

Impact of Islamic Tolerance on the Promotion of Peace and National Unity in Nigeria

Dr. Mutahir Akanni Ayinla

akannijoju@gmail.com

Dr. Abubakar Chika Adili

Department of Islamic Studies

Shehu Shagari College of Education

Abstract

Durable peace, stability and tolerance are important in the promotion of peace for national unity in Nigeria these virtues are nurtured and sustained by the Islamic teachings. One of the major impacts of Islamic teachings in any nation is centre on peace, tolerance and the pursuit of good and discouragement of evil in the society. All these will be examined with a view of bringing about peace and development in Nigeria. This study therefore sets out to address how Islamic teachings can create unity, development and a sense of community among the people. It discusses the concept of peace in general and the concept of peace in Islam; it also discusses the concept of tolerance in general and the concept of tolerance in Islam. It also analyses the significance of tolerance in facilitating national unity in Nigeria. In the content analysis of this paper, it made use of both primary and secondary sources. The study concludes that the practical steps of the teachings of Islam on peace and tolerance are contained in Madinan period; and any society or individual following them would definitely lead to prosperous life and gradually attain the pinnacle of glory.

Keywords: Impact, Islam, Tolerance, Promotion, Peace, National, Unity, Nigeria.

Introduction

Tolerance is one of the important ingredients of development and by implication sustainable development. Thereby, for any meaningful development to take place there should be peace and stability in the society. The promotion of peace and national unity is the overall objective of the ethical teachings in Islam. The Glorious Qur'an make it cleared that no any meaningful development can be achieved without peace; this is why the book of Allah makes it easy the affairs of mankind in both the spiritual and materials domain.

In this vain, Almighty Allah make the believers to understand that if Allah has willed He would have made the people of the world as one nation (Q.10:99). Thus, mankind differences in language, skin colour, race or tribe are nothing but the power of Allah (Q.30:22). However, once people understand that their difference are not meant to give privileges to some over

others, then every individual will not discriminate and they will remain tolerant and peace loving people. Application of the Islamic tolerance teachings will remove the root causes of discord and disharmony on grounds of religion or ethnicity in the country. This paper looks at the Islamic tolerance teachings on the promotion of peace and national unity which can facilitate sustainable development in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

For better understanding of this study on “Impact of Islamic Tolerance on the promotion of peace and National unity in Nigeria”, there is a need to give detail explanations on some of the major concepts employed by the authors for the study.

Concept of Peace: The concept of peace has been subjected to different interpretation by different scholars in the field of peace studies and conflict resolution. The word peace is a value loaded and multifaceted concept; its meaning can be inferred from the different levels of human social interaction as well as at the level of state actors in international system (Muhammad, 2006).

In another dimension, peace is both a state of affairs and a process. It compasses a process of calmness, stability and tranquility (Muhammad, 2006). In the Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary, peace has been defined as: A situation or a period of time in which there is no war or violence in a country or an area; the state of being calm or quiet.

Generally, peace can be defined as an absence of violence war or dissension (Rabie, 1994). From all indication, the term peace is the absence of any real or imaginary tension or discord that could create disharmony among individuals, groups or nations leading to instability, confrontation, violence or war. From this definition:

Peace, therefore, is a situation generally characterized by absence of war and violence in which human interactions are conducted in an orderly manner and disputes arising from such interactions are settled peacefully. Peace at the individual level is essentially a state of mind. It arises from individual perception of the presence or absence of psychological control of one’s self or environment. (Rabie, 1994).

The concept of peace in Islam

Peace in Islam is more than a mere desire that ought to be realized. Through Islamic teaching peace is viewed as a humanitarian unity that aims at mutual acquaintance and cooperation among people towards all that is good. Peace according to Ibn Zahim and Ibn Fauzan is the

opposite of fear, it is the absence of violence as crises, and it is a situation when there is love, affection, understanding, development and doing things in an orderly manner (2001).

Ibn zahim further reveals that, peace refers to law and order, peace of mind and absence of fear and free movement. The quest for peace is by far above everything; absence of peace will lead to absence of eating, sleeping, and staying in peace and lack of tranquility. Absence of peace will bring about killings, orphans, widows; disabled men and women and total destruction of a society (Ibn Zahim, 1997).

According to Shittu (2014), Islam teaches peaceful co-existence and tolerance. It is the only religion that emphasizes on peace due to the fact that: every good thing in human life can only be achieved in a peaceful environment. “Spiritual upliftment, social welfare, prayer and educational activities can all be acquired when the environment is violence free. Peace in Islam has rooted deep in the psychology of Muslims. Therefore, Islam dictates a wise plan to invite people to peace gently, it loves life and people as well. It further frees them from fear and dictatorship of men. It has become part of their entity and faith. Since the dawn of Islam, this religion has voted a call for peace (Q.5:3).

In fact, the word peace has occurred in different places of the Glorious Qur’an and the tradition of the Prophet (SAW). This diversity is due to the graceful place; peace occupies in Islam. It is intended by this repetition to awaken the sensation of people and orient their thinking to this sublime peaceful principle. Thereby, no any law or any legal system in the world that forces people to adopt the concept of peace except the faith of Islam because it is established on solid foundation and firm principles (Q.5:3). Likewise, peace is achieved through active obedience to the revealed commandment of Allah, for Allah is the JUST and the PEACE.

Concept of Tolerance

Tolerance can be understood through different meanings from different scholars. Ayinla asserts that, “Literally the word “tolerance” means “to bear”, “to accept” or it is the attitude of someone who is willing to accept some else’s belief without intimidation or coercion” (2015).

As observed by Khan (2011), the concept of tolerance, denotes respecting, accepting and appreciating the value systems of others despite the diversity in culture, expression and manners as influenced by their socio-religious and political activities.

However, the word Tolerance is seen as “a disposition to allow freedom of choice and behaviour”. Tolerance is defined further as willingness to accept behaviour and beliefs that are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve them.

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>. It is also an ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviours that one dislikes or disagree with. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>. The dictionary meaning of Farlex, define tolerance as the practice of recognizing and respecting the beliefs or practices of others”. Tolerance is also defined as “a fair and permissive attitude toward those whose race, religion, nationality, etc. differ from one’s own; freedom biogotry”. (Farlex).www.thefreedictionary.com/tolerance.retirevedon18/10/2017.

In a nutshell, tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures; it is also a form of expression and ways of being human. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. In fact, tolerance is being yourself without imposing your views on others. (Yunusa and Dahir, 2015).

From our little academic contribution, tolerance is the willingness to accept or tolerate somebody or something, especially opinions or behaviors that you may not agree with or from people who are not like you.

The Concept of Tolerance in Islam

The religion of Islam speaks about the basic dignity of all human beings regardless of their race, colour, language or ethnicity. Being a Muslim does not prevent one from meting out kindness to another person of different faith. In Islam, Muslims are enjoined to deal kindly and justly to non-Muslim that does not interfere or fight their faith. They should not fight against those who contradict their belief system as far as they did not fight the former. The Muslim was allowed to relate with all people, irrespective of colour, creed, race, with righteousness, goodness and friendliness.

On the issue of tolerance Islam granted the Muslim to marry women of the people of the book purposely to buttress the harmonious relationship in the society. During the period of the Prophet a chain of tolerance between the Muslims, the Jews and Christians in Madinah were initiated. They were accorded the rights of religion, life and property and handled with fairness and justice. (Tajudeen, 2014).

Islam willing to tolerate anything but it teaches zero tolerance for injustice, oppression and violation of the rights of other human beings. Islam recognized other religious as communities, which deserve to be given full freedom in accordance with their own legacy and genius. Other religions were granted the permission to operate and administer their laws

in their courts, such communities were allowed by Islam to use their languages and train their children in schools according to what they designed, (Tajudeen, 2014).

It is apparent to note that Islam teaches tolerance at all levels: between family members, between husband and wife, between parent and child, between neighbour and friend and between groups and nations. However, the best conduct in Islam is to treat human beings with dignity, equality, fraternity and justice. The Glorious Qur'an further said in the matter of tolerance that:

O mankind! We have created you male & female and have made you nations and tribes so that you might (affectionately) come to know one another. Surely, the most honoured among you, in the sight of Allah, is the one who is the best in conduct. (Q.49:13).

Concept of National Unity

Attempt had been made by many scholars to conceptualize the national unity. Ibaba Samuel (2009), defines it as the process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based upon an order its members regards as equitably harmonious.

Caxton and Tunzu (2007) believe that a community is united when it has:

1. an effective control over the means of violence
2. a centre of decision making that significantly affected the allocation of resources and rewards.
3. a dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of nation citizens.

According to Oxford learner's dictionary defined national unity to become or make somebody a member of a community rather than remaining in a separate group, in other words, race, ethnic, colour or religious differences should not be the basis of denying someone his due right and privileges in accordance with nationally laid down rules and regulations. All these are part of Islamic tolerance teaching to integrate the nation.

Meanwhile, national unity could simply be described as an attempt to bring together the different potentials of the nation (men and natural resources) for the common goal. More so, it is an aspect of nation building which includes the process of modernization in all aspects.

Significance of Islamic Tolerance in the Promotion of peace and National unity in Nigeria

It is a general believed that Islam has being teaching the Muslim in several verse of the Glorious Qur'an that Allah has destined that human being are different in religious affiliations but has a single origin despite their differences, in race, colour, language and geographical locations as this shall continue to remain so to eternity. This is a divine decree

that cannot change and due to this Muslim are enjoined to deal kindly and justly to all people (Q.2:83). This is because of the fact that despite their diversity they are bound by a universal brotherhood having stemmed from a single pair of parents: Adam and Hawwa.

It is imperative to note that, the tolerance shown by the Prophet (SAW) to other religious may be the constitution itself, called the “saqeebah” by early historians. Due to this, the Prophet (SAW) laid down a “constitution” which detailed the responsibilities of all parties which resided in Madina, their obligations towards each other, and certain restrictions which were placed on each. All parties were to obey what was mentioned therein and any breach of its articles was regarded as an act of treachery (Ahmad, 2011). Among the significance of Islamic tolerance in the promotion of peace and national unity are:

1. To maintain one nation: Islamic tolerance considered every members and citizens of Nigeria as one nation to the exclusion of all others. All tribes had to act as a whole with disregard to individual alliances, any attack on other tribe or religion should be considered as an attack on the state or the country.
2. The lives of the practitioners of other religions in the country should be given protective status.
3. Islamic teaches tolerance permitted each individual to have their separate religion. They should practice their beliefs freely without any hindrances, and no acts of provocation would be tolerated, (Q.110:1-6)
4. It encourage the inhabitants of the state to recognize a higher level of authority, and in those matters which involved various tribes and religions, justice could not be meted out by individual leaders; rather it must be adjudicated by the leader of the state himself or his designated representative.
5. Islamic teaches tolerance allow individual tribes who were not Muslims, to refer to their own religious scripture and their learned men in regards to their own personal affairs. Although in the life of Prophet, they could though, if they opted, ask the Prophet (SAW) to judge between them in their matters. Allah says in the Glorious Qur’an “... *if they do come to you, either judge between them or decline to interfere...*” (Q.5:42).
6. It encourage political freedom: every member of the state is free to accept any party he/she has interest to follows; nor should Muslim cooperated between the people of other faiths in the political area. History affirmed that, prophet of Islam selected a non Muslim, Amr-Ibn Umayyah ad-Damri, as an ambassador to be sent to Negus, the King of Ethopia (Ahmad, 1995).

7. It insists that there is absolute human equality and respect between all human beings neither race; colour, ethnicity, nor privilege (but only righteousness) can be the sole standard of value in Islamic tolerance teachings.
8. It maintains the conception of justice which is not limited by race, colour, belief or nationality. Allah says: *“When you judge, between people, judge with justice: verily how excellent is the teaching which Allah gives you!”* (Q.4:58).
9. Islamic tolerance gives chance to dialogue which is a frank exchange of ideas or views on a specific issue in an effort to attain mutual understanding. The Glorious Qur’an instructed that dialogue must be conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect and through ways that are best and most gracious (Q.16:125). It encourages the believers to use dialogue in resolving ideological conflicts between them and other religious groups (Q.3:64).

Conclusion

To sustain peaceful co-existence and national unity in Nigeria, there is need to maintain Islamic teaches on tolerance, justice, equality, mercy, and kindness. For these are the values that keep people together without the hatred and persecution. It is a religion that encourages the interaction between the people of different culture living in a society, and this interactive is not mixed with deception, mistrust and harmfulness. Averagely there would be peace in that state or country but in the absence of all these, such country cannot enjoy peace or maintain national unity. Therefore Islam unequivocally affirms the right of each individual to freedom of thought and religion. If one takes the time to read the Glorious Qur’an and study the life of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his companion, one will find that they built a society base on love, lenience, justice and brotherhood. People are urged to go beyond mere coexistence and to actively seek mutual understanding and relationship of cooperation with one another. The Prophet of Allah (SAW) taught that all people are considered part of the family of Allah, and that Allah loves the most those who are most useful to His family members, friends, neighbours and nation.

Recommendations

The foregoing are some Islamic tolerant teachings for peaceful co-existence and national unity in Nigeria. They are perfect guidelines that need sincere and diligent understanding to bring about sustainable harmony and cordial relationship among Nigerian citizens across religious, cultural, and national. These are:

1. Islamic teachings inculcate the quality of tolerance, forbearance and forgiveness in our day to day activities.
2. Everybody should imbibe with the virtue that will foster peace and tolerance as is obtainable in the teaching of Islam.
3. We should encourage and participate in inter-faith dialogue in order to promote peace, tolerance and national unity in Nigeria.
4. Islamic scholars should educate and enlighten both Muslims and non-Muslims on the peace covenant between Muslims and non-Muslims in Madina. Thus this creates positive development in term of sustainable in and outside areas of Madina.
5. The problems of tribalism and religious can be handled if we respect others irrespective of caste, creed, gender, ethnicity and nationality.

References

- Ahmad, K. (2011), *The Concept of Tolerance in Islam*, the milli Gazette
- Ahmad, S. (1995), "Muslim and Non-Muslims Face to Face", Foundation for Islamic Knowledge, Lombard IL. ND Madinan Society at the Time of the Prophet, Akram |Diya al-umari, International Islamic Publishing House
- Ali, A.Y. (1992), *the Glorious Qur'an Text, Translation and Commentary*, Amana Corporation, Maryland
- Ayinla, O.A. (2015), "Leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a Model for Tolerance towards other Religions", in B.O. Yusuf (ed.), *Arabic and Islamic Textual interpretations on Religious Tolerance*, Unilorin, Nigeria Association of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS)
- Caxton and Tunzu Wang, A.A. (2007), *The Role of Religion Promoting Peace, Security and National Development*, *Journal for the Promotion of Studies in Religion Education Languages and General Studies* (NAPSGELGS)
- Haykal, M.H. (nd), *the Life of Muhammad* (PBUH), Zahran Bookshop Al-Azhar al-Sharef
- Ibaba, S.I. (2009), *Education and National Integration in Nigeria*
- Ibn Fauzan, S.A. (1422H/2001), *Al-khutab al-Manbariyyah fi Manasiba. Vol. 3*, Rassadr publisher, Asriyyah
- Ibn Zahim, A.M. (1997), *Khutab al- Jumahdoa al-A'yad: Ulziyahla Manbarkhair al-ibad, Vol. 5*.
- Khan, K.A. "The Concept of Tolerance in Islam", Published on line 28 June, 2011, www.mliga/ette.com/news/1761-the concept of Tolerance in Islam, retrieved on 18|10|2017
- Muhammad, H. (2006), "General Introduction Basic Concept and Theories of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution", in H. Muhammad (ed.), *Concepts and issues in Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution*, Book of Reading V.I. General Studies Department. Bayero University, Kano.
- Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary. International Student edition
- Rabie, M. (1994), *Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity*. West Part Press, Prague
- Shittu A.D. (2014), "The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as a Model for Peace in Nigeria", in B.O. Yusuf (ed.), *Perspective of Arabic and Islamic Studies on Security and Peace Building*, Unilorin, Nigeria Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS)

Tajudeen, T.O. (2014), "Islamic and Inter-Religious Dialogue for Security and Peace Building in Nigeria", in B.O. Yusuf (ed.), Perspectives of Arabic and Islamic Studies on Security and Peace Building, Unilorin, Nigeria Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS)

The Freed Dictionary by Farlex: www.thefreedictionary.com/tolerance.retrieved on 20|10|2017

Yinusa, A. and Dahiru, A. (2015), "Islam and the Respect for other Religions", in B.o. Yusuf (ed.), Arabic and Islamic Textual Interpretations on Religious Tolerance, Unilorin, Nigeria Association of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS)