

LEGACY OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE: A CORRELATE OF ISLAMIC ETHICS AND YORUBA VIRTUE OF OMOLUABI

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Abstract

It is not an over-statement to maintain that no society can really attain social, economic and political heights when peaceful coexistence is lacking. It is therefore imperative that all nations of the world whether multi-religions and multi-ethnic must all trend the path of peaceful living among its people. Moreover, the ethics of harmony and peaceful living in Islam has a great correlation with the concept of Omoluabi in Yoruba culture. They are like a twin brother. This descriptive works opined that culture and religion play pivotal roles in the lives of African people and as such both should be engaged in promoting and maintaining harmony and peaceful coexistence. The presentation concludes that peaceful coexistence which is one of the Islamic ethics and Yoruba virtue of Omoluabi if applied can serve as a heuristic device to achieve a well-ordered society. The paper recommends among other that there should be a consistent and persistent dialogue strategies among religious groups and the indigenous people to always facilitate peaceful coexistence among people.

Keywords: *Omoluabi, peaceful coexistence, heuristic, culture and Yoruba Virtue*

Introduction

It has been largely observed that lack of peaceful coexistence in the nation often resulted to civil disorder, violence, insurgency and religious war. Thus, development is sine-qua-non to peaceful living. Islam religion preaches love, harmony, justice, equality, tolerance and to live peacefully among Muslims and non-Muslims. In the same vein Yoruba race of the Southwest, Nigeria, parts of Kwara, Kogi and also some parts of Republic of Benin is notable and renowned for their passion for peaceful coexistence. The tribe attached greater importance to the ideology of Omoluabi, the philosophical and cultural concept used to describe someone of good and virtue nature. An Omoluabi is expected to display and exhibit great virtues and values translating the core moral conduct in Yoruba culture, such as humility, good naturalness, bravery, accommodating, good will and diligence among others.

Aliyu (2015) opined that Islam accommodates and embraces people as brothers and sisters regardless of their religious afflictions and ethnic backgrounds. The principle of peaceful coexistence in Islam is so unique as it refrains any one from forcing Islam on other people.

There is no compulsion in (accepting) religion. The right course has become clear from error (Quran 2:256).

It is worthwhile to mention that those early immigrants who brought Islam into Yoruba land through trade were warmly welcomed, accommodated, well treated and tolerated. This cordial relation often led to inter-marriage between the indigenes and the settlers. This correlate of peaceful living in the religion context and in African culture of Yoruba Omoluabi has a tall order

to put an end to religious war and civil disorder. Religious tolerance is so important as it leads to peaceful coexistence between people of different beliefs. Islam has granted the people of other faiths the highest degree of tolerance by allowing them to follow their way and equally practice their religions as it suits them. This then makes room for peace and freedom rather than violent disturbances experienced in our society.

“And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed all of them entirely. Then will you compel the people until they become believers” (Quran 10:99)

An Omoluabi of Yorubas will do everything humanly possible to accommodate and live peacefully with his neighbours regardless of religion and ethics. On this premise, this descriptive works examines the value of promoting harmony and peaceful living among people and moreso advocate that the principle of tolerance should be imbibed by every citizen of the nation.

Concept of Peaceful Coexistence

Dictionary of contemporary English (new edition) defines peaceful coexistence as existing and living together without fighting and violence. It is an act of living together in peace rather than in constant hostility. Adewale (1994) defines it as a way to evolve a peaceful atmosphere for the practice of religions in a religiously pluralistic state which makes it possible for each religion to give up the element that causes conflict. The concept also signifies groups of people existing together in harmony at the same time or in the same place. Contextually related to Nigeria, the two concepts imply the ability of different groups of people with diverse cultural and social backgrounds to interact harmoniously on the platform of tolerance without compromising their religions. Peaceful coexistence is vital to Nigeria in view of the increased cleavage on socio-religious crisis that is now rampant.

Francis (2006) defines it as the absence of war, fear, conflict anxiety, suffering and violence. A more useful conceptualization of the concept must therefore see beyond the narrow conception of absence of war, fear, anxiety, suffering and violence. In this regard, Prof. Okay Ibeanu defines it as a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and in the wider international community (Ibeanu, 2006). Many philosophers see peaceful living as a natural, original, God given state of human existence. Sociologically, peaceful coexistence refers to as a condition of social harmony in which there are no social antagonisms. World over, it cannot be over-emphasized that peaceful coexistence and security of life and property are the primary conditions for progress and development of any society. The unification of Nigeria by Lord Lugard, more than a century ago, was a divine amalgamation of the protectorates destined to live together under one political entity.

The independence of the country in 1960 was based on the basis of unity, patriotism and peaceful coexistence. Prejudice against particular tribal group or a religious group is a preconceived notion that promotes enmity. Ordinarily, Nigeria as a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country, the concept is a key elements to put an end to all sorts of religious imbroglios (Jimoh, 2018). The Nigeria constitution is commendable for its identified feature for the provision for the freedom of religion and freedom of peaceful living. 1999 constitution 15 (c) is so explicit on the fundamental human right of a citizen to practice any religion of his choice without been forced. This is in tandem with the principle of peaceful living adopted by Shariah in Islam and the well adopted ethics of living harmoniously with neighbours a watchword of the Yoruba people.

Again, in its 28 sessions of the general assembly in Paris in 2008 (UNESCO) asserted that tolerance and peaceful coexistence are the capacity to accept differences, respect one another and stand up for what one knows to be right. In order to promote harmony in the relationship between different religious communities plurality, it should be accepted as an opportunity to be legalized and promoted.

Value of Peaceful Coexistence in Islam

In Islam, peaceful coexistence is given prominence, the law of Islam (Shariah) forbids Muslim from oppressing non-Muslims and Commands them to treat others with justice and compassion. Islam emphasizes the establishment of equality, justice, tolerance as these lead to peaceful coexistence between different people with different religion and different culture. Anecdotes have been heard on how the prophet (pbuh) in speech and action made use of tolerance, and harmony to tackle headlong socio-political, economic, legal and even mundane issues, not only through verbal statement but also through practical applications of the Islamic injunction in its prinstinc model (Hussain, 2015).

Living peacefully with non-Islamic adherents is an essential Islamic principle that is clearly stated in many Quranic verses and it has been practiced by Muslims throughout their history. Its requirement is demanded by the nature of Islamic religion and not something that Muslims impose or resort to as a result of exceptional external circumstances. God tells Muslims that no one except Him has absolute control over people's mind and hearts. The role of the prophets and other preachers is only to guide and not to enforce religion on the people.

Remind them for you are only one who reminds.

You art not at all a warder over them (Quran 8:21-22).

The prophet (phub) was strictly warned by Allah not to force people to accept Islam. The misconception that the prophet holds the Qur'an in one hand and the sword in the other hand to either accept Islam or be killed is a wrong impression and misleading. The Holy Qurian frowned at such action.

Is it you (prophet) who can force people to be believers? (Quran 10:99).

Also

You (the prophet) cannot guide whom you love to guide. It is God who guides whom he will (Quran 28:56).

The purpose of tolerating non-Muslim, living peacefully with them and even treating them nicely is to present the truth of the message to them in the best ways and to make the picture of the message clearer and becomes easy for them to see for themselves and voluntarily accept it. Religion and culture cannot be separated and should not be at variance with each other. It should be noted that the prophet strongly condemned act of violence and using of force.

Prophetic Example of Peaceful Coexistence

The Holy Quran makes it clear leaving no room for any doubt that the Muslims have to regard the old testament, Psalm and the gospel as book of God revealed to Moses, David and Jesus respectively including all other books of God. Not only that Muslims should have believe in all prophets of God like Muhammad (pbuh).

“we believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and revealed unto you, our God and your God is one, and unto Him we surrender” (Qur’an 29:46).

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) stipulates that peaceful coexistence should be imbibed by every Muslim and he himself equally demonstrated this noble attitude among his companions and other non-Muslims. The Medina community was a perfect example of demonstration of peaceful living. When the prophet migrated to Medina, his role as a religion leader extended by becoming the political leader of a state by the precepts of Islam which demanded that clear law of governance be laid out to ensure harmony and peaceful livings among Muslims, Jews, Christians and Traditionalist. Ishaq (2015) writes about the warning giving by the prophet to the Muslims against any abuse, crime and cruelty of non-Muslims, the prophet (pbuh) stated:

“Beware! Whoever is cruel and hard on a non-Muslim curtails their right, burdens them with more than they can bear, or takes anything from them against their free will”. I Muhammad (pbuh) will advocate against the person on the day of judgement.

There are many other examples of the prophetic saying during his life time that practically portrays his tolerance and harmonious living shows to other religions and other ethnicity. The treaty which took place between the Muslims and the Quraish in the sixth year of Hijra was yet another monumental demonstration of promoting peaceful coexistence by the prophet (pbuh).

The Muslims were prevented from performance of Umrah (Lesser hajj) by the Quraysh until the following year and this was accepted by the Prophet as they returned back to Medina without performing the Umra till the following year. The Commonwealth of Islam established by Prophet Muhammad at Medina was based on egalitarian society, thus Christians and other religious groups formed a common nationality with the Muslims.

In his capacity as head of state, the Prophet (pbuh) used his wisdom in dealing with the people of various tribes and cultures including those who lived under a variety of conditions and circumstances, and this has adversely shaped their character morally. It thus teaches us on how best to embrace and create peace and love in dealing with the people. Peace is a goal that Muslims are required to strive for not only in their own families but also in their dealing with people in the immediate communities. It is ironical that many people especially non-Muslims hold a lot of misconceptions about the concept of peaceful living in Islam.

Mukhtar (2015) listed some of these misconceptions which include:

- Killing of non-Muslims.
- Forcing non-Muslims to embrace Islam
- That Muslims are terrorists
- Militancy and violence.
- Islam is a religion of intolerance; and
- Declaration of war against other religions, among others.

Nevertheless, there is the need to demarcate between bad actions of some few fanatical Muslims and extremist in comparison to the teaching of Islam which if not checked may lead to incorrect conclusion of the aforementioned negative misconceptions. It is worthy to mention that Islam from time immemorial in an unequivocal language honours, respects and holds sacrosanct human life.

Peaceful Coexistence: A Legacy of the Yorubas in Omoluabi

Yorubaland is the cultural region of the Yoruba people in West Africa. It spans the modern-day countries of Nigeria and Benin. The Yoruba language and culture are identified with the people living mainly in Nigeria's Southwestern states of Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti parts of Kwara and Kogi and also in some parts of Dahomey (Republic of Benin). Yoruba culture is very unique as it encourages intelligence and wisdom, its relationship with other religions especially Islam has helped to gain a social ground in promoting peaceful living. Though the Yorubas are predominantly into African traditional religion, the tribe advocates peaceful coexistence, harmony and the good ethics of Omoluabi integrity.

Yoruba race is renowned for their staunch passion for the legacy of accommodation and peaceful living, national cohesion and development. Religion in Yorubaland is not a strange phenomenon. In fact, it becomes almost impossible to see a typical Yoruba man who would reject this concept in the name of atheism. Awolalu (1983) observed that the indigenous Yoruba people believed in the existence of the supreme being and anyone who opposed it has been exposed to non-Africa cultural influence. The Yorubas attached much importance to the concept of Omoluabi. The Omoluabi is a philosophical and cultural concept that is native to the Yoruba. It is used to describe a person of good character, person who is accommodating and have taste for integrity and able to leave peacefully with the people. The Omoluabi concept signifies courage, hard work, humility, respect and ability to interact with the people of different cultures and religions.

The concept of Omoluabi is one of Yoruba ideology and taught moral which says much about personality of an individual. To the Yoruba, an individual can be an Omoluabi irrespective of the religion and ethnicity. Consequently, some of the characteristics and traits of an Omoluabi are considered as virtues in Islam having similar correlation, for example humility, truth, honesty and justice and peaceful cohabitation are all characters jointly accepted by both. In Yorubaland like in most Africa culture, peaceful coexistence is the hallmark of our tradition and at the same time yardstick to identify a true Muslims in the society.

Aworanti (1983) explained further by giving a list of the expected character of Omoluabi as consisting, honesty, trustworthy, integrity, confidence, courage, loyalty, unselfish, citizenship and competence. However, most of these characteristics are actually missing in the society today thereby underlining the Yoruba saying that.

“Iwa lewa Omoluabi” character is the beauty of Omoluabi

Character training is the corner stone or most paramount in the upbringing of an “Omoluabi”.

A Correlate of Islamic Principle of Peaceful Coexistence and the Yoruba tradition of Peaceful Living

From the aforementioned deductions, one sees clearly that both Islam as a religion and Yoruba's culture embrace the principle of peaceful coexistence as indispensable and also a tool to put an end to religious and civil wars that is so rampant in Nigeria especially in the Northern part of the country. Fear of Allah and that of the deity by Muslim and Yorubas respectively is a virtue extolled by both and its adoption endears the person to His creator and enable him to live as peaceful fellow men. Muslim says “*Taquu Ilaha*” meaning “fear Allah” while Yoruba says Eberu Olorun, “*B’oba Aye o ri o, T’orun n wo o*”. If the monarch did not see you, that (king) of heaven is watching you.

Muslims usually adhere to this saying of the prophet (pbuh) that:

“the best among you is who benefit others and do good to other”.

The present situation in our country is far from being what Omoluabi concept postulates in regards to our cultural values and religious moral codes of giving room to peaceful coexistence which have been abandoned and jettisoned”.

Omoluabi lies the solution to some if not all the problems confronting us as a nation, we should not only abhor all vices but try to imbibe all virtues related to Omoluabi. As mentioned earlier tolerance and peaceful living is a stepping stone to unity. On the other hand, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) serves as a role model for Muslims, he lived peacefully as head of state with the Muslims and non-Muslims in Medina. And also the companions after him equally demonstrated the principle of *“live and let others live”*. The four Khalifah (caliphs) during their regime embraced peace, and harmony, and tolerated others to practice their religion without any harassment. There is need to rebuild our society where Muslims, Christians and African Traditional religions will live together in peace and harmony irrespective of whether the practitioners are Hausas, Yorubas or Igbos.

Moreover, the Nigeria constitution is commendable for its identified feature in the provision of the freedom of the religion and it so explicit on the fundamental human right of a citizen to practice any religion of his choice and live peacefully in any part of the country as a citizen. The fact that, Nigeria is a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country ordinarily, peaceful living is a key element to put an end to all sorts of religious and ethnic imbroglios.

According to Fafunwa (1974) Islamic literacy in Yorubaland has contributed to the growth and development of Islam in Nigeria. He pointed out that Islamic education has established from roots long before the arrival of Western education. This is evident in the point that Islam as a religion has played a major role in shaping Yoruba culture which gives room to peaceful coexistence among the people.

Conclusion

It is fervent belief that our sojourn in this multi-ethnic and multi-religious setting called Nigeria is neither a mistake nor a curse, rather, it is a blessing, a right step in a right direction, and a good omen. If properly managed, Islam preaches peace, harmony and tolerance which is synonymous to the Yoruba culture of embracing the principle of Omoluabi such as integrity, harmony, truthfulness and harmony among people. In addition, the concept presupposes a vigorous respect for the sovereignty and integrity of all nations and cultural cooperation based on full equality and mutual benefit. Religious scholars and traditionists should not rest in their oars in making efforts available to promote peaceful coexistence among their followers.

Recommendations

The following steps are recommended to enhance harmony and peaceful living:

- All adherents of religious and ethnic groups should promote peace, love, harmony in the society and avoid violence, crises and war.
- Growth and development especially in a multi-ethnic and diverse nation like Nigeria can only be attained when the people live in harmony irrespective of their diverse culture and various religion beliefs.
- There is need for constant dialogue between the religious leaders and other groups in the communities on ways to curb the menace of religious intolerance and ethnic violence.
- Our communities should work together to prevent criminal activities that emanate from intolerance and allow peaceful living regardless of their faith background.

- Our contemporary leaders should try as much as possible to follow the teaching of Islam as well as to imbibe the virtues of Omoluabi to enable people cohabit together.
- Religious and cultural education should be made compulsory in all strata of our educational system.
- Everybody including religious bodies, communities, corporate bodies as well as individual should see that attainment of living together in harmony is everybody's concern.
- Government should endeavor at all levels to work with the various communities to promote harmonious relationships across the religious and ethnic affiliations. This can be achieved through the building of inter-ethnic/religious networks at the community level.

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