

POLITICS AND RELIGION: POSSIBILITIES OF PEACE IN NIGERIA TOWARDS MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF NIGERIA NATIONHOOD

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Abstract

Peace and Islam are not only interrelated but are also taken to be two sides of the same coin. No doubt, peace is a leit-motif in Islam, which is why Muslims or Muslim communities have been exhorted to uphold variables of peace. However, conflicts result from misconceptions, intolerance and prejudice, which make it more important to devise strategies for achieving peace in any human community. This paper therefore, supposes that Islam can interface with politics effectively in Nigeria towards peace-building for nation-building.

Introduction

Western imperialism made all efforts to convince people that religion has nothing to do with the state and its organization. To them, religion is something and politics is another thing else. This gave rise to certain misleading slogans such as: "Religion is for God, but the land is for all". By this phrase, it is only a mere relationship that exists between a human being and his Lord that has nothing to do with society or the system of life. However, highlights of major concepts of this paper will clarify the misconceptions.

Politics implies the art and science of directing and administering State and other political units-known as government. It is the complex or aggregate of relationships of men in society, especially those relationship involving authority or power.

Religion means the belief in, worship of, or obedience to God or gods as supernatural power or powers, considered to be devine or to have control over human destiny. It could be applied to something of overwhelming importance to a person, so much that he worships it as a divine being.

Peace on the other hand is a situation or a period of time in which there is no war or violence in a country or an area. It is the state of being calm or quiet, or leaving with somebody in friendship without rancor. In other words, it is a state of harmony between people or groups.

Islam is a religion with a very comprehensive law that penetrates all aspects of life, politics inclusive. Indeed, it advocates organization and identifying responsibilities and opposes unrest and disorder in everything. Unrest and disorder are the basic issues that send peace into oblivion anywhere they manifested. Thus, this paper discusses the Islamic perspective of how religion can interface with politics to actually achieve the desired peace in Nigeria, towards meeting the challenges of the Nigeria Nationhood.

Theoretical Framework

Religion as a social necessity has been attracting attention to what it is and what it is not. It is indeed, a social manifestation of the spiritual life-views of the people with the main purpose of preserving the society or community of man, (Bamikole, 2002). This simple definition explains the emergence of various perspectives in relation to religion.

From functionalist perspective, religion is examined in terms of the contributions it makes to meeting the functional needs of the society. For instance, this perspective recognizes religion only from the degree to which it cements social solidarity, value consensus harmony and integration between its parts. (Haralambos et-al, 2004). To be more specific, Persons (1965) argued that religion is part of the cultural system. As such he contended that religious beliefs provide guidelines for human action and standards against which people's conduct can be evaluated. By establishing general principles and moral beliefs, religion therefore helps to provide the consensus, which is necessary for order and stability in society.

To Marxism however, religion is an illusion, which eases pain produced by exploitation and oppression. For Marx, it is a series of myths that justify and legitimate the subordination of the subject class and domination of privilege of ruling class. He argued further that religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opinion of the people (Haralambos, *Op cit*). Marxism saw religion as not more than an expression of real suffering and a protest against suffering but does little or none at all to solve the problem because it helps to make life more bearable and therefore dilutes demands for change.

While one seems to accommodate some of the liberal views expressed by the functionalists, it is important to point out that religion particularly, Islam is never conservative. The development of the people and of course, its adherents (both mundane and divine affairs) is its utmost concern. In the same vein, we need to be conscious of the passions and prejudices of the Marxist theories. Religion and indeed Islam, has been a revolutionary tool for certain countries in the Middle East. The responses and reactions of Islamic activists against the predilectic policies of the United States of America and its allies against Islam is a living testimony of the progressive wheel of Islam.

Religion does not always legitimate power; it is not simply a justification of alienation or a justification of privileges and it may attimes provide an impetus for change. In fact, this treatment of religion has been refuted by Hamilton (1995) where he pointed out that to say, however, that religion can be turned into an instrument of manipulation is no more to explain it than saying that because art or drama can be utilized for ideological purposes, this explains art or drama.

Prejudice aside, the lines of thought expressed by some extreme functionalist Marxist theories is archaic and unfashionable in the contemporary world. Those profane views and positions were based on the orientations and elements of such godless societies that produce the likes of Karl Marx. It is only in recent times that recognition is accorded to the potentiality of religion as a vital means that can lead humanity to true happiness both in this world and the next. (Jimoh, in Folorunsho et-al-(eds). (2004).

When we delve into the arena of politics, some ideals must have to be brought to the fore, clarified and defined before it can adequately interface with religion for peace-building. First, let us consider what politics itself entails. On the periphery, politics is about management, administration

and distribution of the resources of state and assuring who gets what and when (Kukah, 1996). But the B.B.C. English Dictionary sees politics as "the actions or activities which people use to achieve power in a country, society or organization".

However, when politics becomes a competition and the pressures for victory impose new expectations and induce new behavioural patterns, the first causality is injustice. This is the more reason why politics is part and parcel of religion of Islam.

Islam maintains that religion elevates man's nature, opening for him inexhaustible treasures of sound thinking and right actions (Abdalati, 1975). Sound thinking and right actions for our purpose entails judicious management of state's apparatus. Anything short of this breeds fear of marginalization, feelings of insecurity, tension and all put together culminated in the crises situation which best describes the Nigerian Nationhood today. Therefore, Islam as a religion with all its potentialities operates politics of justice, and this is the only possibility (even with God) for peace-building in Nigeria towards meeting the challenges of the Nigerian Nationhood.

Challenges Of Nigeria Nationhood

With more than 140 million people divided in nearly 300 ethnic groups, Nigeria inevitably faces major problems of governance. Today, 65% of budgetary revenues derived from oil is located in the south, while the north remains relatively poor. However, it is noticeable that the north has dominated the political landscape since independence in 1960. The nation has opted to balance resources and limit the risk of secession through a federal structure but the tensions have often proved too great. For about 30 years, Nigeria was subjected to military rule. The Military Regimes did little to address their concerns and grievances. The judiciary, police, legislature, etc that make for good governance were allowed to decay. Although on the scale experienced by other African countries, Nigeria has been spared of such conflict, but it certainly experienced pocket of conflicts (F.G.N., 2003). Recently however, conflicts had blossomed to a wild fire in some parts of the North. This is in addition to the large insurgency that have characterised Nigeria as a nation.

The submission above signifies that conflict exists in Nigeria as a substantial problem. It is natural that where tension exists the possibility of its eruption into violent conflict is on the high side and idiosyncrasy, territorial disputes, resources control palava and succession/dethronement saga are all sources of tension. The divisions between north and south, Islam and Christianity, which are rooted in pre-colonial and colonial history, are inclusive. But the most important of all sources is political corruption, the concentration of resources in the state makes the possession of political power very lucrative and the competition for political positions very tense (F.G.N., 2003).

Political and religious manipulations by some few selfish individuals, ethnic and communal conflicts, age-old competition over resources between pastoralists and farmers, corruption of the police force and its inefficiency, injustices and lack of fairness in the judiciary, general instability and breakdown of law and order in the society, break down of social values, poverty and unemployment, unequal development opportunities, proliferation of small arms, foreign mercenaries and international tension and of course, the call for extreme solutions such as 'Bakassi'

Boys and Niger Delta Crises including “*Boko Haram*” are matters of serious concern that require a pro-active Religio-political response.

Again, religion has often been used as a tool for crises by followers of various religious groups. It is either inter-religious or intra-religious wrangling. Instances of this include Kafanchan riot in 1987, Maitatsine crises in 1980, Funtuwa (Maitastine) crises in 1991, Musa Makaniki in Yola, Gombe crises, Zangon Kataf in 1992 the 2002 Kaduna Episode from the point of implementation of *Shari'ah* (Aboki, 2003) and Post-Election crises in 2010. The reactionary trend of Islam over these multifarious human artificial problems and challenges of Nigeria Nationhood is rooted in its politics of justice and fair play. This is manifested in the Islamic concept of Peace Education, which shall form the discussion of the next section.

Peace Education In Islam

The term Islam literary connotes peace. It is a religion of peace. It preaches peace and with full conviction in peace. It is no doubt, therefore, that 'peace' is the hallmark, the milestone and destination of Islam. With constant and consistent recurrence of the subject of peace in Islam, shades of meanings and connotations have come to be identified with it.

Allah (S.W.T) says in the Glorious Qur'an where He describes gardens of Eternity, which He promised to His Servants:

They will not there hear any vain discourse, but only salutations of peace: And they will have therein, their sustenance, morning and evening (Qur'an 19:62).

The peace mentioned in this verse has a much wide signification. It includes (1) a sense of security; (2) soundness, freedom from defects; (3) preservation, salvation, deliverance; (4) salutation, accord with those around us; (5) resignation, in the sense that we are satisfied and not discontented; (6) freedom from any jarring element. (Ali, note 2512).

Quran chapter 36:58 is also explicit with regards to the concept of peace as it relates to the mercy of Allah. It says:

"Peace" a word (of salutation) from a Lord Most Merciful".

Peace here sums up the nature of Allah whose supreme glory is mercy, peace and harmony. Islam, in its bid to promoting peace in every circumstance, urges Muslims to opt and be ready for peace if there is inclination for it on the other side of their contending party. (Q8:61).

The ongoing recognize the fact that it is a law of nature that variety and differences will always exist among people. Everywhere and at all times, there has been diverse colours, tongues, customs, concepts, intellects and degrees of knowledge (Q30:22). It is not surprising thus, that people of diverse culture, religious and ethnic backgrounds coming together differ in opinion, feelings and emotions (Q11:118). But the most detestable atmosphere is selfishness and morality to crept in, and peoples disputations become mixed up with hatred, jealousy and sin. In relation to Nigeria state, exalated contentions, dissensions, controversies, wranglings, socio-political antagonisms, legal tussles, academic and educational misdirections, personality clashes, incompatibilities and inconsistencies and heartlessness are all characteristics of Nigerian

Nationhood which, Islam as a religion, provided guidelines for a sustainable peace-building, (Enagi, 2004), see also Q4:59).

Possibilities Of Peace In Nigeria: Islam And Politics

Politics and Religion are two integral and indivisible entities. They are not mutually exclusive, that is no religion without politics and politics without religion is not recognized in Islam. Islam was not only a spiritual community. Rather, it also became a state empire. It develops as a religio-political movement in which religion was integral to state and society.

Muslims belief that Islam embraces faith and politics is rooted in its divinely revealed book, the *Quran* and *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and this has been reflected in Islamic doctrine, history and politics. The Islamic expression, *Allah Akbar* (God is most great) summaries the centrality of God and wedding of personal religious conviction and political life in Islam.

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognizes the fact that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi religious entity, not secular (F.G.N, 1999). This forms the basis for incorporation of religion into the scheme of government. Moreso, three forms of law are recognized by the Nigeria government viz: customary; *Shari'ah* and common/civil law. If we can find constitutional accord to religious practice and recognition of different forms of law including *Shari'ah*, a trail of *Shari'ah* system of law will convince us that Islam is a political force that can bring about lasting peace in Nigeria. But why has the culture of peace remain illusive in the Nigeria Nationhood? So many manipulations and malpractices have overtaken the role of religion. Religion by its nature is not politics. True to its descriptions: *Al-Din wa al-Dawlah* (a religion and a state), Islam as a religion defines a comprehensive and well defined political system (Jimoh, 2004).

It should be recalled that Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) himself, established the Muslim State of *Madinah* and administered it for a decade. His successors, who improved on this theory of government, established key political institutions to ensure smooth running of the affairs of the state. The armed forces, the police department, the judiciary and revenue administration were well organized. More importantly, pious and qualified personnel were appointed to manage the institutions. For instance, during the caliphate of Umar bn Al-Khattab (R.A), Nafi'u bn Abi Harith (R.A) was appointed governor of *Hijaz*, Uthman bn Hanif (R.A) as revenue collector, Abdullahi bn Mas'ud (R.A) was the Treasury Officer, Hadrat Shuraih was the Judge and 'Abdullah bn Khaza'l (R.A) was the Secretary of Defence. (Khan, 1978). Unfortunately, a torchlight on the Nigeria state reveals a very disappointing situation. Discussions earlier made, the situation in which we woke up to find Nigeria gave rise to suspicion, misinformation, misdirection, misappropriation and general tension resulting in violence and Conflict.

Anywhere problems are identified, solutions cannot be far-fetched. Because of the centrality of leadership to good governance, which is the number one source of crises in Nigeria, Islamic political system have spelt out the qualifications, status and functions of the Head of State. He is to be a person endowed with high standard of piety, knowledge, wisdom and physical qualities. (Q49:13). His status should be that of a vicegerent of Allah and representative of the people. He is not in any case, above the law. He should know that his leadership is only a trial. Thus, the manner in

which each aspect of trial is abused or properly utilized shall certainly be accounted for. Qur'an chapter 3:178 confirms:

They should not think that our giving them reign is good for them: we give them reign only to let them grow in sinfulness, and shameful sufferness awaits them.

In recognition of the magnitude of the warning in this verse, the Prophet (S.A.W) was quoted to have said that:

Verily, each one of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock. (Buhari, 1977).

Generally, Beekin and Badawi (1999) have highlighted what they termed "five key parameters" as the qualities that must be considered when appointing people to public offices. They are: justice, trust, righteousness, the struggle towards self-improvement and promise keeping. This is regardless of any religious faith one may profess, considering the composition of Nigeria as a multi-religious entity. In addition, there should be "even" distribution of posts. The principle of asset declaration when assuming and leaving office should be highly emphasized. This is one of the avenues that can guarantee peace and survival of the nation (Jimoh, 2002).

The Islamic political system guarantees basic rights to all people, including the following: security of life and property (Q6:151), protection of honour (Q49:11); sanctity of private life, respect for the chastity of women (Q17:32); the right to basic necessities of life (Q51:12), the right to freedom, equality of human beings (Q49:13) and equality before the law. If these principles are upheld with all sincerity, peace will reign and public safety shall not require much labour (Q4:83).

The fore-going reminds one of the Sokoto caliphate which has been a culmination of 1804 Jihad of *Shaykh* Uthman bn Fuye. It was established on justice and fair play exhibited by Islam. Indeed, it is the historical, most-recent model of government that can be adopted within the Histo-cultural context. Also reference could be made to the first republic, where Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto was able to combine his religious views in to government (politics). Although there were antagonists to his stand, it is a shining model worthy of emulation in our present democratic dispensation.

However, what has turned Nigeria into a battlefield is our collective recklessness, negligence, non-challant and lukewarm attitudes towards the sustenance of the spirit that uphold humanity. Consequently, people become miraged in the worship of government bureaucracy, ego, ethnicity, locality, regionality and nationality, all at the expense of the pure worship of Allah (*Ta'ala*) and this is the prime source of decadence and socio-economic bankruptcy. (Enagi, 2004, see also Q7:177).

It is equally important to point out that our present predicament has been precipitated by a lot of injustice which Nigerians have done their own souls. This is contained in the sayings of the Prophet (S. A. W) where he enumerated:

When the state finance circulates in the hands of a few clique, when the most despicable in character becomes the people's leader and disregard to the full implementation of the laws of Allah, then, tribulations and misfortunes, draught and

hardships, dissention, mutual disharmony and conflict shall befall them (Muslim, 1971).

Recommendations

- i. Nigeria should begin to believe in the sovereignty of Allah and of Him alone. Authority and control is His and all other acclaimed powers are only secondary.
- ii. Nigeria should be resolute in obedience to His Mighty authority and listen to men who have been endowed with knowledge of spirituality not America and its plots. Spirituality should be the basis of our actions from top to bottom.
- iii. There should be cooperation in righteousness and justice, meaning that the basis of human actions should be moral and not merely political. Fundamental morality and political activity should be weaved together,
- iv. Government has to be organized on the basis which makes it possible for decisions to be the result of mutual consultation in meeting the yearnings and aspirations of the teeming masses.

Conclusion

Islam is a perfect and comprehensive political ideal that provides guiding and controlling mechanism divinely patterned for a realistic and ultimate resolution of all crises in human domain. It enhances human cohesion, fosters coherence and instills the vitalities of human brotherhood, mutual respect, love and fair dealings (Q5:8). I am therefore confident that if justice is allowed to reign we will achieve lasting peace in this country, with the support of all including Muslims and non-Muslims. In so doing, the democratic rights of the people must be granted. We must all return and obey our creator. There must be co-operation in righteousness and justice or else the yearning peace in the Nigeria Nationhood will remain illusive.

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