



## Features: SAY NO TO RELIGIOUS WAR!

Jul 02, 2018

### ABUJA, NIGERIA -

The desire of every extremist, terrorist and those who politicize religion is to cause religious war. To achieve their aim, they operate as if they are speaking in the name of an organized religious body such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA). For this reason, responsible Christians and Muslims must say NO to their efforts. In the Catholic Church and other organized religious institutions there is what is called "personal opinion" and "official statements" either from an Episcopal Conference or from the Holy Father the Pope. I say this because some people who seek to make religious institutions and organizations chaotic by causing intra-religious conflict do not seek the welfare of the people. These could perfect their mischief from intra-religious conflict to inter-religious conflict. Some of these people have fought for power to no avail and thus resort to make their legitimate institutions ungovernable. No wonder Saint Thomas Aquinas said that those who fight for power by all means should not be allowed to have leadership positions.

The publication in Punch newspaper on Saturday, June 23, 2018 sounds like a clarion call for war. The publication states that "The present generation of Christians in Nigeria may cease to exist in 25 years from now (2043), beginning from 2018". This was credited to "a group of Christians under the aegis of 'National Christian Elders Forum'". The publication states that, "the present generation of Christians faces the risk of being the last set of Christians in Nigeria. The NCEF therefore demanded the restructuring of the Christian Association of Nigeria before

the 2019 general elections. The organization warned that if the current faulty structure would be carried into 2019, it might be too late to preserve Christianity in Nigeria.” After naming the members of this forum, the report added that the Secretary of NCEF, Pastor Bosun Emmanuel, expressed these fears in his paper entitled: “Impact of lack of unity in CAN as threat to Christian faith.” Emmanuel Bosun said that “the current administration of President Muhammadu Buhari in Nigeria is openly pursuing an anti-Christian agenda that has resulted in countless murders of Christians all over the nation and destruction of vulnerable Christian communities”(theeditor@punchng.com).

This publication does not represent the consensus of all the Christians in Nigeria. It is not the collective decision of the National Executive Council of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN NEC). The general public and readers of Pastor Bosun’s publication should take serious note that the “National Christian Elders Forum” is not in the organogram of CAN. The Constitution of CAN only recognizes the “President in Council” that comprises responsible Christian leaders who play the role of responsible elders. These Church leaders are committed to the promotion of Christian Unity and Peaceful Co-existence with people of other religions. The President in Council do not have the mandate to echo the sounds of inter-religious war. They promote the values of Jesus Christ and prevent crisis. Those who call for crisis lack the Spirit of Christ who is the Prince of Peace. Jesus calls Peacemakers children of God (Matthew 5:9).

The publication of Pastor Bosun shows that the “Christian Elder’s forum” is anti-CAN leadership. May they not drag innocent Christians into unnecessary religious war. No responsible institution would come to the open to wash dirty linens in the pages of the newspapers. The Christian Association of Nigeria has a National Executive Council that meet to discuss the concerns of Christians for the nation. Coming to the pages of newspaper to show how an army is divided and lacks unity of purpose is already a colossal failure before the battle. This is so because a reasonable army believes that “unity is strength” and “divided we fall”.

These clarifications are necessary because the publications by the “Christian Elders Forum” have been credited to CAN by Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC). Professor Is-haq Akintola, the President of MURIC should not think that these drums of war are the decisions of the leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria. The readers should know that even the President of CAN is under serious attack by the “Elder’s Forum”. MURIC should also note that the July 18, 2017 publication in the “Renaissance” titled, “Stop politicizing religion: MURIC warns CAN and belligerent retired Christian military generals” is addressed to the wrong Association. If CAN is really planning for war against Muslims, they would not reveal the weakness of the Association in the newspapers. A wise leader is fully aware that a divided army cannot win a battle. No Christian Association who follow the footsteps of Christ would want to go to war talk less of revealing the war strategies in the public newspapers that are accessible to the perceived enemies. I suggest therefore that MURIC should address the publishers only and say NO to religious war.

It is a pity that the Christian Elders have brought CAN and its immediate past President to ridicule with this question by MURIC: “Is there any connection between this surreptitious union and the South African money-for-arms scandal which involved an aircraft belonging to Ayo Oritsejafor, former CAN president” (<http://therenaissanceng.com>)? I beg the “Christian Elders Forum” to respect the leadership of CAN and our dear Pastor Ayowhom they claim to be their founder. The Ogieneni of Uzairue says that it is the Prince who insults the King if he insults another person’s father. This is because the King who is the father of the Prince would be insulted in retaliation. What Nigeria needs now is for Muslims and Christians to jointly demand for justice and accountability from the leaders we gave our votes to make Nigeria a developed nation such that every Nigerian citizen would live in comfort. Nigeria is rich enough to stop the mass exodus to foreign countries where they are treated worse than slaves. If the Nigerian youths are empowered with jobs, they can have food on their tables. They will stop dying in the deserts and oceans of other nations that are not as viable as Nigeria in terms of natural and human resources.

How many Christian and Muslim leaders really care about religious values? Calling on Christians to vote only for

Christians and Muslims to vote only for Muslims is an effort to use religion like cabbage. What we need now is a human being who is a Nigerian that has value for human dignity and care for the common good to be voted as our leader. Preparing for war in 2019 and prophesying the extinction of any religion is not what Nigeria needs now. It is an insult to humanity to count only numbers of those who have died or displaced due to security challenges. Have these killings really respected any religion? Human beings who are Nigerians are being killed on a daily basis by hunger, kidnapers, armed robbers, ritualists, political thugs, religious extremists, terrorists and herdsmen. These are the enemies we should fight and bring to justice rather than instigating Christians and Muslims to prepare for inter-religious war. We must say NO to war and YES to peaceful co-existence. May God save us from unguided insinuations and threat to peace!

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