhammad Yusuf had nursed the radical tendency and had worked towards establishing the radical movement and insurgency.

Salafī *‘ulamā* in Nigeria including Ja‘far M. Adam, his erstwhile mentor, vehemently opposed the emergence of such radical ideology, and the dangers it poses for the Nigerian nation. At the time the group broke away from the “*Ahlu-Sunnah*”, they perceived the Sunnis as followers of the corrupt Nigerian establishment, which runs the *Sharī‘ah* courts in un-Islamic way and they saw the *Sharī‘ah* implementation as insincere. While other Salafī scholars believe that *Sharī‘ah* can be implemented “from within a legitimate government”.⁶⁰ Muhammad Yusuf was more disposed to a *Jihādī* struggle to establish the *Sharī‘ah* and the Islamic system of government in Nigeria.

Other ideologies promoted by the Boko Haram movement include:

1. The prohibition of (modern) Western education.
2. Labelling those who opposed their belief system as infidels.
3. Prohibition of working for an un-Islamic government.
4. The claim that acceptance of democratic norms, the constitution and legislature is idolatry and these were considered as *Ṭawāghūt* (*Ṭāghūt*) i.e worshipping deities other than Allah.⁶¹

Muhammad Yusuf was able to gather followers who are enthusiastic about his call. He built a centre known as Markaz Ibn Taimiyyah which served as the headquarters of the movement in 2004.⁶²

By July 2009, the Nigerian government clamped down on the movement, destroyed the mosque, killed the leader, and the major sponsor of the group from the government circle, BujiFoi,⁶³ who was a commissioner of the Borno State government. From then, the group became more violent and has continuously attacked the Nigeria citizens and the security apparatus, adopting a guerrilla warfare strategy, using indiscriminate shootings, bombings and suicide attacks against civilians. The crisis was responsible for the death of over 20,000 people and the displacement of almost 3 million from their homes.⁶⁴

There had emerged major schisms and factions in the ranks of Boko Haram over the question of *takfir* and killing of Muslims. When the group was an affiliate of al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), between 2010 and 2012, Jamā'atu Anṣārīl Muslimīn fī Bilādi - s-Sudān and Yusufiyya Islamic Movement broke away. After its affiliation with IS in 2015, it became the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP), another faction led by Abū Muṣ'ab al-Barnāwī with the support of the Islamic State broke away from the leadership of Shekau, and Barnāwī was recognised by IS as its province governor of West Africa.⁶⁵

3. State Checks on Radicalism in the Middle East and North Africa: A Lesson for Nigeria.

Aggression from the Radical elements should be stopped and resisted by the state. The radical thoughts are rooted in the Middle East and North Africa, and it is pertinent to examine how the people of the region curtailed or contained such radical elements within their geographical location. Egypt was able to contain extremists within its borders for many years, though there are many instances of violation of human rights.

Egypt had many exponents of religious radicalism, different regimes were however, able to contain them despite the harm the society incurred in their hands. President Anwar Sadat for instance, was assassinated by the radicals, precisely by Khalid Islambouli, in collaboration with Muhammad Abd al-Salam Farajj.⁶⁶ Other radical elements of Egypt include Shukri Mustafa, the leader of Takfir wa al-Hijrah⁶⁷ and Ayman al-Zawahiri the current leader of al-Qaeda terrorist network, and previously the leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ).⁶⁸

Algeria has also been battling with religious radicalism for decades, yet no tangible results in curbing such elements within its territory has been achieved. The government has used different methods to curb the extremist activities, including the use of force and dialogue.⁶⁹ Many other nations having radical elements with dissident views

and convictions with their states such as Saudi Arabia, have been always kept at check through brutal force and elimination of such elements. Ansary opines that the Saudi counter extremism has yielded much successes. The Saudi Arabia government after September 11 attack on the United States took serious measures to aggressively counter extremism and terrorism. The government arrested thousands, questioned many, destroyed terrorist cells, killed their members, extradited many from other countries and supported other countries such as the US in fighting terrorism.⁷⁰ Ansary wrote further that for the Saudi government to confront religious radicalism, it looked into the root cause of radicalization among the youth who are recruited to commit violence against governments and civilians. It is discovered that the ideology is based on a narrow interpretation of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* to justify such actions, and this ideology is based on "the theological doctrine of *takfir*".⁷¹

Furthermore, the Saudi authority has realized that eliminating radical elements rather than the root of the ideology is counterproductive. The government therefore, embarked on counselling programme, which entails intensive religious dialogue and rehabilitation to make extremists denounce terrorism. This group consists of those who planned and participated in terrorist acts, those who sympathise with them, support the radical ideology and invite people to it. The programme re-educates them to understand the real teaching of Islam. Ansary calls it "confronting thoughts with thoughts".⁷² It also entails the help of psychologists, psychiatrists and religious scholars and professors. The programme has recorded much successes, as many have renounced the ideology through the programme while in prison.

Another strategy of the Saudi authority is the "tranquillity campaign" which entails the participation of experts in combating terrorist ideologies on the internet, by visiting extremist website and engaging them in their chat rooms. The campaign also has its own website explaining the misconceptions of the radicals.⁷³

Other strategies include the "religious authority campaign", the religious figures in the Kingdom also led the campaign against terrorism, extremism and violence. The media is also used to educate the people against joining the extremist groups. Another strategy is the review and development of the religious studies curricular, to educate students that extremism is deviant from Islam and to promote religious tolerance. Other measures include monitoring of religious preaching to check preachers who preach hate, promoting dialogue, taking legal position to tackle radical ideologies, by cutting their funding, and cooperating with the international community in combating the scourge.⁷⁴

The Nigerian government has identified rehabilitation of people with extremist tendencies as vital means of curbing radicalisation in Nigeria, the government has therefore, established centres for the de-radicalisation and rehabilitation of arrested and convicted Boko Haram terrorists. These centres are situated at Gombe State⁷⁵ and Kuje

Prison.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, Some Nigerians saw the whole programme as ‘a misplaced strategy’⁷⁷ and non-positive yielding.⁷⁸

4. State Control/Interference in Religious Matters as an Antidote for Radicalization

The pluralism of religion in Nigeria presupposes that the government be neutral in terms of religious matters and patronage. It is however, not so, as government in Nigeria has in many instances patronized religious authorities and institutions to win public support. This is not peculiar to the civilian regimes and politicians, even the military has at different times patronized religious organizations and personages to ensure stability. Kukah quoted Falola who said that “no one can aspire to, or hold political office in Nigeria without pretending to be religious”.⁷⁹ Thus, different regimes have always tend to impress the religious communities and made concerted efforts to win their support.

Furthermore, the Nigerian political authority has much fear for religious bodies because of the followership they control, their abilities to influence or incite the general public against the government.

The Nigerian government often finds it difficult to take actions against religious groups, for the fear of backlash from co-religionists of the group or for the fear that a religion may claim being persecuted. The Nigerian state is therefore, characterized by accusations and counter accusations against government that favours certain religion above other. Gwamna calls this “government’s partisanship with religion”, which he describes as a major factor that disturbs religious harmony in Nigeria. The way government does this include sponsorship of projects, attendance of programmes, a sectionalized patronage excluding others, etc. through this act “government’s partisanship towards religious groups in Nigeria is a sustained feature which has created bitterness, acrimony, suspicion and apprehension between Christians and Muslims over the years in Nigeria”.⁸⁰

Many issues had raised controversies over the years, the establishment of Muslim Pilgrims’ Board in 1975, led the Christians to demand for a similar provision and the Nigerian Pilgrim Board Act of 1975 was amended in 1986 to cover the Christian pilgrimage after it was hitherto designed to cater for *Hajj* and ‘*Umrah*’.⁸¹

The Muslims also sought for the establishment of the Federal Sharia Court of Appeal at the Constitutional Drafting Committee in 1976, it was strongly opposed by the Christians and it generated heated debates across the nation and in the press, the debates lasted up to 1978.⁸²

Nigeria’s full membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) also generated heated debates in the 1980s, it was strongly resisted by Christians, the government had to set up a committee to douse up the tension in the land, the committee was then turned to a permanent committee known as Advisory Council on Religious Affairs (ACRA), which was formally launched in June, 1987.⁸³

After the year 2000 religious crisis in Kaduna, the Obasanjo led government set-up the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) as an advisory body to the government and an inter-religious peace making body.

The above paragraphs give insights into how the Nigerian state treated and manipulated religion. This paper has also hinted on how members of the government and the ruling-class aligned with leaders of organizations which later became security threats to the nation. There are reports on how the government of Kano courted the emissaries of Maitatsine before the outbreak of the crisis.⁸⁴ A senior official of Borno State Government was also a “political protector” of the founder of Boko Haram.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the thesis of this paper that State should “control” religion is not novel, as the Nigerian state governments at the wake of religious crises have established preaching boards that were saddled with the responsibility of regulating and licensing public preachers. This is to prevent preachers from inciting the public into violence or preaching hate. Ahmed Salisu Garba⁸⁶ traces the history of government regulation of preaching to before and after-colonial eras of Northern Nigerian. After independence, a Council of Ulama was formed by the Premier of the Northern Region in 1963, to advise the government on Islamic affairs, and specifically on the disagreements between the major Sufi orders of the Qādiriyya and Tijaniyya. The Fityanul Islam, a group with Tijaniyya affiliation, wrote to the Premier of Northern Nigeria complaining about the activities of Gardawa group in January 1964, seeking the government to issue licences to preachers. And in July of the same year, sought the Council of Ulama to ban the preaching of the Gardawa, thus licencing was made a pre-condition for preaching in the region. Subsequent promulgations of rules regulating preaching were made in Kano in 1967 by the Emir, and was approved by the governor in 1970.⁸⁷

After the aforementioned Maitatsine uprising, the Nigerian civilian federal government placed a ban on open air preaching, though according to Garba, there were Preaching Board Laws in most of the states in Northern Nigeria. The military regime in 1983 also built upon the status quo and ban the erection of new Friday mosques without permission from the emirates.⁸⁸ The Boko Haram insurgency also renewed the people’s quest for regulation of preaching in Nigeria.

Despite the existence of the Preaching Board Laws in states of Northern Nigeria, preaching has been unregulated in most parts of Nigeria, many individuals assemble

people and establish religious organizations without government having interest in the activities of such groups. The setting up of a centre of operation called Markaz Ibn Taymiya at Maiduguri, by the Boko Haram leader and its branches is an example of that. There had been other such assemblies of people, which the government still ignored. It was after the Boko Haram violence in 2009 that the government of Nigeria decided to dislodge a community, Darul-Islam, which had an estimated 4000 inhabitants.⁸⁹ The community has a creed similar to the Boko Haram. They boycotted what they call a “sinful and corrupt” society, and decided to live solitarily in accordance with the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah*. They conducted their activities without mingling with other members of the society. The community had been in existence 16 years before it was dislodged outside Mokwa town of Niger State. It was initiated by 20 persons who migrated with their families and sought permission from the Village Head of Masha, to establish a community where Islam will be practiced without corruption. Other people joined the group and the community grew. They have the same trait of abhorrence for secular education and authority. They have been accused of having affinity with the Boko Haram.⁹⁰ Nigerian Security agencies have recently linked terroristic activities in some North-Central to the members of the disbanded group.⁹¹

Conclusion and Recommendations

Religion is part and parcel of an African man’s life, for the Muslim, it is his most important responsibility because it must be taken care of before any other need. Therefore, secularism in whatever form it may mean whether atheism or government neutrality or non-interference with religion is not in consonance with the African and Islamic world views.

Nigeria is at the crossroad on its acceptance of secularism. The British colonialist who brought the Western civilization to Nigeria promote a secularist system, which makes religion a private affair, and this is in agreement with the Christian belief system of giving unto Caesar what is due to him, and giving to God what belongs to him.⁹² Yet the system transmitted to Nigeria is more favourable to Christianity.

Nonetheless, Muslims and Christians in Nigeria do not want the government to be neutral on religious matters, as both religions are competing to outwit each other in terms of benefitting from government.

To the Muslim world view, religious wellbeing of the people is a primary responsibility of the state while the preservation of faith against heresy is also a primary obligation of the state. Therefore, “control” of religion or interference in its activities is in agreement with the Islamic political theory, though there is a dissident Muslim view on the existence of a political system in Islam.

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Forms of religious radicalism that have cost Nigeria loss of lives and properties have their roots in peculiar understanding and interpretation of Islam, and government negligence in not curtailing the rise of such radical tendencies. The conclusion of this paper is that government needs to regulate the propping up of religious organizations in Nigeria and be aware of the basic teachings and the *modus operandi* of religious groups. Religious education should also be managed in a controlled manner to prevent radicalisation. Furthermore, the Nigerian state should take clue from countries like Saudi Arabia whose de-radicalization techniques have worked positively and effectively to rehabilitate extremists, and to engage experts in the field of Islamic Studies to create awareness among the Nigerian citizens especially those with likeliness to join the radicals, that terrorism and other activities of the extremists are not in agreement with the pristine teaching of Islam. This paper has alluded to how this was done in Saudi Arabia. The author, however, does not support arbitrary extra-judicial extermination of lives, this technique is counterproductive, and it has led to the escalation of religious radicalism in Nigeria. Proper judicial processes should be followed, and criminals should be punished in accordance with the law.

This research incites further researches on the success or otherwise of the de-radicalisation programmes in Nigeria, and better ways of achieving religious peace and harmony in a religiously pluralistic society with peculiarities and the rising trends of radicalisation.

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²⁷Musleh-uddin, *Islam and its political system*, 89- 90

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³⁴ The reason for the fear of Islam in these areas is based on the teachings of the Christian Missions who introduced Christianity into what is called the "Middle Belt" in Northern Nigeria, the missions were basically formed to counter Islam. The founder of Sudan United Missions, Karl W. Kumm, for instance, wrote that: "we are called to do something more than bring the Gospel... we are called to prevent Islam reaching these peoples, and please God, by Christianization". See Samuel Dali, "Mission Activities" *Churches in Fellowship: The Story of TEKAN*, ed. Mark Hopkins- Musa Gaiya (Bukuru: ACTS, 2005), 29. Gwamna however, agrees with Karl Maier who traces the causes of clashes between Muslims and Christians in the volatile region of the Middle Belt to the efforts of the ethnic minority Christian groups to free themselves from the Hausa- Fulani Muslim establishment. See Gwamna, *Religion and politics*, 7.

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