

## Golden Rule and Its Impact on Resolving the Conflict of Ethno-Religious Supremacy in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Golden Rule as a principle of love sustains peace and orderliness in a society where it is applied, especially a multi-cultural and religious society like Nigeria. This principle advocates for equal treatment of humankind regardless of one's ethnicity and religion. This minimises the usual conflict of ethno-religious supremacy. Ethnic and religious tussle for supremacy has introduced hatred among adherents of many religions in Nigeria. Each adherent abuses another in one way, partly driven by difference in belief, doctrine, worldviews and the likes. This has been a cog in the wheel of peaceful co-existence in a multi-ethnic and religious state like Nigeria because it accounts for political and religious crisis in the country. The Golden Rule principle shows that loving your neighbour like yourself without minding his appearance, language or mode of worship enhances peaceful co-existence. Moreover, the golden rule is a clarion call for selfless service and tolerance: A behavioural pattern will guarantee living in harmony and being united regardless of our differences. The Golden Rule when properly internalised or seen as a way of life can reduced the problem of ethno-religious supremacy to insignificant in Nigeria. This is because, it is a moral obligation that prohibits restriction of love within individual religion and ethnic group. The aim of this study is to encourages the practice of golden rule in a multi-ethnic and religious society. The paper applies the phenomenological research design. Data was mostly gathered using secondary sources from journals, newspaper, textbooks and online materials. It was analysed using descriptive analysis. The researcher found that a multi-ethnic state that practice golden rule experience less political and religious crises.

**Key words:** Golden Rule, Conflict, and Ethno-Religious Supremacy

### Introduction

The pride of any state or nation is to have low record of internal conflict or crisis. It makes the citizens derive natural attachment to governance because their civil rights are not questioned, and fundamental human rights are always respected. This has been the ideal state of Nigeria, but religious and ethnic pluralism poses as a problem towards achieving this end. Nigeria with a population of 216.7 million inhabitants (Doris, 2022), have Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion as the major religions distributed in the east, north and western regions of the country. Moreover, Abdul (2005) documents that Nigeria consist of not less than 250 difference ethnic groups, of which Igbo, Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba is the major among them. Among these three major ethnic groups, Islamic faith is preponderate among the Hausa/Fulani while Christianity is more prominent among the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups. Osaghae and Suberu (2005) states that "elements of African Traditional Religion like masquerade activities etc are found among these ethnic groups regardless of being endow with Islam and Christianity" (p5). However, each ethic group have unique culture, religion and ideologies different from others. Therefore, their belief system, mode of worship, dressing, language, etc. varies. The differences among the ethnic groups gave rise to competition. Competition within the groups can be related to ecological competition. As stated by Georgii (1986), ecological competition is "the struggle between two or more organisms for the same resources within an environment" (Para. 1). He further states that if a limiting resource exists in the environment and two species rely on that resource, only one of the species will survive. The other will either become extinct in the environment or it will develop evolutionary adaptations that shift it toward a different ecological niche. This is always the situation in a multi-ethnic State. An ethnic group would like to exercise dominion over other, possibly by controlling the political and economic resources within the environment. The ethnic group also coerce others to accept their belief system, ideologies and cultural worldview. Occasionally, the inferior ethnic groups oppose the decisions and actions of the superior in defence of their own belief system, ideologies and cultural worldview. Patriotically, the inferior defends their ethnicity for the fear of going into extinction or adapting to a difference derogatory ecological niche. The superior oppresses the inferior, so that they will remain the conqueror.

The inferior in turn revolt against the superior to relief themselves from being the conquered. In this situation, loving people of other ethnic group, treating them equal or tolerating their activities such as belief system, mode of worship, political structure etc. became a thing of the past. As the tussle for supremacy continues, the environment became a battlefield characterized of political corruption, human right infringements, arson, kidnapping, destruction of lives and properties. For instance, Boko-Haram as an Islamic fundamental group oppresses any religion, cultural tradition, form of government etc. once it does not run in accordance with sharia law (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Boko-Haram>). To emphasize its quest for religious supremacy, the group on Dec. 24, 2010 detonated explosives in Christian neighbourhoods in Jos, killing more than 30 people. Furthermore, they drew worldwide condemnation after it perpetrated a mass kidnapping of more than 275 girls from a boarding school in Chibok in Borno state in April 2014 (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Boko-Haram>). The group engaged in such terrorist act to show supremacy of their religion and how they dislike opposite religion and culture (western education). In this 21st Century, chaos caused by Boko-Haram, Fulani herdsmen and ethnic militia in a quest for ethnic political domination and religious supremacy have forced people to migrate to a safer places/country as refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee, 2021). This United Nations agency maintains that, “over 3.2 million people are displaced, including over 2.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in north-eastern Nigeria, over 684,000 IDPs in Cameroon, Chad and Niger and 304,000 refugees in the four countries”. The researcher is of the opinion that the reason behind these conflicts is because, each group sees another as rival, spiritually unclean and socio-politically unequal.

However, maintenance of golden rule is one of the concepts among others that can sustain peace in such environment. Norman (1961), opines that “golden rule is the ability to love and treat everybody equal, regardless of ethnicity or religion” (p.5). It is a call to love and tolerate the culture which others hold in high esteem or consider sacred if it does not affect others negatively. For peace to reign, adequate measure to forestall this ethno-religious crisis need to be put in place so that Nigeria will become an ideal State to other nations. Therefore, it is the aim of this study to encourage the practice of golden rule in a multi-ethnic and religious society. This paper applies the phenomenological research design. Data was mostly gathered using secondary sources from journals, newspaper, textbooks and online materials.

### **The Concept of Golden Rule**

Golden Rule in religion according to Norman (1961) is the principle of treating others as one would like to be treated. This principle simply mean that one should have respect for all life, or shall not kill (you should not kill others as you do not want to be killed); Deal honestly or shall not steal (you should not steal as you do not want others to steal from you) etc. On a contrary, the rule suggest that ethnics groups should respect the culture of each other, just as they want others to respect their culture. Each group should tolerate the

religion, mode of dressing, language and existence of one another. The rule reminds us that we are peers to others who deserve comparable consideration. It urges more egalitarianism of ourselves in outlook. It suggests a general orientation towards others, an outlook for seeing our relations with people of other culture. At least, we should not impact others negatively, treating their interest as secondary. This suggests that all religions and political leaders must be altruistic in discharge of their duty. Altruism negates the act of ethnic or religious preference.

Kendra (2021) defines Altruism as the “unselfish concern for other people by doing things simply out of a desire to help, not because you feel obligated to, out of duty, loyalty, or religious reasons, rather acting out of concern for the well-being of other people” (Para. 7). Altruism encourages people to jeopardize themselves to help others. This is the act of helping others without expectations of reward. It is a situation whereby we act to promote someone else’s welfare, even at a risk or cost to ourselves. In a multi-ethnic and religious State, citizen should not limit help on family members, neighbours, friends, ethnicity or religion. Rather, to any person that need help. The Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 demonstrated pure altruism. Regardless of social hostility between the Jews and Samaritans, he demonstrated true love by taking care of the needy at his own expenses. Evolutionary theorist like Charles Darwin as cited in Berkeley (2022) “speculates that altruism has such deep roots in human nature because help and cooperation promote the survival of our species” (p.8).

Golden rule is also a strong egalitarian message that will resolve ethnic and religious hatred. Egalitarianism according to Cambridge dictionary is the believe that all people are equally important and should have the same right and opportunity in life. This implies that people should relate to one another as equals or should enjoy the same fundamental status in a society. The idea is that citizens might be unequal in wealth, resources, welfare, and other dimensions of their condition, yet be equal in status in a way that enables all to relate as equals. In political economy, Adams (1999) opines that egalitarianism signifies;

Equality of opportunity and options to borrow money for investment purposes such as starting a business should be open to all applicants, that applications be assessed by relevant criteria of merit, and that the top-ranked applicant should be offered the job or option to borrow. The relevant criteria of merit are to be set so that those who score highest are those whose selection would best further the morally innocent purposes of the enterprise and not by ethnicity, sex or religion (P.5).

The general idea of equality of opportunity in political economy of a society is that positions that confer special opportunity should be open to all applicants with applicants selected by merit. Mill (1979) states that an egalitarian society contrasts sharply with a society of caste or class hierarchy, in which the public culture singles out some as inferior and some as superior, and contrasts also with a society with a dictatorial or authoritarian political system, accompanied by

socially required kowtowing of ordinary members of society toward political elites. Eventually, egalitarianism in golden rule, also known as religious egalitarianism, suggests that all human should receive equal caring, love and treatment, regardless of ethnicity or religion. One significant source of this thought is the Christian notion that God loves all human souls equally. Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:28, states that 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'. The parable of Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37; summarized this religious egalitarianism and pointed at tolerance.

Tolerance as defined by Merriam-Webster (2022), "is the ability or willingness to accept the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with". Also, Forst and Rainer (2007) documents that the term 'toleration' originated from the Latin word 'tolerare', meaning to put up with, countenance or suffer generally. This refers to the conditional acceptance of or non-interference with beliefs, actions or practices that one considers being wrong but still tolerable, such that they should not be prohibited or constrained. Toleration is thus understood as not interfering with something that one considers wrong but not harmful. In a multi-ethnic and religious State, toleration means that citizens should respect one another in a more reciprocal sense (Weale, 1985). Ethnic or religious group should neither consider itself as superior nor view others as inferior. Citizens should recognize the political and economic right of one another as a moral obligation, without showing preference to an ethnic or religious group (Forst, 2002).

However, altruism, egalitarianism and tolerance summarized the love in golden rule. One cannot claim that he loves if he cannot treat others equal as he treats himself, deny himself certain pleasure for the good of others nor live in harmony with people of opposite faiths and traditions. Understanding the concept of toleration, egalitarianism and altruism as the true definition of love will enable humankind practice golden rule effectively. Those concepts defined and explained the act of love that human ought to reciprocate to ensure peace, cooperation and harmony in a multi-ethnic and religious society like Nigeria. This can be achieved through the religious and political leaders.

#### **Lack of Golden Rule: Its Economic and Political Effect**

The reoccurrence of religious and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria has untold effect on economy of the nation. It is not only life that are being lost, but sources of livelihood, goods etc. are being destroyed or carted away, leaving victims economically handicapped. It has made investors to relocate their businesses to other peaceful areas that are haven for their growth. Jegede (2019) asserts that;

The former president, Olusegun Obasanjo, on assumption of office in 1999, made it the priority of his government to woo foreign investors into the nation's economy. His passionate appeal yielded little or no result. This is because the security of the investors and their investment could not be guaranteed (p.65).

He further documents that apprehension of the international community was confirmed in 2000 Kaduna riot where foreigners in the state had to flee in their numbers. According to him, the Kaduna

Chambers of Commerce and Industry in the same year lost about 600 million naira because its trade fare was cancelled as a result of religious tension. The religious tension made the State to witness exodus of businesses to neighbouring States that are safe for their investments.

Absence of golden rule among the religions and ethnic groups in Nigeria has contributed much to the political instability in this country. It has made a group to feel superior to others. The current administration of President Mohammad Buhari illustrated ethnic supremacy in his political appointment. Wale (2015) states that "the president has neglected other ethnic groups by appointing Senate president, Speaker house of representatives, Secretary General of the Federation, Army chief, Airforce chief, Navy chief, DSS, Customs, Prisons, Minister of Interior Defence, Minister of Justice, Chief Justice of Nigeria, Appeal and Customary court chiefs etc. only from his northern region" (para. 2). This appointment according to Wale (2015), has automatically given northern region absolute power to govern the country according to their will without opposition. Collins (2015) opines that, "such bias appointment has negative effect on politics" (para. 4).

Collins (2015) further states that, "absent of golden rule in a multi-ethnic States makes it difficult to fight corruption because, an ethnic group may decide not to expose or prosecute fellow tribesmen for corruption" (p.1). Collins (2015) gave example of a private jet belonging to the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Bishop Ayo Oritsajafor, which was apprehended in South Africa over possession of \$9.3 million allegedly meant for purchasing arms. Before the South African government could conclude investigation, his ethnic region and kinsmen were already in the media defending and exonerating him and declaring war if their son is prosecuted. Later, he was discharged and acquitted. Hence, the concept of golden rule which is the ability to treat everybody equal must be applied if corruption would be minimized in Nigeria.

Again, lack of golden rule enhances politics of ethnicity or religion. Politics of ethnicity and religion has made it difficult for Nigeria to have the right leaders in its political sojourn over sixty-one years of independence, except for a very few of her leaders who have demonstrated total commitment to the nation's development. Ethnic politics has been a clog in the wheel of political advancement of the nation such that, there has never been a leader with national outlook that has emerged in Nigeria. The election of candidates so far, has been based on where the candidates came from and his religion, rather than on the right candidates for the post (Umezina, 2012). These so-called leaders are without the interest of all the citizens at heart. They emerge to political limelight through ethnic and religious sentiments but end up in disappointing other groups. Ethnic supremacy has made political appointment in Nigeria to be one sided. Any ethnic group that controls the government appoints and employs more of his members instead of maintaining federal character. This has always been an obstacle as it encourages inter-tribal and religious hatred.

#### **Role of Religious Leaders in Promoting Golden Rule**

Religious leaders are the largest and best-organized civil institutions in the world, claiming the allegiance of billions of believers and

bridging the gap of ethnicity, class and nationality (Dan and Ram, 2016). Their expertise can greatly benefit achieving peaceful co-existence of different religion in a society. The role of religious leaders as agents of peace and custodian of doctrines cannot be under emphasized since religion itself is one of the cultural patterns of human society which helps to shape and reshape the society. Religion serves as an agent of social justice and truth. No doubt today that our present-day Nigeria social environment is vehemently suffering from religious persecution, insecurity etc. Therefore, for the nation to be at peaceful and security consciousness void of conflict, the religious leaders must tell the political leaders the truth. This, they could diligently and courageously achieve through her teachings, prophetic proclamation and criticisms.

Religious leaders should educate the citizens and advise Nigerian leaders at all levels to lead by example especially when they are deviating from law or distorting the law. For instance, in the Old Testament we see the prophets criticizing the capitalist and the extortionist tendencies of their own societies. Good examples of such prophets are Amos and Hosea. These men were leaders who lived above shame as a result of the fear of God in their lives. Therefore, the religious leaders should not only be spiritual but also human. Both Christians and Muslims must learn to show love and concern for human Political problems as their predecessors did.

Thus, Nigeria will be a peaceful humanly habitable society if our leaders will strive and show the fear of God in their leadership. Religious leaders in order to make Nigeria society maintain a peaceful co-existence, should always speak the truth with all and to all without fear or favour knowing full well that the society is faced with all sorts of immoral acts. Therefore, the religious leaders must not stand aloof when issues affecting the stability of the society are at stake especially looking the ways the leaders at the helms of affairs are accumulating wealth while their subject suffer. If the religious leaders and the people are truthful, they will be guided away from vices and acrimony. Thus, religious leaders must be on ground in order to protect human dignity, rights and values. The religious leaders must be the moral watchdog of the country. The presence of them in the country serves as the conscience that is necessary for peace and security that leads to sustainable development.

Through the preaching of our religious leaders, the conduct and behaviour of the populace will be regulated by inculcating the moral virtues needed in the society. If the people adheres to the religious sermons preached by Christians and Muslim, pastors and clerics, the behaviour of the people will be modified positively by shunning corruption and immoral acts, thereby, ensuring transparency and accountability, creating of job opportunities, ensuring service delivery and by maintaining law and order, protection of lives and properties of all citizens. If these are fervently and properly put in place, we believe that Nigeria will maintain a high sense of peace

and when there is peace; security must take its place thereby leading to less ethno-religious violence.

### **Recommendation**

The researcher recommends that, Imams, pastors, priests, and leaders of other faith communities ought to play a powerful role in shaping attitudes, opinions and behaviours because their members trusted them. Community members and political leaders listen to religious leaders, especially at the family and community level. Religious leaders have the power to raise awareness and influence attitudes, behaviours and practices. They can shape social values in line with faith-based teachings. The researcher advises that they should use love in golden rule and nurture the mind, behaviour and attitude of the citizens so, that the young ones will grow-up loving individuals beyond ethnicity or religion. It will enhance unity among people with diverse culture, religious beliefs, social status and other demographic differences as they grow. The doctrine of golden rule enhances mutual understanding and cooperation between groups with different ethnicities, religions, political ideologies and economic status. Also, it will be a basis for longer and deeper process of developing a culture of peace. It is the minimal essential quality of social relations that eliminate violence and coercion. This simply affirmed that golden rule is the pathway to peaceful life in a society. Preaching golden rule will make the young ones to appreciate and accept the belief of other religions without necessarily involving or practicing it. In the Church, Mosque and social gathering, religious leaders should preach to the congregations how to respect and relate with other people's belief and values (which is quite different from personal faith and belief), without enforcing others who are not adherent followers. This accounts for religious tolerance

### **Conclusion**

It is observed from this study that one of the major sources of conflict in Nigeria is ethno-religious supremacy. This has contributed to political instability and economic setback in the country. It accounts for greater percentage of country's failure on maintaining good health care centre, constant electricity, availability of adequate water supply for domestic usage and irrigation, standard education, respect for fundamental human rights etc. This conflict grows out of religious and ethnic tussle. A situation whereby a religious or ethnic group claim superior over others. The tussle creates a feeling of contempt that metamorphoses into conflict, then a full-blown crisis. Moreover, it leads to discrimination, neglect, destruction of lives and properties worth billion dollars, abandoning of government and private projects etc. Golden Rule therefore is a doctrine of reciprocity. It advocates extension of love to even those one considers as enemy. This act will heal long-term grudges harboured in the heart of each ethnic and religious group since pre-independent of Nigeria. It will then give room for peaceful co-existence of multi-ethnic and religious group in Nigeria.



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