

# Ἀγάπη (Love) IN 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-7: A TOOL FOR INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** *The increasing rate of Inter-Faith Conflicts and religiously induced conflict, especially between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, in the past four decades is heart breaking. This has become one of the dreadful socio-religious problems in recent times that slow down the pace of socio-economic development, religious harmony and political stability. Due to the frequent nature of this problem, it now appears as if there is no remedy to this epidemic because, it has rendered many people homeless, jobless, orphans, hopeless, burnt and slaughtered in cold blood. The study examines agape in 1 Corinthians 13:1-7, as a tool for inter-faith dialogue in Nigeria. It provides insight into the causes and effect of inter-faith conflict in Nigeria. The study adopted Hermeneutical and interpretative methods for the investigation of the causes of inter-conflict and interpretation of the text. It ascertained that, inter-faith conflict in religious practice causes breakdown of peace and harmony and major impediments to social and economic development, political stability and religious harmony. The study contributes to knowledge by asserting that, political and religious stakeholders can move the country faster in the attainment of religious, socio-economic harmony, infrastructural and human capital development through the application of dialogue and non-violence approaches in peace building by the application of agape model of conflict resolution. Finally, the study recommends the application of the principle of agape as a tool for inter-faith dialogue in conflict management, resolution and as standard for sustainable national unity through effective administration, social stability, human capital and infrastructural development.*

**Keywords:** Love, Dialogue, Conflict and Inter-faith.

## INTRODUCTION

It is recalled from the history of Nigeria and some parts of the world that for the past several decades, religious antagonism influenced by religious fundamentalism is increasing daily in the society and this has become a heart-breaking incident of national and global concern because; anywhere and anytime there is outbreak of religious conflict, its result is always disastrous and perpetrators infringe on the right of citizens and leading to death of loved ones, breakdown of laws, order and setbacks to social, religious and economic activities. Also, religious intolerance as a horrific development results into disagreement, hatred, bitterness and aggression among various religious groups, family members and individual in the society. This paper encapsulates that, the advancement of national unity, peace, harmony, acceptable standards of social behaviors and economic development are ardent responsibilities of every religion's adherents, political and community leaders and members of all social institution in the society. But, a situation where a nation such as Nigeria cannot experience peace, religious harmony and socio-economic development shall definitely result into anarchy in the society, economic instability and depreciation.

In addition, one of the major concerns of and challenges facing political and religious leadership in Nigeria is how to devise ways of reducing, averting or controlling religious conflict through peace building and crisis resolution initiatives. The purpose of peace building initiative is to enhance good inter-personal relationship and harmony among the various religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria. Also, peace building initiative is necessary because religion forms an integral part of people's culture in a society and it influences the norms, traditional beliefs and behavioral pattern of people in the society by teaching them to imbibe good moral conduct. Subsequently, some core values of religion to be imbibed by adherents because of their potencies in sustaining national cohesion include; all religions advocate love for God and one another, promotion of peace in the society, mutual respect for the sanctity of human life and individual's personality and brotherly relationship. Additionally, inter-faith conflicts have caused greater number of victims to become internally displaced persons even in their own country.

Therefore, the graveness of damages caused by inter-faith conflicts to the nation and the global community, this insurgent act (inter-faith conflict) has attracted the attention of the international bodies because; it is putting on the face of terrorism, an infringement on and rebellion against fundamental human rights, a crime against humanity.

As well, inter-faith conflict gives room for infiltration and proliferation of illegal firearms and other weapons of mass destruction to be prevalent in the society. Due to the preceding circumstances, it has been very difficult for the Government and her security agencies to combat and retrieve most of these firearms that have filtered into the society illegally. Most assuredly, inter-faith conflict is an open door for political instability and disintegration of the society into various groups. Besides, there is great tension and fear among Christians and Muslims which has spontaneously given birth to lack of love and trust for one another even in families where some are Christians and others Muslims. Christians fear the militants and warlike nature of Islam and her great interest in political domination. On the other hand, Muslims are frightened of the evangelical presence of the Christians and this has led to the problem of religious insolent and insecurity across Nigerian societies.

## Objectives of the Paper

The paper examines the concept and characteristics of ἀγάπη (love) in 1 Corinthians 13:1-7, as a tool for inter-faith dialogue in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to; hermeneutically explore and contextualize the characteristics of ἀγάπη in 1Corinthian 13:1-7 and apply them as tools for the promotion of sustainable peace and cordial inter-faith relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

### Relevance of the Paper

The paper is a resource for researchers who intend to explore the causes, effect, control, management of inter-faith conflicts and undertake steps towards inter-faith conflicts resolution in Nigeria. Also, religious, society and political stakeholders can apply the principles of ἀγάπη (love), in handling all kinds of conflicts that may arise in their jurisdiction. Finally, been that conflict is inevitable in every sphere of human society, educational and other social institutions should explore the information to enhance inter-personal and ethno-religious relationship. Members of the different religious groups in Nigeria should access and utilize this information to promote cordial relationship and maintain peace in the practice of religion.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Conceptual Clarification of Love

Αγάπη (love); the Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament defines ἀγάπη as God's affectionate love, goodwill and benevolence. It speaks of various dimensions of love (affection). ἀγάπη is applied in human relationship to mean "love: especially brotherly love, charity; the love of God for man and of man for God". Αγάπη is used in ancient texts to describe feelings for one's children and the feelings for a spouse. In another vein, ἀγάπη is used by Christians to express the unconditional love of God for his children. In addition, it is also used in scripture to describe; (a) the love which man should express towards God as his creator, John 5:42. (b) The redeeming, tender care and compassionate love of God towards mankind. (c) Man's love which Christ commanded that they should demonstrate towards one another in inter and intra-personal relationship, John 13:34.

Nevertheless, Liddell & Scott (2001), noted that, the other kind of love is ἔρως; it means that kind of love expressed through sexual passion and the Modern Greek word usage is "erotas" and it means intimate relationship in love. Although Eros was initially felt for a person with contemplation yet, it becomes an appreciation of the beauty within that person or even becomes appreciation of beauty itself. The third type of love is φιλία, philía means "affectionate regard or friendship", usually between people of equal status. According to Liddell & Scott, this is described as a "dispassionate virtuous love, a concept developed by Aristotle in his best-known work on ethics and expressed in various ways as loyalty to friends". it is brotherly, family and community love.

The fourth type of love is στοργή; storgē; it refers to love, affection that exist especially between parents and children. It is the natural empathy demonstrated or felt by parents for their offspring. The fifth type is Φιλαντία, (philautia); it is self-love or to have regard for one's own happiness or advantage. This love has been conceptualized both as a basic human necessity and as a moral flaw, akin to vanity and selfishness and synonymous with egotism. Another class of love is ξενία, (xenia); it is an ancient Greek concept of hospitality and sometimes translated as guest-friendship or ritualized friendship. It is an institutionalized relationship demonstrated in generosity, gift exchange and reciprocity.

### Love in Religious Worship

Love is a basic concept and a fundamental virtue in both Christianity and Islam; the dominant religions in Nigeria and in some parts of the world. According to the Al-Islam.org, Mahnaz asserted that, the scope of love in Islam encompasses "the case of Divine love, human love for God, for His creation, for good deeds and for each other". Love plays a crucial role in the Islamic world-view, especially in theology, mysticism and ethics. Also, love for the truths embodied in religion builds up the faith and in Islam faith is based on knowledge of the religious facts, it is not limited to that knowledge because; there might be people who have knowledge of the religious facts and are confident about them but still do not commit themselves to any faith. Thus, faith and belief only come when a person voluntarily commits himself to acceptance of the articles of faith and does not refuse to follow them. Mahnaz added that, "in Islamic beliefs, the prototype example of those who know very well but refuse to practice what they have known is Iblis- the great Sata and Islamic sources revealed that, Iblis does whatever he does out of arrogance and selfishness, not out of ignorance".

Mahnaz note that, in a famous hadith the Prophet Muhammad said; "the firmest handhold of faith is to love for the sake of God and to hate for the sake of God, to befriend God's friends and to renounce His enemies". The same idea is emphasized by Imams of the Household of the Prophet. For example, Fudayl ibn Yasar, a disciple asked Imam Sadiq whether love and hatred are derived from faith. Imam replied: "Is faith anything but love and hate?" So, in Islam, love is universal.... " (Qur'an 21: 107 and emphasizes that, even fighting against those who do wrongs and injustice should be done out of love; there should be an act of genuine love for mankind as a whole. Sequel to this, the Christian concept of love is not far from the Islamic dimension. It is embodied thus; "Love your neighbor as I have loved you and by this all men shall know that you are my disciples, if you love one another", John 13:34, 35. In addition, James (2005), spotted the distinctive character of love in I I Corinthians 13; he explains what (i) Love is: (i) Love is patient. (ii) Love is kind. This is followed by what love is not; Love is not; It does not envy; it does not boast; it is not proud; it is not rude; it is not self-seeking and it is not easily angered. Religion detest in wrong practices among adherents. Hence, every religious adherent is bound to maintain peace and harmony in the society and in inter-faith relationship. What then is love's attitude?

### The general attitude of love towards wrong/evil

- (i) It does not keep record of wrong done by other people.
- (ii) Love does not delight in evil/wrong but, rejoices in the truth (honesty, equality of all fairness, justice etc). It always protects and always trusts.
- (iii) Love always hopes and always perseveres. Thus, the apex of this submission revealed that; love is imperative in enhancing peace and harmony in inter-personal relationship.

### **Factors that instigate Inter-Faith Conflicts**

Within the last four decades, Nigeria witnessed varieties of religious unrest and these in no doubt threatened the peace and religious harmony of the nation. Some of these conflicts were political, tribal, economic and religious in nature. It is obvious that "conflict"- a state of dispute, disagreement and quarrel between groups, two persons and countries occur due to certain factors. They include the following:

#### **(1) Differences in Religious Belief and Cultural Values:**

Culture as people's total way of life; such as education, religious beliefs, occupation, arts, civilization etc, have potentials to influence the perception and world-view of people, their differences in religious beliefs and concepts of right and wrong. For instance, the Christians' view on man's relationship with God is through Jesus Christ, while that of the Muslims is through Prophet Mohammed. These different views always result into disagreement and degenerate into fierce conflicts associated with violence between Christians and Muslims across the world. In addition, Muslims believe that God asked Abraham to sacrifice Ishmael, while Christians believe it was Isaac. This has also generated great controversy among them. Thus, this problem can be referred to as doctrinal differences in teachings, beliefs, application and practices found among the various religious activities of human affairs in the society.

#### **(2) Lack of Qualitative Educational Awareness**

In the aspect of character training and moral discipline, an in-depth religious education is meant to transmit good value for moral development of individual. Adedokun (2003), asserts that, lack of qualitative religious moral value in the Church and Mosque is responsible for moral decay in the society and that religious devotees have neglected the purpose and mission of the Church and Mosque as agents of social change and cultural transformation. Religious institutions exist to add values and promote good cultural heritage in the society. This is one of the reasons why Abogurun (1984), notes that, the task of the Church and Mosque is to serve as centers for moral training, to promote good moral values and ethical re-orientation in the society. This implies that, adherents who have behavioral problems of disobedience to parents, law of the land and constituted authority, stealing, drug addiction, Cultic practices, dishonesty, insubordinations, aggressions etc, are changed through religious teachings. But, it is sad to note that the moral behaviors of some contemporary religious adherents have become that of being more desperate in violence and wickedness irrespective of the teaching. In addition, the Church and Mosque must continue to serve as places for moral development through the provision of qualitative religious instruction to facilitate the inculcation of accepted moral values because, lack of qualitative education among religious institutions have made virtues such as honesty, kindness, brotherliness, devotion to duty, hospitality and respect for the sanctity of human life to disappear from man's interpersonal relationship and religious practices in Nigeria. The grave consequence is that, the situations have gravitated into the state of socio-religious anarchy in many societies, in Nigeria.

#### **(3) Religious Fanaticism;**

This is another agent of religious hostility and violence in Nigeria. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 8th Edition, fanaticism is "the blind belief that an idea or doctrine is absolutely true and that, it is acceptable or even right to force others to accept and share that particular belief. It is a misplaced enthusiasm which involves over-zealousness and lack of self control ". A fanatic is a person who is filled with excessive enthusiasm, particularly for extreme religious or political course. To this effect some religious leaders and adherents demonstrate fanatical attitude and extremist behaviors or beliefs under the disguise of religious defense and apologetic.

#### **(4) Religious Fundamentalism.**

This is like the former discussed above. Religious practices in Nigeria have taken the trend whereby some religious sects assert that, their religious dogma, teachings and values are the best for every member of the society to accept and as well practice. Speaking on "Islam Revealed", Ali (1991), expresses that, Ayotola's declaration before the World in 1984 that, "In order to achieve the victory of Islam in the World, Muslims need to provide repeated crises and engulf the World in crises". This declaration was

borne out of the conviction that, Islam must spread by all means. To make it more explicit, Gwamna (2010), note that, the concept of fundamentalism was popularized during the early 20th Century and it was declared in religious undertones as the affirmation of religious authority and creed as absolute; it is expressed through collective demand that, specific religious Creeds and Ethical teaching or ideologists derived from sacred writings, must be publicly recognized and legally enforced. For instance, the introduction of the Sharia Law as a main body of civil and criminal Law in 2001, in twelve States in Northern Nigeria, is one among the various demonstrations of fundamentalism in Nigeria.

#### **(5) Fear of Domination of One Religion over the Other.**

The goal of every religion is, to get more adherents and become famous through her evangelical outreaches but, some do this by violence and not recognizing fundamental human rights of the individual's freedom of worship enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Dudley (1989), argues that, fear of domination of one religious group over the other, causes religious conflicts in Nigeria and that a concise review of religious conflicts in Nigeria, reveals that, they are frequent in the six Northern States, than in any other regions in Nigeria. This assertion is buttressed by one of the Guardian Newspaper of July 13, page 21, when the spokesman of Boko Haram, Abu Qaga said, "Christians in Nigeria should accept Islam and regard it as the true religion or they will never have peace. We shall continue to look for Government officials; they will never have the rest of mind. We will attack their homes and security agencies in the way they are attacking us and destroying our homes that we have been renting. We do not have any agenda than working to establish Islamic kingdom, like during the time of Prophet Muhammad, no matter what will happen to us"

#### **(6) The role of the Government;**

The role played by the Federal, State and local Governments or their agencies can help in conflict resolution, prevention or aggravation. Thus far, Olademo (2012), notes that the tendency of the Federal Government to take side and speak or act in favour of one religion at the disadvantage of the other, must definitely open a flood gate for misfiling and religious crisis in the country. An example is that during the regime of President Ibrahim Babagida, Nigeria was registered as a member of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). This implies that the Government must not take side status with any religion in Nigeria, except Islam. This is a clear fact that the government seems to support one religion at the disadvantage of the other religion. Also, the introduction and adoption of the Sharia Legal System in 2001, in some States in the North sparked off fierce crises that engulfed the States of Zamfara, Kano, Kaduna and other areas in the North, where in several lives and properties worth millions of naira were destroyed.

In another vein, the failure of the Government to provide adequate infrastructure, security of lives and properties contributed and will continue to lead to proliferation of sophisticated weapons of mass destruction. The state of insecurity results into indiscriminate loss of human lives and inhuman treatment. The worst of it all is that, the Federal and State security agencies are helpless over this unfriendly situation prevailing in the society today.

(7) Ethnicity and Unemployment; The diverse cultures and ethnic groups have been negatively influenced or turned by religious disagreement and intolerance to become agents of divide and rule in the extent that ethno-religious conflict are on the increase in Nigeria. Speaking on religious conflicts and internally displaced persons in Nigeria, Gwamna (2010), says that "the reoccurrence of religious violence in Jos can be attributed to ethnic factor. That, the main indigenous ethnic groups are in Birom, Naraguta and Afizere who claim ownership of the land". So, this agitation of the land's ownership is coupled with religious differences, reinforce ethnic division, fuels conflict particularly in the North central part of Nigeria where most of these crisis have occurred.

**(8) Incitement and Provocative Utterances** Words as means of communication are very powerful instrument in communication that can be used to built or destroy relationship, depending on how they are used. Omotosho (2003), says that a "careful study of the relationship between Islam and Christianity shows that instead of using the areas of common interest between them to foster better understanding, the leadership of the two religions particularly the intellectual use considerable amount of their efforts in terms of literature and sermons to incite or create sense of hatred and enmity among the followers". For this reason, the words of Ayotollah in (1984) cited by Ali (1999), on the basis that the spread of Islam will be by repeated provision of crisis is a typical example of incitement by religious leaders. Because, right from 1984 till date religious violence had been on the increase.

On the use of provocative language, Gwamna (2010), added that the cartoon riots of February 2006 in Nigeria, was sparked off as a result of blasphemous cartoon on Prophet Muhammad, published by a Danish Newspaper in September 2005. This led to protest in Libya, Pakistan, Indonesia, Syria, Lebanon and Iran. It started as peaceful protest but, resulted into the loss of lives and destruction of properties in Maiduguri, Katsina and Bauchi. In view of the foregoing, religious leaders and followers must strictly avoid the use of offensive words against religious leaders when proclaiming their religious ideas and beliefs. Consequently, it is important to note that some of the utterances, teachings, preaching and publication by religious leaders and intellectuals in one way or the other has influenced religious sentiments, disharmony and violent reactions.

**(9) Religious Intolerance;** A participative observation and interaction shows that, Religious practice in Nigeria lacks forbearance, open mindedness to and acceptance of one another. This is why a man takes up arm against another man irrespective of biological, socio-cultural and ethnic relationship. Strife and bitterness are on great increase; there is no agreement and good relationship among Muslims and Christians. By the way of definition according to Gwamna (2010), intolerance means an ability or failure to regard or appreciate the civic rights, beliefs, convictions, practices and expression of other people In the society. It should be understood that religious intolerance breeds other social vices such as hatred, bitterness, brutality etc. These acts work against socio-economic development and religious harmony. In addition, intolerance is a deviant behaviour which leads to rebellion, unruliness, cruelty and disobedience to religious ideals and societal norms.

Commenting on Religious crisis in a Pluralistic Religious State, a Christian Perspective, Gwamna (2010) remarked that, "the relationship between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria have not been very friendly since time immemorial and this resulted into wars, of which the Crusades and Jihads are prominent". He added that there is a rotating and growing tide of religious discrimination in Nigeria as potential bomb whose explosion is disastrous. Contrary to this sad experience, religion ought to have been and can be used to build peace and restore broken relationship in the society, rather than being changed into instrument of mass murder and destruction of lives. It is now observed with great sadness and dismay that the termites of ethnic and religious intolerance have eaten deep into the heart of the nation's unity and cohesion. Also, Momodu et'al (2010), pointed out that "since religious crisis coupled with destruction of lives, properties and all forms of ill human treatment are frequent in Northern parts of Nigeria, the emphasis and enlightenment by the Northern leaders forum, all religions, communities and political leaders should focus on the promotion of religious tolerance so that families and all people can live in harmony in the society".

### **Consequences of Inter-faith Conflicts**

Religious conflict has unpleasant and unfavorable impact on every sector of human life in the society at any given time it occurs. The contemporary Nigerian society is confronted and besieged with challenges of religious hostility, insecurity, untold hardship, killing, and indiscriminate but deliberate attacks and bombing of Churches and Mosque. Other effects are:

#### **(1) Disruption of National Peace and Harmony;**

Time without number religious conflict breaches national peace and harmony in the society. It is of great importance to note that socio-economic tranquility and meaningful human capital development cannot exist in the absence of peace. In this context, what is peace? Peace refers to the absence of war, freedom from internal and external disturbances. Without been told, the socio-economic and religious tranquility of the nation are being short lived by religious disturbances and any time there is religious conflict, the society is always engulfed with total breakdown of law and order. Most frequently, inter-faith conflict has in recent time led to a state of anarchy and in most cases people are killed, internally displaced, seeks for safety and shelter.

#### **(2) Human Capital Development;**

The havoc wrought by religious conflict on human lives and societal development are enormous. Human being is one of the greatest assets that every nation needs, to develop because they are paramount in evaluating the development of a nation. Often times inter-faith conflicts have brought major disaster upon and slow the pace of Human development by inflicting untimely deaths and displacement on children, youths and adults. Winchester (2005), notes that, history has shown that violent, conflict and war are the worst enemies of mankind and socio-economic development. Therefore, the task of finding solution to the problem of religious frictions and foster human resource development are the best ways to seek for the nation's socio-economic development. Hence, Udoh in the Guardian Newspaper of July 24th 2012, page 15, notes with surprise that;

I think it is about time the Northern leaders come together to find lasting solution to these killings. And if I may add, I think it ultimately would be in the Interest of the Northerners and establishments to end this bloodshed. For one, the economy of the North currently has used up. Some elements think that killing of innocent people would guarantee them entry into heaven... The most important thing about a people should be to strategize and work towards the socio-economic advancement of their people to improve their condition and to create an environment that would engender the pursuit of happiness and success...

Thus, there is economic disaster and waste of innocent souls in Northern and every region in Nigeria because some people think that, killing of human being will give them entry into heaven. This is a great error in the society today because; the ideal is that, there cannot be a nation without a people and religion is useless if there are no people to practice it. So, the killing and destruction of human resources caused by religious violence retards the pace of development and mount pressure on Government and Non-

Governmental Organizations, to spending enormous proportion of their resources on relief materials, medical care and education of fatherless or motherless children and rehabilitation of internally displaced victims of the violence.

### **(3) Threat to Security and Investment Opportunities;**

Many things come to mind when the issue of security or safety is mentioned. The word "Security" refers to safety, defense and freedom from attacks, war and fear of the known and unknown enemies". The state of security in the Nation today reveals that religious violence ranks the highest social problem and led to several declaration of state of emergencies and sometimes dusk to dawn curfew, most especially in the Northern parts of the country. As a result of frequent religious conflicts, security of human lives and properties are at stake. On the interim, security can greatly promote local and foreign investment. Momodu et'al (2010), which reacted to the Implication of Religious conflict for National Security in Nigeria note that, with adequate security put in place socio-economic activities, will blossom. But, the challenge confronting the Government is that, there is no guarantee of safety of lives and properties even in the midst of security intelligence and huge capital spent by the Government to curtail security problems facing the nation. May I add that the great insurgent that worsened the nation's insecurity situation is the Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen and they are affiliated to fundamentalist and militant group that use religious disguise to advance their course..

### **(4) International Relations:**

One of the functions of religion is the anticipation to unite people and all social systems together. But the reverse is the case in Nigeria and other parts of the World. It has been turned to become an instrument of mass destruction of lives, properties and social disorder. According to Smock (2005), one of the greatest challenges to International relations in contemporary time is religious Fundamentalism and this problem is dangerous to Global Socio-political stability and economic development. The current cases of brutal attacks, mass murder and bombing of churches and Mosques in the Northern and other parts of Nigeria, makes the international Communities to categorize Nigeria among the troubled and terrorist nations of the world.

In addition, Musser and Sunderland (2005), say that, Islam plays a major role in determining the political authority of leadership and policies in Muslim societies but, that it is those international politics which focus on Western civilizations that clash rather than cooperate. Meanwhile, in some cases the struggle for Islamic civilization is noticed as one of the biggest threat to national and international peace, law and order for it does not agree to Western civilization. So, the current Islamic revival is a response to the world order that is designed by Western culture or civilization. This forms the basis for Islamic Fundamentalism across the world and it is resistance to Western civilization in other to uphold Islamic tradition and ethics. This is as a result of the fact that Islam means submission and the goal of Jihad is to force people of all nations to submit to Allah's rule. Sometimes, some of the Muslims activities are based on some of the sacred texts. For example, "fight against them so that Allah will punish them by your hands, disgrace them and give victory over them and heal the breast of a believing people" Surah 9:14. The Hadith of Sahih commands Muslims to "Fight against those who disbelieve in Allah and make a holy war" Hadith 19:42.

Therefore, the commands in the Hadith to fight against those who disbelieve Allah and to make holy war, is the flame that motivates Islamic Jihads in the World today. Another declaration is found in the Hadith compiled by Jim Murk. Hadith 1:9, "I have been ordered by Allah to fight people till they bear testimony to the fact that there is no God, but Allah". The implication is that, the fight is against the International community who believe not in Allah, in the context of the Muslims.

### **(5) Social and Economic Development;**

Facts finding on the impact of religious conflicts on the socio-economic development of the society indicates that, both the social and economic segments of the nation have received negative impact of inter-faith conflicts in Nigeria. Religion as a way of life is meant to positively bind up politics, laws, arts, ideologies and entire consciousness of the society and to serve as a tool of mass mobilization through its ethical code of behaviour, which serve as guidelines for the principle and practice of faith to be manifested through attitudes of people towards cooperation with government, legal rules and the market economy. Today, the socio-economic situation of the nation is crumbling on daily basis and victims of conflicts lost huge amount of their wealth, assets and loved ones to religious wars and intolerance.

#### **The Goal of Inter-faith Dialogue**

Inter-faith dialogue is directed toward finding remedy to continuous occurrence of inter-faith conflicts. The goals of inter-faith dialogue are:

(1) To build genuine co-existence and sustainable development through joint community partnership effort in the grass root level, using interactive inter-faith dialogue as a vehicle.

- (2) To ensure that there is cooperative, constructive and positive interactions among the various religions in the World, for the sustenance of peace and harmony.
- (3) To promote international relations, foreign and local investors, ensure national unity and ethno-religious agreement.
- (4) To maintain working relationship among the various religions in the World
- (5) To reduce religiously inspired conflicts and genocide by the use of dialogue.
- (6) To discuss and resolve areas of religious value, differences, disagreement and encourage cooperation among the various faiths.

#### **Interpretation of I Corinthians 13:1-7:**

If I speak in the tongues of men and angels but, have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal and if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountain but, have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all and if I deliver my body to be burnt but, have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful. It is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. It is irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrong but, rejoices on the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. (I Cor. 13:1-7RSV)

#### **Background**

Garland (2003), postulated that, "in biblical text exposition, 1Corinthians13, is referred to as the hymn of love and often noted for being the most loved chapter in the entire New Testament" (p. 120). Garland premised further that "in chapter 13 Paul addressed the Corinthians' problem of unhealthy competition in matter of spiritual gifts with one another". Thus, Hawthorne (1993), noted that, "the Corinthian were wondering whose spiritual gifts are greater and better than the others in order to establish some sort of superiority" (p. 102). This competition and unhealthy rivalry are synonymous to what has been happening between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Additionally, Hawthorne (1993), reiterated that, Paul followed up "the intention and question of whose gift is superior with chapter 13", telling them that they need to love one another and he established among the Corinthians' church that, "not only should they love each other, but they should love everyone as well because; all are children of God".

Furthermore, Gerhandus (2010), opined that, "1Corinthians 13 is classified by some scholars as the second part of Paul's writing to a sequence of three chapters and it is devoted for the personification of the attributes of ἀγάπη (God's kind of love) in Christians' inter-personal and by extension in all matters of human relationship" (p. 88). Thus, in the text, love is the unifying factor in God's relationship with man and man's relationship with his neighbor. Consequently, Elwell and Yarbrough (2005), reaffirmed that, "Paul introduced the subject of the various spiritual endowments in such a manner as to promote the edification and welfare of the Church and that at the close of, 1 Corinthians 12;31, he opined that it was necessary for the Corinthian Church to desire the most eminent gift conferred by the Holy Spirit because; it was more valuable than all" (pp. 101-102). Consequently, Gerhandus (2010), added that, "the most valuable endowment in Christianity is love and this must be obtained by every follower of Christ".

#### **Purpose of the Chapter**

Coogan (2001), ascertained that, "1 Corinthians 13 was written with a focus on proper analysis of the supremacy of love and a continuation of the issues that Paul was discussing on spiritual gifts and how love should be at the centre of all of their actions, not self interest". He added that, the chapter also "addresses the connection of spiritual gifts with the love of God in relationship with God and one another". These actions of love in Chapter13 are representations of the presence of God. Thus, in this Chapter, Paul did not argue that gifts are greater than each others, but rather the issue is their lack of love for one another. According to Paul, "Christ-like love is not represented by the actions of the Corinthians and this lack of love is the root of all of their problems. He called on the Corinthians' believers to live in love; a lifestyle God expects of christians in order to overcome the issues of controversy of spiritual gifts in the Church" (Garland, 2000, pp. 301-302).

#### **Contextual Analysis of I Corinthians13:1-3**

According to Sampley, (2002), "love is often used in the New Testament to describe the intimate and close affections of God and the love of Jesus for people". Also, it describe a communal relationship between Christians and members of the society. Some scholars suggest that the "tongues being referred to here is the gift of speaking in tongues and also recognized as being reference to as speech of "any kind" (Morris, 1985, p.177). Also, Morris (1985), reiterated that the reference to "tongues may as well be referring to heathen worship, especially the worship of Dionysus and Cybele because; the clanging of cymbals and the braying of trumpets was a characteristic of these heathen's worship". Thus, this suggests that "even the coveted gift of tongues was not better than the uproar of heathen worship if love was absent (Garland, 2003).

Furthermore, Hawthorne (1993) emphasized based on the intensity of love that; the chapter consists of three portions:

1. The excellent nature of love above the power of speaking in the language (tongues) of men and of angels; love is above the power of understanding all mysteries; above all faith and above the virtue of giving of all one's goods to feed the poor, giving of one's body to be burned. All these endowment would be valueless without love, [1 Corinthians 13;1-3].
  2. A statement of the characteristics of love and its happy influences on the minds and hearts of those who possess it, 1 Corinthians 13;4-
  3. A comparison of love with the gift of prophecies and the power of speaking the foreign languages was made along with the gift of knowledge, [1 Corinthians 13; 8-13]. In this portion of the chapter, Paul affirms that love is superior to all other spiritual gifts because, it is the nature of God, the essence of Christ's sacrificial death, an example for believers to emulate and it will live in Heaven and it will constitute the chief glory of that World of Bliss.
- (1) The Principle of tolerance in inter-personal relationship. Lawson (1967) asserted that, "patience is descriptive of God's communicable attribute of long suffering attitude towards humanity in their imperfect status". In addition, Abdu-Fatah (2009), added that patience among the religions, is an instrument needed in other to control the growing tides of religious conflicts in Nigeria.
- (2) Love advocates for exercise of self control and discipline. Religious fundamentalism and fanaticism are both acts of extremism in religious practice that fuel conflict situations. Thus, lack of self control among religious leaders, adherents and political stakeholders, in the times of conflict aggravates it, than resolve it.
- (3) Love promotes kindness and good will in the society. Love is kind, tender heart and delights in the happiness of others; as well promote their welfare; not working to see their downfall. Everett et'al (22004), posit that, kindness indicates the act of being lovely, friendly, generous and merciful. Also, Guthrie (2010), advocates that, to love means to show compassion and sincere concern (empathy), towards one another. Still on the importance of kindness, Ralph and Reid (199), consider kindness as, being helpful and considerate towards other people during inter personal relationship.
- (4) Love promotes trusting one another. But, in many homes, society and in religious practices, lack of trust is a mirage. Ralph and Reid ascertained that, the phrase "love believe all things", means that, love is ever ready to believe the best for every person and not imagine evil of anyone but, gladly receive whatever may tend to be the advantage of anyone who may have suffered from harmful humiliation and depression.
- (5) Love is not jealous of its neighbor. Jealousy on the negative dimension here means the emotion that is inspired by the action of infringing on or denial of the exclusive right of worship and service by man, Everett et'al (2004). Meanwhile, Ralph and Reid agitate that, there is also the positive side of jealousy demonstrated by humans which reflects God's nature; God is jealous hence, he does not want any human being to worship or bow down to idol or other gods. The jealousy of God is that he does not want us to do evil because it has negative effect on our lives and thus, man's jealousy should be directed toward working for one another's welfare and progress.
- (6) Love is not arrogant, puffed-up or rude. Arrogance is an emotional feeling of superiority complex over other people; it is also insubordination attitude. According to Milland (1996), the word "pride or puffed up" means to show a higher than thou self esteem but, on the contrast, love is not infiltrated with a sense of its own importance or achievement; it knows that it has nothing by its own power but by the Grace of God.
- {7} Love works in the principal of cooperation and obedience. The willingness of people to accept and submit to authorities at all levels will greatly facilitate social harmony and economic development. Anywhere love exists there is bound to be unity and progress. Also, the society will be more peaceful when people share good ideas together and listen to each other during interaction. Apostle Paul says that true love does not insist on its own way, without considering the opinion of others. To insist also means to be resolute, persevere and to be resolute, persevere and to be adamant. Milland [1996], notes that, the fact that love does not insist on its own opinion in human relation means that, it is not adamant nor conduct itself improperly, disgraceful or in a manner to deserve rebuke. This conveys the fact that love does not associate itself with the claim of superiority complex found among many religions today.
- core values in religion accelerate social, economic and religious stability True love that flows from God does not think of evil towards its neighbor; evil means wickedness, malicious act and other social vices that hinder social, religious, economic and political harmony. This characteristic of love in the view of Milland [1996], means that a person under the influence of love is not malicious or disposed to find fault in or device evil against others. Gerhandus [2010], says that the Greek word expresses the fact that love does not reckon charge to a man any evil intention or design. In contemporary religious practices, some people specialize in nurturing and exhibiting act of destruction of lives, properties and other social crimes in the clamor for fulfilling religious obligations. It is observed that, love makes the difference in a way that the man whose heart is controlled by God's love gives every man credit for his profession of religion, uprightness, and godly zeal.
- [9] The principal of Justice/ Fairness. Is it possible for peace and socio-economic development to thrive in an atmosphere of social injustice and break down of law and order? The answer is absolutely no. So, every true religion must strive to promote fairness, impartiality, honesty, integrity and righteousness because these are some of the core valves for peace and harmony in the society. Apostle Paul told the church at Corinth that God's love does not rejoice at wrong or wickedness. Some of the wrong acts and practices that cause problems and destroy socio-religious and political stability in Nigeria today are, religious restiveness [terrorism], bribery, bandits, insecurity, political, religious and economic injustice, to mention but a few.
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### Ἀγάπη: A TOOL FOR INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE

Inter-faith conflict is frequent in the day to day history of religious practice in Nigeria and the application of the principle of agape(love) will play paramount role in inter-faith dialogue.

#### Principles of Conflict Resolution

Conflicts have existed in all cultures, religion and societies since time immemorial, as long as human have walked the earth. Philosophies and procedures for dealing with conflict have been part of the human heritage but, differing between cultures and societies. In addition, nations, groups, and individuals have tried throughout history to manage conflict in order to minimize the negative and undesirable impacts that they may pose. Also, identifying a problem and the causes is good but working out ways toward the solution is of great importance and more beneficial to the human society. Nevertheless, the nation cannot enjoy socio economic development and religious harmony unless the problem of religious intolerance is properly handled by all religious, society and political stakeholders. In the search for lasting solution to conflict using the Beatitudes of Jesus as a model, (2011), listed some traditional methods of conflict resolution to include the following:

- (1) The principle of collaboration; this is built on the idea of teamwork and co operation in helping people to achieve their goals while they still maintain relationship. This means that, to effectively manage conflict in the society, everybody needs to work together, in partnership to restore peace and broken relationship.
- (2) The principle of compromise (give and take) is built on the premise of winning something while losing a little in an effort to handle a difficult situation. This principle is recommended because; it promotes the idea of cooperation and negotiation in finding the middle ground for give and take.
- (3) The principle of accommodation. This principle asserts that, working together towards a common goal or purpose is important. It is related to the principle of co- operation which depicts the fact that unity is strength.
- (4) The principle of competition; this is an effort to resolve conflict through rivalry, aggression, antagonism, war struggle or contest. This is associated with the process of winning a conflict with strife, competition and with the assumption that when goals are extremely important, one must sometimes use power or violence to win. This is not supported by the love paradigm in 1 Corinthians 13.
- (5) The principal of Avoidance. This principal in conflict management is based on the premise of avoiding one another with excuse that this is not the right time or place to address the issue, so, it can be postponed till further notice. Those who have the disagreement continue to avoid each other and doing things separately, without proper relationship in the process of searching for remedy for the problem of misunderstanding and crisis situation. To the best of my knowledge the principals of accommodation and collaboration or cooperation will be relevant for inter-faith conflict resolution because, they will greatly enhance socio- economic development and promote peace in the society.

#### RESEARCH METHOD

This paper used the qualitative (documentary) research approach with main focus on the literary/analytical, sociological, and historical research methods.. Justifiably, these methods centers on review prior empirical documentations on a subject with a view to ascertain the extent to which contributions have been made by scholars over time. It is in the light of this, the paper carefully examined the extent to which Ἀγάπη (**Love**) IN 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-7 can be used as a tool to solve inter-faith conflicts.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established among other things that, inter-faith conflict has negatively impacted the economic development, societal peace and religious harmony of the nation. It thus establish that, the adoption of the principle of Agape in 1 Corinthians 13, must be applied by all inter-faith peace building and conflict management/resolution agencies, to avert the ranging wave of inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Hence, the paper submits that, religious leaders and adherents, as well as political and community leaders should apply the principle of dialogue and tolerance in inter-faith conflict resolution. The Government at all levels, religious leaders and adherents must cease from the use of provocative words because; it stirs up conflicts among the people in the society. In addition, religion must not be used by religious leaders and adherents, as a rod of division to promote hostility and anarchy in the society but, as a unifying factor in every aspect of human relations in the society.

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