

Review Article

Islamic Religious Studies: An Instrument of Peace, Unity and Stability in Nigeria

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Abstract: It needs no emphasis to state that the corporate existence of Nigeria has over the years been threatened by disunity, instability and lack of peace among the diverse ethno-religious groups. The contemporary situation is even worse over than that which prevailed two decades ago. The period of the present democratic regime for example, is the period, which the generality of Nigerians have the impression that violent eruptions have been accepted as a way of life in Nigeria and could happen anytime, anywhere without anyone getting sanctioned. In the last two decades of this political era, Nigeria has witnessed various forms of organized carnage, which put the unity, stability, and peaceful co-existence of the Nigerian citizens under a serious threat. It is the researcher's belief that for the people of Nigeria to continue living as one corporate body, religious education must be enforced to all and sundry. It is in the light of this therefore, that this paper examined Islamic Religious Studies as an instrument of peace, unity and stability in Nigeria.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Studies Unity and Stability.

INTRODUCTION

It is the belief of the researcher of this study, that peaceful co-existence among the diverse ethno-religious people of Nigeria depends on certain basic principles. These principles are truth, justice, religious tolerance and unity. Without truth and justice there cannot be peace. Without religious tolerance, people cannot live in peace and harmony. And above all, without unity, there cannot be political stability. The above-mentioned basic principles can only be effectively studied and applied through religious education. To be precise, through Islamic Religious Education. This is because Islamic Religious Studies involves all round development - i.e. physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual training of man. And this training aims at producing well disciplined, highly skillful, morally conscious, peaceful and responsible citizens who value their nation, cherish their cultural values and are ready to safeguard the unity and stability of their country [1]. This clearly shows that the most effective instrument, which if adequately studied and applied will bring sustainable peace, unity and stability in Nigeria, is Islamic Religious Studies. The role that is being-played by this important discipline is therefore what this paper intends to examine.

The Role of Islamic Religious Studies in Sustaining Peace, Unity and Stability

The moral guidance (*Tahdhib*) studied under Islamic Religious Studies is aimed at molding the character of the students so as to make them responsible, reliable, reasonable and peaceful members of their societies. Through this section of *Tahdhib*, this paper shall examine the following sub-topics which if judiciously learnt and practiced, Nigerian citizens will continue to live in peace and harmony. They are:

i. TRUTHFULNESS

Truthfulness is one of the most important qualities that is studied under Islamic Moral Education at all levels. In Islam, truthfulness is the quality of being truthful to one's inner belief and outer actions. It involves giving real and correct information, fulfilling one's promises and undertakings and behaving genuinely and honestly. The Glorious Qur'an commends those who always fear Allah and speak out the truth. He orders the believers to keep their company:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ﴾ [التوبة: 119]

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O you who believe! Have fear of Allah and stand with the truthful

(Al-Tawbah, 9:119)

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا. يُضْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَالَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا﴾ [الأحزاب: 70، 71]

O you who believe! Fear Allah and Speak the truth, He will bless your works and forgive you your sins. He who obeys Allah and His Apostle shall win a great Victory. (Qur'an 33:70-71)

In the Hadith, the Prophet (S.A.W.) said:

عَلَيْكُمْ بِالصِّدْقِ فَإِنَّ الصِّدْقَ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْبِرِّ، وَإِنَّ الْبِرَّ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ، وَإِنَّ الرَّجُلَ لَيَصْدُقُ حَتَّى يُكْتَبَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ صِدْقًا (مسند أحمد (6/ 147)

Verily, truth leads to righteousness; whereas righteousness leads to paradise. When a man is always speaking the truth, Allah will order that his name be written in the file of the Truthful[3].

Truthfulness, if adequately studied therefore, highly disciplined, responsible and reliable students will be produced who will always be ready to benefit their country and protect its integrity and unity.

The corresponding opposite of Truthfulness which is also learnt under Islamic Moral Education is lying. Telling lies is considered one of the basic qualities that distinguish hypocrites from the real believers. The Prophet (SAW.) said:

آيَةُ الْمُنَافِقِ ثَلَاثٌ: إِذَا حَدَّثَ كَذَبَ، وَإِذَا وَعَدَ أَخْلَفَ، وَإِذَا أُؤْتِمِنَ خَانَ (الأذكار النووية)

Signs of a hypocrite are three: when he talks, he tells lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks; and when entrusted, he becomes dishonest.

[4].

A lie (Al-Kadhib) which is the contradiction of truthfulness (Al-Sidq) involves the following categories:

1. Lies that are said against Allah or the Prophet (S.A.W). This is the most sinful of all sins. Allah the Almighty says:

﴿فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ كَذَبَ عَلَى اللَّهِ وَكَذَّبَ بِالصِّدْقِ إِذْ جَاءَهُ أَلَيْسَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَثْوًى لِّلْكَافِرِينَ﴾ [الزمر: 32]

Who is wicked than the man who invents a falsehood against Allah and denies the truth declared to him? Is there not a home in Hell for the Unbelievers? (Al-Zumar, 39:32).

The Prophet (SAW) Said:

"مَنْ كَذَبَ عَلَيَّ مُتَعَمِّدًا، فَلْيَتَّبِعُوا مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ" (الأذكار النووية (ص: 377)

Who lies against me intentionally should prepare for his abode in the Hell fire. (Al-Adhkar al-Nawawi, p377)

2. Lies that injure others in their lives, property or their honor. This also is naturally dangerous. That is why the punishment of false accusation is heavy. Allah the Almighty says:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ يَزْمُونَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَا يَأْتُوا بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَدَاءَ فَاجْلِدُوهُمْ ثَمَانِينَ جَلْدَةً وَلَا تَقْبَلُوا لَهُمْ شَهَادَةً أَبَدًا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ. إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ﴾ [النور: 4 - 5]

Those that defile honourable women and cannot produce four witnesses be given eighty lashes. And do not accept their testimony ever after for they are great transgressors except those among them that afterwards repent and mend their ways. Allah is Forgiving, Merciful Al-Nur, 24:5-6).

3. Lies that are emphasized by swearing in Allah's Name even though it does not involve cheating others. Allah the Almighty says:

﴿وَسَيَخْلِفُونَ بِاللَّهِ لَوِ اسْتَطَعْنَا لَخَرَجْنَا مَعَكُمْ يُهْلِكُونَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ إِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ﴾ [التوبة: 42]

Yet they will swear by Allah: 'Had we been able we would have marched with you'. They bring ruin upon themselves. Allah knows that they are lying, (Al-Tawbah, 9:42).

4. Simple lies which neither involves cheating others nor emphasized by swearing. This also is very bad even though it is less than the previous ones. It is however very unfortunate that lying has become a habitual phenomenon in the political, social and economic life of many Nigerian citizens. The politicians for example, tell lies to the electorates in order to persuade them vote for them. There are constant false promises in marriage or business contract. These lies are seriously affecting our moral and cultural values which need to be addressed through Islamic Moral Education.

We learn from the above-mentioned topic (i.e. Truthfulness) that for one to be a righteous citizen, he must be truthful in his utterances. He must not only speak the truth as far as he knows it, but he must always try to hit the right point; i.e. he must not speak unseasonably, and when he does speak, he must not beat about the bush, but go straight to that which is right in deed as well as in

word, Then Allah will make his conduct right and cure any defects that there may be in his knowledge and character This will eventually make him a peaceful and responsible member of his society.

ii. JUSTICE

Justice is another important aspect of Islamic Moral Education. Any responsible Islamic Religious Teacher attaches too much attention to this topic. Justice in Islam means "putting everything in its due and right position" [5]. Justice is based not merely on some mere experience of the day to day life but based primarily on the fact that it is an eternal quality of Allah the Almighty. In the Qur'an Allah qualified Himself with the attribute of Justice. He says:

﴿شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا بِالْقِسْطِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ﴾ [آل عمران: 18]

Allah bear witness that there is no god but Him, and so do the angels and men of learning. He is the Executer of justice, the only Allah, the Mighty, the Wise. (Ali Imran, 3:18).

According to the Qur'an, Prophets and Messengers were not raised but to establish justice. Allah the Almighty says:

﴿لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ﴾ [الحديد: 25]

We have sent our Apostles with clear signs and brought down with them Scriptures and the scales of Justice so that men might deal with fairness. (Al-Hadid, 57:25)

Thus, justice in Islam is something which is essential and basic. Its concept is absolute and firm. Allah the Almighty says:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ إِنْ يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىٰ أَنْ تَعْدِلُوا وَإِنْ تَلَوُّوا أَوْ نَعَضُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا﴾ [النساء: 135]

O you who believe! Conduct yourselves with Justice and bear witness for the sake of Allah, even though it be against yourselves, your parents, or you kin folk, whether he be rich or poor, know that Allah has better right over both. So do not be led by passion, lest you should swerve from the truth. If you distort your testimony or decline to give it, know that Allah is cognizant of all that you do. (Al-Nisa', 4:135)

In another verse, He says:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا اعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾ [المائدة: 8]

O you who believe! Be dutiful to Allah and bearers of just witness. Do not allow your hatred for other men to turn you away from justice. Deal justly; justice is nearer to true piety. Have fear of Allah; he is cognizant of what you do. (Al-Ma'idah, 5:8)

Justice in Islam covers even the unbelievers. During the period of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)[7], someone among the Muslims called Tu'mah stole armor. He went and kept the armor in the house of a Jew. When the armor was discovered, the Muslim accused the Jew of stealing it. The case was brought before the Prophet (SAW) for investigation and judgment. Tu'mah's relatives persuaded the Prophet (SAW) to favour and free him from guilt since he was a Muslim. The Prophet (SAW) refused to offer him the favour [8]. For that reason, Allah the Almighty revealed the following verses:

﴿إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِمَا أَرَاكَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَكُنْ لِلْخَائِنِينَ خَصِيمًا. وَاسْتَغْفِرِ اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا﴾ [النساء: 105 - 106]

We have sent down to you the Book in truth, that you may judge between men, as guided by Allah: so be not (used) as an advocate by those who betray their trust. But seek the forgiveness of Allah; Allah is oft Forgiving, most Merciful. (Al-Nisa', 4:105-106)

Thereupon, the Prophet (SAW) cut off the hand of that Muslim.

From the above quotations, we learn that normal human nature is such that when it liked something, it will tend to defend it, and ignore its weakness. On the other side, when it hates something, it tends to deny it any right and exaggerates in describing its weaknesses. That is why Allah enjoined the believers that love, pity or hatred should not stop them from being just. Also, we observe that Allah enjoined us to be kind to our parents, relatives and the poor. This however does not mean that when they are wrong, we cover them.

In other words, the concept of justice as we study it within the context of Islamic Moral Education implies that there is no difference between the leader and the led, the rich and the poor, or the male and the female, or a Muslim and a non-Muslim, etc. All are equal before the law. Undoubtedly, if the lessons derived from the basic principles of justice are rightly studied and applied by the Nigerian citizens, there will be sustainable peace, unity and stability in this country.

iii. RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

Religious tolerance is also one of the most important topics that students of Islamic studies learn under Moral Education. From the Qur'an and Sunnah (Prophetic Traditions), Muslim students learn how the relationship between the Muslims and Non-Muslims should be. The basic foundation of this relationship is referred to in the following verses of the Qur'an:

﴿لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ﴾ [الممتحنة: 8]

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 with them. Verily, Allāh loves those who deal with equity. (Al-Mumtahinah, 60:8)

In the above-mentioned verse, Muslims are enjoined to deal with unbelievers kindly and justly unless they are rampant and out to destroy Muslims and Islam as was shown by the example of the Prophet (SAW) in treaties of Hudaibiyyah and Madinah [11, 6].

As for the people of the Book, i.e. the Jews and the Christians, they have been given a special position in the Glorious Qur'an since their religions were originally based on the Divine Books i.e. the *Tawrat* and the *Injil*. The Glorious Qur'an says:

﴿وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ﴾ [العنكبوت: 46]
And dispute you not with the people of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation). (Al-Ankabut, 29:46)

In a state where the Shari'ah is implemented, the fundamental rights of the Non-Muslims are safeguarded. These include:

- Protection from all external threats.
- Protection from all internal tyranny and persecution [2].

In addition, religious tolerance is strictly adhered to as the Glorious Qur'an prescribes in the following verse:

﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ﴾ [البقرة: 256]
Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error. (Qura'an 2:256)

There is also the question of hospitality and asylum regarding which the theoretical position is strengthened since the time of the Prophet (SAW). The Glorious Qur'an testifies:

﴿وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّى يَسْمَعَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ أَبْلِغْهُ مَأْمَنَهُ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾ [التوبة: 6]

If one amongst the pagans ask for asylum, grant it to him so that he may hear the word of Allah, Allah, and then him where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge. (Al-Tawbah, 9:6)

From the above verse, we could see how just and kind Islam is even to the enemies of Islam, who may require protection from Muslims. Allah enjoined that full asylum is to be given to them.

The Prophet (SAW) did not only treat the non-Muslims very kindly but also, he enjoined his Companions that the non-Muslims must not be oppressed by any ruler. In the following Hadith, he says:

"من ظلم معاهداً أو كلفه فوق طاقته فأنا خصمه يوم القيامة"
 (جامع الأحاديث)

Whoever oppresses a non-Muslim subject or taxes him beyond his capacity, and then I shall be the opposite part to him in the litigation. (Jami' al-Ahadith)

It is a known fact that lack of religious tolerance is one of the factors that occasionally cause ethno-religious crises in Nigeria. And that is also one of the reasons why there is no sustainable peace and unity among Nigerian citizens. However, it is certain that if the lessons derived from the topic of Religious Tolerance are critically studied and applied according to the guidelines of the Islamic Moral Education, peace, unity and stability will be maintained among the Nigerian People especially the Muslims.

iv. UNITY AND BROTHERHOOD

This is another significant topic that is studied under Islamic Moral Education. Students are taught that Islam enjoins the Muslims to unite and become brothers in faith. Their attention is drawn to the following verses of the Glorious Qur'an which stress the importance of unity and brotherhood:

﴿وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا﴾ [آل عمران: 103]

And hold fast all together by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves (Ali Imran, 3:103)

﴿إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ﴾
[الحجرات: 10]

The Believers are but a single brotherhood: so, make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear Allah, that you may receive mercy. (Al-Hujurat, 49:10)

The students are equally taught that the significance of unity and brotherhood is not only limited to the Muslims. It is extended to the non-Muslims as well. An example of this phenomenon could be seen from the Prophet (SAW) when he migrated to Madinah. He succeeded in uniting the inhabitants of the region. He constituted a City-State in which *Muhajirun* (Immigrants from Makkah), *Ansar* (Helpers of Islam from Madinah) and the people of the Book (Jews and Christians) all entered into a social contract. The Prophet (SAW) thus, protected the non-Muslims from internal high-handedness, persecution, tyranny and injustice. The Jews of Madinah had their Synagogue and educational institute which the Prophet (SAW) did not temper with. In the treaty with the Christians of Najran, the Prophet (SAW) gave a guarantee not only for the inhabitants, but had also expressly left the nomination of Bishops and Priests to the Christian community itself[9].

Abul A'la al-Maududi also explained how the relationship between the Muslims and the non-Muslims should be in the following words:

In dealing with them (Non-Muslims), the believers have been instructed not to be intolerance or narrow-minded. They have been commanded not to abuse or speak ill of their religious leaders or saints, nor to say anything insulting to their religion. They have been instructed not to seek dissensions with them unnecessarily but live in peace and unity [10]

From the above, it could rightly be said that the problems of disunity, hatred and instability that pervade the Nigerian Muslims in particular and the whole citizens in general could easily be solved if the lessons derived from the concept of Unity and Brotherhood are faithfully adhered to.

CONCLUSION

From the forgone discussion, this paper tried to explain that, for peace, unity and stability to reign between the diverse ethno-religious people of Nigeria, certain basic principles (i.e. truth, justice, religious tolerance, and unity) should be effectively studied and applied. Similarly, the paper highlighted that Islamic Religious Studies is the most effective instrument that could be used to study and apply those principles. Looking at the lessons derived from each topic discussed above, it becomes obvious that Islamic Religious studies is indeed the most effective instrument of peace, unity and stability in Nigeria.

In conclusion therefore, all those concerned with the implementation of Teacher Education Programs are advised to make Islamic Religious Studies a compulsory subject upon all Muslim students at all levels irrespective of their areas of specialization.

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