

**AN EXISTENTIAL ASSESSMENT OF RELIGION: PATH TO PEACEFUL  
CO-EXISTENCE IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

To be an African man is to be notoriously religious so says J.S Mbiti. Hence separating an African man from his religion is like taking away one of the most essential part of his existence. Existentialist on the other hand upholds that our existence precedes essence, thereby making man to be solely responsible for his actions as far as he continues to exist in such a way that, when we make choices we do not only make choice for our self alone but our choice has a way of affecting the others. This paper examines the notion of existentialism as a philosophical school of thought vis-à-vis the inevitability of man's fallenness with the others. It attempts to address the problem of religious conflict in Nigeria with special recourse made to existentialist themes such as freedom, guilt, death, subjectivity among others. This paper examines the concept of monotheism and its role in religious conflict in Nigeria. the paper concludes with a call on Nigerian's to always maintain a subject- subject relationship among themselves as against treating one another as an Object in a subject-object relationship which has led to so many inter and intra religious conflicts that the nation has witnessed up till date.

**Keywords: Existentialism, Religion, Monotheism, Fallenness, Freedom.**

## **Introduction**

*Existentialism is not just a philosophy but a way of reasoning and a path to accountable existence*

Violent conflict is a great predicament in any human society, and most times, it is predictable. While history shows that conflict is ubiquitous and often useful element in human relations and may occur within and among individuals and groups, violent conflict is rarely productive. In the case of Nigeria, one of the several types of violent conflicts that constantly plague the socio-political history of the nation is the sort of conflict that is based on, or centrally involves, religious differences. Nigeria is the largest country in the world with an evenly split population of Christians and Muslims. According to research by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, this population is perhaps the most intensely religious in the world<sup>1</sup>. In a symposium hosted by the Council on Foreign Relations, Nigeria experts and religious scholars examined the political compromises that maintain relative stability in Africa's most populous country. "To understand where Nigeria is headed, we need to understand the religious dynamics in Nigeria."

However, J.S Mbiti said to be an African Man is to be notoriously religious<sup>2</sup>. Hence religion is intertwined with African culture, trying to separate an African man from his religion is like taking an essential aspect of his life away. In this part of the continent we have very few atheist and free thinkers. It should be noted that Christianity and Islam are not the only two religions in Nigeria, Nigeria has three major religions. These are African Religions (Afrel), Christianity and Islam. With a population of about 170 million, Muslims are estimated to be 50%, Christians 40% and practitioners of African Religions are put at 10%. This estimation excludes practitioners of alternative religious ideologies from the eastern world. The current population estimate is being disputed by the Christians and African Religions, who argue that the long (1966-1979;1983-1999) domination of the nation's polity by military dictators, who are mostly Muslim from the Northern part of the country, placed them into the best positions

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<sup>1</sup> Summary: A Symposium on Religious Conflict in Nigeria May 8, 2007 <http://www.cfr.org>contents>meetings> Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> October 2017. 3:55pm. p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Mbiti J.S 1969 *African Religion and Philosophy*. London: Heineman.p.69.

to manipulate the figures in favour of Muslims<sup>3</sup>. But however, judging by the status quo within the Nigeria society, one can say that there is little or no space for adherent of other religion has the question is turn between these two major religions even in official settings. In taking of oath for public offices, court of law, filling documents, religion in Nigeria has been narrowed down majorly to two, although in recent years, some scholars have argued for the inculcation of traditional oath taking system within the public sector, but one major setback with the traditional oath taking system has being the plurality in the traditional belief system. For instance, if one is to take an oath as a believer of traditional religion, which of the gods or elements will be used and how do we get truthful specialist within the multiplicity of the traditional religion.

Nevertheless, it does not make these religions less relevant, but rather, I am only trying to point out why this paper has streamline religious conflict in Nigeria down to the Christian and Islamic religion as they have been at the center stage of religious tussle over the years. On the other hand, existentialism is a humanitarian philosophy that place responsibility solely on the existing man, from the existential point of view, conflict is basically an offshoot of human activities and choice, hence, the only path to peaceful existence rest in the conscious choice of people as existing individuals.

This paper shall attempt a trajectory of the origin of religious conflict in Nigeria, with special consideration to monotheism as a panacea for conflict, and then examine the existential approach to religious conflict in Nigeria as a path to peaceful co- existence.

### **Trajectory of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria**

***“We all met religion on the planet. Both Christianity and Islam are alien to Nigerians and they have all being used as a tool to colonize us”***

It is a general belief that both Christianity and Islam are foreign or alien religion to Nigerians. Islam started from Arab and eventually spread throughout the world. When Arab merchants entered in Kanem Borno Empire in nineteenth century, then it results in Jihad. So jihad results in the speedily spreading of Islam especially in Northern part of Nigeria. Then gradually it also spread in Southern part of the country mostly in Eastern region of the country. Islam is a religion which provides complete code of conduct for every human being

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<sup>3</sup> Nwaomah, S. M. 2011 ‘Religious Crises in Nigeria: Manifestation, Effect and the way forward’. *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology in Practice* vol 3, no. 2 August.p.4

and in Islam perspective all the Muslims are part of Islamic Ummah. Muslims are related to each other as being Ummah, either they are in any part of the word. But like every religion extremists in Islam are destroying the beauty of Islamic religion<sup>4</sup>. However, Christianity found its way into Nigeria in different stages. The first contact came probably through Christian Berbers or Tuaregs. The second came through the Portuguese in 1488 in the neighborhood of Benin and Warri but failed to make lasting impact. Finally, Christianity began to take permanent root in Nigeria as from 1842 with the coming of the English speaking Christian mission in Badagry<sup>5</sup>. The quick spread of this faith in this region, especially Badagry and Abeokuta, was facilitated by some freed slaves who had been converted to Christianity and decided to contribute in its propagation. Following the establishment of Christianity in the southern part of Nigeria, it was introduced to the Northern part of the country.

Needless to say that conflict studies in Nigeria situate the distant root of religious conflict in Northern Nigeria to the pattern of colonial system of governance<sup>6</sup>. This, it is assumed, is traceable to the pluralistic nature of the different colonial administrative arrangements which later became the Nigerian state, a stage set up following the Berlin Conference of 1884. Islam had taken a firm hold in the Northern part and Christianity was the flourishing faith in the Southern part. These circumstances left the emerging nation divided into two parts with deep ideological differences in politics and economic organization, as these are advocated by the two religions. Since colonial times, Nigeria has been divided between a Muslim north and a Christian south. This division became more important after the country's independence in 1960. Before that time, thirty percent of Nigerians were neither Christian nor Muslim. Now, that figure is only one percent. Both faiths have grown, but Christianity has risen dramatically from some twenty-one percent of the population in 1950 to about forty-eight percent today<sup>7</sup>. This increase in numbers heightened Christian participation in Nigerian politics, said Father Mathew Kukah, vicar general of the Catholic archdiocese of Kaduna, Nigeria. It also increased religious tension between Christians and Muslims. The Nigerian government

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<sup>4</sup> Nuzhat. F. 2014. 'Religious Conflicts In Nigeria And Their Impacts On Social Life'. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol.2, No.4, pp.15-19, June. United Kingdom, European Centre for Research Training and Development.p.1.

<sup>5</sup> Aderibigbe, I. S. 1988. 'Muslim-Christian Relations in Nigeria: History of Tolerance and Peaceful Coexistence'. In Momoh, C. S. et al (eds.) *Nigerian Studies in Religious Tolerance*, Vol. 111. Lagos: John West.p.137

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*.p.71

<sup>7</sup> Nwaomah, S. M. 2011 'Religious Crises in Nigeria: Manifestation, Effect and the way forward'. *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology in Practice* vol 3, no. 2 August. p.5.

reports up to fifty thousand deaths from religious violence since the mid-1990s, though this figure is disputed by other sources<sup>8</sup>.

In the wake of colonial influence in Nigeria, it will be unjust to solely attribute religious conflict base on the influences of the two alien religion, prior to Nigerians contact with the western world, research has shown vividly that there were always intra religious conflict among the adherent of traditional religion in Nigeria, hence, the issue of religious conflict in Nigeria dated back before the contact of Nigeria with the western world. It must also be noted that religious conflict is not only peculiar to Nigeria or Africa alone, as religious conflict has become one of the rising cause for global tension both in the time past and in this present age. However, the recurrent religious conflict in Nigeria between the two majorly dominant religion cannot but be traced back to the origin of this two religion which in itself is full with conflict and power tussle.

Without any form of doubt, it is a well known fact that both Christianity and Islam came from a single source, 'the man Abraham', who gave birth to two sons according to history, the first son being an offspring on an Egyptian maid Haggai and the second son being an offspring of the wife, Sarah, at this point, the tussle between who the heir should be began, as both sons could become the heir, from the point of birth, the first son deserve to be the heir, from the point of legality of marriage, the second son deserves to be the heir, it was this power tussle and conflict that led to the separation of this two brothers which is still evident till date. Hence when tracing the issue of religious conflict between Christianity and Islam, it is important to point to the fact that the origin of this two religion is not devoid of conflict itself. However, the import of colonialism on Nigeria in relation to the introduction of these two religions has resulted in more religious conflict with political undertones in recent years instead of mere religious conflicts. It seems as if the nation is not geographically divided but rather religiously divided. People from both religions are not in state of accepting each other, Muslim fanatic consider that Nigeria must be an Islamic State and the other part consider that it must be Christian State<sup>9</sup>. While some have also argued that the colonialist used religion as a means of penetrating into the system thereby leading to the fusion of religion with politics. "To convince the Northern emirs and the sultan of the commitment of the colonial government towards maintaining the socio-political status quo, it became a matter of colonial

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.p.1*

<sup>9</sup> Nuzhat. F. 2014. 'Religious Conflicts In Nigeria And Their Impacts On Social Life'. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol.2, No.4, pp.15-19, June. United Kingdom, European Centre for Research Training and Development. p. 2

policy not to interfere with the functioning of the existing institutions, rather, they were strengthened on the condition that they were accountable and made subservient to the colonial government<sup>10</sup>”.

Ellis and Haar (2007) describe religion as an emerging political language whose pattern of interaction cannot be ignored in the study of African politics. For Matthew Kukah (1993), the process of political bargaining in Nigeria appears to increasingly embody the factor of religion. Toyin Falola (1998), in his part pushes this further by underscoring the profundity of religious attachment expressed by both Muslims and Christians and its instrumentality in political life and leadership in Nigeria<sup>11</sup>.

From this point we have been able to see the religious trajectory in Nigeria, at this point it is important to examine the import of this two religions in Nigeria and the emergence of religious conflicts.

### **Religious Conflict in Nigeria: Christianity and Islam in retrospect.**

*If the best way to serve a creator is killing and harming fellow subject, then such creator embarked to on a thoughtless mission to have created humanity, howbeit; no religion preaches hate.*

In religious conflicts, it is not clear which aims are to be achieved. Gofwen regards political aims as primary; in his view, religious conflicts form a specific form of conflict between groups which differ ideologically along religious lines within a pluralistic setting with each striving for political relevance<sup>12</sup>. In a similar vein, Takaya emphasizes the political import of religions:

Religions are parochial and emotional socializers. They specialize in building one-faith

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<sup>10</sup> Gofwen, R. I. 2004. *Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria and Nation Building: The Throes of two Decades 1980-2000*. Kaduna: Human Rights Monitor (HRM).p. 59.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*.p.98.

<sup>12</sup> Gofwen, R. I. 2004. *Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria and Nation Building: The Throes of two Decades 1980-2000*. Kaduna: Human Rights Monitor (HRM).p. 34.

exclusive brotherhood communities; ii. Religion, at some point, is politics and is the most potent and long lasting political association. Moreover, religious creeds excite and extract the deepest possible emotional and physical loyalties from their adherents when in political competition with people of other faiths<sup>13</sup>.

One significant element driving conflicts of this type is the attitude of superiority that religious persuasions as a sociological fact often adopt in their dealings or assessment of others. This attitude tends to exclude others, classifies them as ignorant and doomed and invariably, creates an atmosphere of hostility. This atmosphere of hostility tends to intensify where opposing religious persuasions see their numerical strengths as political advantage. In such a situation, the leaders think that new religions are threats to the hegemonies enjoyed. Further, where the political, social or economic factors are unfavorable, messianic rhetorician exacerbate the tensions.

However, before we go into the effect of religious conflict in Nigeria, it is important to know that just as we have inter-religious conflict, we also have intra religious conflict; research has shown that the notion that religious violence in Nigeria is always characterized by conflicts between religions (Muslims versus Christians) is too simplistic. This study shows that between June 2006 and May 2014 the frequency of violent death incidents involving Islamic groups against Islamic groups is 60; a figure higher than 57, which is the frequency of violent death incidents involving Islamic groups against Christian groups or Churches within the same period<sup>14</sup>. Also, we have several cases of violent death between Christians and Christians, suffices to say that when discussing violent death in religion, it is not only a case of inter religious violent death but also intra religious violent death. However, Between June 2006 and May 2014, religious causes of violent deaths accounted for 11 384. Some other factors registered higher frequencies and two major variables included crime and car accidents with absolute figures of 27 647 and 15 109 respectively<sup>15</sup>. The data suggests that religious issues did not constitute the overarching cause of violent deaths. Hence, the causes of violent death in Nigeria is not basically religion, however religion still contributes a lot to causes of violent

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<sup>13</sup> Takaya.B. J. 1992. 'Religion, Politics and Peace: Resolving the Nigerian Dilemma'. In Olupona, J. K. (ed.). *Religion, Peace and Multi-faith Nigeria*. Ile-Ife: O. A. U. Press. P.10

<sup>14</sup> Akinola. E.O. 2014. *Muslims, Christians and religious violence in Nigeria: patterns and mapping (June 2006 –May 2014)*. IFRA-Nigeria epapers series, n°32.p.11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*.p. 13.



death in Nigeria by ranking third. It is important to know that the rate of violent death in Nigeria has continued to increase over the years with religious conflicts having political undertones. Hence, the instability of the nation has been viewed by some as an achievement on the part of the British colonialist who used religion in manipulating our political system and birth several political unrest in the nation.

Needless to say some towns that have experienced some of the notable religious conflicts in the post-independence era include;

Maitatsine riots in Bulumkutu (1982);  
Maitatsine riots in Jimeta (1984);  
Kano(Maitatsine-1980,1982, 1987, 1990,  
1995) Maitatsine riots in Gombe  
(1985,1991); Illorin religious conflict  
(1986); Jalingo (1992, 2009); Shagamu  
(1999); Kafanchan (1987); Tafawa  
Balewa (1991, 1995,2001); Zangon-Kataf  
(1992); Tiv-Jukun and Tiv-Kuteb (1992-  
93); Potiskum (1994, 2009) Kuteb-  
Chamba (1997-1998); Igbirra-Bassa  
(1986-2000);Moon-Eclipse crisis in  
Borno (1996); Kaduna (Maitatsine riots in  
Rigassa 1982, 1992, 2000) Tiv and Others  
in Nassarawa (2001); Jos (1994,2000,  
2001-2003,2008, 2009,2010); Ikulu-Bajju  
(2001); Yelwa-Shandam (2002,2004);  
Mangu-Bokkos (1992-1995); Bukuru-  
Gyero (1997); Maiduguri (2006,2009)  
Iggah-Oyikwa (2002); Kano(2004);  
Numan (2004); Azare (2001); Bauchi  
(2010); Ibadan(2010), Wukari (2010)<sup>16</sup>.

From, all the above statistic owing claim to the rate of religious violence across the nation, it is important to know that, no matter how small the violent may be, it has a way of affecting

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<sup>16</sup> Nuzhat. F. 2014. 'Religious Conflicts In Nigeria And Their Impacts On Social Life'. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol.2, No.4, pp.15-19, June. United Kingdom, European Centre for Research Training and Development .p. 2.

the nations development, a nation who progresses is such that have internal rest, Nigeria spend billions of money every year on internal security and not external security, the nations development has been hampered by consistent religious tussle.

Furthermore, considering, the Boko Haram issue in Nigeria, although some have argued that it has political underpinnings, but then, it place religious ideology at her forefronts, this deadly sect have being responsible for cases of death, destruction of properties and values, several injury, and without any doubt, the disappearance of the Chibok girls who have not been completely seen years after their abduction, all this are not just destroying the nation, but also destroying the people. However, religion as a powerful tool could be used to brainwash people and make them perpetrate a lot of evil and this is evident in the suicide bombing attack the nation has continue to witnessed.

Permit me to say that, discussing the havoc caused by religious conflict in the nation will be crying over split milk, as the effect of religious conflict is evident is our day to day life as a people of a nation. However, one can summarize cases of religious conflict to one single cause as we quest to look for the way to peaceful co-existence as a nation.

### **Religious Monotheism: a Critical Evaluation in Nigerian Society**

*It is not a concern for humanity to worry over who is or how many are the Supreme Being (s), the task of humanity should be looking for individual part to access him or them.*

It is important to retreat what I said at the beginning of this discourse, which was the fact that, religion play a vital role in the essence of an average African man, hence separating him from his religion is taking an essential aspect of his life away. In view of this African's take their religion with so much pride, dignity and preservation. It is within the purview of this that they are ready to do anything to protect their religion. Hence, this was what propel Mbiti to say that to be an African man is not just to be religious but to be notoriously religious, at this point we must note the word 'notorious' used to qualify the religious attachment of an African man, he is radical, dedicated, committed and will not take anything for granted when it comes to the issue of his religion. This leads an average African man to be notoriously monotheistic. The belief that it is only his God that is the true God and there is no other God apart from his own God. This is evident in the Christian scripture 'Jesus said ... I am the way...', the use of article "the" implies the only way, hence, this phrase makes the Christian faithful to opine that, aside their religion, others are on the wrong path, this is also evident in

Islam religion, where we have ‘...there is no other God except the almighty Allah...’, the word no other God except almighty Allah itself implies all other religion are on the wrong path. In the wake of this radical and notorious monotheism put forward by these two religions, we are faced with the battle of tolerating one another with special consideration given to our mode of worship and our practices.

Permit me to say at this junction that it becomes easier to wrong a fellow from other religion since we have this belief that such person is on the wrong path. It also becomes easier for us to be manipulated; hence the monotheistic belief in God and the notoriety of African’s towards religion is an offshoot of every form of vices that comes from religion. Ordinarily, religion should be a way or path through which man return back and reconcile to God, so if in my quest to reconcile to whom I hold to be God, another person sees my path has wrong, then we have a problem already. The best thing is for every individual to focus on his or her God and moderate his practice within the cooperate society. We must have the consciousness that we live a subjective life and this is what existentialism preaches.

### **No One God: Existentialism in Retrospect.**

*It is either we have many God’s or the one God accepts plurality of means to get to him, or we operate by laws of nature and no God in existence.*

It is imperative to know that the path way to self actualization is subjectivism, individual must be solely responsible to define his own life and existence, hence examing what existentialism mean will be very important to this discourse before moving to the concept of no one God. Existentialism in the broader sense is a 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy that is centered on the analysis of existence and the way humans find themselves existing in the world. The notion is that human exist first, then each individuals spend a life time changing their essence or nature. In other words, existentialism is a philosophy concerned with finding self and meaning of life through freewill, choice and personal responsibility<sup>17</sup>. The belief is that people are searching to find out who and what they are throughout life as they make choices based on experiences, beliefs and outlook. A personal choice becomes unique without the necessity of an objective form of truth.

Existentialistic idea came out at a time in the society when there was deep sense of despair following the great depression caused by the second world war. The despair was being

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<sup>17</sup> Existentialism- A Philosophy. 2015. <http://www.allaboutphilosophy.org/existentialism.htm>. Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> October 2017. 3:55pm p.1

articulated by philosophers well into the 1970s and continues up to this day as a popular way of thinking and reasoning. An existentialist could either be a religious moralist, agnostic or atheist moralist<sup>18</sup>, we have Soren Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jasper as a religious moralists, Fredrick Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus as atheists.

To the existentialist, they belief that the idea of religion is very much subjective, the step to faith according to Kierkegaard is a step taking out of choice and not out of compulsion, hence the idea of serving a supreme being should not be out of compulsion but rather out of freewill and personal conviction to follow through such chosen part. Fredrick Nietzsche in his philosophy declares ‘the death of God’, as he sees religion as an excuse or hiding point for people who are cowards and living an in authentic life. Looking at Nietzsche’s death of God and the implication for religion in African, it is important to point out that religion should not be the basis for morality, each individuals could uphold a moral standard, society could have a moral standard outside of religion, hence, we must dissuade our mind that our moral conviction should be rooted in religion, we must learn to live a moral life with the mind set of Nietzsche that, ‘God is dead’. I should be moral not because I will be accountable to a God or because one God demands me to be moral but I should rather be moral because morality itself is an intrinsic part of my existence, as I constantly make choices, I must be a wear that does choices are made to my own good. At this point one might want to consider making egoistic decision on the basis of morality. But it must be noted, that egoism is not the same as selfishness because in selfishness, you might not be protecting your own self interest. We must understand that one of the greatest power of the human race is the ability to make choices, we decides whatever we want to become, even though some might belief in predestination, but the idea of predestination in no wise relegates man to machines or robots. Our value system and belief system should be decided by us base on choice and not base on religion.

However, if we will not make moral rules and standards out of religion with the assumption that God is dead, we are then left to belief that God is alive, the implication of God being alive means that, if he is alive and he oversees the affair of the universe who worship God in diverse way, by implication, it is either God is not one or God is one and can be accessed in different ways because of his dynamic nature. From the existential point of view, we can draw allusion to the fact that God is not one, because individual define their existence and what they choose to belief, just as language could be invented, the idea of God could also be

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid. p.1*

invented. If I call on a God and he answers me and another person calls on a God using different approach from the one I use and such person claim the God also respond, by implication, we can either be calling on different God or calling on the same God that allows different root or path to get to him. If we view it from this perspective, then notorious monotheism among Africans will reduce.

Having the belief that our God is not the only God or if he is the only God, then we can access him through different means. With this consciousness, it helps individuals to adopt an existential way of life, by being responsible for the God you choose or the path through which you worship your own God, without interfering with the others.

Despair, guilt, death which is the awareness of our finitude is what leads man to become anxious of living an authentic. this drives some towards religion, all this are subjective trait, one face despair, guilt, death as an individual, nobody can face it on one's behalf, hence, if what drives man towards religion are subjective traits of existing being, then man must handle religion in a subjective way, the idea of God or deity must be subjective. Furthermore, no one can claim to have an empirical knowledge of God, religion according to Kierkegaard is an act of faith<sup>19</sup>, hence, it becomes irrational and inauthentic existence to impose an act of faith on people, the best is to express an act of faith to people and leave them with the decision of making choices. Individuals are responsible for the choices they make, so forcing people against their choice will be forcing them not to be human because one of the characteristics of existing being is the ability to make choices.

Having examined the idea of no single God via existentialism, it becomes imperative to look at how existentialism can help to solve religious crises in Nigeria.

### **Existentialism: Path To Peaceful Co-Existence In Nigeria**

*The world is neither a mosque, church nor any religious house; rationalism demands we make it not a religious home but a place where being exist.*

Conflict is a product of human activity, so peace also is an offshoot of human action. Although we cannot totally eradicate conflict among humans, because it will be reducing man to being an unemotional being, by implication a machine or a robot. Hence, I shall attempt to look at the role of existentialism as a system of thought towards reducing the rate of religious conflict in Nigeria.

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<sup>19</sup> William. F. L 2002 *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*. U.S.A: Wadsworth.362.

First, the very consciousness of the freedom of man to make choices is in itself a path to pursuing peaceful existence, man must be conscious of the fact that he has the right to choose to sustain a peaceful co-existence among others and at the same time to live in an Hobbesian state of nature, hence, one of the very fact that can lead man to peace as a nation is the recognition of freedom as individual to choose and make decisions that affect one's life's.

In discussing freedom of man, one cannot but lay hold on Jean Paul Sartre who is being regarded as the philosopher of freedom, freedom according to Sartre is not such freedom that is limitless or permit recklessness, for Sartre said, when I choose, I am conscious of the fact that I am not just choosing for myself alone but I choose for the others<sup>20</sup>. Hence, I must be conscious of the fact that in making my choices, it has a way of affecting the others; hence I must be ready to take responsibility for the consequences of my choice. If men are conscious of the fact that their choices have a way of affecting the others, then religious extremism and barbarism will be moderated. Also, individuals must be ready to take responsibility for their actions according to Sartre, in taking responsibility for one's choices, he learn to moderate his actions, because he becomes aware of the fact that, when he perform actions as such that are to the detriment of fellow being, then he must be responsible for the consequences of such actions.

Furthermore, Martin Buber in his philosophy of I and I Thou, he admonishes every individual to see their fellow human beings as subject and not as object, an object does not have the power of choice and can be used for anything, but a subject is an existing being, hence one must be responsible towards fellow individual, man must not use fellow man as a means to an end, individuals must know that just as he is a subjects and want to be treated well because he is a subject, he must also treat other subject like that. If men are conscious of their relationship with the other as fellow subject and not just an object, this will help to moderate religious excesses and foster tolerance among individuals.

Gabriel Marcel notion of fidelity, while discussing being in his existentialism, said fidelity is a path to peaceful co-existence, one of the causes of religious conflict is lack of trust and faithfulness, hence, he emphasizes more on fidelity as a part to authentic existence, he said subject should express fidelity to fellow subject, just as they do to their lovers<sup>21</sup>. Lovers are bound to offend each other at times, but through an act of fidelity, they forge ahead and

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<sup>20</sup> Stumpf . S.E. 2000. *Socrates to Sartre and Beyond: A History of Philosophy*. New York: McGraw Hill Publisher.p.464.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.p.459.

continue to tolerate each other, if men can transfer this fidelity among people of different faith, then there will be less cases of conflict within the nation.

More so, existentialism preaches discipline and personal responsibility, these are two cogent factors that can help to sustain peaceful co-existence in Nigeria, people must have self discipline, not because religion preaches it but because it is essential in life, it was this personal discipline that Nietzsche was discussing with his idea of the 'over man', someone who has control of himself and takes responsibility for his life, religion preaches slave morality according to Nietzsche, Nietzsche wants us to grow outside the morality of religion, to master morality, that is based on personal discipline and forming your personal standard of existence<sup>22</sup>, if individuals are well disciplined, it will help to control religious activities, individuals should not use their own religion to disturb other existing individuals. The world is neither a mosque nor a church; hence all activities of religious gathering must be moderated to allow for adherents of other faith to enjoy their own existence in the world. Religious houses must desist from disturbing the environment with noises coming out from their speakers or public address systems among other activities that infringe upon the convenience of fellow beings.

Man is a being towards death<sup>23</sup>, so says Martin Heidegger, the day a child is born, he is old enough to die, hence, man must always be conscious of his finitude, that no matter what we choose to do on earth either good or bad, one day, he will die, the consciousness of death should be a trigger to authentic existence according to the existentialist, the fact of the awareness of one's finitude should make people want to live the best possible life they can live and make the best possible decisions, and since the notion of afterlife is still debatable, men should be conscious of this one life alone, and if peradventure, there is an afterlife, they can take a subjective decision to also live a good life in the afterlife. 'As long as we exist, we exist for now, for we do not know tomorrow, we make tomorrow's decision tomorrow for we are not even sure if tomorrow exists.' men must live an authentic life, Heidegger said that fallenness with which they will lead to inauthentic existence, hence, life must not be based on religious doctrines or ideologies, individuals must choose and live by their own ideologies.

## **Conclusion**

***The path to peaceful co-existence rests not in the hand of any Supreme Being but in our existential decisions***

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p.427.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p.539.

When someone, society, religious groups tries to impose or demands that their beliefs, values or rules be faithfully accepted or obeyed, existentialist believes this destroys individualism and make a person becomes whatever the people in power wants him to be. Hence, existential philosophy or thinking demands man to subject everything to criticality and take a conscious decision by himself, the decisions man must take, demands him to be responsible for his actions, hence, if Nigerian's think existentially, the Kantian golden rule will be a guide to our conduct, and the nation can be on the path to peaceful co-existence irrespective of religious differences and biases.

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