

Peace Paradigm for Nigeria and its Co-Existence

Isidore U. Nwanaju

Department of Philosophy & Religion, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria.

Abstract

Every society needs peace to preserve its environment and cultural heritage, as well as its collective existence as a nation or country, whichever way it is best described or depicted. Peace is a sine qua non for progress and development. It is the function of all those concerned to promote its success, especially in a multi-cultural and pluri-religious society like Nigeria. This means that even the language of communication between peoples of such a cultural heritage must be geared towards a harmonious living. Failure to give peace a chance in such a polity might lead to chaos and anarchy. It is the aim of this paper therefore to contribute to the ongoing debate regarding the *modus operandi* of preserving the Nigerian society through a healthy promotion of its language, culture, and environment by proposing the need for PEACE in the polity as a paradigm for its success.

The paper is a reflective contribution towards the promotion of mutual co-existence in Nigeria based on some suggested principles of peace. The threat posed by Boko Haram – a dreaded Islamic fundamentalist sect – to the corporate existence of Nigeria since July 2009 is one of the clearest indications for the urgent need for peace in the country as a nation.

1. Introduction

The word 'Peace', 'Salam', or 'Shalom' comes into play where two or three find themselves together. This is why we hear of such phrases like: (a)being at peace with oneself/somebody/something, meaning being in a state of friendship or harmony; (b)keeping the peace, that is, not creating a disturbance in public or preventing people from quarrelling; (c) holding one's peace/tongue, that is, holding one's peace especially in the face of provocations; and (d)making one's peace with somebody, that is, putting an end to a quarrel, etc (Kumar 1998). Respecting these simple rules provide the necessary environment for harmonious living in a society. In other words, the basic condition for such a communal or social peace is the internal peace exuding naturally and uncontaminated from the various individuals who make up the said community because no one gives what he does not have, as the latin adage would put it, *nemo dat quod non habet*.

If it is then true that people give only what they have, and in abundance too, could it be that the almost irredeemable conflict-situation in Nigeria arises from the fact that there is not much individual peace of mind and of spirit of mutual co-existence in the majority of Nigerians, who are either Christians or Muslims? Could it be that their lives are simply a contradiction of their revered holy books, The *Qur'an* (used about 44 times) and The *Bible* (430 times), which speak of Peace and its paradigm as a pre-condition for salvation? Qur'anic instances include surah 2:224 (doing good and guarding against evil and making peace between men; s.19:62 (peace, and they shall have their sustenance therein morning and evening; s.20:47 (from your Lord, and peace is on him who follows the guidance; s.36:58 (peace: a word from a Merciful Lord); etc. The Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible are also replete with words of peace. For instance, Genesis 43:23 (And he said, Peace be to you, fear not...); Exodus 4:18 (And Jethro said to Moses, Go in peace; Leviticus 9:18 (speaks of a sacrifice of peace offering); Deuteronomy 27:7 (And thou shalt offer peace offerings); Matthew 26:23 (But Jesus held his peace); John 14:27 (Peace I leave with you, my peace I give ...); Phil.4:9 (the God of Peace shall be with you); 1 Thess. 5:13 (And be at peace among yourselves); Hebrew 12:14 (Follow peace with all men, and ...), etc.

Based on these scriptural references from both the Bible and the Qur'an, one can really appreciate the need to propose some peace paradigms for mutual co-existence in Nigeria. This is aimed towards creating a conducive and harmonious environment for the overall development of Nigeria.

2. Is Nigerian Environment: truly religious and peaceful?

The majority of the Nigerian population claim to be either muslims or christians, and statistically apparently true. Mosques and Churches rub shoulders in height and numerical strength. Yet, the pages of these holy books, as mentioned above, proclaiming peace are rendered ineffective, or almost useless through the daily modes of inhuman relationships and conflicts. Newspapers, Magazines, and even radio/television broadcasts are filled daily with the sad news of conflicts, violence, and crises, sometimes rooted in the name of religion or ethnicism. The current drama of bombings and killings by the islamist sect called Boko Haram is a case in point (Anyanwu, & Nwanaju, 2010). Locally and internationally, our country portrays an environment filled with, and polluted by one type of crisis or the other. A regular headline reads thus, "Boko Haram bombs ..."; "Boko Haram: Abuja hotels next target – US"; "...Churches suspend Sunday service in Maiduguri, Damaturu" etc (Ola & Orude 2011).

If it is not the story of corruption in one sector of the economy, it is the news of another type of malfeasance somewhere else, such as insecurity and kidnapping (Taiwo-obalonye 2011), as well as vandalism (see Ogunwale, 2011). They fill the air like filthy carcasses that render the environment unhealthy for human habitation and co-existence. Yet, Nigerians are depicted as truly and incurably religious, as if religiosity should be tainted with notoriety and callousness.

For instance, every mention of the name of Prophet Muhammed is followed by the phrase, "Peace to Him". According to Zepp (1992:71), "The name of Muhammad is always followed by a benediction (word of blessing) when spoken or written by a devout Muslim. That benediction is "Peace Be Unto Him" (P.B.U.H.). To add to his significance, such phrases as "Glory of the Ages," "Peace of the World", and "Prophet of the Great Completion" are just three of the more than two hundred titles and names by which Muhammad is known". Continuing, Zepp argues that in "fairness, "Peace Be Unto Him" is used after the mention of any prophet, including Jesus". However, Zepp's extension of the respect accorded to the Prophet Muhammad by Muslims to Jesus can be seen as utopic and speculative because majority of Muslims would hardly accept this honour for any other person other than Muhammad. In any case, one can say that Zepp's assumption and other similar progressive Islamic scholars, point to an indication that the Qur'an holds both Islam and Christianity in esteem. This means that the issue at stake is the ultra-literal interpretation given to the sacred book by some religious fundamentalists and fanatics such as the Boko Haram sect menacing the peace of the country.

If the name of the Prophet is called five times a day in Prayer by almost 75 million Muslims in Nigeria, then the mathematical conclusion is obvious when such a number mentions the same holy name seven days in a week, etc. If the similar number of Christians in Nigeria also proclaim the Holy Name of Jesus everyday and several times in a week, why do we elude Peace in the polity? Or rather, why does peace - indeed real Christian Peace - elude us as a country, as a people, as a society, and as a nation? Perhaps, there is a dialectical opposition between the peace read from the pages of the Qur'an and the Bible with the lips, and the real peace of God/Allah which is supposed to reside in the souls of these worshippers, but which is lacking.

What is it in the name, Nigeria, especially between Islam and Christianity that has refused to give peace a chance to grow both in the hearts of its citizens and in the land itself? Could there be some historical antecedents to the ever-souring relationship between Christians and Muslims? Going through the pages of historical and archival documents, one realises that both religions could have presented different agendas at the beginning of their contact with the various peoples of Nigeria. Moreover, the role of a third party, the Colonial Administration (Tamuno, 1980), did not help matters impressively. Without any intention to apportion blames or praises, one would take all interested minds a bit down the lane of history.

3. Negative historical Antecedents?

During the early period of contact between the different colonial authorities and the entity that is known today as Nigeria, Christianity and Islam were seen as having much in common - a great deal of similarity and continuity with the religions of Africa - the commercial goal of pursuit of trade, notwithstanding. The power game between the Portuguese (Eluwa, et al. 1988) representing European and Christian interest and the Arab traders (Eluwa, 36) representing Arab and Islamic interest, is not to be easily forgotten. Historical antecedents also show that Christianity entered Africa in the first century of its inception, and although Africans from ancient Egypt and its neighbourhood played an important role in its formative years, the greater part of Africa, including Nigeria was destined to know Christianity as a world religion only when Europe became the dominant world power in the centuries following the maritime explorations of Prince Henry the Navigator (Eluwa, 158).

Christians had lived in Africa, but their members were confined to the countries bordering the Red Sea and among the members of the Coptic Church. This group of Africans had little or no contact with what was to emerge in our century as the most dynamic and fertile centres of the christian message in the world. There was to a certain extent a veil of ignorance covering both their knowledge of their co-religionists in other parts of Europe and proper interaction with members of other religions like Islam. But in this shade of ignorance, there was still one thing they had in common: the belief in a personal God.

In other words, there was already the continuity of belief in a finally single personal God of creation and providence. Both religions had also special continuity that they were already held by Africans before they were brought in as the official religion of the West and of the Arab world. This was most obviously true of Islam, whose West African presence was already enormous, and also true of Christianity, which was believed to be identical with the African race. It was the grip which black Africans from Sierra Leone, or the Cape Colony, or indeed Ethiopia, already had on Christianity which made it a great deal easier for black Africans elsewhere to appropriate it quite quickly and confidently in the age of partition. Thus, Christianity even in the worse moments of the scramble, was seldom seen as a religion of the whites. Nor was the European colonialist, for the most part, seen to have come to Africa - at least at the beginning - with any particular hostility towards Islam. They were portrayed as religions of peace.

If the above historical beginning was true, or at least minimally correct, the question arises as to what really led to the change of situation between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria. It is not mystical to solve. The reality of the Jihad of Uthman dan Fodio (1754-1817) and the prominence of the Sokoto Caliphate gave Islam a different significance in Northern Nigeria. It became both religion and morality. It constituted the paradigm for political and economic development - individually and communally. In this regard, Hermans (2000); argues that in a country like Nigeria where Multiculturalism is a challenge, one of the major questions in this field of research is the question of the neutrality of the state in religious matters.

Bearing this argument in mind, one can say that it was such that when Christianity came with a separation of both aspects of life for the people and the community, a strange glance of suspicion arose which was to shape dramatically the mode of relationship between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria in the years to come. Any seriously-minded Nigerian knows a bit of the development of this unhealthy relationship which has in the long-run established a dangerous and uncomfortable paradigm of societal relationship. The result is a dichotomy based on the 'north'- 'south' affiliation; the 'muslim' - 'christian' identity. In the face of this ugly development, one might ask: who is a Nigerian? what is Nigeria? where is Nigeria? Any answer to these questions will certainly lend some credible suggestions and solutions to the question of a peace paradigm for Nigeria.

4. Peace Paradigm for Nigeria

The Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes* (no.78) enunciated a fundamental concept related to the nature of peace, thus: "Peace is more than the absence of war: it cannot be reduced to the maintenance of a balance of power between opposing forces nor does it arise out of despotic dominion, but it is apparently called "the effect of righteousness" (Is. 32:15). It is the fruit of that right ordering of things with which the divine founder has invested human society and which must be actualized by man thirsting after an ever more perfect reign of justice". Continuing, they argued that peace does not depend only on principles but must also be "built up continually" through "unceasing vigilance by lawful authority" (no.78).

From the foregoing, one can then ask: what is a true peace paradigm for Nigeria? A true Peace Paradigm for Nigeria is therefore one which is rooted in relevant principles for enhancing justice in the Nigerian society. Like Plato, it is important for the mind to discover the principles and rules that things in their behavior obey (cf. Stumpf, S.E. 1983:45). In fact, this would offer a real alternative to the prevailing state of violence. Within a paradigm of violence, Christian and Muslim Fundamentalists in Nigeria can portray their brutal repressions as acts of self-defense against one another. Non-violent religious demonstrations to express ill-feelings and disagreements should not be interpreted by local police or military commanders in favour of any particular religion. The reverse should also not be the case. It has happened in the past and still happens in the recent times. But it is not impossible to reverse the trend of violence, hate, and mistrust. To reverse the paradigm of religious violence in Nigeria, there is need for joint effort from all sections of the society - the political, economic, socio-ethical and above all, the spiritual.

There is need to understand that violence can be a reaction to one act of brutality or another. That is why unless an oppressed people had an alternative, they would use violence as their tool of liberation. No particular religion or even ethnic group should re-introduce colonial rule or apartheid in any act or form. This is not only condemned by International law, but also to stop the suffering of innocent and common people in the society. To do so, is to enhance one of the most peaceful steps towards achieving the needed human rights in the new Millennium. The cogent question remains as to what all well-meaning citizens of Nigeria think and do to support a shift to non-violence, in order to increase the chances of Nigeria's transformation and the just resolution of the recurrent Muslim-Christian conflicts.

Firstly, we must ask loudly and effectively: "what is violence?", "who is perpetuating this violence?", and "how are they violent?" Biblical reflection and candid social analysis are part of the process of answering such questions. We must honestly destroy the myths upon which the violence of both christian and muslim fundamentalists are based - the myth of superiority complex. Moreover, the pathology of victimization that flows from the arrogant use of power is vitriolic because it does not allow anyone else to be a legitimate victim. Each side sees itself as the absolute victim, the innocent party that is the sole target of "violence". But of course neither side is innocent, and there are many victims on both sides.

Again, we must jointly redefine the ideal of the nation state. This means that the Nigerian community must find the will to shake off its paralysis and move to redress the injustice perpetrated in the name of religion, in a spirit of concern for what is best for both sides, or more crudely put, for the oppressor as well as the oppressed. But the question remains how we can truly and objectively define either of these connotations? A sincere answer becomes necessary so that when the desired liberation comes, it frees not only the oppressed but also those who structured and maintained the untenable and incalculably costly systems of oppression, injustice and religious antagonisms, especially since her political independence in 1960. A clue to a correct answer may be taken from Aristotle's definition of the State, thus: "Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think good. But,

if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good" (Aristotle, Politics, Bk 1, ch. 1). If we accept Aristotle's conception or definition of the state as relevant for us, then, the principle of justice would be vigorously promoted. It would also eventually help us to cancel the negative connotations of the words, "oppressor" and "oppressed" in the Nigerian polity.

Furthermore, there must be an ecumenical and inter-faith movement. Muslims, Christians, African Indigenous Churches' adherents, African Traditional Religion Adherents, social activists, etc must work together. This is because religious oppression/conflict can constitute the worst apartheid system in this new age, if not properly addressed. In other words, let the presence of the religions in the society be for progress and development, not depict what Chinua Achebe in "Things Fall Apart" (1958:115) satirically described said about the missionaries in Igboland, thus: 'The arrival of the missionaries had caused a considerable stir in the village...' One hopes that such an expression be not used for Nigeria in a negative sense in the coming years.

One advocates therefore some kind of positive mobilization involving faith communities, universities, media centres, service groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the Federal Government as leader for the development of the society. This step has become urgent because the universal values of the two monotheistic religions with regard to human rights, cry out for space in Nigeria. The Qur'an and the Bible must never be misinterpreted, especially when we really believe that we are in a democratic society. Democracy should also not be used to denigrate the values of any religious group or association. We need respect for one another and for what we hold to be true, and religion stands highest in this scale of preference.

Moreover, the risks of attaining the desired goal for peace, co-habitation and justice must be embraced and shared by all Nigerians, without fear or favour. Above all, the method of teaching non-violence must be *incarnational* rather than rhetorical, consistent with the emboldening restraint of the sermon on the Mount (cf. Gospel of Matthew 5). It is also in this spirit that the menace of Boko Haram should be jointly confronted by both government and religious bodies for the sanitization of the environment for conducive development and upliftment of the people.

Eventually, a new generation of selfless leaders is needed in Nigeria, muslims and christians alike, free from the greatest problem of the country's leadership, corruption (Okaneme, 2008). One would suggest a progressive leadership that has large and open ears to listen to the critical situation brought about by extremist portrayal of religion and politics. Such leaders must be ready to address core justice issues, which is the only basis of attaining peace and mutual co-existence among a people of divergent and opposing religious values and worship. Finally, to achieve the South African feat on a political framework and the Indian industrial leap, Nigeria needs a man or men like Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi. This will help all to heave a collective sigh of relief.

5. Conclusion

Nigeria as a nation needs peace for its environment, development, and progress. This would help to avert an inevitable disaster rooted in the type of violence perpetrated by some religious fanatics like Boko Haram in Nigeria today. In other words, there is need for an honest and collective commitment to what is good for the Nation. The result of such a sincere struggle will be the 'miracle' of proper Christian-Muslim relations in a diverse country like Nigeria. In fact, a deliberate decision to engage in properly-oriented talks, dialogue, and negotiations will be far better and preferable option to the eccentric and erratic ongoing conflicts and 'wars' of dominance at all levels- religious, social, economic, political, cultural, etc To do so would be analogical to the freed man in Plato's allegory of the Cave, who after experiencing and distinguishing the reality from appearance was expected to go back to the cave to free others who still live in ignorance and slavery of thought and false perception of reality. The battle for justice is, in fact, the singular road towards achieving true peace for the development of Nigeria and making its environment conducive for mutual co-existence. It is a road map to enhancing the proper inter-play of ethics, politics, and religion for the development of society.

References

- Achebe, C. (1958), *Things Fall Apart*. Edinburgh: William Heinemann Ltd.
- Anyanwu, S. O., & Nwanaju, I. (eds.), (2010). *Boko Haram: Religious Conflicts and Dialogue Initiatives In Nigeria*. Vol. 1, Owerri: Edu-Edy Publications.
- Eluwa, G. I. C., Ukagwu, M., O., Nwachukwu, J., U., N., & Nwaubani, A., C., N. (eds.) (1988). *A History of Nigeria*. Onitsha: Africana First Publishers Limited.
- Flannery, A. (ed.). (2004). *Vatican Council II (The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents)*. Mumbai: ST. PAULS.
- Hermans, C. A. M. (2000). The Challenges of Multiculturalism. in *International Journal of Education and Religion*, 1,1-18.
- Kumar, V. (2000). *The Sterling Dictionary of Idioms*. New Delhi: Sterlings Publishers Private Limited.
- Mckeon, R. (ed.). (2001). *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. New York: The Modern Library

- Okaneme, G. (2008). Fighting Corruption in Nigeria: Beyond Rhetoric and Slogans. In *Amamihe. Journal of Applied Philosophy*,6, 113-128.
- Tamuno, T. N. (1980). British Colonial Administration in Nigeria in the Twentieth Century. In *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Obaro Ikime (ed.), Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) PLC, pp.393-409.
- Zepp, I. G. (1992). *A Muslim Primer: Beginner's Guide to Islam*, London: Sheed and Ward.
- Ola, T. & Orude, P. (2011). Boko Haram: Abuja Luxury hotels, next target – US. In *Daily Sun*, Monday, November 7, p. 5.
- Shakir, M. H. (2005). *A Concordance of The Qur'an* (Extracted from the M.H. Shakir translation of The Qur'an) Elmhurst. New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc.
- Taiwo-Obalonye, J. (2011). Interview with Jubril Aminu, “There is no strategy to check insecurity in Nigeria”. In *Daily Sun*, Wednesday, November 2, pp.40-41.
- Ogunwale, G. (2011). State Security Service parades three suspected bombers of Agip oil pipeline. In *The Nation*, Friday, November 4, p. 60.
- Strong, J. (2001). *The New STRONG'S Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Red-Letter Edition), Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- Stump, S. E. (1983). *Philosophy:History & Problems*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.