# Assessing the Role of Religious Fundamentalism in Social Sustainability in Christian Churches in Obudu, Cross River State, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

This study borders on a clear appreciation of the impact of Christian Religious Fundamentalism on the overall societal livelihood patterns in the area under investigation. The problem identification sprang from the generally observed trends in religious worship among Christian adherents that is characterized by a marked division between the "Born again" and the "non-born again" Christians. This division is orchestrated by the former sect who in their prejudice draw a clear line of demarcation between themselves and others. The concern then remains what augury this will be for the entire society in their day-to-day live modes in the churches, their place of work, the general public and all the rest.

The justification is born out of the fact that a clear evaluation of this scenario may pave the way towards instituting a proper direction of mutual understanding between the two groups for the achievement of a sustainable society. Sustainable society here is seen from the point of view of inclusive livelihood between all Christians and non-Christians for the interest of societal progress.

Following this, the objectives include investigation of the role of religious fundamentalism in inter-denominational crises, the impact of this on family life, its impact in neighborhood understanding in family life and cohesion and investigation of the sex dimension of this belief system.

Accordingly, the literature reviews embodied explanation of the concepts of fundamentalism and its approach by the practitioners. It also included the negative contributions of fundamentalism to societal progress. The literature glaringly depicted that fundamentalism smacks of literary appreciation of biblical dogma without question and also that it negates inclusiveness which is one of the cardinal injunctions of the Christian faith. Again that fundamentalism features out-group hostility and inimical to social sustainability,

## INTRODUCTION

Religious fundamentalism is a system of religious belief that tilts to extreme perspective of non-tolerance/admittance of errors by self and other. It may be termed a puritanical stance in religious faith concerning the idea of salvation. Officially, a succinct expression of this concept has been provided by Kossowka *et al* (2018) in their expressions which read:

Religious fundamentalism is said to be a collection of infallible beliefs or principles that provide guidance regarding how to obtain salvation. Religious fundamentalists believe in the superiority of their religious teaching and in a strict division between righteous people and evil doers. This belief system not only regulates religious thoughts, but also all conceptions regarding self, others and the world. It is a system of "meta belief" a world view that provides an absolute foundation to determine what to do in various particular situations and how to live in general.

The above descriptions highlight a glaring tendency of condensed religious conduct non tolerance of flaws or fallibilities which human nature is imbued with.

It provides an arid ground for non-accommodation of the numerous religious virtues of compassion, understanding of human frailties, and love of neighbor, forgiveness and what have you. In this sense social sustainability is chequered/ rocked to the barest minimum.

This falls in line with the statement made by Swed (2020) that "Religious fundamentalism has significantly shaped world history and continues to influence individual attitudes and behaviors. The behavioral perspective is couched in two technical expressions concerning the fundamentalists and the non-fundamentalists concerning their respective dispositions to uncertainties. While the non-fundamentalists are regarded as being "low in their need for closure", the fundamentalist are said to be "high in their need for closure". This means that the non-fundamentalists are easily pacifiable and tolerant or understandable while the fundamentalist are rigid and give no room for forgiveness.

This attitude is a serious bane of social sustainability. Social sustainability is simply a condition of social harmony or mutual living for the sake of peace, love and progress which agrees with the injunction provided by our Lord Jesus Christ in his prayer instruction to his apostle; "Let thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven". How can the kingdom come on earth in the face of sectorial discrimination among churches and all the other variants of fundamentalist rivalries.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM/JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

### Problem Statement

The role of religious fundamentalism in the sustainability of societies has never been positive. When people discriminate among each other there is bound to be a rift, conflict or crisis. Historical accounts of such incidents are enormous or ubiquitous in Nigeria. Full blown incidents of fundamentalists uprising are common place incidents in Northern Nigeria which have led to riots and rampages by opposing sects resulting in the loss of many lives.

The shape taken by the fundamentalists Christians against their brothers is somewhat seemingly subtle but socially damaging. It comes in the form of propaganda, castigation and other sorts of "holier than thou" approach. It is the

clear understanding of how or to what extent this is prevailing among churches, individual worshipers, family line, and the general society that this research endeavor sets out to investigate.

### Justification for The Research

Social sustainability is what is most crucial for peace and progress in societies. God is not satisfied only with people praying all round the clock without love and accommodation of one's neighbor.

Adequate knowledge of human interaction at all levels of societal existence is worthwhile for competent social engineering. It is at the backdrop of understanding livelihood at all levels of the society.

Understanding of the clear perspectives of religious rivalries caused by zealots or fundamentalist will provide worthwhile avenues for intervention by social workers and other professionals in the field.

Information garnered from the study will serve as a guide in the understanding of the true perspectives of the relationships among religious organizations in the area of study. It will be valuable in family life counselling regarding religious tolerance and freedom of worship and belief.

It will significantly contribute to knowledge relevant areas in the academia.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objective for the study are as follows:

1) To examine the role of religious fundamentalism in interdenominational rivalries in church worship in the area.

2) To investigate the impact of religious fundamentalism in family life harmony in the area.

3) To assess the effect of religious fundamentalism in neighbourhood sustainability in the area.

4) To evaluate the impact of fundamentalism in the overall family cohesion.

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS:

HO: There is no significant impact of religious fundamentalism in social sustainability in Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Terminological Conception

The terminological concept of religious fundamental has been provided by many studies carried in the field. Broadly, religious fundamentalism is taken to be an aggregation of infallible beliefs or principles that provide guidance regarding how to obtain salvation. The fundamentalists are said to believe in the superiority of their own teachings, and in a strict division between righteous people and evil doers (Alterneyer and Hinberger, 1992), The belief system not only regulates religious thoughts, but also conceptions regarding self, others and the world. It is said to be a Meta belief, a world view that provides an absolute foundation for how do in various particular situations and on how to live in general (Koltko Rivers 2006).

The fundamentalists are said to engage in error-response monitoring and emphasis on self-control. In their Meta belief, fundamentalists increase the subjective feeling of self-control as well as foster self-regulation (Baumester and Heatherton, 1996). By this means the fundamentalists believe that one may refocus attention, alter ones mood or emotional state, overcome fatigue, resist temptation or various other ways change one's mind or action (Geyer

and Bumester, 2006). Studies carried out revealed that fundamentalism is related to temptation resistance, endurance of discomfort, the ability to delay gratification and response accuracy (lnzliche & Tullet, 2010).

Nikolaws et al (2023) have provided a broad typology of the image of religious fundamentalism. They held that the fundamentalists are searching to create enemies and the need to fight and thus attracting and gathering enemies. That the religious fundamentalisms is exclusive because it is believed to have exclusive guidelines for all aspects and questions of life and conversely is anti-pluralistic. Again that they are political activists and that they consider themselves "warriors of God". Further on, that they are literally following the sacred texts but that they use them selectively and that unconscious that they lean forward modernity, despite the fact that they present themselves as anti-modernism. Going further that they are male oriented. That the key position is taken by a "gifted leader" who often times may be of double character. The typology is longer but the truth remains that the fundamentalist are subjective, egocentric and self-conceited.

Regarding the antecedents of fundamentalism (Knilter 2003) reported that fundamentalism was born in the 1920 in North America by circles of Baptist and

Presbyterians who founded the "World's Christian fundamentalists association. Accordingly, Pobee *et al* (2002) outlined some basic principles of the fundamentalists' dogma as:

    i.    The belief that holy bible is literally inspired by God;

    ii.    That modern theology and any science which contradicts biblical science is insignificant;

    iii.    That anyone who does not live according to their tenet is not a Christian.

Several other of such extremist tenets abound.

## PERSPECTIVES ON FUNDAMENTALISM AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Fundamentalism has severally been viewed as a form of extreme religious advocacy or dogma about the essence of God and man. Obviously, it has been stated categorically that the fundamentalist notion of religion tends to portray God as a punishing God not as a merciful God (Bierre and Elloitt, 2003). It was reasoned that fundamentalism as a form of an increase religiousity may result from an earlier experience of trauma, victimization and maltreatment (Kulie and Ehring, 2014).

This agrees with Graquis & Diekie's (2005) compensation hypothesis that individuals with insecure childhood attachment may be more likely to seek God for compensatory attachment relationship.

There is also the context of fundamentalism and out group hostility which of course is the nucleus of the fundamentalist departure from the liberal Christian, adherents. This has been substantiated based on extant research which has consistently documented that fundamentalism is strongly associated with prejudices and hostility towards various out-groups including homosexuals (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 1992, Baythe et al 2002) members of other religious groups (Altemeyer 2003) and various other ethnic and racial minorities (McFarland 1989).

## FUNDAMENTALISM AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

### The Bright and Dark Side of the Image

Sustainability devolves on continuity, multiplicity, harmony and sustained progress. Sustainability borders on an inclusive spirit of people in a society which involves expression of true love, cooperation, mutual coexistence and the respect of human rights and dignity (Ukoma 2008).

Ukoma (2008) presented a lucid digest of the two sides of the image. On the Bright side, he held that positive religious fundamental focuses on the practice of such acceptable religious moral tenets which lead to the protection of common good. He illustrated the Biblical instance of this image by reference to the Beatitudes (Matthew 5) and the Pauline letter to the Roman (Roman 13) which direct attention to the essence of good citizenship. Also, the Muslim doctrine of the respect for the mother earth and the universal recognition of persons as a common race were also alluded as encouraging sustainable development.

The dark side of fundamentalism manifests in violence, wanton destruction of lives and property and disruption of economic activities which are inimical to social sustainability (Ukoma, 2008).

In line with some existing schools of thought fundamentalism is founded on certain underlying philosophies which give vent to the approach to reality and world view (Okpa et al 2018).

Some of these include: ultra-orthodoxy, ultra-orthopraxis messiahism, Reactivity and moral Manichaeism:

    -    Ultra-orthodoxy is based on absolute accuracy of the holy book. This is based on the direct interpretation of holy book. Ultra-orthopraxis which dovetails on following the rules to the letter.

- Messiahism concerns the belief of an almighty messiah or savior. Reactivity is based on the practical response of the fundamentalist to the process and consequences of secularization and modernity.

- Manichaesim centers on the dualist conception of the world into the spiritual world of light and the material world of darkness with firm belief that at the end the spiritual world will overcome the material world.

Based on the true spirit of the above philosophies religious fundamentalism has a great deal to contribute towards social sustainability it based the spirit of hard work, tolerance, trust, honesty, hope, peace and courage but the reverse is the case, In Nigeria elsewhere fundamentalism has wrecked untold havoc on the society leading to loss of lives, and displacement of persons and all other social maladies.

The Matasinis, the Boko Harams, the Shieks and many others have been unleashed against Christians in Nigeria. In Europe, there is serious consternation between Moslems and Christians as reported in extant literature and other digests.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The basic framework of the methodology of research is as follows:

**Research Design**

This research design is a form of action research design aimed at investigating an existing trend in a bid to unravel true perspectives of the incidents towards proffering possibilities of reversal of the trend.

**Area of Study**

The study area is Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Obudu is one of the eighteen geo-political entities that make the Cross River State of Nigeria. Geo-politically it belongs to the Northern Senatorial zone of the state, the others being central and southern senatorial zones respectively.

Geographically, it falls within the Guinea Savana biome and/or the tropical continental regions of dry and wet seasons respectively. The people are predominantly the "Bette" speaking ethnic group who engage in some form of arable farming with small scale horticulture which is enabled by the hilly terrain that provide adiabatic effect in its climatic regimes, This incidence provide the fertile soil catena at the lower foot hills thereby encouraging luxuriant growth of trees/tree crops.

Modernization and urbanization has led to the presence of heterogeneous population with correspondingly variegated cultural background. This has significant implications for religious practices and beliefs. The native traditional beliefs still subsists among some natives in the area.

**Study Population**

This entire universe of this study comprise all adherents of Christian faith who fellowship in different denomination in Obudu urban and its environs. The age category of the respondents span between adolescent categories to adult worshipers.

**Sampling Technique**

Sampling was carried out in stages as follows:

a. Categorization and identification of the existing denominations in church worship in the area.

b. Stratification of the denominations into orthodox, Pentecostal, and spiritual miracle working churches.

c. Representative selection from the three categories.

d. Randomization from the sample text.

**Instruments for Data Collection**

The main instrument employed in field data collection is the questionnaire which was administered on the respondent to derive the necessary information for reporting. Other surrogate measures such as observation was used as supplementary devices.

**Method of Data Collection**

Data was collected based on the following procedure:

i. Identification and enumeration of existing religious sects in the area.

ii. Classification into groups based on mode of worship or dogma.

iii. Selection or determination of sample size.

iv. Actual field data collection in stages.

**Method of Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using the One Way analysis of Variance statistical technique.

**Data Presentation**

The field data collected is presented ion table 1 below. The respondent's information elicited was collected using the 4 points Likert scale as follows: A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree. This is represented horizontal and the table below while the sustainability parameters are equally represented on the vertical axis on the table below.

**Table l: Impact of religious fundamentalism on social sustainability in churches in Obudu area in Cross River State, Nigeria.**

| ITEM NO. | SUSTAINABILITY PARAMETER | LIKERTS 4 POINTS RATING SCALE | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | AGREE | STRONGLY AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE | TOTAL |
| 1. | Religious fundamentalism has a strong negative impact in church service in the area. | 225 | 215 | 62 | 07 | 500 |
| 2. | Religious fundamentalist has adverse effect on neighbourhood relation in the area. | 178 | 221 | 80 | 17 | 496 |
| 3. | Fundamentalism affects family cohesion. | 216 | 183 | 62 | 36 | 497 |
| 4. | Fundamentalism causes breakages in marriages. | | 207 | 131 | 15 | 497 |
| 5. | Fundamentalism produces anti-social behaviour by the fundamentalist. | 304 | 97 | 63 | 31 | 495 |
| 6. | Fundamentalism evokes poverty and low mortality in the area. | 199 | 203 | 71 | 21 | 494 |
| 7. | Fundamentalism leads to disease causation among its members. | 189 | 162 | 89 | 47 | 487 |
| 8. | Fundamentalist produces cultural disembeddedness among its members. | 245 | 185 | 42 | 18 | 490 |
| 9. | Fundamentalist produces conservation ideals by its members. | 196 | 205 | 68 | 27 | 497 |
| 10. | Fundamentalism causes disunity in communities and traditional societies. | 267 | 165 | 42 | 14 | 492 |

**HYPOTHESIS ONE**

HO: There is significant impact of religious fundamentalism in social sustainability in Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

*To test this hypothesis, data from table 1 above was analyze using One-way Analysis of variance.*

Anova: Single Factor

SUMMARY

| Groups | Count | Sum | Average | Variance |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Religious fundamentalism has a strong negative impact in church service in the area. | 4 | 509 | 127.25 | 11990.92 |
| Religious fundamentalist has adverse effect on neighbourhood relation in the area. | 4 | 496 | 124 | 8570 |
| Fundamentalism affects family cohesion. | 4 | 497 | 124.25 | 7844.25 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fundamentalism causes breakages in marriages. | 3 | 353 | 117.6667 | 9349.333 |
| Fundamentalism produces anti-social behaviour by the fundamentalist. | 4 | 495 | 123.75 | 15166.25 |
| Fundamentalism evokes poverty and low mortality in the area. | 4 | 494 | 123.5 | 8427.667 |
| Fundamentalism leads to disease causation among its members. | 4 | 487 | 121.75 | 4267.583 |
| Fundamentalist produces cultural disembeddedness among its members. | 4 | 490 | 122.5 | 12104.33 |
| Fundamentalist produces conservation ideals by its members. | 4 | 496 | 124 | 8096.667 |
| Fundamentalism causes disunity in communities and traditional societies. | 4 | 488 | 122 | 13646 |

ANOVA

| Source of Variation | SS | df | MS | F | P-value | F crit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 184.6923 | 9 | 20.52137 | 0.002059 | 1 | 2.222874 |
| Within Groups | 289039.7 | 29 | 9966.885 | | | |
| Total | 289224.4 | 38 | | | | |

**Decision Rule:**

Since our *f Critical* Value *(*2.222874*)* is greater than our *F value (*0.002059*)* at an alpha level of 0.05, we therefore accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypothesis which means there is significant impact of religious fundamentalism in social sustainability in Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Religious fundamentalism is concerned with the core of religion in people's lives; it emphasizes behavior that is defined by religion as "good" or "evil," and it fosters confidence, faith, and quick solutions to the most difficult problems facing humanity. Furthermore, it fosters a distinct feeling of identity, connection, and purpose that meets the existential and social requirements of practitioners. Believing in a rigid religious doctrine known as fundamentalism forbids actions like hate speech, societal disintegration, intolerance, hostility, immorality, oppression, and fanaticism.

Nonetheless, in all human society, progress and sector changes result from a strong and unwavering dedication to these fundamental ethical ideals. We are not fully aware that any society may continue to exist without strong adherence to morals, trust, justice, liberty, truth, goodness, and loyalty, according to Anyanwu (2004). He insisted that religion alone was the source of all these virtues. In light of the aforementioned claim, it would not be inappropriate to say that this phenomena can, in fact, contribute to the formation of moral character, which is an essential component of sustainable growth.

All forms of religious restlessness and insurgencies are caused by the misreading and improper application of religion teachings, ethics, and principles. This has put an end to all initiatives and programs intended to promote sustainable development in Nigeria.

According to Ojoajogwu (2014), Nigeria's three main religions share a great deal of shared ideals that enable them to forward the goals of the country. The ability of religion to mold honorable human personalities is its most significant attribute. Each of these three religions has unique principles that govern human behavior and establish what is right and wrong (Imaekhai, 2010). According to Ojoajogwu (2014), all of these religions share comparable standards that, when faithfully followed, can foster and improve national development

### *Conclusion*

In the last ten years, a large body of research has been conducted that shows the advantages of religious activity in society. The well-being of individuals, families, and the community is enhanced by religious activity. Fagan (1996:112) notes that research suggests that religion helps the underprivileged: Strong marriages, well-behaved kids, and a healthy, stable family life are all associated with regular attendance at religious services. Additionally, there is a decrease in the prevalence of drug misuse, addiction, domestic violence, and criminal activity among those who practice religion. Furthermore, practicing religion increases longevity, educational attainment, and mental and physical wellness.

As much as we may allow the impact of sophisticated education on peculiarly structured minds, experience and reason both prevent us from expecting religious principles to be subordinated to national morality. Understanding religion's role in the country's constitutional system is essential to the country's continued prosperity, considering how much religious activity fosters civil society. A significant remedy for many of the urgent social issues facing our country—many of which have grown to historically high proportions—is the practice of religion. Even so, there are still many obstacles that religious expression in public places must overcome.

As a result, lawmakers ought to look for constitutionally sound means of investigating how religious practice affects society and, where necessary, acknowledging its significance for the long-term growth of the country. Religion enhances economic well-being, health, and academic performance. It also develops self-control, self-worth, empathy, and compassion.

Numerous of the country's most important social issues, some of which have gotten to the point of seriousness (such as unwed births and family breakup), can be addressed by religious belief and practice. Studies have connected religious practice to lower rates of drug and alcohol abuse, divorce, criminality, delinquency, unwed pregnancies, health issues, anxiety, and prejudice. Faith-based outreach has been especially successful in drug addiction treatment and prisoner re-entry programs. Moreover, religious practice and belief have cumulative, generational repercussions. They "compound the interest" of our social capital, so to speak.

The right to freely practice one's religion and the freedom from an established religion go hand in hand. This freedom is not to be confused with the so-called shield against religious influence. To further contribute to the breakdown of society is to endeavor to lessen the impact of religious belief or practice. The effects of living in a society where there is little to no religious activity are greater than any discomfort that some people may feel from the religious beliefs and activities of others.

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