

The Concept of Peaceful Co-Existence in Islamic Theology: Lessons for the Muslim Youths in Nigeria

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Abstract

Peaceful co-existence is vital for social stability of any nation; it is one of the fundamental principles in Islam which Muslims should practice in both their spiritual and mundane existence. In fact, it is backbone of belief system in Islamic theology for which mankind has been ordered to hold fast by the covenant of Allah. The paper therefore aims to discuss concept of unity from the Islamic theological approach. It also underlines the fundamental bases of peaceful coexistence in Islamic theology. It will further explain the significance of forgiveness for peaceful co-existence among Muslim youths towards promoting unity. The paper proffers lessons for Muslim youths in Nigeria, which will be useful for reconciliation and stability of their country. In writing the paper the researcher adopts the critical analytical method to reach the goal of the research.

Introduction

At independence, many efforts were made to stop disputes among people in Africa especially in Nigeria, so that they would live together as brothers and sisters in happiness and prosperity but the efforts made have not yet achieved the desired goals because human efforts are in most cases spiritual force which is fundamental of achieving peace in society. Many questions come to mind: what is peaceful coexistence especially in Nigeria? What is peaceful coexistence, from theological perspective? What are the bases for peaceful coexistence and significance of forgiveness in the society? What lessons to be learnt by the Muslim youths in Nigeria?

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Concept of Peaceful Co-Existence

The word peace in Arabic “Salaam,” has multiple other connotations, it denotes safety, well-being, justice, prosperity, equity, good fortune, friendliness. At the personal level, peaceful behaviors are kindness, respect and tolerance of others.²

As a resulting these meanings; disunity and conflict have no basis in Islam. Islam as a gift from Allah is perfectly moulded to ensure peace and unity.

Islam means a state of peace through submission to Allah’s will and Muslims are the ones who should implement peace through submission to Allah’s will. Therefore, where there is no peace, then the Muslim submission is either weak or it lacks quality. A Muslim would not enjoy in disunity, rather he should strive to unite the Ummah bearing in mind Allah’s warning:

“Fear Allah and keep straight the relationship between yourselves: obey Allah and His Messenger if you do believe”³

On peaceful coexistence in society and the concept of unity among believers, Allah says: “The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy.”⁴

Respect should be a norm of the believers. In the Qur’an it is well pointed out that believers should respect each other.

*O you who believe, let not a people ridicule (another) people perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do call each other by (offensive nicknames. Wretched in the name of disobedience after one’s faith. And whoever does not repent then it is these who are the wrong doers”.*⁵

O you who believe, avoid much (negative assumptions). Indeed, some assumptions is sin and do not spy or backbite each other. Would one of you

² Anis Ibrahim, *Al-Mu’jam al-Wassit*, Cairo 1972, p. 471.

³ Qur’an 8:1.

⁴ Qur’an 49:10.

⁵ Qur’an 49:11.

*like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead? You would detest it. And fear Allah, indeed, Allah is accepting of repentance and merciful”.*⁶

According to the above verses, all men and women are created by Allah. Therefore they have the value and dignity.

Unity of Mankind from Islamic Theology

Allah mentioned that He has created mankind from a single father and a single mother, so that they feel compassion for each other and are kind to the weaker among them.⁷

In the same vein, Allah says that “the believers are nothing else but brothers”.⁸ Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also corroborated the above verses in his traditions. For instance, he said: “The believers with respect to another believer are like a building, one portion strengthening the other.”⁹

From the above evidences from both the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW), it can be understood that peaceful co-existence should be encouraged among people living in the same society.

Allah points to the sameness of our origin as a bases for the unity of man.

“O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another indeed, the noblest among you in the sight of Allah is the one who is more deeply conscious of Allah”.¹⁰

Social Cohesion from Islamic Theology

The social system expected of the community of believers is one binded in love and brotherhood each believer being the keeper of his/her brother Muslim. The duties of brotherhood go a long way to enhance unity, the Prophet (SWA) said “The believers all are like a single body, if its eye complains, its whole body complains and if its head complains, its whole body complains”.¹¹ Almighty Allah crowned it all:

⁶ Qur’an 49:12.

⁷ IbnKathir, *TafsirIbnKathir* (Abridged) Abridged A group of scholars under the supervision of ShaykhSafiur-rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, Al-Haramain, Islamic Foundations, First Edition, 2000, p.370

⁸ Qur’an 49:10

⁹ Saheeh al-Bukhari and Saheeh Muslim

¹⁰ Qur’an 49:13.

¹¹ Al-Bayhaqi, S. H., *Shu’abu al-Iman*, Maktabatu al-Rushd, Riyadh, 2003, vol. 11: 8574

*The believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another, they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, pay Zakaat and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is exalted in power, wise.*¹²

Islam is a religion that rejects social disunity, racism and prejudice, one can pass as many laws as one will; but as long as this disease is rooted in the heart, there can never be true social cohesion. However, Islam has wiped that disease of disunity in the verse that indicated social cohesion, Allah says: “O mankind! We have created you from a male and female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with God is that (believer) who has piety and God consciousness. Verily God is all-knowing, All-aware”.¹³

Hence, race and ethnicity should have no effect whatsoever with respect to societal cohesion in the eyes of a Muslim.

Faith as a Bond for Peaceful Co-Existence in the Society

Some people restrict the meaning of bond among people as blood relationship, ethnic background, and nationality, educational and tribal bond. However, the Qur’an shows that these kinds of bonds are not that strong if the foundation behind them is weak. In the Qur’an, there are many evidences that show the significant bond of faith that is supposed to be between people in the society. Allah said: “And He has united their (i.e. believers’) hearts. If you had spent all that is in the earth, you could not have united their hearts, but Allâh has united them. Certainly He is All-Mighty, All-Wise.”¹⁴

Unfortunately, the ties between the people today are subservient to their goals, desires and wants of this materialistic world. Many people are quickly and easily willing to sell out their own kith and kin to get ahead or get something in this world.¹⁵ All these demonstrate one thing: when the ties in this world are based on worldly considerations even if they are originally blood ties, then those ties are given up when the worldly considerations so demand them to be given up. These are not the strongest ties that should be built among people. The

¹² Qur’an 9:71.

¹³ Quran 49:13

¹⁴ Qur’an 8:63

¹⁵ See more Doc. Islamic Banking and Finance-wikipedia_files/societal cohesion in Islam (part one of 3) Bond of faith- The Religion of Islam.htm on 15/11/2017

strongest ties that should be achieved between people are the ties of Islam and true faith. In this regard, Allah says: “And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allâh (i.e. This Qur’ân), and be not divided among yourselves...”¹⁶

Bases for Peaceful Co-Existence in Society

In analyzing the segments of peaceful co-existence in the society, the researcher talks about the bases without which peaceful coexistence cannot be well understood. These are as follows:

1. Bases on Justice

To achieve peaceful co-existence among people in the society, Islam gives more importance to the implementation of justice and righteousness in the interest of Muslims and non-Muslims. Therefore Muslims are advised to do justice among themselves and non-Muslims alike with the exception of those who fight against Muslims. In this context Allah said “Allah forbids you not with regard to those who fight you not for your faith, nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly within them, for Allah loves those who are just”.¹⁷ Justice according to Islamic theology is so vital in the establishment of any society, it is even the backbone of human growth.

2. Discussion as Bases for Peaceful Co-Existence

One of the Islamic bases for peaceful coexistence among people in society is discussion and debate among people through peaceful manners to reach a mutual understanding in the Quran. There are many verses in which Allah encourages Muslims to open discussion and debate among themselves with non-Muslims. Allah said: “Invite all to the way of your lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with in ways that are best and most gracious”.¹⁸

From the above verse, it can be understood that for effective peaceful co-existence among people in the society the preacher (*Da'i* or *Du'at*) are advised to be very conscious and use good method in *Da'wah* activities by using different approaches such as (1) invitation to the way of Allah by wisdom (2) preaching by intelligent way and consciousness (3) debate with Muslims and non-Muslim in the best manner.

¹⁶ Qur'an 3:103

¹⁷ Qur'an 60:8.

¹⁸ Qur'an 16:125.

In the other verse, Allah said: “And dispute not with the people of the book except with means better (than mere disputation) unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong. But say “we believe in the revelation which has come to us and in that which came down to you, our Lord and your Lord is One, and it is to Him we submit”.¹⁹ In addition to the above verse Allah said in other verse which is related to the principle of logical debate for reinforcing peaceful co-existence among Muslims and non-Muslims. “So announce the good news to my servants, those who listen to the word and follow the best of it. Those are the ones who Allah has guided and those are the one endued with understanding”²⁰ The verse above, is important for any person who is living among people in the society to be conscious vigilant and know his rights and duties towards himself, society and his religion.

Non-Compulsion in Religion as a Bases for Peaceful Co-Existence

Among the bases laid down by Islam for the assurance of peaceful co-existence in society is the fact that there is no compulsion in religion. Therefore, it is the right of people to choose any religion that they find suitable for their lives and the message of a Prophet is to guide and teach people to the right way without using any sort of force or intimidation. Allah said in this context, “let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands clear from error”²¹. Besides “if it had been the Lord’s will, all who are on earth would have believed. Will you then compel mankind against their will to believe.”²² In the other context here is another Qur’anic verse which is against any sort of compulsion in Islam and giving freedom to all mankind in either and belief matter “say the truth is from your Lord, let him who will believe and let him who will reject”.²³

In the same vein, it is categorically forbidden to use authority to interfere in any person’s affairs that one relates to his Iman (faith), therefore Allah asked, the Prophets not to intimidate anybody “you shall remind, for you are the reminder you are not one to manage (men’s faith).²⁴

¹⁹ Qur’an 29:46.

²⁰ Qur’an 39:17-18.

²¹ Qur’an 2:256.

²² Qur’an 10:99.

²³ Qur’an 21:22.

²⁴ Qur’an 21:2.

The Guide to Peaceful Coexistence in the Society

To understand some issues of peaceful co-existence among Muslim and non-Muslim in the society, the following guides should be understood here:

- There should be mutual tolerance for each other's minor mistakes between Muslims and non-Muslims
- There should be cooperation for the mutual benefits between Muslims and non-Muslims
- There should be mutual understanding with non interference in each others internal affairs; unless the two partners allow that
- There should be mutual non-physical and moral aggression
- There should be mutual respect for each other's life and his/her dignity
- There should be mutual consideration for each other's festivities
- There should be also dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims by widely manner

In explaining the peaceful co-existence in the society according to Islamic theology, issues of forgiveness, respect, fundamental human rights, freedom of religion, respect of law and kindness are among the guides that ensure peaceful coexistence, unity and brotherhood in our communities, schools, societies and the nation as a whole.

Islamic Theology and Peaceful Co-Existence Reinforcement

Assessing etymologically the term "Islam", it will appear clearly that Islam denotes "salam" peace and submission to the will of Allah.²⁵ It has a similar meaning in French 'la paix'. In this respect, peace is among the important subject of discussion among scholars of Islamic theology. Even in greeting, whenever a Muslim meets another person he says to him or her peace be upon you. "As-salamu Alaikum".

In Islamic theology, sustainable peaceful coexistence among people in a society is among the requirements to be a true believer. There are many injunctions in the Qur'an²⁶ for settling disputes among individuals, groups, society and nations with aim of establishing peaceful coexistence in the society.

²⁵ Read this definition in *Al-mujaamu al-wassit* of Ibrahim Anis, Cairo 1972, p. 471.

²⁶ See for Instance Qur'an 49:10, Qur'an 8:1, 49:13.

Significance of Forgiveness in Promoting Peaceful Co-Existence

Islamic theological approaches to pardon and forgiveness are well articulated in the Qur'an²⁷, there are also various terms that denotes forgiveness or pardon in Islamic theology such as "Al-Afw"²⁸ that occurs 35 times in the Qur'an. It is also used interchangeably with "Ghufran"²⁹ "Afw" means to pardon, to excuse for a fault or an offence. According to Muhammad Amanullah³⁰ forgiveness "Afw" in Islam is derived from three wisdoms. First and the most important wisdoms of forgiveness is that, it is merciful when the victims or guardian of the victim accepts money for compensation.³¹ The second wisdom of forgiveness is that it increases honor, and prestige of the one who forgives".³² Forgiveness is not a sign of weakness, humiliation or dishonor.³³

Forgiveness is honor, it raises the merit of the forgiver in the eyes of Allah and enables a forgiver to enter paradise.³⁴

The third wisdom of forgiveness is that according to some *mufassirun* interpreters of the Qur'an such as al-Tabaari, Qutubi and Tahir Ibn Ashur; Forgiveness expiates (*Kaffarah*) the forgiver from the sins he or she might have committed at other occasions in life³⁵. From the above statements, it can be observed that forgiveness is a kind of charity sadaqat) it has to do with *taqwa* (piety), a quality of Allah-fearing people.³⁶ The most important elements of forgiveness between Muslims and non-Muslims are discussed in the following paragraph:

Peaceful Coexistence among Muslims and non Muslims in the Society

In Islamic theological approach, there are rules and regulations that guide Muslims and non-Muslims that enforce their cohabitation together. Among these rules are as contained in the Qur'an where it was reported that:

²⁷ Read Qur'an 2:219, Qur'an 4:149, Qur'an 5:95.

²⁸ See the meaning of "Afw" in *Mu'jam al-Wassit* by Ibrahim Anis, Cairo 1972, pp. 642-643.

²⁹ Ibrahim Anis Ibid, see again Abu-Nimer and Nasser, Forgiveness in Arab and Islamic contexts, *Journal of Religious Ethics*. 41(3), pp. 474-494. Ahain, Oliver Leamaan, the Quran" An Encyclopedia, Routledge, pp. 1213-216.

³⁰ Amanullah. M. Just Retribution (Qisas) versus forgiveness (Afw), in Islam, past, present and future, international seminar on Islaamic thoughts, proceedings, December (2004) at the Department of Theology and Philosophy, Faculty off Islamic studies, UnviersitiKebangsaan, Malaysias 2004, p. 871-883.

³¹ See for instance: Gottsesman, E. (1991). Reemergence of Qisaas and Diyat in Pakistan, the Column Humaan Rights Law Review, 23, pp. 433-439. Again see: Tsang J. A. McCullough, M. E. and Hoyt, W. T., Psychometric and Rationalization Accounts of the Religion-Forgiveness Discrepancy, *Journal of Social Issues* 61(4) 2005, pp. 785-805.

³² Muhammad Amanullah, Ibid.

³³ Olivier Leaman, Ibid.

³⁴ Muhammad Amanullah, Ibid .

³⁵ Khalil Athamina, Al-Qisas: Its emergence, religious origin and its socio-political impact on early Muslim Society, *StudiaIslamica*, 1992, pp. 53-74.

³⁶ Amanullah M., Ibid.

*Allah forbids you not for your faith nor drive you out of your homes from dealing kindly and justly with them: For Allah only forbids you with regard to those who fight you for your faith and drive you out of your homes and support others in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances) that do wrong”.*³⁷

From the Qur’anic verses here, it can be observed that Muslims are asked to deal with believers and unbelievers kindly and justly unless they are out to destroy Muslims and their faith as was shown by the example of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in the treaties of *Hudaibiyaah* in Medina.³⁸

Furthermore, the Christians have been given a special position in the Qur’an since their religion was also divine based on the teachings of *Torat* and *Injil* which they have distorted. The Qur’an says in respect of *Ahl al-kitab*:

*And dispute you not with the people of the Book except with means better than mere disputation. Unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong and injury but say: we believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you, our Allah and your God is one and it is to Him we bow (in Islam).*³⁹

There are two fundamental rights of non-Muslims in a Muslim state as identified in Islamic theology, they are:

1. Their protection from all external threats
2. Their protection from all internal tyranny and persecution

The first kind of protection is applicable to the Muslims. The head of state and those in authority are duty bound to look after the interest of all citizens using all the force at their command. The Maliki scholar Imam al-Qurafi quoted the statement of Ibn Hazm from his book *Maratib al-Ijma*:

If enemies at war come to our country aiming at certain Dhimmi, it is essential for us that we come out to fight them with all our might and weapons

³⁷ Qur’an 60:8-9.

³⁸ See more explanations in Musnad Ahmad, Bukhari and Muslim. Also read some details in Maududi ‘sTafhim al-Qur’a n (Urdu), Delhi, 1975, pp. 433-434.

³⁹ Qur’an 29:46.

*since he is under the protection of Allah and His Messenger. If we did anything less than this, it means we have failed in our agreement for protection.*⁴⁰

This context prophet says whoever huts a free non-Muslim under Muslim rule shall have me as an opponent on the Day of Resurrection”.⁴¹ In other statement, “the similitude of believers in regard to mutual love, affection, and fellow-feeling is that of one body, when any limb of it aches, the whole body aches, because of sleeplessness and fever.”⁴²

Lessons to be Drawn by the Nigerian Muslim Youths

From various discussions in the paper, the following lessons could be learnt by the Nigeria youth:

Tolerance: Muslims and non Muslims should be tolerant towards one another’s rights. There should be tolerance for each other’s minor mistakes among them

Cooperation: There should be cooperation for the mutual benefits between Muslims and non-Muslims provided the cooperation does not transgress the basic teachings of Islam

Mutual Understanding: There should be mutual understanding with non interference in each other’s internal affairs; unless the two partners allow that based on mutual and legal agreements.

Moral Discipline: Muslim and non Muslim youth should learn good moral values through the various teachings of their religions. There should be mutual non-physical and moral aggression among them.

Mutual Respect and Consideration: There should be mutual respect for each other’s life and his/her dignity and there should be also mutual consideration for each other’s festivities

Peaceful Dialogue: There should be dialogue from time to time in order for muslim and non-muslim to ventilate their ideas so as to avoid acrimonious relationship.

⁴⁰Imam al-Qarafi, Shihab al-Din Abul-Abbas Ahmad bin Idriss al—Malik, Al-Furuq, Cairo 1346 A.H. vol, 3, pp. 14-15.

⁴¹Quoted by Muhammad A. M. M. (2007), the Approach of the Muslim, Dar al-Kutub Al-Kmiyah, Beirut, p. 112.

⁴²Al-Bayhagi A. H. Shuabu al-Imaan, Ibid.

From the Islamic history, youths in Nigeria can learn lessons from the life of the Prophet (SAW) particularly the Madinah constitution. According to the constitution, everybody was free to accept any religion and adapt nay political and philosophical ideology. At the same time anybody who commits an atrocity or crime intentionally such as killing an innocent person would be judged according to the law and justice.⁴³ Through the constitution of Madinah the tribal disputes which were based on blood and kinship were abolished and people of various geographical ethnical, and cultural background came together under Islamic brotherhood and formed a strong social unity. Madinah constitution is an important guide line and example from which Muslim youth in Nigeria would take wisdom for unity and peaceful co-existence in nation building.

Ethical Lessons

In Islamic theology, moral values are important aspects for human progress in the society. Islam lays emphasis on upliftment of character of human being and encourage Muslims to practice good moral qualities in their lives. The life history of the prophet is an example and lessons for Muslims youths. He says “I have been appointed to complete moral value”.⁴⁴ It is also vital in ethical lesson to mention some characteristics of a believer, such as patience, sincerity, generosity, kindness, forgiveness, lack of moral stands among people in society, vices such as greed, ignorant, materialism, envy, hatred against others, corruption among others will cover people’s attitudes. Against these vices Muslim youth need moral education or value education in their schools.

Rational Lessons

The significance of rational lessons for Muslim youth is to use their mental ability in understanding the purpose of human existence in this world. They should go back to the Qur’an and Sirah Maghazi literature,⁴⁵ the life history of the prophet (SAW) who utilized in many cases that concerned their lives and what will be beneficial for the Nigeria as a nation. They can use their reasoning, wisdom, reflection, meditation and thinking to solve the problems of Muslim Ummah. Moreover, in hereafter, the day of accountability some people

⁴³Ibid p. 47.

⁴⁴Mussnaad Al Bazaar AnAbiHurairah.

⁴⁵Read for instance: The first prize winner Book: The sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheequl-Makhtum). The Biography of the Noble Prophet (SAW), written by Safiur – Rahman al-Mubarak puri, Maktabaatu Al—al-Sheik, Darbu al-At raak – Khalfa al-Jamia al-Azhar, Cairo, 1st ed. 1436 H/2015 AD, p. 398, 400-406.

would regret why, they did not use their mental ability for doing better work before leaving this World to another world (*Al-Akhrāh*). The Quran shows their regret (Had we were but listened or pondered, we should not have been among the inmates of the burning fire".⁴⁶

From the above verse, it is vital to understand here that reflection, mediation and using mental ability to reform ourselves and society and cooperation to work together for human progress all were agenda of the Prophet (SAW). Moreover, in the Qur'an there are some verses which call Muslims for unity, brotherhood, reconciliation and peace. Among these verses Allah said: "And hold firmly to the rope of the Allah all together and do not become divided".⁴⁷

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that peaceful coexistence and unity among people in the society is more significant than ordinary agreement that organizations or groups of people sign on paper for their conflict resolution. Peaceful coexistence however, has four essential stages, peace, cooperation, solidarity and union. Cooperation is an important element in peaceful coexistence which is considered by Islamic theology, regional and later recognized by international organizations such as African Union and United Nations. Furthermore Islam as a peaceful religion that recognizes pluralism, diversity, dialogue and harmony, unity and brotherhood among people in the society negate discrimination or hatred on the basis of religious and cultural differences.

⁴⁶ Qur'an 67:10.

⁴⁷ Qur'an 3:103.