

Inter-Connectivity and Confluence of Peace Between Islam and Christianity: An Historical Survey Towards Peace Building and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Coupled with the fact that Nigeria is a multi ethno-religious state, inevitability of peace to entrench development is non-negotiable. The nation has experienced serial conflicts having religious coloration against the claim and consistent belief that the two religions- Islam and Christianity inherently rally for tranquility and peaceful co-existence. The diversity and difference of religious inclinations should under no circumstances be a brooding net for conflicts and disharmony. Religion should rather be seen serving as unifying and integrating social factor than acting as an excruciating instrument of divisive tendencies. Loss, disaffection,, under-development and backwardness are characteristics of any nation identified with religious conflicts and disharmony because religious chaos inflicts the society adversely. This paper thus dwells on the pattern of inter-religious relationship that characterized the Ministry of Prophet Muhammad the nature of which placed credence on the essence of religious co-existence even when it was practically difficult. The early Muslims demonstrated enviable level of enduring perseverance , tolerance and practical abstinence in the face of hostilities unleashed upon them by religious antagonists. It further extols the virtue of confluence from which Muslims and Christians in Nigeria could borrow a leaf to promulgate and propagate peaceful co-existence. The paper also does not shy away from incidents of religious conflicts in Nigeria, ex-ricing perceived causes and consequently comes with array of recommendations to forestall religious instigated conflicts in Nigeria towards achieving sustainable peace and development.

Introduction

Nations and communities of the world, clamour for and desire peace. In fact, issue of peace has been in the forefront of global yearnings and discussions. Literarily, peace depicts absence of conflicts, rancours,, insecurity and all forms of violence in the human society. peace connotes and translates into sustainable national development. This accounts for some higher institutions of learning in Nigeria mounting academic programmes such as Peace and Strategic Studies and Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution. Peace culminating into human security according to Akande (2004), is essential to attain development. Individuals and corporate bodies are concerned about peace/ conflict situation in Nigeria especially the aspects of its frequency and enormity. Nigeria as a nation has experienced a lot of conflicts which have left remarkable devastating consequences. The memory can not easily be lost of ethnic/communal clashes, political conflicts, inter/ intra religious conflicts in Nigeria as they threatened peaceful co-existence and development on a grand scale. However, our particular focus in this piece is conflict having religious coloration or undertone.

Religious conflicts have on the alarming increase since the return to Democracy in 1999 (Jegede, 2019). The violent Christian- Muslim clash in Jos in 2001 according to Alanamu (2004), brought so much physical and psychological trauma to the Nigerian victims. The Maitatsine riot in 1980, in Maiduguri in 1982, in Jimeta- Yola in 1984, Kafanchan clashes between Christians and Muslims in 1987 according to Jegede (2019), and the bloody clash between Izalatul- bid'ah wa iqamatul –Sunnah and Tijaniyyah Brotherhood in Gombe in 1987 in the view of Rotgak (2004), all left devastating consequences on the lives and properties of the victims and thus, threatened peace and development in Nigeria.

In spite of the precautionary measures and initiatives to curb, prevent and control religious conflict in the country, it seems no positive effects and results have been feasible but rather, the trends and dimensions to religious conflicts have been horrendous and disparaging. If the Muslim majority population of Nigeria according to Jegede (2019) and the other religious groups can not afford but co-exist, it becomes pertinent for the Muslim and Christian communities to imbibe the model or pattern of relationship of the days of Prophet Muhammad which enshrined peace, harmony and co-existence.

Religious Conflicts and the Law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

The law of the federal Republic of Nigeria has promotion of the incidents of religious disharmony, conflagration and conflicts. It thus guarantees freedom of religion and association in such a manner that it does not lead to infringement on the right of other people. The section 204 of the Nigeria's Criminal Code of the 1999 Constitution of as amended, prohibits blasphemy and considers it a grave and punishable offence. The section 204 is entitled 'insult to Religion.'" The section provides that:

Any person who does an act which any class of persons consider as public insult on their religion, with the intention that they should consider the act such an insult, and any person who does an unlawful act with the knowledge that any class of persons will consider it such as insult, is guilty of a misdemeanour and is liable to imprisonment for two years (Criminal Code Act, Chapter 77, Law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999)

Furthermore, the Constitution seeks to give and protect the citizens' inalienable right to religious belief and teachings without being infringed upon. The section 38 sub-sections

2 and 3 of the constitution grants religious freedom in terms of belief and instructions thus:

No person attending any places of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own or a religion not approved by the parent or guardian (38/2)

No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination (Section 38 Sub-section 3 of the amended Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999:44)

Blasphemy in the eye of the Nigerian law, is punishable with two years imprisonment. The law is purportedly enacted partly to protect right and partly to forestall a situation where religion is used as subject or object of conflict or violent behavior. This is in consideration of the fact that the link between religion and reactions or behaviours are spontaneously inseparable. The law of the federal Republic of Nigeria gives inalienable right to her citizens to profess faith-in and practice religion of their own choice without any hindrance or encroachment on the rights of others. It needs be stated that the Federal Republic of Nigeria operates two court systems namely the customary and shari'ah systems. The two systems tend to promote religious harmony in precepts as they are vested with Criminal jurisdiction. In Nigeria, the following courts have superior status: Supreme Courts, the Courts of Appeal, the Federal High Court, the State High Courts, the Shari'ah Court of Appeal and the Customary Court of Appeal of a state. These courts mentioned above, seek to adjudicate on criminal matters including violent religious and public disturbances. Promulgation of Decree no. 2 known as the Civil Disturbances Decree was a fall-out of the 1987 Kaduna religious riot which broke out following an address by address by the Christian preacher Abubakar Bako to students of the Advanced Teachers' College in Kafanchan. Bako's address was perceived to be a misrepresentation of the Qur'an and that eventually resulted to a violent quarrel between the Fellowship of Christian Students and the Muslim Students Society. If Bako was conscious and mindful of the section of the constitution that frowns at insults on others' religion and their symbols, I suppose he wouldn't have ventured into such that consequently triggered violence.

Religion and conflicts in Nigeria

The situation and experiences in Nigeria make it seem that conflict is a mark of religion and part and parcel of it. The loss which religious conflicts have inflicted on the country is inestimable. The incessant violence sparked on the platform of religion in Nigeria, have made a monster of religion to the extent that some people have developed apathy towards it while some have tagged it as instrument of oppression against humanity. Soyinka (2012), remarks that religion is innately an enemy of humanity, if not indeed of itself a crime against humanity. Babangida (1992), submits that man has failed Islam and Christianity. He laments that the adherents of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria have not allowed the two faiths to serve Nigerians the desired peace and harmony. Babangida wrote thus:

It may be a theological question whether God reveals Himself or he reveals religion through His messenger, His prophet or His son,

irrespective of the position one takes on this issue, one should be reasonable enough to know that God, like the father of any household, can never be satisfied with members of the family who quarrel, fight, undermine and sometimes kill one another in the His name (Babangida, 1992)

The frequency and enormity of religious conflicts in Nigeria has at one time or the other informed the intervention of international Religious and diplomatic bodies towards creating and ensuring enduring peace in Nigeria. The Jordan Royal Aal-al- Bayt Institute of Islamic Thought (RABIIT) (www.ammanmessage.com) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) visited Nigeria and jointly played significant roles in dousing religious tension by jointly organized interfaith peace conference in collaboration with Muslim/ Christian communities in Nigeria on the 25th May, 2012 in Abuja. The RABIIT is an autonomous international Islamic non-governmental institute headquartered in Amman, the capital of Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan while the World Council of Churches is a conglomerate of more than three-hundred and fifty churches headquartered in Geneva. The WCC has a guide for inter religious dialogue tagged ; “ Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with people of other Religions.” The bodies jointly paid working visit to Nigeria between 22nd and 26th May 2012 to:

- Express to Nigerians serious concerns and anxieties of the international community about the current religious and political situations in Nigeria and
- Express solidarity and offer prayers for Nigerians and particularly victims of violence.

In the commitment of the duo jointly, they proposed certain projects to actualize religious cum political peace and harmony in Nigeria. The project proposal is as follows:

- Separate and substantial publication of volumes of texts on theology of peace in their respective religions with Nigerian participation in Nigeria and translated to Nigerian languages;
- Publication of booklet by a group of Nigerian Muslims and Christians in a popular format distilling the understanding of peace and harmony in both Christian and Muslim scriptures and those booklets be made available in Nigerian languages and made available into Nigerian school and university religious and civic curricula;
- Planning to work with individuals and institutions in Nigeria to develop a common statement for people to sign, based on both their religious traditions, pledging themselves to work for the peace and wellbeing of Nigeria and
- Seeking partners to enable the opening of a neutral information collection and archive centre, ideally both virtually and on the ground in Nigeria, which will facilitate the sharing of stories, allow the voices of those who feel themselves voiceless to be heard and recorded, and assist with collecting of accurate data about incidents of violence, online and through hotlines.

The RABIIT and WCC did Nigeria a great favour as well by diagnosing the factors responsible for religious violence in Nigeria and the solutions partly have been embedded into the peace

project enumerated above. The factors according to the Report on the inter-religious tensions in Nigeria- World Council of Churches (<https://oikoumene.org/report>) are listed below;

- Inadequate depth of understanding of both Christianity and Islam within and without the duo;
- Lack of knowledge and information on a popular level, particularly in local languages, of scriptural-based condemnations of violence and terrorism in both Christianity and Islam;
- Statements and actions of religious leaders, both Muslims and Christianity, which could be understood as condoning or encouraging violence;
- Tensions arising from well-funded and organized foreign Christian missionary and foreign Muslim missionary activity;
- The actions and influence of Boko Haram and Takfiris, and the ideological influences upon the genesis of Boko-Haram. Revenge killings by some Christians for the deaths
- The actions and influence of gangs of Muslim youths carting out organized killings of innocent Christians;
- The actions and influence of gangs of Christian youths carrying out organized killings of innocent Muslims;
- The geographic polarizations of Muslims and Christians along an imaginary North-South 'fault-line' in the middle of the country, aggravated by demographic shifts and refugee movements in the period since independence;
- Further geographic polarizations of Muslims and Christians particularly within the Northern states where Christian residential areas (and in some cases local markets) and Muslim areas are segregated and
- In effective co-operation within Nigerian Inter-religious Council (NIREC) relative to two years ago.

Other Fronts Towards Inter-Religious Co-operation and Harmony Across the Globe

There have been other world initiatives and moves to establish inter-faith co-operation to have enduring peace across the globe.

- (1) In September 2006, Pope Benedict xvi delivered a speech in Regensburg where he advocated for peace between Muslims and Christians by acknowledging some essential common ground and understanding among both faiths based on the Two-Great Commandments of love of god and love of neighbour (www.worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com)
- (2) In 2007, an open letter was jointly originated by one-hundred and thirty-eight (138) Muslim scholars, intellectuals and clerics to the leaders of the Christian faith. The action or initiative which they tagged " A Common Word Between us and You" was a response to H.H Pope Benedict xvi's address soliciting for peace between Muslims and Christians across the globe. (www.worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com and www.culturaldiplomacy.org)
- (3) On the 20th October, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously established and adopted first week of every February as "The World Interfaith Harmony week" and the following resolutions were reached by the General Assembly:

- The General Assembly re-affirms that mutual understanding and inter-religious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace;
- The General Assembly proclaims the first week of February of every year the World Inter-faith Harmony week between all religions, faiths and beliefs;
- The General Assembly encourages all states to support, on a voluntary basis, the spread of message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship during that week based on love of God and love of neighbor, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions
- The General Assembly requests the Secretary General to keep the General Assembly informed of the implementation of the resolution. (www.worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com and www.culturaldiplomacy.org)

It is not our mind to recast the incidents of religious violence in Nigeria. We only want to put it on record to show that despite the fact that Islam and Christianity claim to be Abrahamic in terms of link and spiritual connection, each seeks to obliterate the other in Nigeria and in the process, pays disregard to the basic teachings of the religion on mandatory peace and harmonious relationship with fellow human beings.

Oneness of the Origin of Islam and Christianity

Islam and Christianity are Abrahamic. They both claim to have link with Abraham (Ibrahim). Islam does not discriminate among the prophets because they were all sent by God. In the Qur'an, Allah instructed Prophet Muhammad to tell the believers (Muslims) not to discriminate against all the prophets because they were anointed and sent by Him. The Qur'an declares thus:

قولوا امنا بلله وماانزل الينا وماانزل الي ابراهيم واسماعيل واسحق ويعقوب والاسباط وما اوتي موسى وعيسي وماوتي النبيون من ربهم لانفرق بين احد منهم ونحن له مسلمون

Say; we believe in Allah and (in that which had been revealed to Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqub and the tribes, and(in) that which was given to Musa and Isa, and (in) which was given to prophets from their Lord, we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit (Qur'an 2 verse 136)

The three streams of the divine or revealed religions hold Abraham as the origin and fountain of the belief in only one true God. Christians admit that Abraham was the father of faith while the Qur'an makes Muslims believe that it was Ibrahim that named them believers (*Muslimun*) Abraham was the progenitor of Ismail's line (Arabs) as well as Ishaq's line. Ibrahim and his first son, Ismail rebuilt the holy Ka'abah in Makkah and purified it for worship. The Qur'an alludes to this in the following passages

واد جعلنا البيت مثابة للناس وامنا واتخذوا من مقام ابراهيم مصلي وعهدنا الي ابراهيم واسماعيل ان ظهرا بيتي للطائفين والعاكفين والركع السجود

And remember when We made the House (at Mecca) a place of resort for mankind and a place of safety. And take you people the station of Abraham as a place of prayers and We commanded Abraham and Ismael that they should purify My House (at Mecca) for those who are circumambulating it, or staying or bowing or prostrating themselves therein in prayer (al- Baqarah 2: 125)

The fact that the glorious Qur'an warns against any form of discrimination against the past prophets and revealed books, is a proof of the oneness of the origin or source of the Divine religions i.e Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Intolerant and fanatical attachment to a particular religion at the exclusion or annihilation of other religions, is alien to the teachings of Islam. Prophet Muhammad demonstrated this in his interactions with people of other religions particularly, the Christians as would be shown later in this piece. The glorious Qur'an says:

امن الرسول بما انزل اليه من ربه والؤمنون كل امن بالله وملءكته وكتبه ورسله لانفرق بين احد من رسله وقالوا سمعنا واطعنا غفرانك ربنا واليك المصير

The apostle believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers, they all believe in Allah and His angels and His books and His apostles. We make no difference between any of His apostles; and they say; We hear and obey, our Lord! Thy forgiveness (do we crave), and to Thee is the eventual course (Qur'an 2:285)

For the fact that Muslims and Christians believe that Abraham was the fountain and origin of the three streams of religious thought according to Gabriel (2013), it behooves of the Muslims and Christian to love one another and co-exist peacefully. The references above are convincing proofs on the inter-connectivity and confluence of the divine religions. The three religions preach oneness of God and supra love emanating from Him to His creatures.

Advent of Islam and Contact with Christianity

Muhammad's call to prophethood and his public declaration were met stanch resistance, stiff opposition, hostility, oppression and persecution never experienced among the Quraysh. The mission of Prophet was of guidance and purity which Ja'far (1984), describes as reformatory role on the path of gradual perfection and development in the evolution and training of everyone. The message and mission of Islam as preached among the Quraysh in Makkah was that which ushered in a new life, regenerated faith, culture and light that demolished all barriers of blood, colour, tribes and geography between one man and another (Abdul, 1971). In spite of the clear and profitable message of Islam conveyed to the Meccans, the belligerent and hostile Quraysh took to persecution of Muhammad and his followers. All hostilities including social boycott (psychological) and physical tortures were deployed against Muslim minority by the intolerant Meccans. The Quraysh unleashed terror on the Prophet and his followers and they were according to Seyyid Saeed (1971), held in contemptuous disdain. They were subjected to all manner of calumnies and humiliation, taunted at and recklessly insulted in a bid to force believers to renounce their faith. Among the early believers that lost their lives to the persecution and relentless oppression at the hands of the idol-worshippers were Haaris bn Abi Hala who was slashed to death in his effort to protect Muhammad from the onslaught of the Quraysh, Amar Yazir and his wife to mention but few, all at the onset of the message of Islam.

When persecution became severe and unbearable and endurance of the believers almost became exhausted, the Prophet advised a hand of his followers, fifteen of them in the first instance to migrate to Abyssinia, the modern day Ethiopia to seek for the protection and freedom of religious practice under a benign Christian king called Negus. The second group of his followers numbered up to hundred also migrated to Abyssinia on the advice of Prophet Muhammad. The second group was led by Ja'far, a brother of Ali bn Talib, the fourth *Khalifatur-Rasul*. What informed the Prophet of advising his handful followers to seek asylum in the territory of the Christian king was that, he discovered sincere belief and virtues in them as people of the book (Injeel). The message of Islam during the time of the Prophet was in consonance with the message of Christianity especially in the aspect of profession of belief in one true

God. Prophet Muhammad thus encouraged his helpless persecuted followers to seek asylum in the territory of the Christians in the kingdom of Negus. (Najashi).

The believers who sought asylum in the territory of king Negus were not disappointed in terms of their expectation. The Quraysh delegates tried to prejudice the king against the exiled and demanded for their deportation. King Negus according to Seyyi Saeed (1971), asked the Muslim emigrants to explain their position. Ja'far delivered a speech which could be described as summary of the fundamentals of Islam thus:

O king, we were plunged into the depth of ignorance and barbarism, we adored idols, we lived in unchastity, we ate dead animals, and we spoke abomination, we disregarded every feeling of humanity, and the duties of hospitality and neighbourhood; we knew no law but that of the strong. At that time, god raised among us a man, of whose birth, truthfulness, honesty, and purity we were aware, and he called us to the unity of God and taught us not to associate anything with Him, he forbade us the worship of idols; and enjoined us to speak the truth, to be faithful to our trusts, to be merciful and to regard the rights of neighbours; he forbade us to speak evil of women, or to eat the substance of orphans; he ordered us to fly from vices, and to abstain from evil; to offer prayers, to render alms, to observe the fast. We have believed in him, we have accepted his teachings and his injunctions to worship God, and not to associate anything with Him. For this reason, our people have risen against us, have persecuted us in order to, make us forgo the worship of God and return to the worship of idols of wood and stones and other abominations. They have tortured us, and injured us, until finding no safety among them, we have come to thy country and hope thou will protect us from their oppression.

The King, Negus did not oblige the Quraysh delegates who had to return to Makkah in utmost disappointment. He did not oblige the pagan Quraysh because he found similarity between Islam and Christianity. The Qur'an acknowledges the goodness and virtues of the Christians of the time of the Prophet especially in reference to the good and hospitable gestures of the Christian king Negus of Abyssinia. The Qur'an declares thus:

لتجدن اشد الناس عداوة للدين امنوا اليهود والدين اشركوا ولتجدن اقربهم مودة للدين امنوا الذين قالوا انا نصري ذلك بان منهم قسيسين و رهبانا وانهم لا يستكبرون واذا سمعوا ما نزل الي الرسول تري اعينهم تفيض من الدمع مما عرفوا من الحق يقولون ربنا امنا فاكتبنا مع الشاهدين

Certainly you will find the most violent of people in enmity for those who believe (to be) the Jews and those who are polytheists; and you will certainly find the nearest in friendship to those who believe (to be) those who say: We are Christians; this is because there are priests and monks among them and because they do not behave proudly. And when they hear what has been revealed to the apostle, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears on account of the truth that they recognize; they say: Our Lord! We believe, so write us down with the witnesses (of truth) (Qur'an al-Maidah 5:82-83)

In essence, the Muslim-Christian relationship at the time of the Prophet was one of love, understanding, tolerance and friendliness. This relationship model could be emulated by Muslims and Christians in Nigeria towards an enduring peaceful co-existence and harmonious interactions.

Prophet Muhammad's Interactions with Christians Beyond Makkah.

Prophet Muhammad's diplomatic interaction with the Christians especially when he was both the religious and political head of the Islamic State in Madinah, is illustrative of the expectation Nigerian Muslims and Christians. This is not to say that he did not interact with Christians while he was in Makkah. Even, he had contacts and interactions with them before he became a prophet. That Muhammad had interactions with Bahira- Nestorian monk and Waraqah bn Nawfa, are copiously captured in history. In his theological teaching, he referred to the Christians as "the People of the book" and "receivers of the Abrahamic revelations' who should be held with respect and love because they were wise people who stand by truth.

The diplomatic relation which Muhammad had with Christians of his time based on understanding, tolerance, love and justice could best be illustrated by his interaction with the Najran Christians. The Najran called Ukhdud today is located approximately 1200 kilometers south of Madinah. According to Shahid (2013), Najran was a popular trade center known for agricultural and industrial boom as it was a predominantly Christian community. After Prophet Muhammad had settled down in Madinah after his migration (*Hijratur-Rasul*), he began to invite different people and groups to Islam. He sent two envoys one of which was led by Khalid bn Walid to Najran which according to Tobi (1999), had been under the control of Muhammad. The Najran Christians in response to the emissary sent by the Prophet, also sent a delegation of the Christian scholars to Madinah to carryout investigations on the Prophet's revelations. The delegation of the scholars, were hosted in the Prophet's mosque in Madinah and were accorded security and well deserved hospitality by the Muslims for three days. The parties according to Acar (2013), had resourceful and peaceful debates which ended in understanding that each religion would leave the other alone to exist. The glorious Qur'an alludes to this in the following passages:

قل يا اهل الكتاب تعالوا الي كلمة سواء بيننا وبينكم الا نعبد الا الله ولا نشرك به شيءا ولا يتخذ بعضنا بعضا اربابا من دون الله فان تولوا فقولوا اشهدوا باننا مسلمون

Say: "O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than God. If then they turn back, say ye : Bear witness that we (at last) are Muslims (bowing to God's Will) . Quran al- Imran 3:64.

Prophet Muhammad and the Najran scholars ended up in having covenant of understanding, tolerance and love which accoding to Haykal (n.d), reads thus:

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Beneficent. This is what Muhammad, the Prophet and God's messenger, has written down for the people of Najran when he has the authority over all their fruits, gold, silver, crops and slaves. He has benevolently left them all that in return for 2000 hullas every year, 1000 to be given in the month of Rajab and 1000 in the month of Safar. Each hulla is equal to one ounce (a measure equal to 4 dirhams). The Najran are also required to provide accommodation and expenses for my messengers, for up to 20 days. None of my messengers shall be kept in Najran more than one month. They are also required to give, as a loan, 30 shields, 30 horses and 30 camels, in case of any disorder and treachery in Yemen. If anything is lost of the shields, horses or camels they loan to my messengers, it will remain owing by my messengers until it is given back. Najran has the protection of God and the pledges of Muhammad, the Prophet, to protect their lives, faith, land, property, those who are absent and those who are present, and their clans and allies. They need not change anything of their past customs. No right of theirs or their religion shall be altered. No Bishop, monk or church guard shall be removed from his position. Whatever they have is theirs, no matter how

big or small. They are not held in suspicion and they shall suffer no vengeance killing. They are not required to be mobilized and no army shall trespass on their land, if any of them requests that any right of his should be given to him, justice shall be administered among them. He who takes usury on the past loans is not under my protection. No person in Najran is answerable for any injustice committed by another.

It needs be noted that during the debates the Christian scholar delegates observed at a point that it was time for their worship. Prophet Muhammad obliged them to carryout their service/ worship in the mosque, venue of the debates. This is understanding and tolerance at its peak. The Roman Catholic in history and truth, acknowledged the closeness of the Muslims in faith to Christians and in their tolerance and catechism, included Muslims among those who acknowledged God as the Creator and adore Him as mankind's Judge on the last day (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd edition, 2000).

Muslim- Christian Relationship in Nigeria

The Muslim-Christian relationship in Nigeria, going by the present and past experiences, falls short of the expected religious standard. What should be the living models of the Muslims and Christians in Nigeria are the religious personality/ creed of Prophet Muhammad and the Najran Christian scholars who demonstrated religious understanding and tolerance. We observe that Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) has been failing in her responsibility in promoting inter-religious understanding, tolerance, mutual trust and essential love required to make them co-operate to engender development.

The relationship between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria in most cases, has been conflictual except in rare cases when the two religious groups form coalition to address peace and conflict matters. An example of this is the localized Supreme Council for Peace and Public Affairs (SCPPA), an Initiative of His Imperial Majesty- Oba Abdul Wahab Kayode Oyedotun Bibire I, the Orangun of Ila. The coalition comprises of both Muslim and Christian leaders and representatives within Ila Local Government Area of Osun State. The Council was inaugurated in 2006 to see to the promotion of peace and harmony within the community. Intolerance and lack of understanding was demonstrated even at the official level of Governance as seen in Yeasom Wike, Governor of Rivers State unconstitutionally declaring the State as a Christian State and the consequence demolition of some mosque in Porthacourt.

Conclusion

Isla and Christianity are of the same lineage though there might be doctrinal and ideological differences due to human interpretational and application factors over a period of time. The differences however should not translate to chaos, discord and fractured co-existence because peace, love and unity are central to the basic teachings and precepts of the two religions. The adherents of the duo have to exercise caution by imbibing the culture of mutual understanding, tolerance, love and restraint bearing in mind that Nigeria is heterogeneously religious.. Prophet Muhammad, his ummah, Christian leaders and community demonstrated enviable interfaith interaction and dialogue. Their understanding, tolerance, sincerity and love towards people of other religion were enduring and heart-rendering.

Blasphemy has been identified as one of factors fueling religious ember of discord and uprising in Nigeria. That act is ungodly and is considered a grave sin in the eye of the Nigerian constitution. The best belt to address blasphemy as could be inferred from the passage of the Qur'an is to exclusively retire the blasphemers to the Court of Allah for adjudication. At the same time, no one should leave on the excuse of freedom of speech, religion and moratorium of tolerance, to misbehave or treat or address others'

faith and belief with disrepute. Other causes of religious violence as identified by RABIIT and WCC in their collective independent investigations must be addressed with utmost sincerity. Belligerent, dissident, instigating and disrespectful speeches, actions and writings should be avoided because they could provoke spontaneous violent reactions. Muslims and Christians in Nigeria need to respect the sanctity of lives and should realize that development can take place in an environment of mutual love and sincere trust devoid of bickering, rancor and disharmony. The model of the inter-religious co-existence and harmonious relationship between Muslims and Christians exhibited during the early period of Islam speak volume of religious understanding and co-existence which if imbibed or emulated in Nigeria, would nourish lasting peace and harmony.

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