
PEACE AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Peaceful co-existence among people of different ethno-religious backgrounds in any society is the foundation for communal progress, development and advancement. Nigeria, as a multi-ethnic and multi-faith state, has become enmeshed in a tangle of religious crises. These waves of religious crises constitute great obstacles to flourishing local business and foreign investment, socio-economic development, political stability, conducive learning environment and communal trust. These according to Irabor (2013) are corollary effects of intolerance of the religious groups in Nigeria as each claims superiority over the others, a ludicrous attitude described by Obayan (1978) as “a holier than thou”. In pursuance of a peaceful and conducive atmosphere for a healthy socio-economic development in all facets of life, this paper examines how peace and harmony can be achieved through religious tolerance education from the Qur’an and Sunnah, which are the main sources of Islamic law. It was discovered that lack of adequate knowledge and proper understanding of other people’s religion is the main cause of most religious crises. The paper concluded by recommending that religious tolerance education should be incorporated into the curricula of all levels of Nigeria’s education system.

Keywords: Peace, Religion, Tolerance, Education, Nigeria, Islam.

Nigeria as a country, according to Adewale (1978:93), is a multi-ethno-religious based nation and not a secular nation where religion is not accorded any recognition. Religion in Nigeria is a sensitive issue which has become part and parcel of the citizens to the extent that British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), according to Onaiyekan (2011:2), arrives at the conclusion that Nigeria is the most religious nation in the world. The religions being practised by the Nigerians are basically three which

according to Onaiyekan (1978:87), are Christianity, African Traditional Religions and Islam.

With regards to Islam, it is the dominant religion in the Northern part of the country with a number of followers in its South-western part. While the Eastern part of the country is dominated by a sect of Christianity known as Catholicism and the African Traditional Religions spread all over the nation with their different modes of worship. This means that the country's population is shared among these three religious groups. According to Nigeria 1963 census, it is stated that 47% of the population were Muslims, 35% were Christians while the remaining 18% belong to the indigenous worshippers.

However, it should be noted that the exact percentage of total population of these religions is controversial especially between the Muslims and Christians as both are claiming equality or superiority in percentage over each other. However, the fact remains that Islam and Christianity constitute the majority in Nigeria as Onaiyekan (2000) said: "Nigeria is one of the greatest Islamo-Christian nations in the world".

It is disheartened to note that religion which is supposed to promote unity in diversity, has now become the tool of crises and disunity. Thus, leading to the threatening of lives and properties as well as national progress and development, as the adherents of each religion often resort to the use of arms and ammunitions in settling their discrepancies. It is worthy of mentioning here that series of measures have been put in place by the government and religious bodies to secure peace and harmony in the society but to no avail. It is against this backdrop that this paper is aiming at presenting Peace and Religious Tolerance Education from the Islamic understanding, as an alternative in promoting peaceful co-existence in Nigeria especially and African states in general.

To accomplish this, the paper is divided into sections; the abstract, the introduction, the conceptual definition, the synopsis, causes and effects of religious crises in Nigeria, the Modus-Operandi of religious tolerance education in Islam and the conclusion.

Conceptual Definition

At this juncture, it will be relevant to briefly explain some concepts which are important to this discussion for the purpose of proper understanding of them in the way they are being used in this context as well as knowing their interconnectivity. The concepts are: Peace, Religion, Tolerance, and Crises.

Peace: is a situation or period of time that is free of civil disturbance, oppression, violence or war. It can also be referred to as a state of orderliness and harmonious existence as well as mutual agreement that bring about security of lives and properties within a community or society.

Religion: is a concept or term that originates from the latin word “religare” which means to bind or to reconnect man to the divinity (Wikipedia, 2013). It is an institution that promotes human welfare and better spiritual well-being for man. Thus, it is an embodiment of rules and regulations that controls the whole life of man. However, the exact definition of religion is not known and certain among the scholars as everybody is just giving personal opinion about it. According to the Essential English Dictionary (2003:65), religion “is a belief or worship of a supernatural power or powers that are considered to be divine or to have control over human destiny”. In the opinion of Shatiz, religion is a total responsibility of the creatures towards the creator then his community and himself. Obayan (1978) postulates that, it prepares man for the life after where hopefully there is reward and punishment for good and bad deeds respectively. Hence, religion affects the ways of life of man absolutely including his interpersonal relation.

Tolerance: is the willingness to accept the opinion or behavior of others that one may not like or agree with even though it causes pain or suffering for the purpose of peace and harmony. It also entails the act of fairness to others with diverse opinions on issues be it religious or political. It can also be referred to as the act of showing an attitude of respect or endurance towards others’ opinions even if they are obviously wrong.

Crises: is the plural of crisis which means a time of great danger and difficulty when problems need to be solved (Hornby, 2000). It can also be referred to as an unrest period or situation when an urgent decision needs to be taken to save lives and properties.

Synopsis of Religious Crises in Nigeria

The importance and role of religion in the life of man cannot be underrated. According to John Monaghan and John Peter (2000:124), religion has been helping in dealing with problems of human life that are significant, persistent and intolerable. It enables man to accommodate anxieties and deal with misfortune and trials. However, it has been turned to an instrument of destruction and threatening lives and properties as well as progress and development of most African states, especially Nigeria.

Religious crises has been in existence in form of provocative statement in Nigeria as far back as late 19th century, precisely 1886 when Rev. M.J Luke declared in his public sermon at Breadfruit church, Lagos that Islam as a religion has no good and

has not taught the people anything whatsoever (Gbadamosi, 1978). In 1953, a crisis erupted between the Igbo and the Hausa in the north as a result of a radio reports on mistreatment of the Muslims in the south. This crisis was, however, religiously coloured then, even though the true colour was inter-ethnic conflict, because the Igbos were majorly Christians while the Hausas were majorly Muslims.

In Zaria 1978, a religious crisis between the Muslim and Christian Students of Ahmadu Bello University broke out and claimed the lives of six students (Falola, 1998). It should however be noted that the majority of the crises in Nigeria occurred in many states of the Northern part in the 80's. These crises could be pinned down to the following states:

1. Kano violence in 1980
2. Kaduna riot in 1982
3. Bulum-ketu in 1982
4. Bauchi religious riot in 1984
5. Jimeta crisis in 1984
6. Gombe riot in 1985 and 1991
7. Ilorin religious riots in 1986
8. Kafanchan riot in 1987
9. Sokoto riot in 1987
10. Zaria religious unrest in 1987
11. Katsina violence in 1987
12. Zango-Kataf crisis in 1992
13. Sagamu crisis in 1999
14. Idi Araba violence in 2000
15. Jos Religious Riot in 2002 (Wikipedia, 2012 and Ademilokun, 2005)

The crises continued since 1980's till now and it has even taken a new dimension among the perpetrators. Presently, religious crises are being carried out with the use of latest sophisticated weapons. The most pathetic of this is that, majority of these crises are associated with the Islamic religion while others are linked with ethnicity or tribalism even though they are Christians with few traditional adherents. The so called "radical Islamic sects", even though their actions may not be justified by the mainstream Islamic teachings, that are associated with these religious crises are Boko Haram, Maitatsine and Darul Islam. The others which are ethnical, even though with Christian and traditional religion undertone, are Movement for the Emancipation of Niger-Delta (MEND) in the Eastern part and Middle Belt of the country and O'odua People's Congress (OPC) in the South Western part of Nigeria.

With regards to Boko Haram, it is the most violent contemporary sect that is threatening peace in the country. It was founded by Muhammad Yusuf in 2001 and

known for several attacks on Christians, their Churches and also Muslims. While MEND attacks politicians majorly and especially the fraudulent ones among them by kidnapping their families and later ask them to pay ransom worth millions of naira for a life.

Causes of Religious Crises in Nigeria

In the opinion of Akanmidu (2010:23), there are four causes of religious crises in Nigeria which are poor teaching in religious places, poverty, ignorance and unemployment.

1. **Poor teaching in religious places:** The situation of most mosques and churches today is worrisome. These places of worship have been limited to worshipping only instead of being places of moral teaching and social welfare. This is due to the non-challant attitude of the masses towards sermon and admonition which do not encourage the religious leaders in disseminating the messages of God. The worshippers either leave the place of worship when sermon is on or does not consider it as important. On the other hand, many religious leaders have been economically captured by the politicians and other social leaders who silence them with their money and position from discharging their religious duties to their followers.
2. **Poverty:** Poverty, as a state of being in need of something especially the basic needs of life, has been seen as the major catalyst that brings about crises in Nigeria. It is clear from the crises and riots in different part of the country that the poor citizens are those that are being used by the politicians to cause trouble in the society.
3. **Ignorance:** Ignorance is a disease that can cause many things in the life of man and the society at large. Religious ignorance breeds violence and war which have decimated the lives (both animals and human beings) and properties in the country. This may be due to the failure of the religious leaders to educate their followers on the convergent and divergent features of each religion.
4. **Unemployment:** The idle hand is the devil's instrument, says an adage. Undoubtedly, the participants in these crises are irresponsible as they are neither accountable nor questionable by anybody whether parents, wives, children or relatives. The majority of the rioters are those that are neither employed by the public nor private organization and have nothing doing personally for their livelihood. By this, it is possible for them to cause any trouble in the society just because of the huge amount attached to it. According to Bolaji Abdullahi (in Soweto, 2013), the greatest problem threatening the Nigerian youth is the

challenge of securing a job. He further submits that 42% of the Nigerian youths are unemployed.

It should however be noted that the causes of religious violence in Nigeria are not limited to those points discussed above as mentioned by Akanmidu. Other points are :

5. **Impact of the colonization:** The activities of the colonial masters had affected the religious setting of the nation through their imposition of the Christian missions on the northerners after conquering the northern part of the country especially the Sokoto Caliphate in 1903. Thus, religious crises started when the missionaries were attempting to use the influence of Christianity and western education in converting the Muslims to Christians (Akanmidu, 2012). It can then be inferred that the British Colonialism first spurred religious violence in Nigeria (Victor, 2009).
6. **Politics of religion:** In his own submission, Mencken (in Victor, 2009) said that democracy is a form of religion; it is the worship of Jackals and Jackasses. This means that democracy, as a form of politics, has become a form of religion for the politicians. In Nigeria, religion has become a means of mobilizing people of the same faith to support in campaigning or winning an election against the opponent especially when the opponent belongs to another faith. Thus, the politicians are manipulating the religious teaching to fuel crises so as to achieve their whims and caprices (James, n.d). For instance, the presidential election between President Goodluck Jonathan and General Muhammad Bukhari in 2011 can be used to buttress this point, where majority of the Christians were in support of President Jonathan and majority of Muslims supported General Bukhari (rtd.).
7. **Exploitation of the media:** The Mass media, either Radio Station or Television station as well as Newspaper, is being used to accelerate the tension of the masses whenever there is religious riot in any part of the country. This can in-turn kindles another fire of violence in other parts of the nation through the provocative and derogative reports of the media. The media that is in support of the Muslims will relay the information to defend the Muslims and the one in support of the Christians will do the same without reporting the damages each religion has caused the other. And at the end of the day, the whole thing will become aggravated as a result of the misinformation relayed on the air which will then lead to religious intolerance on the part of each religion's adherents (Ibrahim, 1989).

8. **Tribalism and ethnicity:** Nigeria, as a country, is a combination of many tribes and ethnics with different religions. It is worthy of note that a tribe may be dominated by the Muslims while another tribe may be full of Christians. So, any quarrel between these two tribes will be counted as a religious crisis even if the crisis is political or social just because of the fact that one is dominated by Islam and the other by Christianity. It is on this that Henry Ajunmogobia said: “The religious crisis in Jos and other towns in plateau state (of Nigeria) is of social and economic nature”. Also, Odiase (2001:48) concludes that the ethnic configuration of Nigeria can pave way easily for the transformation of ethnic conflicts between Muslims and Christians into religious war.

Moreso, there are some other factors that can also trigger and kindle the fire of crisis among the adherents of various religious. These include:

- a. Inadequate religious knowledge
- b. Religious intolerance
- c. Provocative sermon and utterance
- d. Whims and caprices of the adherents
- e. Retaliation and so on.

Effects of Religious Crises in Nigeria

The Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria have been a rat and cat relation since 80's. It has been shuddering the peaceful co-existence, security of lives and properties as well as national progress and development. Almost all the sectors in the country have been affected by this endemic malady. The effects of this violence have been manifested in the nation socially, economically, politically and educationally.

With regards to social effects, many lives and properties worth billions of naira have been lost. Many infrastructural facilities have also been vandalized. For example, the Kaduna riot in November 2002 claimed the life of about 200 people, injured about 1000 and made over 11, 000 people homeless (News Agency, 2002). The 1987 crisis between the Muslims and Christians in Katsina, Kafanchan and Zaria led to wanton destruction of lives and properties while hundred churches were burnt to ashes (Falola, 1998). Due to this untimely crisis, many women have become widows, children have become orphans while many families have been scattered and become refugees.

Furthermore, the country has also been affected economically. The economy is diminishing day-in day-out through the destruction of oil refineries and industries which are the major foundation of Nigeria economy. The crises have made many investors to leave the country to surrounding nations like Ghana, South Africa etc.

In addition, the political system of the nation is scrambling due to the inappropriate selection of leaders. Each religion is demanding for equal number of representations in making decision for the country. By this, each religion's adherents are voting for their own candidates even if they are not qualified for the position. This ludicrous attitude leads to the election of incompetent leaders who are not concern with the welfare of the masses socially and economically which may later lead to revolution and political instability.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the educational career of many Nigerians in the Northern part of the country, have been endangered by these unlimited crises. The academic calendar of many tertiary institutions has been disrupted while a lot of school facilities have been vandalized along with the life of both students and staffs. Some students have schooled and graduated but are unable to collect their notification of results talkless of certificates due to concurrent happenings of religious crises in places like Maiduguri, Nasarrawa, Yobe etc. The lives of corps members, who are serving their father's land as part of their graduate requirements, have been jeopardized. Thus, they are prevented from serving in those areas that are wallowing in religious riots. By this, education in the concerned areas is retrogressing.

The Way Out

Undoubtedly, the government and various bodies have been exerting their efforts in managing and controlling the existing crises and preventing the upcoming ones. Series of conferences, seminars and workshops have been organized. But this has not yielded effective and positive change among the citizens and adherents of each religion. The crises rather have continued to take new dimensions day after day. It is against this backdrop that this paper is advocating for peace and religions tolerance education to be part and parcel of Nigeria Educational Curriculum as a way of breeding peaceful and accommodative minds right from their primary education to higher institution. The curricular should be based on the teachings and contents of each religion. Based on this, the paper discusses and elaborates the Islamic perspective of this in the light of the two main sources of Islamic law; Qur'an and *Sunnah*.

Islam, as a religion, calls for peaceful co-existence among the religions in the society through its laid down principles and teachings as entrenched in the Qur'an, explained by the Prophet and practiced by his companion. Some of these principles and teachings that can serve as syllabus for this in Nigeria Educational Curriculum are:

- i. **Individualism:** Islam as a religion, believes in the existence of other religions and tries to co-exist with them in a peaceful and harmonious way. Quadri (1978), in his submission, said:

Islam does not pretend to be the only religion in the Universe; it is aware of the presence of other religions. Its attitude towards other religions and their adherents is based on the nature of such religions.

From the above quotation, it becomes clear that Islam gives not only recognition to other religions but also accords them the chances and privileges to co-operate in a society provided individual differences are noted and put into consideration. On this recognition, the Qur'an says:

Verily, those who have attained to faith (in this divine writ), as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians- all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds, no fear need they have and neither shall they grieve. (Q5:69)

In another verse it says:

Verily, as for those who have attained to faith (in this divine writ) and those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians, and the Magians (on the one hand) and those who are bent on ascribing divinity to aught but God (on the other hand). Verily, God will decide between them on the Resurrection Day: For, behold, God is witness unto everything. (Q22:17)

In line with the above quotation, religions can be grouped, according to Quadri (1978:31) and Balogun (1978:3), into two which Quadri called Monotheistic and Polytheistic religions while Balogun called them Scriptural and Non-Scriptural religion. Similarly, they can also be called revealed religion under which Islam, Christianity and Judaism fall, and unrevealed religion under which African Traditional religion falls. Thus, Islam recognizes all the monotheistic or revealed religion because of the features and values they shared together. The Qur'an says in Q2:136 that:

Say ye: "We believe In Allah, and the Revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: we make no difference between one and another of them: and we bow to Allah (in Islam)."

Hence, Islam is the only religion in the world that accord recognition and respect to other religions, their books and prophets. From this submission, it is crystal clear that Islam can not be fighting or combating such religions it has honoured and recognized without any cogent point.

2. **The Concept of Neighbourhood:** Islam, as a code of conduct, has approved and made it incumbent on the Muslims to maintain good relationship not only with

other Muslims but also the adherents of other faith as a way of exemplifying its tolerance. It does not differentiate between Muslims and non-Muslims neighbour. The Qur'an says:

Worship Allah and join none with Him (in worship); and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, Al-Masakin (the needy), the neighbour who is near of kin, the neighbour who is a stranger, the companion by your side ... (Q4:36).

In the explanation of the above verse, Ibn Kathir (2006), an exegete, said that the neighbour who is a stranger is referring to the Jews and the Christians. The word stranger is used because of the absence of blood relation. Thus, Islam commands goodness on the part of the Muslims to their Christian neighbours who are not of kin. In the Hadith of the Prophet, Aishah stated that she once asked the Prophet (S.A.W), "O Messenger of Allah! I have two neighbours. To whom shall I send my gifts?" He said. "To the one whose gate is nearer to you" (Ibn Hajar, 2007, Hadith 6020).

It is deducible that Islam does not only call for peace but has also laid down the ways it can be achieved by treating the neighbours kindly whether Muslim or not. Some other ways are:

- a. Speaking to them politely and gently as contained in Q16:125 that: Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious; for thy Lord knows best, who have strayed from His path and who receive guidance
- b. They should not be forced to accept Islamic faith as contained in Q2:256 that: "Let there be no compulsion in the religion...". Also, Prophet Muhammad was warned by Allah not to look at himself as a compeller but as a warner as contained in Q88:21-22 that: Therefore do thou give admonition, for thou art one to admonish. Thou art not one to manage (men's) affairs.
- c. Eating their lawful as contained in Q5:5 that: "...and the food of those who were given the scripture is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them".
3. **Invitation to Dialogue in case of ideological Conflict:** Islam, as a religion of peace, calls for peace through settlement of dispute between two parties or other faiths as revealed in the Qur'an about the Christians and the Jews that:

Say: O people of the scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take another as lords instead of Allah. But if they turn away, then say, Bear witness that we are Muslims. (Q3:64).

The above verse is the basis of dialogue between Islam and Christianity. This is what was in operation during the time of the Prophet and his companions who made the Christians enjoyed full rights in the Muslim terrain. A. Rahim (2001:34) says:

In 6 A.H/628 A.D, the Prophet granted to the Christians a charter which is a monument of enlightened toleration. It accorded them the rights of religion, life and property and they were treated with fairness and justice... no Christian was to be force to renounce his religion. There should be no demolition of the Christian churches.

It is from this dialogue that the convergent and divergent features of each religion will be known with the aim of learning about others religion, teachings, history and traditions. By this, religious understanding and tolerance will be developed for the betterment of the society and individual.

4. **Shared Values:** This, according to Bidmos (2012:20), means the teachings and tenets that are common to Christianity and Islam. It is a known fact that both religions have some things in common because of being from the same source-Allah and are monotheistic religions. The following are some of their shared values (Bidmos, 2012:2-24):
 - a. The Unitarian concept of God as contained in Q112:1-2 that: “Say! He Allah is One...” and Mark 12:29-31 that: “The first of all Commandment is, hear O Isreal, the Lord our God is One Lord. There is one God; and there is none other but He.”
 - b. The Concept of Justice as contained in Q5:8 that: “Do not let hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just, that is nearer to righteousness” and Amos 5:24 that “But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream”.
 - c. The concept of worship as contained in Q51:56 that: “I have not created the Jinn and Mankind except to worship Me” and Mathew 4:10 that: “Thou shall worship the Lord thy God and Him only shall thou worship”
 - d. Kindness to parents as contained in Q17: 23-24 that: “And your Lord has decreed that you worship none except Him, and do good to the parents. Whenever one or both of them reach old age with you, say not to them uff and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word...” and Exodus 20:12 that: “Honour thy father thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee”

Besides, the other shared values are Murder, Adultery, theft, Interest, worship others than God etc. It should however, be noted that as there are convergent values, there are divergent values which should also be discussed and understood as well as

tolerated through dialogue. Some of these are the concept of Trinitarian, Son of God, Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Original Sin, Atonement of Sin, Universality and Finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad.

Conclusion

So far, this paper has revealed that religion which is supposed to be the tool of promoting unity in diversity has been used by some idle hands to cause commotion in the country. The summary of the crises that had happened in Nigeria has been discussed. Nigerians have been wallowing in this since the middle of 20th century till the present. Despite the efforts of the government and stakeholders in controlling the crises, they have continued to take new dimensions and pose threat to national security and development. The causes and effects of the crises have also been mentioned and discussed.

In the light of the above, we strongly recommend that peace and religious tolerance education should be taught at all levels of education starting from primary level to higher institution. The impact of this will be felt after the graduation of the students from the University when they would have possessed proper understanding of other people's religions and appreciate the shared values and features in their religions through comparative religious studies. The incorporation of the Islamic approach to peace and religious tolerance education into the syllabus of Nigeria education will go a long way in shaping the thinking of the youths on religious particularism which is one of the basic causes of religious crises in the world. It will also afford the future leaders the adequate knowledge and proper understanding of other people's religion, ways of life and thinking. Likewise, it will assist in identifying the peace-breakers who are not only acting against the wills and teachings of their religions but also working in accordance with their whims and caprices.

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Peace and Religious Tolerance Education in Nigeria: The Islamic Perspective -Saheed Badmus Suraju

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