The Symbiotic Relationship between Nigerian Development and Islamic Education

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Abstract

Various disciplines have explored many approaches to reducing the perennial religious, social and political conflicts ravaging Nigeria. However, utilizing the themes of Islamic education on peaceful and integrated co-existence has not been adequately explored. Therefore, this article is an attempt to examine the role of Islamic education to reducing the perennial conflicts, crises, killing, bombing, maiming that have characterized Nigerian democracy. In agreement with previous research, this study notes that there is prevalence of problems affecting our national integration. The findings of this paper indicate there is misunderstanding among people on the role of Islam as a religion that emphasizes peaceful co-existence. This article contends that there are multifarious problems facing our democracy such as: corruption, poverty, frustration, killings. This study reveals that for the dividends of democracy to be fully realized, the themes of peaceful co-existence, unity and single brotherhood in Islam and Christianity should be constantly preached.

1. Introduction

This paper will examine how revealed religions could serve as potent instrument in solving the political, social, economic problems facing Nigerian democracy and national unity, with a focus on Islamic education. The objective is to give the readers the opportunity to explore together the deficiencies within the Nigeria's socio-economic-political and religious system that often give rise to these perpetual crises. Alford opined that religion played a vital role in Protestantism despite separation of the church from the state [4]. In ancient Greek world, Plato and Aristotle saw religion as very vital to political life. Alford puts it that 'Aristotle took it for granted that religious homogeneity was a creation for political stability. Aderibigbe and Aiyegboye stated that there is a complete and absolute relationship between religion and politics in African settings [2].

Religion is all pervasive in people's beliefs, systems and behavior. It is more so, for the Nigerians whom Bolaji Idowu has rightly described as being 'in all things religious' [11]. The antithetic dimension of usage of religion as a political instrument has been variously stressed by scholars down the ages. Karl Marx cited in Aderibigbe and Aiyegboyin sees it as 'the sign of the oppressed creatures, the heart of a heartless world as it is the spirit of an age that has no spirit; it is the opium of the masses' [5]. This implies according to Asaju (1991), the susceptibility of religion as a tool of political manipulation of the oppressed masses by their exploitative capitalist rulers, the disadvantages resisting reaction because of their belief in religious constraints and spiritual hope.

Alford asserts that 'Religious beliefs in a future world, one in which the inequalities of the present world will disappear has prescribed resignation to the oppressed and kept them in a state of obedience to power' [4]. This statement perhaps, does not address the positive effects to which religion can be employed and in fact does not recognize the socially and politically radical or revolutionary content of some religions. Thus, the attempted extinction of religion from the communist people's lives and belief systems as if it were dominantly bad, and injurious is erroneous and apparently extremist, as proven by current reverses of the atheist trend by the Perestokia initiated by Russian President, Mikhail Gorbachev. On the other hand, both Emile Durkheim and Max Weber as cited in Aderibigbe and Aiyegboye are quick to acknowledge that religion is capable of uniting people and fostering among them an orderly and moral existence [2].

Usman claims that religious manipulation in Nigeria is due to the instigation of foreign powers on the attempt by Nigerian stooges to please them, it usually arose because of the desire of the political elite to exploit religion as a tool in satisfying their socio-economic aggrandizement' [15]. Agi agrees with Usman's position when he stated that 'what seems most evident is that the Nigerian political elite and their counterparts in the churches and mosques are manipulating religious sentiments for their own personal, not group ends' [3].

Politics in Nigeria today is full of corruption, avarice, graft, lucre, malfeasance, assassination, malversation, electoral violence and so many other criminal activities, politics for the sake of enriching one's purse. The politicians campaign hypocritically in order to win the election by whatever means. Recently, the Government has introduced anti-people

policies such as: removal of fuel subsidy, construction of toll gates and collection of tolls. Our social, educational, health institutions are not good, the roads are bad. The *New swatch Magazine* captures the political mood of Nigeria when it says:

Politics in Nigeria means primitive materialism. Our political leaders are in a rat race for the acquisition of houses (in and outside Nigeria), choice parcels of land, posh cars, business houses and shares in blue chip companies. Their lifestyle spells ostentation and they believe in self-centered politics. They carry on as if the dividends of democracy are for only themselves and members of their nuclear family…the materialistic inclination of our political leaders' smacks of gross insensitivity and it is myopic…

2. Concept of Islamic Education

From its earliest period, the object of education in Islam according to Al-Rawim , was "understanding the religion of Islam, to enable one comply with it as perfectly as possible, and earn the divine reward of paradise in the hereafter" [14]. This shows a significant difference between the focus of Islamic education and what obtained in pre-Islamic Arabia. Indeed, Islam and in fact, its educational system was considered as a turning point, a real revolution, in the life of the Arab tribes.

Moreover, most of the social changes witnessed then, were products of a system of education directed at the productive population of the nation (the adult). The Prophet (P.B.U.H) began his educational programme by collecting his disciples, who were adults round in his house or mosque; for Islamic training and "*Dawah*" (the spiritual-moral teaching of Islam). Since the earliest period of Islam, priority was given to the education of the adult Muslims.

Besides, many revelations and verses of the Qur'an and the Hadith (Prophets' Traditions) pointed out that Islamic learning and acquisition of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim-male and female, young and old. According to a Hadith (tradition), the Prophet said "a learned believer is seventy times better than a worshipping believer" he also said, "The demand for knowledge is an ordinance on every Muslim". Thus, the desire for knowledge, and the pride in its acquisition was incumbent on all Muslims-young and old. Furthermore, the Prophet also emphasizes that Muslims of all ages must seek knowledge and should be educated when he says:

Acquire knowledge because he who acquires knowledge in the way of the Lord performs an act of piety, who speaks of it, praises the Lord; who seeks it, adores God; who dispenses instructions in it, bestows alms; and who imparts it to its fitting objects performs an act of devotion to God.

It is therefore obvious from this injunction, that the philosophical basis behind Islamic education was religion itself and its clientele was not limited to any particular age. In fact, it has been observed that Islamic education at its novel stage did not develop beyond the level of the aspiration, desire and interest of the individual.

Islamic education has its own peculiar character which distinguishes it clearly from all other types of education both in theory and in practice, because the idea that man has no source of knowledge and guidance, wherefrom he could receive a doctrine of life, other than the code he draws from the results of his interaction with his environment, and the experience he accumulates as a result of such interaction, is unacceptable to Islamic tradition and values. In Islam therefore, God is the sole Ruler and Creator of the universe and all things therein. Hussain opines that the aim of education in Islam is to produce men who have faith as well as knowledge, which can do humanity much good [9]. As a result, any man whose education is devoid of faith in God and good behaviour is not recognized by Islam as a man whose knowledge is balanced.

Kazeem submits that the principle of Islamic learning places the Qur'an as its central curriculum, with theology, morality, charity, patience, forgiveness of offenders and virtues that constitute right conducts in Islam as the Ultimate goal of education [12]. However, it has been observed that Islamic educational principle recognizes the need to acquire some knowledge in which man can improve his ability and gain greater benefits from his environment as in Qur'an (Chapter 2 vs 164) which emphasizes the development of human faculties.

3. Ways of Utilizing Islamic Education in Promoting Nigerian Integration and Development

Islamic education can be used for the stabilization of Nigeria's nation in many ways because Islamic education inculcates peaceful spirit and orientation. Moreover, the Muslims and Christians constitute the largest percentage of the population of Nigeria. Opeloye asserts that the gulf between Islam and Christianity should be bridged and we should promote harmonious Muslim-Christian relationship and foster understanding between the two beliefs systems through Islamic education and beautiful preaching; by laying more emphasis on common teachings of Islam and Christianity. This method is by propagating and disseminating areas of common teachings of the two religions among their adherents. One of such area deals with the scriptural account of Jesus, a personality which accounts for the dominant gulf between Islam and Christianity.

Furthermore, Opeloye goes further to say that there are four aspects of spiritual accounts of Jesus in which the Qur'anic and Biblical teachings are harmonious [13]. The first deals with the account of his miraculous birth. Chapter 3 verses 45 – 47 of the Qur'an say:

Behold! The angels said 'O Mary, God gives thee glad tidings of a word from him. His name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary held in honour in the world and in the hereafter and of (the company of) those heaviest to God: she said 'O my Lord, how shall I have a son when no man has touched me? 'He said, Even so, God creates what He wills when He has decreed a plan He says to it; be' and it is.

Thus, the above Qur'anic passages agree to a large extent with the information contained in Luke 1:26, Luke 2:7 and Mattew 1: 18 - 25. The accounts in the two scriptures agree that the conception of Jesus by his mother took place immediately after the angelic announcement without any sexual relation with a man. The second area of concord relates to the 'Qur'anic and Biblical views of Jesus employment of miracles to propagate his mission. Thirdly, despite the Qur'anic denial of Jesus crucifixion on the cross, the scripture agrees with the Bible that he was taken into heaven as evident in Q4: 148 which says: 'Nay! God raised him up into Himself and God is exalted in power and wise'. The fourth one is the common belief of the two scriptures in the second coming of Jesus in Q4:159, this shows or points to the common origin of the two beliefs systems; all these could be used to promote peace among the adherents and also stabilize body politics.

The Qur'an leaves no one in doubt that Islam recognizes Christianity as a revealed religion. The Qu'ran itself mentions Christianity as a religion whom Allah promises salvation if they believe in one God and do good work. Chapter 2:62, Q3:63 encourage Muslims to dialogue with people of the books including Christians. There is indisputable common root of Islam and Christianity which was Abraham. The divine promise made to the great Patriarch to make great nation out of his offspring does not exclude Ishmael as evident in Genesis 21 vs. 31 and 38. The greatness of the Ishmaelite descendants (the Arabs) alluded to in the passage does not rest on anything than Islam. It follows therefore that Islam and Christianity as branches of Abrahamic faith are both legitimate and they should recognize one another as such, If we recognize the legitimacy of one another's tradition, it logically follows that we should understand one another's view points. For example, experience in Nigeria shows that the Muslims viewpoints have always been misunderstood particularly on the issue of the *Shari'ah* and introduction of Islamic Banking.

Religion could be used to promote the gains or dividends of Democracy in Nigeria, in the sense that there should be no crying of wolf among adherents of other religions based on the religious beliefs of one religionist, because the issue of *Shari'ah* is tearing the whole nation apart, which should not be so. Opeloye claims that *Shari'ah* should not be a source of controversy because *Shari'ah* technically means the path established by the Almighty Allah for the Muslims to follow, if he desired to succeed in every aspect of his life whether mundane or spiritual [13]. A Muslim must live his life in accordance with the provisions of the *Shari'ah* because *Shari'ah* and Islam are the same. Q45; 18 says:

'Then we have put thee on the right way of the Shari'ah so follow it and follow not the desires of those who know it'

This is an explicit injunction of Allah instructing Muslims to seek guidance from the *Shari'ah*. Chapter 5:44-47 state in detail the implications of rejecting the law, it is only a devout Muslim and indeed any believer in a revealed book to take heed of it if he wants to see the pleasure of God. *Shari'ah* is not new in Nigeria, what is new is the expansion of the scope of its application to include the criminal aspect but this has been the wish of the Muslims long before independence. During the Colonial rule, the Muslims expressed their desire for the full application of the law by resenting the native court ordinance of 1933, 1948 and 1951 including the British clauses. The 1999 constitution gives them permission to operate *Shari'ah* in section 277 of the 1999 constitution which says:

The Shari'ah court of Appeal of a state shall in addition to such other jurisdiction as may be conferred upon it by the law of the state exercise such appellate and supervisory jurisdiction in civil proceeding involving questions of Islamic personal law. This clause no doubt grants to widen the jurisdiction of this court by its ability to confer any other jurisdiction on the Shari'ah court if it deems it necessary.

Besides, section 4:7 of the same constitution confers on the House of Assembly the power to make laws for the peace, order and good guidance as regards any matter not included in the legislative list set out in part of the second schedule of this constitution, any matter included in the concurrent legislative list set out in the first column of part II of second schedule any other matter with respect to which it is empowered to make laws in accordance with provision of the constitution. Opeloye asserts that there should not be crisis over the full implementation of Shari'ah in some states [13]. The fear of oppression of the non-Muslims in such states should be doused, where a case involves Muslims

and non-Muslims, the non-Muslim has the right to request that the case be tried at a court of his choice. Therefore, opposition against the *Shari'ah* would not have been so vehement if it is realized that the provisions of the law are in many respects inconsonance with the Biblical provisions. For instance, Islam prescribes stoning to death for adultery in conformity with the provisions in Deut 22:22-24.

In the same vein, a murderer shall be put to death as prescribed in Q4:92 and Num. 35:30; drunkenness is a punishable offence as evident in Deut. 21:20 – 21 and Zech 5:3; while usury (interest on loan) is outlawed in Qur'an 2:275 and Lev. 25:35. It may be argued that these are Old Testament Laws which may not apply to the Christians, but we should equally remember that in Matthew 5:17 Jesus informs us that he has not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. The essence of bringing such Biblical passage to light is to show that some of the *Shari'ah* tenets are what Muslims and Christians have in common and therefore should not be a source of conflict.

Another way of using Islamic education for the stabilization of Nigeria's nation is that every preacher should be cautious in their proselytization. Islam and Christianity, as missionary faiths, encourage religious propagation with a view of winning converts. The Qur'an in *Surah* 16:125 specifically enjoins the Muslims to invite others to Islam with wisdom and good admonition. Islam abhors terrorism, fanatics, extremism in whatever form and threatens those that insist on it with punishment.

Moreover, wisdom demands that one should keep audience and convey the message in accordance with the requirements of the occasion. Excellent admonition implies that one should be content with convincing the audience with argument within their comprehension, and equally appeal to their feeling. This shows that application of force in propagation is repugnant to Islam. Similarly, the Biblical passage which enjoins the Christians to evangelize which is derived from Mark 16:15 where Jesus directive to his disciples reads thus:

'*Go into the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved but he who does not believe will be condemned*'

Opeloye claims that the concept of particularity that is inherent in all religions should not be over stressed [13]. Bidmos also posits that preachers of revealed religions should be sincere; they should have the knowledge of the religion [6]. Religion alone should not be used as the only yardstick of appointment of Ambassadors to some foreign countries rather it should be based on merit and efficiency so that the development of the government

will not be thwarted. Muslims should also live with good model in terms of good character so that people can learn Islam from them.

Bidmos makes the following recommendations for peaceful and harmonious co-existence between Muslims and Christians. He says among others [7]:

'*... that Federal Government should establish National Centre for the study of Inter-Religious Relations, the centre, when established, should be charged with the responsibility of organizing courses periodically for Muslim and Christian clerics, religious leaders, government functionaries for the promotion of peace and harmonious co-existence. The centre can also organize voluntary Religious Youth Service during long vacation for secondary school students in which youths of diverse religious backgrounds would be made to execute joint community projects, government should come up with a code of ethics for religious preaching with penalties for violating any of its clauses.*'

The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) should review the curriculum of Islamic and Christian Studies with a view to incorporating and emphasizing aspects of promoting religious and social harmony. Islamic studies should be made compulsory in the curriculum since those who participate in the selection are literates and educated people, Nigerian Religious Council (NREC) should be structured to allow state and local governments to have similar bodies to attend to Religious problems of their respective levels of government. Membership should be made up of people who are committed to religious harmony; Nigerian constitution should be reviewed to take cognizance of multi-religious nature of our society. It would be hypocritical to regard Nigeria as a secular state in view of the Nigerians commitment to and government's involvement in religious matters. If religion is taken genuinely, our political arena will be peaceful, stable and progressive. Perhaps Nigeria as a country may not experience religious fanaticism, extremism, which is currently engulfing the country.

Abdalla Amin in his work emphasizes that both the classical and modern exegetes are unanimous on the textual evidence for the punishment for religious violence which includes terrorism as contained in Q5:33-34, in Islam, they are: execution, crucifixion, amputation of alternate hand and foot, and banishment [1]. Another unspecified punishment awaits religious violence-inclined person in the hereafter except he repents. The severity of the punishment according to Abdalla Amin goes a long way to emphasize '…the extent to which the Qur'an respects the human soul regardless of faith, race, and geographical location'. Al-Dawoody states that Islamic law of war prohibits Muslims from resorting

to violence, except in defending against aggression and the religious freedom of the Muslims [8]. It also indicates that sanctity of protecting the lives of enemy non-combatants, their properties and their environment. Ibn Kathir (2010) maintains that the crisis that claimed the life of Uthman bn Affan was of this nature, it led to division among the Muslims eventually. These are included in the role of Islamic education to ensure stability and peace in the government and the nation as a whole.

4. Conclusion

This paper examined the role of Islamic education in promoting the peaceful co-existence between the Muslims and Christians. The findings of this study suggest that there are endemic problem facing our democracy today which invariably leads to wanton destruction of lives and properties. The findings in this study are in conjunction with earlier findings of Bidmos [7] and Opeloye [13] in their discussions on the causes, and recommendation to reducing the phenomenon of religious acrimony. This study has implications for Nigeria Government to be proactive in formulating policies that will improve the standard of living of the citizens, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs could be established to oversee any cases of religious crises. Islamic Religious Education should be made compulsory at all levels of the education. The study revealed that when religion is used negatively, the consequence will be disastrous. It is posited in this paper that Islamic and Christian Religions should be incorporated in the political structure of Nigeria in order to guarantee Nigerians the much needed stability, security and peace. By divine design, both faiths have common provisions that can serve as guiding principles to fashion an enduring political system. This paper has adopted a pragmatic approach to the whole issue by recommending a methodology that is capable of stabilizing Nigeria's body politics.

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