ISLAM AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: STRATEGIES AND WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

Islam as a religion of peace and harmony always envisages living in cordial peace with one another and even with the non-Islamic adherents- Jews and Christians and by extension the polytheists. However, in the case of crisis between any two conflicting parties, either inter or intra, strategies are also laid in order to ensure relative peace as well. This paper may be considered a very timely, apt and relevant to our unstable situation now in Nigeria and beyond where people engage in either communal clashes, kidnapping, cattle rustling, abduction and so many others. This is for no any other reason but to give peace a chance to reign and in order to avoid clashes and bloodsheds. It is against this background that the paper discusses four most important aspects that comprise Islam, conflict resolution, strategies in resolving conflict in Islam and finally the way forward to avoid conflict. Lastly a conclusion is going to be made to wrap up the research

Introduction

Islam as a complete way of life guarantees life, religion and security for all irrespective of religious adherence. It equally ensures and advocates for peace from which the name 'Islam' was derived. Peace to human beings and animals alike. Thus, Islam promotes reconciliation between two conflictingparties even when their faith differs. Nigeria as a multi-religious country that guarantees the practice of one's religion and especially under democratic political settings needs nothing more than ensuring peace. This is because it has in the recent past suffer set back in living harmoniously, especially the ugly emergence of the so called (*BokoHaram*) in the north –east of the country which led to hundred thousand lives.This paper is therefore timely considering the fact that Nigeria is full with fracas that is posing threat to the unity and security of this nation. The paper therefore wishes to opine the need for all to understand their religious teachings properly so as to adhere to those teachings in order live in peace with one another. Recommendations are made to help in building a peaceful and harmonious society.

What is Islam?

Wali, (2010:5) defines Islam as a religion revealed to mankind by Allah through His prophet Muhammad (PBUH), to guide mankind from conflict to peace, from disunity to unity, from unhappiness to happiness, from poverty to posterity. In essence, Islam requires mankind to live harmonious life in the world in preparation for the journey to the hereafter.

Mujtaba (1977:52) defines Islam as a religion that stands for harmony and perfectibility with an unmatched depth and breadth of scope that comprises all aspects of spiritual life. It described all roads that lead to blessing and happiness. It has the cure for human ills, individuals and collective, and makes them as plain as the wit of man can deviseor comprehend. It equally sets out to develop all sides of each person; and therefore perforce includes every reality which impacts on human existence.

Ahmad 1977:1) sees Islam from the linguistic aspect to mean the act of resignation to God. The root word SLM, pronounced 'salm' means peace from which comes the word 'aslama' which means he submitted, he resigned himself. It is therefore means Islam brings peace to

mankind when mankind commits himself to God and submits himself to His will.

Mazrui:(2006:84) crowned it all to say that'it is in pertinent with the above that islam guarantees inter-religious relationship with indigenous religions, such as the ancestral creeds of the Black Africa.

That is why a condition has been set that for a person to become a Muslim, he must proclaim with conviction the Kalimatus-shahadawhich in Arabic reads "*La IlahaIllalLahuMuhammadurrasulullah,*" meaning" There is no deity of worship but the one God and Muhammad is His prophet and messenger". (Encarta premium, Encyclopedia 2009).

Accordingly, the religion of Islam is not new, but rather a continuation of the previously monotheistic revealed message sent by Allah to His prophets right from Adam (the first human and the first prophet), Nuhu (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus Christ)to Muhammad (the last and seal of prophets (P eace and blessings of Allah be upon him). (Opcit:5)

Impliedly, all the prophets sent to different nations and tribes preached one thing: believing in Allah and associating Him with none, and doing good and avoiding evil. The religion is the same in essence and originates from the same source.

Allah (S.W.T) says:

> The same religion has He established for you and that which He enjoined on Noah, that which We have sent by inspiration to thee- And that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus; namely that you should remain steadfast in Religion, and make no divisions therein: (Qur'an 42:13).

Based on the above quoted verse, one cannot be a live Muslim without believing in all the messengers of Allah, notably Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus (P.B.U.T). (Ibid, p.6)

What is Conflict?

Conflict according to (Encarta Premium Dictionary, 2009) is a non denoting warfare between opposing forces, especially a prolonged and bitter but sporadic struggle. In another word, conflict is seen as a "disagreement or clash between ideas, principles, or people".

Oyeshola:(2005: 105) defines conflict from different perspectives of erudite scholars as "the simultaneous occurrence of two or more mutually antagonistic impulses or motives". Citing Wilson and Hama, Oyeshola sees conflict through their mirror as "a struggle involving ideas, values and or limited resources". Invariably, conflict can also be described as an "action which prevents, obstructs that interferes with injuries or renders ineffective another action which it is incompatible".

Although the concern of this paper is on people and their ideological, religious and perhaps tribal differences, but it is worth mentioning that, conflict has many dimensions, ranging from social, economic, political, family, global etc. This, therefore implies that, conflict has different facets that it can emerge from. That is why conflict is often rooted in people's beliefs and perceptions about goals as opposed to the objective facts. This could probably be explained why sometimes people fight over 'nothing' and they do this religiously with all the resources at their disposal.

Causes of Conflict

As earlier stated, causes of conflict has different facet ranging from local to international, domestic to religious, social, economic, political tribal, ideological differences and otherwise. However, this paper is going to limit itself to two key areas. These are domestic (family) and religious, because of the importance attached to them. Similarly, these are the areas that often occur daily and periodically. Must especially when people or family are at logger head with another and where religious knowledge is virtually or deliberately turned against. in order to keep to peace between different religious adherents, Allah stressed that we should keep ties with those from the other religious side in as much as they did not fight us neither drive us out from our homes.

Allah says:

> Allah forbids you not with regards to those who fought not against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes that you should show kindness, and deal justly with them. Verily Allah loves the just dealers.

Allah however was very specific with regards those that either fight us or support others to fight us that we should not take them friends or show kindness to them in this regard, and whosoever contrive rhe law nd order of Allah in this regars is a wrong doer in the sight of Allah.

Allah says:

> Allah forbids you only those who foughtagainstyou on account of religion and have driven you out from your homes and helped to drive out, that you may make friends of them, and whosoever makes friends with them, then such are wrong doers. Q60: V 8, 9

Types of Conflicts
Domestic Conflict

This is the situation whereby the two couples were finding it difficult to compromise differences between each other. In this case, it used to result out of either poor feeding, non-challant attitude towards children's welfare by the father, cheating upon another; disrespect to the husband, non-sexual satisfaction etc. Men are considered as masters in their homes and providers for sustenance. Thus the Glorious Qur'an states:

> Men are the protectors and the maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means: therefore………….. Qur'an 4:34

The next verse after this explains how to resolve any misunderstandingarising from a family.

> if you fear a breach between them twain (the man and his wife), appoint (two) arbitrators, one from his family and the other from her's: if they both wish for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation. Indeed, Allah is Ever All-knower, Well Acquainted with all things. Qur'an 4:35

Those two verses elucidate the fact that at a point, the husband owns an upper hand and power over his wife in terms of her feeding, shelter, maintenance, protection, love and affection. But a situation whereby the situation went sour, the two family should form a committee of arbitrators to reconcile the two conflicting parties so as to allow peace to continue to reign in the family, thus, especially for the affection and harmony of the children.

Religious Conflict

The Muslim jurists have for purpose of understanding classified the world into zones according to the types of people and government in each. There are:

a. **Dar al-Islam (Peace zone)**

This means a zone whereby its members are predominantly Muslims and inside which the enactments of Islam were put into practice. In this regard, the Muslims here have full rights and are free to practice their religious obligations, while non-Muslims have partial right even though they are not prevented from practicing their religious duties thatthey are considered as protected members of this zone against any external aggression. (Abdul: 1980:243).

In another word, an Islamic society is responsible for implementing the shariah, even if the it is of concern to a non- Muslim. Thus, if there are those who do not honestly and effectively perform the said duties or who deviate from the right path, other members of the society should guide them to the righteousness by forbidding all bad deeds. They should stand by the oppressed and wronged party regardless of his religion.

Suffice it is to cite examples that sometimes an incidence of injustice may not provoke a complaint from the non-Muslim, but if it does, the Muslim official must listen to him and then deal judiciously with the usurper, regardless of the latter's social stand. A non-Muslim is, therefore, entitled to file his complaint with the governor or a local official. If his case does not receive due consideration, hemay complain to a higher authority, until he is satisfied that justice has been done. If he we to challenge the caliph(president) himself, his case would be presided over by autonomous body authorized to sentence the head of state.

For instance, history has recorded outstanding cases of this nature, two of which will suffice to illustrate the point. A Christian monk in Egypt lodged a complaint with the ruler Ahmad ibn Tulun against one of his military leaders who had illegally taken some money from him. The ruler summoned the leader to his office and after admonishing him, took the money from himand gave it back to the monk. Then the ruler told the monk,

> If you had claimed more money, I would have got it returned back to youtoo.

By this act of justice, the ruler opened the doors for any oppressed non-Muslim to regain his rights, even though the accused might be a high-ranking military or government official. If the

governor or his relatives are the source of the oppression, the imam (religious leader) or the caliph(president) should intervene and stop it. Al-qardawiy (2001: pp15-6)

The other example worth citing is the well-known story of a Copt and Amr ibn al-AS, the ruler of Egypt during the reign of Umar ibn Khattab (RA). The ruler's son, proud of his parentage, hit the Copt's son with a whip. The Copt complained to Umar ibn Khattab, who then summoned Amr and his son to Madinah. Umar gave the whip to the Copt's son and said,

> Whip this son of the noble parents.
>
> After he had done so, Umar said, Now whip the bald head of Amr, because his son beat you onaccount of his father's authority. The Coptthen replied, I have already whipped the person whowhipped me, Then Umar turned his face to Amr anduttered his everlasting words, "O Amr, since when doyou treat as slaves those who were born as free men?

But the most remarkable aspect about this incidence is the fact that even a slapwas totally inadmissible. On the other hand, in Romanand other times, many similar and even worse injustices went unpunished, for the injured party could take advantage of his rights and self-respect, even if he had to travel from Egypt to Madinah to do so. Such journey would be given due consideration and that his complaint would be dealt with justly. (ibid)

All these examples clearly demonstrated the position of Islam to justice, equity and equality among all citizens irrespective of religious inclination.

b. **Dar al- Sulh/ dhimmis (Pact zone)**

This is a territory of those with Islam agreement or peace accord had been entered int. This embraced all non- Muslims who have signed the pact with the Muslims. Muslims are at liberty and free to practice their religious duties although they are not in control of the government. This zone depicts federation where democracy or any polity covered emerge to pave way for non-Muslims or Muslims at alternation like Nigeria for example where citizens are allow to move freely from one end to another in pursuit of their livelihood without molestation.

c. **Dar al-Harb (War zone)**

This is the zone where the people are hostile to Muslim and of whom the Muslims must always bow on the ground in dealing with them. It is also feared that, conflict could be ignited any time. (ibid, p:243)

The treaty of Hudaibiyah

(Ibid: p.29) In 628 February, and to be precise in the 8th year after the prophet's migration, he set out for Mecca at the head of 1,500 Muslims to perform the Umrah, lesser pilgrimage, but was deprived the right of entering into Mecca by the Quraishite. After a serious confrontation, it was agreed that a peace accord be extended into.

Here it is not the issue of the peace accord entered into but the greatest achievement made was the recognition which Quraish accorded the prophet as being equal to themselves. (Ibid, p:31). This therefore demonstrate the fact that, Islam is not always after war as misunderstood by some people, but rather ensuring peaceful co-existence between different religions.

Mahmood:(2005:170) explains that it is in relation to this that, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) migrated to Madina decided to enter into peace accord with the Jews of Madina. Ibn Ishaq reported that the messenger of Allah(pbuh) had written a document of accord or a kind of treaty between the emigrants and the Ansar on one side and the Jews on the other. This document is commonly known as the "constitution of al-Madinah". The prophet (peace be upon him) made peace with the Jews and allowed them to practice their own religion and ritual and made them feel safe towards their wealth and money, but he laid certain conditions to which they all must abide despite the fact that Islam had upper hand over the Jews by then. These conditions entered into with the sole aim of ensuring peace and harmonious relationship with other religions, especially the Jews of Madina.

This peace accord demonstrated the importance Islam attached to ensuring peaceful atmosphere to all between the Muslims and adherents of other religions. It clearly signifies also that, Islam is not a religion of war and crusade, bloodshed and mischiefas perceived by some but a religion that gives every individual and groups their rightsto live and practice their religion.

Similarly, Doi(opcit;423) described the prophet as the greatest politician who did not forget to respect the treatises and pledges, but rather held on the contrary great importance to the strict observance of terms oftreatises entered into by Muslims. It is to this fact that sometimes in observing the terms of treatises, he had to forgo

the advantage of his title common wealth of Islamwhich function on the principles of *Shariah*(Islamic law).

For example, one Huzaifah bin Yaman could not migrate to Madina with the Prophet (peace be upon him). But he entered into a contract with the Quraish he would not fight againstthem and in consideration thereof he remained free from molestations at Mecca. Subsequently, at the battle of Badr, 624 February, he joined the prophet to fight against the Quraish. The prophet was informed of the solemn contract between Huzaifah and the Quraish. The prophet consequently ordered him to refrain from attacking the Quraish in fulfillment of his contract.

> The best example of this can be seen in the 'treaty of Hudaibiyyah' when the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) entered into a treaty relation with non-Muslims even though the terms of the treaty were unfavorable to Muslims. Suhail was negotiating the terms of the treaty with the prophet on behalf of the Quraishites with his son, Abu Jandal, who had accepted Islam and was persecuted by the Quraishites for having done so managed to escape the hands of the enemies. It was verbally agreed between Suhail and the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and not yet written down or sealed, that a Muslim should not aid another Muslim against a non-Muslim who enjoyed the protection of a pledge even for a religious cause.

The Qur'an says:

> But if they seek your aid in religion, it is Your duty to help them, except against A people with whom you have a treaty. Qur'an8: 72.

Strategies to Make Peace among Conflicting Parties in Islam

Islam attaches great importance to peace making amongst conflicting parties not necessarily between Muslim and non-Muslim. This is for the purpose of ensuring peaceful co-existence. Similarly, there cannot be any meaningful progress and development in the society without peace. That is why Qur'an 49:9-12 explain in detail how to deal with arbitration. Qur'an says:

> "and if two parties (or groups) among the believers fall to fighting, then make peace between themboth. But if one of them outrages against the otherthen fight you (all) against the one that which outrages till it complies, then make reconciliationbetween them justly, and be equitable. Verily, Allah loves those who are the equitable. The believers are nothing else than brothers(inIslamic religion). So make reconciliation betweenyour brothers, and fear Allah, that you may receive mercy" O you who believe! Let not a group scoff atanother group, it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor let (some) womenscoff at other women, it maybe that the latterare better than the former. Nor defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames. How bad it is to insult one's brother (a faithful believer) as: "o sinner", or "or wicked" and whosoever does not repent, then suchAre indeed (wrongdoers)

The prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) elucidates the above verses as reported:

Narrated umm kulthumbintuqba(ra) that she

> Heard Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) saying, "he who makes peace between the people by invitinggood information or saying Good things, is not a liar." Sahih al-Bukhari, vol.3:2692

> In another narration reported on the authority of sahl bin sa'd(ra) said that: "once the people of Quba fought with each other tillthey threw stones on each other. When Allah's messenger(pbuh) was informed about it, he said, let us go to bring a reconciliation between them"

> Sahih Bukhari, vol3:2693.

Impliedly, peacemaking from the afore stated statements of the prophet is a pillar in ensuring harmonious relationship as decreed by Allah himself. Equally, this peace making or reconciliation is not relative to only the Muslims but rather a universal issue. That is why Islam always preaches peace among all.

Nigerians as a multi- religious country should try to learn from the beautiful teachings of Islam that encourages living in peace with one another. in so doing, conflict among the citizens will become a thing of the past and the country would be a model to emulate in its peaceful atmosphere.

Conclusion

The paper is of the ardent belief that if Nigerians learn from this beautiful lesson and Nigeria as a country imbibes the spirit of togetherness that will go a long way in fostering peace and harmony among the citizenry. This is for the fact that the views expressed were cited from divine inspiration and not in any human whims and caprices

Recommendations

- Islam and Muslims should be seen as peace loving people.
- That Islam guarantees freedom of religion and living to all.
- That the leaders at the helm of affairs should not allow conflict and crisis to get out of proportion, but rather use religious means to resolve discords among warring parties.
- That it is high time Nigerians learn from history and try to live harmoniously.
- That Nigerians should see one another as brothers and peace-loving people.
- That Nigerian government should make it a policy by teaching course(s)in our schools that have direct bearing to peace.
- That hatred words be avoided not to fuel enmity and conflict among one another.

- That the Prophet of Islam should be seen as a role model who entered into peace accord with Jews and Quraishites.

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