

THE CONFLUENCE OF SHARIAH AND THE SOCIETY IN RELIGIOUS CONFLICT
MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

Whenever conflict is mentioned, what comes to the mind is crisis, chaos or violence. All these are resultant features of conflict whenever conflict is not adequately managed and not its interpretation. The consequence of crisis is destruction of living and nonliving property with precious human lives inclusive. Most of the crisis recorded in Nigeria, even though they are mostly coloured religious and ethnic, are politically motivated. While conflict is inevitable in any society because it is part of the society, the proper management of the experienced conflicts in Nigeria would assist in curbing crisis and its negative effects on the development of the society. Recognising the relevance of the Qur'an to all aspects of human life, this work analysed some verses of the Qur'an and studied their relevance to conflict management with the objective of suggesting divine solutions to conflict management in Nigeria. A combination of historical and exegetical research methods were adopted in carrying out the research. The researcher employed observation, oral interview and library materials for data collection and analysis. Finding of the research revealed that the Qur'an remains a source for problem solving in the society and therefore, adherents of Islam should constantly advocate for a return to divine injunctions in solving their social problems.

Keywords: Qur'an, shari'ah, religion, conflict, crisis, violence

Introduction

Whenever conflict is mentioned, what comes to the mind as its interpretation among other things are chaos, crisis, disorder and violence. Conflict is that which concerns “a state of disagreement between people, group, country etc.”¹ It is a clash between ideas, principles or people or better still, a state of negative situation that exists between two groups or parties who find themselves incompatible to live together peacefully. Conflict situation arises whenever one party perceives that its goals or means of achieving such goals are being threatened or hindered by the activities of the other party or parties and it is predominantly witnessed in multi religious countries like Nigeria. Whenever conflict escalates into crisis, it destroys valuables acquired over years and hinders progress in the society. Conflict is not only natural but a unique phenomenon which can ignite anytime through any means with a view to rendering the opponent victim of circumstance or to drop the objective.

Nigeria as a community, has witnessed quite a number of crises with their causes ranging from ethnical to political, and religious. Of all the various causes of these crises, religious is considered most prominent to an extent that others that are of different causes are later considered religious or turned religious because of the sensitivity attached to religion in Nigeria.

An Overview of Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Nigeria has witnessed numerous religious crises over decades. These crises predominantly exist between Muslims and Christians even when the two religions share common features. Islamic VS Christianity crises in Nigeria has reached the state that it could be referred to as war in various parts of the country ranging from the Maitatsine riot of Kano in December 1980 which claimed many lives and properties, Bulunkutu Bizarre (1982), Kaduna crisis and Maitatsine uprising of Maiduguri in 1982,² Jimeta War (1984), Gombe revolt (1985),

Kastina crises (1999), Kano riot (1995), Shariah crises in Zamfara, Kadunna, Bauchi, Sokoto etc in 1999 and Shariah reactions in Aba, Onitsha, and Owerri in 1999. Between September 2001 and May 2004, nearly fifty-four thousand men and women were killed in three years of ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau state. These uprisings made the then president of the federation, President Olusegun to declare a six-month state of emergency for Plateau state in May 2004. These instances are few as there was no year without three to four instances of religious conflicts in Nigeria in the years before 2015. These conflicts are not without cost to the Nigerian people. The disintegration, dispersion, instability, lost of lives and properties, discontinuing economic programmes and projects are some of the resultant features of these crises.

Causes of Religious Crises in Nigeria

Causes of religious conflict in Nigeria varied with variance in the environment. Some factors that appear general include the ignorant of adherents of the teaching of the various religions. The claim for superiority of one religion over the other and the ignorance in the desired methodology of the propagation of religion. Allah advises thus “invite (all) to the way of your lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious”. (Q. 16:125). Upholding a doctrinal view which is contrary to others view is one of the major causes of intra-religious conflict in Nigeria. The activities of the Jabata group in the south of Nigeria speaks volumes the misuse of the weapon of religious advocacy in the creation of an unhealthy environment in Nigeria.³

Campaigns of hatred and blackmail is another cause of religious crisis. Some of the religious leaders busied themselves in the campaigns of hatred instead of advocating for peace and tolerance. These religious leaders herald the negative sides of a sister religion in their

attempt to praise the religion they belong to. In their bid to do so, leaders of the sister religion or followers get aggressive and in most cases, react violently,

Bad leadership is considered another major factor of religious crises in Nigeria. The issue of favourism and nepotism equally aggravate crisis in the society. When an adherent of a religion is in power, what comes to his mind is how to favour his religion at the expense of the second religion and in the attempt of people of the second religion to protest, the resultant feature is usually radical.

Extremism which in most cases, is based on poor knowledge of the teaching of a religion being defended by the group involved, may equally lead to religious violence. This factor is more prominent in intra religious than in inter religious crises in Nigeria, this occur when a group believes that their mode of worship is the best and hence, rubbishes other's,

Unbridled action of the press is a contributing factor to religious uprising in Nigeria. Exaggeration and misinformation regarding issues and occurrences in most cases, succeed in triggering crises among adherents of different religions.

Lastly, lack of genuine desire by adherents of the two prominent religions to understand one another is a factor of religious crises in Nigeria. Even when there is a universal call for inter-faith dialogue, some Muslims in particular still belief that it is a Christian method of winning minds into their religion and as such, they are not ready to co operate for the exercise.

Effects of Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

Religious conflicts cause disintegration discrimination and mutual distrust among citizens of the country. Wherever there is no peace, there will be no unity and when there is no unity, there will be no progress. communities that hitherto co existed peacefully now threat each others

with mistrust. This is in addition to loss of lives and property. Many lives have gone and many property disposed as a result of religious uprising in the country. In a world news released on 23rd of July, 2019, the Shiite group in Nigeria were reported to had a clash with the Nigerian police and military and during the clash, there was loss of lives and property⁴

In any country with persistent religious crisis, there will be discontinued economic programs and projects and foreign investors will equally be scared of coming into such country to invest. This will at end, cripple the economy of the country and create unemployment for the citizens and deprive the nation of the economic gain.

Islamic Antidotes to Religious Violence

In its teachings against violence, Islam heralds peaceful co existence and tolerance in the society irrespective of any barrier; be it tribal or religious. Peace in Islam is more than a mere desire, it is a principle that is deeply rooted in all the fabrics of Islam.⁵ The Prophet of Islam emphasised on the need for peaceful co existence when he said “ you cannot enter the paradise unless you have faith (in Allah) and you cannot have faith unless you love one another. Can I guide you towards an act which, if you embark on it you will love one another? Propagate peace”⁶ .

In Islam, Fight is only a phenomenon of necessity and even in the midst of the fight; Muslims are encouraged to be ready for peace when the opposition party inclines to it. Islam considers fight a joyful duty not for itself but to establish the reign of peace, righteousness and Allah’s law. Allah orders:

وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلَامِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

but if the enemy incline towards peace, you should also incline towards it and trust in Allah for He is the One that hears and knows all things (Q8:61)

Ibn Āshura is of the view that Allah (SWT) gave an indiscriminate invitation to God fearing to explain that man all come from the same origin and they share common ideology⁷. The verse explains that the difference in our races, tribes and nations are only convenient labels for identification of certain characteristics in us, but before Allah (SWT), we are all one and equal as contained in Q49:13. This unity of origin is best exemplified in the conduct of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). When he immigrated to Madinah to establish the earliest Islamic state, he concluded a treaty between all the tribes he met among whom were Christians and Jews establishing religious freedom and equal rights and duties.⁸ Islam recognises the Christians and the Jews and gave them a honorary title of ‘People of the book’ it further confirms that the three religions; Islam, Christianity and Judaism share a common moral code:

Say, we believe in God and the revelation given to us, and the revelation given to Abraham, Ismaeel, Isaac. Jacob and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus and that given to (all) the prophets from their Lord: we make no distinction between one another of them and to Him we are submitters (Q2:136)

Thus, the teachings of Moses and Jesus were the same with that of Prophet Muhammad. Even when the scriptures left by Moses and Jesus are not in their pristine form, they are still extant and not withstanding the connotation of Q2:256 that Islam is the only accepted religion, the differences in peoples beliefs, cultures and languages are divined wisdom as confirmed by the Qur’an:

...to each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single community, but (His plan is) to test you in what He had given you, so compete amongst yourselves to do the common goal ...(Q5:48).

It will hence, be wrong for anybody or a group of people to claim monopoly of God's mercy or deny it to others. Allah's mercy is guaranteed for anybody who believes in God and works righteous irrespective of that person's religious inclination:

Those who believe in the Qur'an and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures) and the Christians and the Serbians, any who believe in God and the Last Day and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve (Q2:62).

even with some doctrinal differences within different faiths which are neither trivial nor to be ignored. Allah condemns fighting or disputing one another on matters that are not relevant when He says

And dispute not with the people of the book except in the most kindly manner-unless it be those of them who wronged-but say, we believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is one, and it is to Him we submit (Q29:46).

The Qur'an encourages that an avenue be created where people of different faiths would come together to discuss issues of common value necessary to create a habitable environment for individuals. Allah enjoins an invitation to mutual understanding in numerous verses of the Qur'an such as:

Say, O people of the book, come to common term as between us and you, that we worship none but God, that we associate no partner with Him, that we erect not among ourselves lords and partners other than God...(Q3:64)

The invitation in this verse is to discussion on issues of common goal among people of different

faiths for the promotion of unity⁹. The implication of this verse is that all religions teach submission and monotheism even though the approach differs. When ever a major difference is noticed, the cause will be easily identified.

The Qur'an enjoins that Muslims should co-operate with non-Muslims and render to them such assistance that will not mean a compromise of faith or ideology. Justice in Islam is absolute and it cuts across the boundary of race, clan and religion. The Qur'an warns:

and let not the hatred of some people in (once) shutting you out of the sacred mosque lead you to transgression (and hostility on your part), help one another in righteousness and piety, but help not one another in sin and rancour. Fear Allah: for Allah is strict in punishment (Q5:2).

Musharraf¹⁰, in his explanation to the content of this verse, established that Islam is a religion that sees everybody as one in creation before considering his religious affiliation.

The Qur'an teaches equal right to the practice of religion and discourages any attempt to force the practice of religion on an individual or a group. Allah explicitly mentions that: Compulsion is not in any way compatible with religion because religion is a matter of faith which must come from the mind and if it were the will of Allah that everybody should be of the same faith, His omnipotence could have made mankind alike just like He rightly told His Prophet:

if it had been your lord's will, they would all have believed-all who are on earth, will you then compel mankind against their will to believe? (Q10:99)

The notion of trying to bring a nation under one religion or trying to enforce the law of a religion on people of other faith is against the teaching of Islam.

Islam enjoins that as much as possible, Muslims should eschew aggression and promote peace. Islam respects human dignity and propagates unity and harmony. Albanna asserts that civil life in Islam is aimed towards peace. Nevertheless, Islam deals with reality and as long as there are people that follow their own desires and self-interest, there will always be conflict and

war. But if war is for the sake of stopping an aggressor, aiding truth and achieving justice, then it is a virtue since it encourages goodness and prosperity for the people. It is a source of evil, social vices and degradation for mankind when it is used as a tool for the wrong-doer, corruption, transgression and oppression of the weak. Islam came to deal with this reality¹¹ Albanna's position is from his understanding of the verse: "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress limits; for Allah loves not transgressors" (Q2:190). This verse is a condemnation of initiating aggression except if it is launched for the purpose of self defense or other justifiable cause and limit should not be exceeded. In a situation when conflict is already the order of the day, Qur'an encourages Muslims to champion the call for peace through dialogue in many verses as will be seen.

Conclusion

The bitter truth about most of the religious conflicts in Nigeria is that some stake holders are the brain behind such conflicts. Their pursuance of personal interest is prioritised over the peaceful co-existences of the masses. It is strongly advised that such stakeholders and political figures should fear God and abstain from wasting the lives of innocent masses. It is against the background of the above that one can conclude that the need for peace and absence of violence is imperative to the development of Nigeria. The role that shall be played by the shariah in getting over any aspect of religious violence is germane but needs adequate application. It is therefore suggested that;

Adherents of all religions in Nigeria should appreciate freedom of Religion as emphasised in Q. 2: 256. The government itself should help to eradicate conflict in Nigeria by being fair in the treatment it gives to all religions in the country. There is also the need to

introduce courses of religious tolerance in our institutions of learning and in so doing, our areas on common value will be discussed in the interest of peaceful co-existence.

Inter and intra-religious dialogue should operate at all levels of the various religions. It should be encouraged among the academia, the market men and women, the office holders and the host of others. Political leaders and traditional rulers should not be left out in the exercise. The government, through religious advisory committee, should ban any preaching that is provocative or that has in it, the tendency of causing discord within different religions. There is the need to be a screening exercise for anybody who will face the audience in any place of worship and preach the words of God. The act of religious propagation should not be left to the hand of just anybody.

Recommendation

Having established that human being emanates from one and the same source and that it is only under a peaceful atmosphere that any nation can grow, it needs to be emphasised that our political leaders must work for the common good. Where they use religion to score political points or to divide communities, more bloodshed will follow and this will not help our dear country.

Our religious leaders must also work together to undermine bigotry and extremism and encourage communities to work together. The truth is, neither Christianity nor Islam tells its followers to kill or maim each other. Religion has been hijacked and so, religious leaders need to reclaim its integrity and promote peace and reconciliation. It's not easy and sometimes they may be criticised but they will continue to call for political and religious solutions to the real problems and for people to have access to the necessities of life.

Our political leaders must address the real issues underlying the conflicts. There is no denying the reality of poverty in Nigeria. Health, education and water supply services are inadequate for the needs of the poorest. Much of the time even the urban centres are without electricity and social safety nets are non-existent. This makes it difficult to avoid corruption and in a multi ethnic country like Nigeria, this exacerbates the potential for violence. In summary, there is the need for: providing spiritual guidance, reconnecting humanities to their creator and developing God bound consciousness, promoting development of moral values in the society and helping in the relief of world poverty and developing sustainable societies particularly in Africa

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