CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Christian tradition has made significant contributions to world peace at a number of different levels (Albert, 2011). Among these are public statements by Church leaders, programs of action at local and international levels, organisations dedicated to bringing about peace, courses of study, commemorative days etc. In recent decades, Church leaders have frequently made statements in support of peace. In some cases these statements have been specific appeals for peace in particular circumstances, however, on other occasions they have also published more comprehensive statements on the need for peace and the means of achieving it. The teachings of Christianity which is guided by the dictates of the bible (word of God) has constantly encourage the members to ensure peace and harmony in the society.

Christian leaders have always publicly stood for societal peace and harmony and against violence. It is now widely accepted that violent conflict is the major hindrance to the development of the African continent and Nigeria in particular. It inflicts human sufferings through death, destruction of livelihoods, constant displacement and insecurity (Barash, 2000). Violent conflict disrupts the process of production, creates conditions for pillage of the country’s resources and diverts their application from development purposes to servicing war. Violent conflict is thus responsible for perpetuating misery and underdevelopment in the country-Nigeria and the continent at large (Adetula, 2006).

Peace is a universal phenomenon that everyone desires and wishes to enjoy endlessly. Traditions, cultures, religions and societies do have different prescriptions to attaining and enjoying peace. Whenever and wherever there is peace there tends to be development and longevity is enjoyed (Salawu, 2010). To this end, Christianity which is one of the predominant religions in the world today teaches peace and encourages all adherents to the faiths to pursue peace and live peacefully with one another. The above statement now seems to be questionable with the rise of intra, inter and ethno-religious conflicts in the world. While most Arab and some European countries are faced with intra-religious conflicts, an African country like Nigeria is faced with both intra and inter-religious conflicts. Nigeria, which is popularly known as Africa’s most populous black nation with a population of now about 170 million people, with more than 250 ethnic groups has Christianity and Islam as
its predominant religions, though there is still in existence the African Traditional Religion (ATR).

Christianity as a word means followers of Christ or Christ like. Christians therefore are those who follow and act the teaching of Christ in all ways of life. One of the climaxes of Christianity or Christian virtue is peace. Christians are enjoined in the Bible to embrace and live peacefully with their neighbors’. The following scriptures confirm this:

Deport from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it (Psalm 34 vs 14).

Blessed are the Peace makers for they shall be called the children of God Matthew 5 vs 9). Let him eschew evil and do good; let him seek peace and ensue it (1 Peter 3 vs 11).

Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12 vs 14). If it be possible, as much as it lieth in you, live peaceably with all men (Rom 12 vs 18).

The word Peace in Christianity is translated from the Hebrew word ‘Shalom’, which is a key word in the Bible and its at the center of how God wants us to live on earth. One of the key things Jesus came to give humanity is Peace and expects us to live in peace as cited in the scriptural verses above. Peace was not only what Jesus taught but He also lived it, this in most cases is what scholars call pacifism, as Jesus never taught violence, even at his arrest by the Pharisees and one of his disciples struck the ears of the priest, Jesus rebuked the disciple and said that “those who live by the sword shall die by the sword” (Mathew 26:52, NKJV).

In another place Jesus taught the people not to retaliate any evil done to them as it used to be, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, if one should strike you on the right cheek, turn the left cheek (Mathew 5:38-39, NKJV) but now to always forgive those that offend them and he charged them to forgive their neighbors even seventy times seven (Matthew 18:22, KJV). With all these scriptural teachings of the church, Christians are suppose to live in peace and harmony in the society.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The church has always taught the members on the act of non retaliation as taught by Jesus which helps to absorb violence instead of escalating it, hence every cycle of violence provoking revenge, which in turn provokes more violence is broken by the simple act of tolerating the violence and avoiding retaliation. On the contrary, there has been increased cases of disruption to peace and harmony in the world today despite the church teachings of peace as stipulated by Jesus Christ. However, the researcher is examining the role of church in ensuring peace and harmony in the society.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The following are the objectives of this study:
1. To examine the role of church in ensuring peace and harmony in the society.
2. To examine the dictates of the church as regards peace and harmony.
3. To identify the factors disrupting peace and harmony of the society.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1. What is the role of church in ensuring peace and harmony in the society?
2. What are the dictates of the church as regards peace and harmony?
3. What are the factors disrupting peace and harmony of the society?

1.5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

$H_0$: The church plays no significant role in ensuring peace and harmony in the society.

$H_1$: The church plays significant role in ensuring peace and harmony in the society.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY
The following are the significance of this study:
1. The findings of this study will be useful for the government, church leaders and the general public on the role of the church in ensuring sustainable peace and harmony in the society.
2. This research will also serve as a resource base to other scholars and researchers interested in carrying out further research in this field subsequently, if applied will go to an extent to provide new explanation to the topic.

1.8 SCOPE/LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
This study will cover the position of the church and Christianity in general as regards the issue of societal peace and harmony.

1. Financial constraint- Insufficient fund tends to impede the efficiency of the researcher in sourcing for the relevant materials, literature or information and in the process of data collection (internet, questionnaire and interview).
2. Time constraint- The researcher will simultaneously engage in this study with other academic work. This consequently will cut down on the time devoted for the research work.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN ENSURING PEACE AND HARMONY IN THE SOCIETY

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