

## **ETHNICISM AND RELIGION IN CONFLICT**

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### **Introduction**

A well-ordered society does not presuppose a homogeneity of people and culture; the structure of political life is a product of the variety of societal elements that need to be organized. These elements include language, religion, ethnic group or tribe, as well as varying social strata, the economy, differentiations in human and natural resources, the presence of interest-groups, and many other factors that distinguish family, regional, and cultural groups. Heterogeneity makes government imperative. At the same time, these very heterogeneous elements make governmental functioning difficult.

But these elements vary both in kind and intensity from society to society. In many cases, they diminish or even totally hinder the organizational success of the people themselves, as a collectivity, as a government, and as individuals. What should be done? Should these elements be controlled so that society may grow?

In this essay, we want to analyse the African case, taking Nigeria, said to be the giant of Africa, and actually the most populous nation in that continent, as an example. We shall concentrate on the two most explosive issues that bedevil African (Nigerian) politics today: ethnic belonging

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and religious affiliation. Our objective is to provide a response to the question of how a good political organisation is possible, where both of the two preceding elements have their appropriate place.

## **1. The Political Setting of Modern Nigeria**

The late fifties and early sixties saw the attainment of political independence from Western colonial powers by many African countries. In Nigeria, it was in 1960, and the colonial lord was Britain. As a colony, the different regions that constituted Nigeria were welded together and ruled by the strong force of British arms and authority. "Nigerians" had to comply willy-nilly. In Ghana and Uganda the situation was practically the same when they won their political independence also from Britain in 1957 and 1962 respectively, as well as in Zaire from Belgium in 1960. In these and other colonized African countries, there was an explosively fragile power set-up that was based on a balance of ethnic, regional and religious diversities.

### *1.1 Colonialism: Before and After*

The colonial masters did not go willingly, for they were losing economic and political power. To reduce their losses, they left structures that would maintain the economic dependence of the new countries on the colonising powers. They also put up machinery (e.g. ethnic politics) that would leave the colonised weak enough to prevent them from becoming powerful states. These nations, including Nigeria, were strategically 'regionalised,' as a means of maintaining a sense of belonging and an element of identity for each region--North, East and West--but also as a ploy to create a weak centre that would be less harmful to colonial interests. J.S. Coleman states

categorically that in Nigeria, every effort was made by the colonising British to encourage 'regional thinking'.<sup>1</sup>

It was not long before the consequences of colonial strategies began to take their toll. Constitutions were drawn that were not brought to the concrete level of the chequered life of the people. From a cumbersome parliamentary system of Government in 1960, Nigeria passed to a Republican model in 1963 which led to a bloody coup in 1966 that decimated the population in all three of the regions.

Thereafter, there was a series of coups and counter-coups, which graduated to a disastrous civil war from 1967 to 1970. The war should have ended the existence of the country as a country. But it was not to be. The country managed to survive, but its psyche was deeply damaged.

Military rule has, since 1966, been the bane of Nigerian and many other African countries. With such rule, the democratic process was halted, even turned back many years. In 1997, Nigerians are attempting to establish a fourth Republic, i.e., installing a democratically elected government, one in which the people can contribute positively toward the construction of their destiny. Will they succeed? The military, which has tasted the honey of political office and economic advantage (the "national cake") must agree to go definitively back to their barracks. They must be disciplined enough to stay at their posts and to allow those who win these and future elections to govern.

While the external factors of colonialism and the economic and political manoeuvring by western forces have played, and continue to play, a huge role in the deterioration

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1. S. J. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958, p. 15.

of conditions in Africa, the internal ones (like the varieties of culture, language, regional interests, religion and, most importantly, economic imbalance and socio-political tussles), have come to be the axe that has kept the African nations in perplexity and governmental midrash.

### *1.2 Three Vicious Triangles*

The African dilemma can be understood in light of three triangles: Religious-Moral-Human; Political-Economic-Social; and Ignorance-Poverty-Sickness. Each triangle is viciously consequent on the others. Thus:

1.2.1 because we are religiously disintegrated, less astute and have too narrow a vision, we have moral inauthenticity. Because of our moral inauthenticity, we have little human integrity both internally and externally. Our low human integrity includes the very low faith we have in ourselves, both as individuals and as a people. There is a generalized inferiority complex that manifests at times in our attitude to our colour, language, culture and general African life-style. The triangle is completed when our religions become wishy-washy vapour and when proselytism satisfies no one.

1.2.2 because we are politically jaundiced, unstable and orchestrated, we are economically in servitude and in disequilibrium. And, because of our economic disorganization, we are in socio-cultural turmoil. The latter translates itself into political irresponsibility. Thus, political stupidity leads to an economic morass that, in turn, produces tragic social cannibalism.

1.2.3 because we are ignorant, uneducated and, therefore, culpably lacking in essential developmental knowledge, we are condemned to a gruesome poverty of mind, body, and materials. Our poverty joins with our ignorance to leave us helpless in the face of disease.

Thanks to our sickness, we cannot work. We grow poorer, more ignorant and diseases multiply. The triangle is complete and its viciousness continues.

We shall proceed now to analyse the two elements of religion and ethnicity that have among others, held modern African politics to ransom.

## **2. Ethnicism**

### *2.1. Definition and Reality*

An ethnic group is a group of people, generally of a common descent, sharing a common language, territory, culture, religion, arts and economy. Its members have, in addition, a common striving in the face of life's vicissitudes. (This general characterization may, naturally, vary a little in detail from one ethnic group to another.) An ethnic group, for instance, could in the course of time possess two languages or [two] different dialects of the same language. They may also live in different places in the same or another nation, having been affected by migration.

Most African countries are composed of numerous ethnic groups who now inhabit them as a result of historical factors like colonialism, wars of tribal conquest and amalgamation. The most distinctive element in ethnicism is the language.<sup>2</sup> In Nigeria, many ethnologists and anthropologists affirm that there are about 250 ethnic groups. This is determined based on the actual presence of such a number of languages found in the country.

There is, however, a majority concentration of three ethnic groups. The Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West, and the Igbo in the East together constitute

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2. See C. K. Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria*. London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1971, Vol. 1, p. xv.

two-thirds of the entire Nigerian population of about one hundred million. Outside of these, others with sizable populations are the Ibibio, Efik, Anang, Edo and Ijaw. Others are the Isoko, Andoni, Odual, and the Kalabaris, in the East, the Kukurukus, the Urhobos, Jekiris and the Ishans, in the west, and the Kanuris, Bolewas, Karekares, Tangeles, Gwaris, Nupes and the Igbirras, in the North and Middle belt. The reality of African pluralism is abundantly clear from the diversity of its ethnic groups and their tensions.

## 2.2 *Ethnic Tension*

Generally, not only with regard to things, but equally with persons, the unknown and the dissimilar are abhorred.

One naturally suspects the other who speaks another language as one who could be an enemy. In African countries replete with ethnic diversities, there are several instances of this.

At the socio-psychological level, the ethnic groups despise and call each other names. The Igbo call the northern tribes 'Alakuba' and the Yoruba 'Ngbati', the Yoruba call the Igbo 'Kobo-kobo' and the Hausa 'Gambari'. The Hausa in revenge call the Yoruba 'Bayerebi'.<sup>3</sup> This name-calling is widely translated into inter-ethnic discrimination, nepotism and exclusivism. One is accepted or rejected at the private, job, official and educational levels on linguistic and cultural grounds. One belongs or does not belong so far as one is, or is not a member of another's ethnic group.

Although the entire political structure is federal, government is pervaded by ethnic bias and tribal considerations. Often one gets a government job, not

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3. See E. Amadi, *Ethics in Nigerian Culture*. Ibadan: Heineman Ed. Bks, 1982, p. 66.

because one is qualified and efficient, but because one is of the same ethnic group with the chief officer. There are also numerous cases of violence, plots and massacres that be-devil the Nigerian body-politic, thanks to ethnic prejudices.

From 1932 until the present day, innumerable cases of violence against the Igbo ethnic group in Northern Nigeria have occurred. The number of deaths that have occurred are in increasing geometric progression from hundreds in Jos in 1932, to three thousand in May 1966, to the decimation of Igbo army officers in July 1966, up to the fifty thousand deaths in the devastating pogrom of Igbos between September and November of 1966. The climax was the civil war against Biafra (1967-1970), where Igbos are the majority. That war was the straw that broke the Igbo backbone in Nigeria, though killings have since then continued in any part of Northern Nigeria where the Igbo displease the Northern land-owners. The stories of the Katanga in Zaire and the Hutu-Tutsi in Burundi and Rwanda paint the same picture of ethnic hatred in Africa. That cankerworm of ethnic violence remains unabated. But why?

### 2.3 Causes

*Political Power:* Who would rule the other is a recurring theme underlying ethnic conflict in Africa, especially in new African nation-states where there is a high premium on government largesse, where the powers-that-be determine practically everything, where there is little or no power-sharing, but rather a winner-take-all attitude. There, whichever ethnic group has political power has all the good things of the nation.

*Economic Welfare:* What is popularly called "the national cake" is what every person and ethnic group wants.

The Igbo seem to advance faster than other ethnic groups given economic liberty. Their progress motivates violence against the.

*Education:* Southern Nigeria (East and West) was educationally far more advanced than the North. The imbalance should be corrected, the Northerners argued, by a shift of resources to educate the North thereby limiting the influence of the South.

*Uneven Development:* Pro rata with the economic and educational disparity was an uneven development between the South and the North. The North felt that it must catch up to the South's fast development and, if possible, surpass it believing it (the North) had the advantage of having the majority of the population. John Blomet puts the matter thus:

Furthermore, the Yoruba, and above all the Ibos benefiting from their earlier contact with colonizers, had become more receptive to modernization. Having adopted Christianity, the colonizers gave them positions in the civil and military government, causing much resentment.<sup>4</sup>

Nwosu reasons that a consequence of uneven development is fear by smaller ethnic groups of being swallowed up or 'destroyed' by greater or more developed groups. This fear heightened anxiety, nurtured resentment and promoted the struggle to win over the others.

*Colonialism:* The Western colonizers did the work of bringing g disparate peoples and ethnic groups together as one nation. This was an important feat. But it was also the primary source of the unceasing and unceasable ethnic conflicts, suspicion and tension in Africa today.

#### 2.4 Effects

The ethnicism practised in African nations has left these nations worst off on all fronts. Ethnicism leads to

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4. J. Blomet, In R. Nwosu, *The Church and Intertribal Harmony*. Rome, 1986, pp. 91-92.



violence, and ethnic violence deepens ethnicism. In the words of Nnoli, ethnicism is a very important agency of socialization into the ethnic scheme of things. In the internecine struggle to destroy or protect lives and property, the ethnic lines are very sharply demarcated.<sup>5</sup>

The social consequence of brute ethnicism is that it alienates the non-members of one's ethnic group. How can one purport to build a nation together with a fellow country-man who is out to kill one on ethnic lines?

Politically, ethnicism is counter-productive. National politics should involve the organization of society for the welfare of *all* its members. Ethnicism destroys this goal. Non-members can go to blazes. Nigerian Northerners have openly proclaimed that they must rule Nigeria for ever. This ethnic chauvinism is inimical to the survival of modern Nigeria.

Economically, ethnicism destabilizes the nation. Uneven development is the outcome of one or two ethnic groups favouring themselves to the exclusion of others. Such economic injustice leads to social unrest. In the words of M. Odudoye.

Ethnicism has grown to be one of the sources of political unrest, nepotism, and favouritism in employment; it has successfully clothed our national unity with superficiality that makes it utterly vulnerable. It is also an element in the universal conception that seems to be endemic in the society. In this situation, nothing is solved, nothing changes.<sup>6</sup>

If the North does not accept the participation of the South, especially in terms of power sharing, if the South

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5. O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*: Enugu: Fourth Dim. Publ., 1978, pp. 246-247.

6. See R. Nwosu, *Inter-Tribal Harmony*, p. 115.

disdains Northern hegemony, if the so-called minorities are afraid of marginalization, and if there is general ethnic tension and conflict, how can a country like Nigeria survive?

### 2.5 *The African Dilemma*

Many have expressed scepticism about the survival of African countries as nations. The ethnic groups are so varied, cultures so divergent, language and customs so multiple and mentalities so conflicting that to think of national unity is nothing but ludicrous. For J. Gunther, the lack of homogeneity is beyond doubt Nigeria's overriding political and national problem. The curse of this great country is in fact sectionalism. Nigeria is a geographical monstrosity, three countries in one.<sup>7</sup>

The crucial problem is that all Nigerians belong to ethnic groups. Each is attached, some deeper, others less so, to their ethnic filiations. How, then, do we get leaders who will think less ethnically and act less tribalistically and who thus would be able to build a nation that is one, where fairness, equality and justice will prevail? How do we transform the mediocrity of ethnicism to the greatness of a national spirit? This is the African ethnic dilemma.

This is the highlight of our inquiry in this essay: that ethnicism--the exaggerated attachment to one's ethnic roots and loyalties--is a serious hindrance to modern political democratic development. We may not perhaps be asked to lose our ethnic identities, but how do we integrate them into our national, i.e., patriotic, belongingness? We shall attempt to respond to this capital question after studying the second subject, the religious question in the African body-politic.

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7. See P. Iroegbu, *The kpim of politics, Communalism, Toward Justice in Africa*. Owerri: I U P, 1996, p. 35.

### **3. Religion**

What the variety of ethnic groups is to the modern Nigerian polity is comparable to what the pluralism of religious faiths is to that country of many nations.

#### *3.1 The Data*

Nigeria and other colonized African countries are replete with a pluralism of religions. Before colonialism, there were numerous traditional religions which however did not raise much conflict. Colonialism brought in Christianization from the West and Islam from the East. These two powerfully organized religions have a cut-throat and inimical relationship. Christianity itself came, not as one religion, but as vying denominations that scrambled for both people and land.

On the whole, Nigeria is about 47 percent Christian (with a majority of Catholic and Anglican churches in the south), 45 percent Muslim (with a concentration in the North), with 8 percent who adhere to traditional religion. In more recent times there are a few who do not practice any religion at all, though they have roots in one of the above three.

The problem, however, is not simply the number of people belonging to each religion. It is rather the uneasy relationship between the two major religions of Nigeria: Christianity and Islam.

#### *3.2 Violence and Threats*

Islamic fundamentalism has wrecked havoc in recent Nigerian history. In a nation that is constitutionally secular, where no religion is the state religion, government has often allowed its organs to institute and enforce religious policies that favour one particular group--in this case, the Muslims. Innocent citizens who have been victims of religious

persecution ask themselves, are we foreigners in our own land? Such questions are especially pressing in a nation where religious freedom and liberty of worship are constitutionally enshrined.

A government that is the overseer when such religious turmoil is happening--indeed, escalating--cannot claim to be a responsible and effective one interested in the common good. This irresponsibility in government is particularly clear when one considers the fact that the Christian and traditional religions are mutually accommodating in the nation. O. Awolowo, one of Nigerian's regional leaders, expressed this well in 1966:

The people of Western and Eastern Regions of the South approach religion with remarkable moderation and nonchalance. Christians, Mohammedans and so-called pagans mix in society without restraint. The people of the North however are extremely fanatical about Islamism.<sup>8</sup>

Any government that spinelessly follows religious fanaticism in a religiously plural country like Nigeria is doomed to fail. The Nigerian one has been failing.

### 3.3 *Consequence: Bleak Democracy*

Nigeria stands today at a crucial crossroads in its political development. It is torn between, on the one hand, its deep commitment to personal freedom and responsible government and its revulsion with the corruption, violence and self-interestedness that have compromised promising

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8. O. Awolowo, *Thoughts on the Nigerian Constitution*, London: OUP, 1966, p. 99. It is, however, important to note that some Christian fundamentalists do at times make provocative religious statements of damnation and hell-fire. Any extremist religious stand that is egoistically self-justifying and other-condemnatory must be warned to desist from fomenting trouble in the nation. The government needs religious peace to pursue socio-political peace and progress.

attempts at democracy<sup>9</sup> and, on the other hand, the religious loyalties of certain Islamic groups have continued to impede the full functioning of a truly democratic government.

While religious loyalties and the existence of democratic government are compatible in principle, in Nigeria they have not been compatible in practice. Once the ruling class subverts democratic principles in order to exercise religious favouritism, there is a threat to society as a whole.

Sadly, some Islamic leaders do not yet seem convinced that they cannot, in modern and post-modern times, force their religion down the throats of non-Muslims. If they persist, there will inevitably be either total war or the carving out of a religiously homogeneous country out of the present one. Who is ready for this? In all, the prospects for genuine democracy remain bleak. Extra effort needs to be made on all fronts to work toward it. The situation in Nigeria is, however, just one instance of a larger question: which way Africa?

#### **4. The Modern State: Constructive Integration of Ethnicity and Religion**

The modern state that can survive and succeed in modern African countries must be one that integrates the contemporary circumstances of life into its theory and praxis. The old monarchies and traditional oligarchies will no longer do. The modern mind is now tuned toward greater personal liberty and conscious participation in the machinery that would shape its destiny. Times have changed. Cultures have evolved. Contacts have been made that have reshaped traditional life. While old and

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9. L. Diamond, (ed.), *Democracy in Developing Countries, African*. London: L. Rienner Publ., p. 85.

established communities and allegiances still play some role and cannot be easily brushed aside, a viable political set-up must be one that integrates the ancient (communal ties) and the modern (individual liberties). We call such an arrangement a communalistic state.

#### 4.1 *Communalism: A Workable Political Theory*

*Communalism* is a political theory for contemporary African societies. On this view, a just society is realizable by making the entire community the foundation of political life. Nevertheless, the individuality and autonomy of the members of the community is also guaranteed. These two aspects need further elaboration.

The 'community' aspect of communalism is a fundamental reality that must be identified and accepted as such by all citizens. It means that all are to be regarded as belonging to the political community without undue discrimination. In other words, all possess belongingness, granted them in virtue of birth or by their expressed decision to become a national. To refuse belongingness to someone is inconsistent with one's own belongingness. Political history has made it so that all Nigerians are Nigerians, that all South Africans are South Africans. No Nigerian is more or less a Nigerian.

Belongingness is made a principle of political participation in the following way:

The arrangement of the foundational structure of society--i.e., the basic institutions that grant rights and provide jobs, income and privileges--is to incarnate and manifest the shared origin, history and overall destiny of all the members of the political community. For example, in a native African tradition, that of the Igbo of Nigeria, all belong to the *Umunna* (i.e., they are the children of (one)

father). The father is the nation and all who are Nigerians belong equally and fully to the Nigerian nation.

Thus, a people with the same political arrangement is a political *Umunna*. The community makes demands on them in view of fathering and mothering them better. These demands include whatever will work toward the continued existence and progress of the community. The community is the members and the members are the community. This is existential as well as functional reciprocity. The members make, and are made by, that community, both sociologically and analytic-philosophically. We shall soon see the existential consequence of this for ethnic groups and religions that make up a community.

While belongingness roots membership, it does not render the members mere cogs in the wheel of the community. Individuals are also to be treated as relatively autonomous agents. They are free actors in the community machinery. They have self-determination. They can set their private final ends (goals) and must be given the tools to realize these as much as possible, but in community. Individuals also have equal liberty to accept communal values--which they may pursue to the best of their ability. They can reconstruct communal values, though not towards the destruction of the community, but towards its development and progress.

Individuality in the theory of communalism includes not only individual persons, but also certain particular collectivities, such as ethnic groups, religions, cultures, languages and social groups. These shall have relative autonomy to exist and to progress and, thereby, to contribute to the good of the national polity.

In a communalistic setting, both the community as communal belongingness, and the individual as an

autonomous agent, must have integral development and welfare as their common *leit-motif*. • This means that nobody may stifle the positive elements in their midst. All shall be harmoniously integrated into a unified whole that makes the community blossom.

What type of state can incarnate the above principles of communalism? It is a non-discriminatory state.

#### 4.2 A Non-discriminatory State

By a non-discriminatory state we mean a state which provides fairly for all the legitimate interests of the individuals and different groups that make up the political community, without discrimination. Generally, people and constitutions (including the Nigerian) identify this with a secular state. By this is meant a state that does not pre-occupy itself with the religious creeds and needs to its members, as distinguished from a theocracy which does.

A non-discriminatory state, however, is neither. It is not a theocracy, in that it does not take over the function of the clergy and cult. But it is not (purely) secular in that it does provide for some basic religious needs, like funding places of worship, pilgrimages, and mission schools. It does so, however, in an equitable arrangement, fair to all. African societies are deeply religious and pure secularism is out of the question.

The state, which has control of the people's money, must assist in satisfying some of the basic expensive religious needs, if it is to be integrally relevant and if the society is to be fully well-ordered. Those who do not go to these places of worship may rightly choose an alternative avenue for which the state must make some provision.

A non-discriminatory state looks at all the valid human interests with fairness. 'Non-discriminatory' implies providing in a way that is fair to all, unlike the term



'secular' which gives the impression that the state has nothing to do with religion. Such a state has the positive advantage of giving a sense of belonging to all the members. It thereby promotes participation in the search and work for the common good in a context where religion is part and parcel of the nature and life of the members of the society. We shall concretize the positive values of a non-discriminatory state with the two examples that have pre-occupied us in this essay: ethnicism and religion.

#### 4.3 Ethnic Fairness

All ethnic groups in a country must have belongingness within the political community. None may be treated as inferior or as an inconsequential minority. Belongingness makes all belong. However since the number of such groups is immense, the government cannot feasibly give each of them equal recognition in the affairs of state. On language, for instance, there is not possibility of imposing one of the numerous languages as a *Lingua franca* for Nigeria, nor can all the 250 languages become official. This is why the Nigerian federal government has adopted just three of the 250 languages apart from the (colonial) English language. These are the Hausa, the Yoruba and the Igbo. These are used both in the news media and in the functioning of state, House, and parastatal matters. But each ethnic group is free to use its language, culture and traditions in its particular state or local government, without hindrance from the federal authorities.

In brief, ethnic fairness demands that the Igbo remain Igbo but also Nigerian; the same applies to the Yoruba, and so on. On federal issues, such as political appointments, there should be no discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin. This is the ethnic fairness that communalism proposes.

#### 4.4 *Religious Justice*

Communalism demands that the state may not obstruct any religion unless such a religion obstructs others by becoming intolerant. Positively, the state must provide for the religious needs of the members as are as circumstances permit. This is because religion is a basic value in African nations. People value their attachment to the supernatural highly, and the expression of such transcendental values is part of human integral blossoming. State provision for religion does not, however, mean that the state becomes the universal priest of all the religions in its domain. Its duty is to create circumstances favourable to the well ordering and practising of each recognized religion. Justice in religious matters demands clear principles of the practice of each religion to avoid conflicts and religious anarchy. It is to live and let live. Within the rule of law, justice must prevail and all religions must have a fair chance to exist. It can, however, arise that religious fundamentalism can provoke situations of crises and serious tension. What can a communalistic state do?

#### 4.5 *Dialogue and Compromises*

To begin with, people who say that patriotism means nothing to them vis-à-vis their religion are on shaky ground, for national interest and unity should accompany their religious fervour. Without a peaceful nation, their religion will have no healthy environment in which to flourish. Secondly, threats to harm others who do not share one's religion are irrational, because violence begets violence. Besides, those who are violent may be the losers at the end of the war. Dialogue is the only reasonable tool here.

In the traditional African setting, all conflicts were resolved via dialogue and compromise--our well-known

*palabre*. We think that whoever feels aggrieved at any level should bring up the matter for resolution dialogically at the appropriate level. In a state governed by the principles of communalism (Belongingness, Autonomy and Integrity), a fair resolution of ethnic and religious problems will be attained, though not without compromises among those whose interests conflict. By mutual compromise, Nigeria and other African nations shall move forward. Fairness, good sense and maturity are what we need to transform the African viciousness to virtuousness.

#### *4.6 From Vicious to Virtuous Triangles*

The three vicious triangles we identified above (see 1.2) can be transformed to virtuous triangles, if we undertake a systematic application of the principles of communalism as a political theory. But such a transformation requires patience and hard work.

To take religion as an example, African nations must understand that religious violence is false religion. The God who made Africans brothers and sisters of one another will never legislate an African fratricide in his name. Rather the belongingness of brethren in the African body-politic is a demand of religious piety. Love your neighbour. Don't kill him or her. Be your brother's keeper. If you know God who created all human beings you will not harm others. True religion begins and ends with this. To be good religiously is, thus, to be good morally. To be a morally balanced person is to become human, decent, and civilized. The triangle becomes virtuous.

This triangle can be carried over into the political, economic and social life of the citizen. Economic egoism is a sign of inhumanity. The good economic person will, then, fight ignorance, poverty and disease. A sustained war on these evils by a religiously and politically balanced

person will remove these threats that dehumanize the modern African. The cultural and political death presently waiting for Africans will be fought back. Life for all will be assured. A developed existence will follow. If communalism is given a chance, the three virtuous triangles will replace the vicious ones we see these days.

### **Conclusion**

Politics in contemporary African societies demands administrative ingenuity. African nations are highly pluralistic, having ethnic groups, religions (traditional and imported) and socio-political systems from both the Eastern and Western worlds. Education in tolerance and mutual accommodation is required to weld together a political machinery that can succeed.

We have analysed two central aspects of contemporary African politics: ethnicity and religion. Our discovery is that there is a heavy tension that has made government practically unwieldy and ineffective. People are too ethnically conscious and too religiously attached to let fairness for all prevail. Ethnicism fans mediocrity, which encourages corruption and retards development. Religious fundamentalism enters the state impotent, and state favouritism of one religion to the detriment of others creates more tension that leads to chaos.

The African experience of the conflict of ethnicism and religion with modern politics touches seriously on the very survival of nation-hood. It has been, in some parts, dangerously explosive. In Nigeria and many other regions of African it has exploded into violence, crises, even civil wars. How do we come out of the imbroglio?

Our answer is communalism. This is a systematic political doctrine addressed primarily to contemporary African nations. It states that the problems of a political

society can be solved through the application of three principles of justice by the state machinery. Through the emphasis on belongingness, all will be seen to belong by provision in nation-hood. Through liberty, all are made to contribute to the building-up of the political *Umunna* (community). And, through integrity, all are to aim at authentic development where ethnic, religious and other values are harmoniously integrated in view of the communal good of the entire society and its members.

At the end of the political day, the entirety of conflicts may not be eliminated, but a sufficient national solidarity would have been built. Such a communal solidarity will carry the nation forward into a better-ordered society in our contemporary world. This is a task for the Africans of today. They can make it if they want to.