
LITERACY AS A RECIPE FOR THE SOLUTIONS OF CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM CRISES IN NIGERIA

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INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades in Nigeria, there have been series of ugly occurrences like killing of innocent children and youths, burning of human beings, houses, vehicles and precious properties, abuse of women and mismanagement of public funds for the purchase of war armaments and dangerous weapons as a result of the conflict between Muslims and Christians. The underlining factor that is responsible for this problem is the fact that the majority of the populace is grossly illiterate. Literacy has to do with the ability to be informed, read and write. Literacy has to do with the ability to digest information and be discriminative in acting upon the information received. Literacy is the ability to communicate effectively and this is what makes human beings stand out from all other God's creation. Literacy is the repository of all our knowledge and wisdom and vehicle to transmit such to others. It is through literacy that all knowledge is transformed and transferred.

In Nigeria, it is worrisome that literacy is at the lowest ebb. What we have on the average in the country is the case of illiterates and semi illiterates, with only a very few percentage of the populace that can be said to have acquired an adequate level of literacy education. In the absence of educated societies however, it has become absolutely difficult to pass across our cherished religious values, especially to the people at the gross root (Babalola, 2008, 302). From the foregoing, it has been discovered that the crises between the Christians and Muslims which have been on ground for decades is partly as a result of the fact that people are not well informed about the purpose of religion which is supposed to give comfort to the sad, peace to the displeased and love to those who have lost hope. In the course of this presentation, we shall examine the background to religious crises and also proffer solutions through literacy.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO RELIGIOUS CRISES

Three major religions are officially recognized in Nigeria, namely; the traditional religion, Islamic religion and Christianity. The two foreign religions (Islam and Christianity) however came to Nigeria and compete seriously with the traditional religion and consequently relegated the traditional religion to the background. Adelowo remarked; *Islam and Christianity competed seriously with each other to claim the souls of the Yoruba and Nigeria generally (Adelowo, 2006:2)*

Historically, the Muslim community by the second half of the nineteenth century had become a factor to be reckoned with in Nigeria. On the Other hand, Christianity gained access through Badagry in 1842 and spread through the interior parts of Yorubaland, namely:

Lagos, Abeokuta, Ogbomoso etc. However conflict ensued between the two religious groups particularly in Yorubaland as a result of a number of issues ranging from modes of evangelization and progress in the field, to beliefs, theology, doctrine and practices. (Adelowo, 2006: 3). Initially, the Christian Missionaries were minorities and they discovered that the Muslim communities grew and expanded daily. Islam spread in an inverse ratio to the Christian faith. Adelowo stated: *The Christian missionaries could not make any appreciable process among the Muslims since they were very reactionary and were rarely Christian potentials (Adelowo, 2006:4)*

By 1875, the Christians had strategically formulated new style of evangelism to challenge the Islamic expansion in Nigeria with the influence of Reverend James Johnson. This marked the beginning of full conflicts between Christians and Muslims. The Christians leaders engaged missionaries whose primary assignments were to propagate Christian faith in the remote areas where Islam had already been deeply rooted. The Christians also established Christian Mission schools and hospitals for their converts. Here, in the schools the converts were exposed to Christian life style. Indeed the Mission schools were also opened to non-Christians. In the Mission schools, church services, Sunday schools and Bible study were conducted. Thus, with the trend of this development many young Muslims were converted. This strategy, worked for a short time because Muslims leaders later came to realize the great hazard lurked in the exposure of their children to Christian teachings, doctrines and value as a result of their attending Christian schools. The end result was conflict.

Another strategy by the Christian missionaries was the use of legal protection (law). An ordinance from the government was issued to the public with the influence of the Christian missionaries that "no child in government –aided school should receive religious instructions (either from parents or guardians), that are different from the instructions in the mission school". It was this stringent rule that prompted the Muslims to react against the Christian faith and western education in the late nineteenth century. From all indications, it is very clear that by the beginning of the twentieth century that the Christians with the support of the government offered legal protection to monopolize western education and thereby possessed a strong instrument against the Muslims. On the other hand, the monopolization of the Christian missions and stringent law by the government prompted the Muslims into action. They were able to defend and propagate their faith in many areas of the interior parts of Yoruba land and Hausa land. Also, this trend of development prompted the Muslims to gain acquaintanceship with some Christian literature, particularly the Bible. This was particularly true of malams who often searched the Christian scriptures for their augmentative significance. (Adelowo 2006:7)

This group was fairly proficient in Arabic, Hausa and Yoruba; and they produced a number of works on Islam. This later culminated in the emergence of Muslim societies such as Ansar-al Din, Nuwair –al-Din and others. The societies aimed at bringing the essence of Islam into reality particularly at the age of religious plurality and modernization since the mid twentieth century until now. The religious crises between the Christians & Muslims centered on the

question of the nature of God. In Islam, it is referred to as 'Tauhid', the oneness of the Godhead. In Christianity, it is referred to as Triune, the nature of the Godhead. In Christianity, it is three in one-God the father, God the son and God the only Ghost. In Islam, God is considered one, the holy one of the whole universe (Lailaha Illallah). This is the point of controversy between the two religious groups. (Aijmer G/Abbink .J, 2000:87).

FUNDAMENTAL REASONS FOR RELIGIOUS CRISES IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa with about 140 million citizens and 250 ethnic groups brought together in the 19th century under the European colonial mapmakers. The population of the country seems to be evenly divided between the predominantly Christian South and the predominantly Muslim North. The section 10 of the Nigeria Constitution gives priority to peace, unity and stability as the motto rights of every citizen in the county; yet it has been discovered that the Nigerian polity has, in recent times experienced violent crises between Muslims and Christians, (Isiramen. C., 2010:329). It has been said earlier that literacy is the underlining factor that has greatly promoted religious crises in Nigeria. Apart from this, the following causes have been identified with literacy: The causes of Religious fracas in Nigeria could be well discussed under the following, namely; Religious reason, political reason and diversionary reason.

Religious Reason

Intolerance and fanaticism are major factors for religious conflict in Nigeria; People killed themselves on the ground of embracing religions different from their own. The fanatics ignore the provisions of the constitution and take laws into their hands. In 1984, Maitatsine led an Islamic riot against Christians in the Northern part of Nigeria. The Christians reacted negatively without patience. Consequently, about 764 people were killed and property worth millions of naira was destroyed (Isiramen, 2010:330) Michakpu gave a vivid report of the incident thus: *Soldiers were called upon to quell the skirmishesReligious conflict has already claimed hundreds of lives. Burnt down houses, churches and cars, Properties and even human beings were randomly set on fire and shops looted during the violence (2001:20)*. If the fanatics had been enlightened and literally liberated about the dictates in Nigeria constitution, then religious crisis would have been at the lowest ebb. Unfortunately, these religious fanatics are not well read not even to talk of being familiar with the sections in the constitution.

Economic Reason

The level of poverty in Nigeria, typified by deprivations by various dimensions, provides empowerment for religious violence. Poverty and unemployment have dealt with many families. Those affected are easily lured into perpetrating violence against others. Young people are known to be paid small amount of money and promised heavenly rewards if they participate in religious violence. The February and March 2000 crises in Kaduna had some economic motive. Though the crises started as a result of the Sharia laws. The unemployed youths were mobilized and heavenly paid by sponsors from international countries. Consequently, about 10,000 were killed, about 750, 000 were displaced. Emeagwali reports;

In February 28, 2000. Igbo speaking Christians in Aba (South Eastern Nigeria) launched a retaliatory attack at Muslim Minorities. The revenge attack spread to south eastern cities such, as Umuahia, Owerri, Uyo, Onitsha (Emeagwali 2002)

Political Reason

Most of the religious crises in Nigeria are locked in with politics. Those leaders who were fond of political power hid under the umbrella of religion to twist positions in their favour. Such leaders engage the youths and fanatics to achieve their desired objectives. In March 1987, there was a violence which had political background between Christians and Muslims in Kafanchan and which later spread to Kaduna, Zaria and other towns. The aftermath of the crisis, as reported in Newswatch is as follows: persons killed – 25, persons injured – 61, persons arrested – 600, number of churches destroyed – 40, number of mosques destroyed – 3, number of private houses destroyed – 46, number of vehicles destroyed – 19, number of hotels destroyed – 30, number of shop, workshops and offices destroyed – 9, number of cattle killed – 9, and number of petrol stations destroyed -1 (Babarinsa, 1987; 8-25).

Diversionsary Reason

A religious crisis is also employed as a diversionsary measure in Nigeria. The Nigerian Society insists on a probe of past leaders. In order to divert attention, Isiramen remarked: *Some of the past leaders organize religious groups or sects to foment trouble. A case in point is the way and manner the Sharia issue came up in spite of the fact that those in the forefront have been in government for years and they did not declare a theocratic state or country while serving. The intent no doubt is to destabilize the nation and divert public attention (Isiramen, 2010:337)*

To some groups of the people who were not literate, shift the blame for poverty and illiteracy on government, capitalism and immorality in the society. These sets of people believe that an option of the adoption of Sharia law as a state religion or declaring the country as Christian nation will serve as a liberating force for them. This is diversionsary.

LITERACY AS A WAY FORWARD

In the course of our investigation, it has been discovered that both revealed religious faiths in their holy books are well disposed to mutual relationship between each other. Take for example; the life of Prophet Mohammad was full of examples of this relationship. When for instance, the persecution of the Muslims by the Qurayah of makkah reached on alarming state at the early stage at the early period of the mission of Prophet Mohammad, he chose Abyssinia (Ethiopia) as an asylum for the persecuted Muslims. The choice of Abyssinia which was a Christian domain at that time must have been informed by both the affinity between Islam and Christianity and the respect which Prophet Mohammad had for Jesus Christ (Bidmos M.A. 1993:45). In spite of the disposition of the prophets and holy books of the revealed faiths to accommodation, love and mutual respect, crises still exist among the adherents of both faiths. By implication, it is obvious that the underlining factor is lack of sufficient literacy education among the populace of the country. The religious leaders and

the body of followership are not well informed about the interactions which existed between Muslims and Christians in the early days. Quran is absolutely in support of unity, love and mutual understanding between religious people. A striking example is Quran 2:190 that states: *And fight in Allah's cause, against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression. For verily, Allah does not love aggressors.*

Quran 16:125 says: Call thou (all mankind) unto thy sustainers path with wisdom and goodly exhortation and argue with them in the most kindly manner. (Bidmos M.A. 1993:18 – 19)

It is amazing that despite such statements as this in the Quran which support peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christians, the adherents are usually in constant battle against each other. Undoubtedly, the problem is lack of literacy through media and other public awareness measures. The intriguing question applicable to both Muslims and Christians is to what extent have the faithful in Nigeria complied with these golden and divine injunctions of love in the Quran and the Bible. The situation so far is that of awful disgust as some of those who claim to be calling people to the way of God have often conducted themselves in a manner considered unconventional as far as the tenets of their religions are concerned. Since literacy is all about awareness, learning and discriminatory reasoning, the entire public should be indoctrinated through constant publicity and media education via Television, Radio, newspapers and others into a life of peaceful coexistence. The various injunctions in the Quran and the Bible must be made accessible to the public, particularly, the adherents of the two religious faiths. This in a way will promote peace and mutual understanding between them.

Also, according to section 10 of the 1979 constitution; "Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief in worship, practice and observance" (Nigerian constitution 1979:1) Thus, religion is supposed to be a vital tool for the promotion of love, unity peace and stability in the communities. Islam stand for peace and Christianity represents love. The two keywords must work hand in hand. The patriarchs in the Bible ensured that love existed among the people within their communities. Apostle Paul in his address to the Colossians in chapter 2:1-2 stated; *I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all those who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in Love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding in order that they may know the mystery of God ... (N&V. Bible; 2004:1)*

Mohammed and other great Prophets also emphasized in the Koran that love and peace must be preached within their immediate environment. The questions of how these teachings and doctrines changed of sudden have become a matter of concern. On this basis it is recommended that the Nigerian Government must create the awareness among both religious faiths, the relevance of religions as stipulated in the constitution of Nigeria. In the first place, the constitution that deals with human freedom must be emphasize. The right of religious freedom applies to individuals and also to religious communities. It includes both

the right to practice a religion and the right to share that religion with others. The exercise of this right should have no territorial limit (Nwanaju 2005:365). The leaders should not impose a particular religion on their citizens.

Also, the Federal Government should contribute a regulatory body, which would be saddled with the responsibility to monitor and maintain peace at all times. The leaders should establish a massive employment opportunities for youths so as to alleviate the pains of poverty in the nation. By so doing, the leaders (Federal Government) will openly condemn religious intolerance and discrimination. They will also disband all private groups whose intentions are for political and economic reasons.

Lastly, Christians and Muslims should pre-occupy their minds with means of eliminating every unethical act that has engulfed the Nigerian society. The Christians and Muslim must see themselves as brothers and sisters to fight against leaders who are corrupt and those who have wrong motives in using religion as tool for violence for their selfish interest. According to Jega: *Right now Nigerians do not need citizens but law abiding citizens, that is, people who neither steal nor kill... Not soldiers but soldiers who are willing to lay (down) their lives for the defense of their country (2008:6)*

Religion therefore is meant to correct ills of the society and enthrone peace and not to destroy it. The church/mosque must be a dynamic symbol of no violence and a symbol of communion. As members of the church, we have to understand our neighbour even if they don't understand us. Tschuy remarked; *The church must equip itself to face the questions of violence by being politically and economically informed, very well in the way to be Peacemaker and mediator in conflict or violence situations and to renounce all forms of power as denomination (1997:154-155)*

From the Islamic perspective, the Muslims have to defend justice. When the right and the justice go ahead, violence decreases. Facing the reality of violence, which in particular violated the dignity and value of human life, Muslims are required to witness opposition to it (Manchala D, 2005:28). The Muslims should be called to generate a movement from hostility to hospitality in the whole of society. The way to that goal is long and winding, full of ambiguities and dangers. The Muslims and Christians must respect themselves. All people who have Christian/Muslim identity have to protest and to resist against violence. Again, the issue of literacy has to be re-emphasized here. This is because every effort made by the government and other stake holder to ensure peaceful co existence would be meaningless without literacy as a vehicle of transmission to the people. The government should therefore do every thing possible at her disposal to ensure adequate literacy education among the populace. If this is done, the people will be able to reason discriminatorily and dies their independent minds when it comes to taking decisions that could be detrimental to their peaceful co-existence.

CONCLUSION

The ecumenical debate has shown that the understanding of violence and peace is intimately linked with the ethical question: what shall be done and what should be avoided to build peace? All Christians would agree that salvation and reconciliation with God is intrinsically tied to the event of Christ's death, "died for us" for the whole of humanity. But in which way do we have to understand this sacrifice? This knowledge should be effectively passed across to the people through the proper channel.

The biblical tradition tells us stories of violence, murder, persecution, exile, occupation, destruction, and also of sacrifice. But in contrast to other religious traditions and cultures where blood –shedding is meant to bridge the gap between humans and God(s), (Gill, 2000: 1189-1192). Bible develops a strong tendency to insist on the innocent of the victim. The Gospel is unbiased about a God who justifies the innocent victim in its mission of non-violence. This is so because the death of Jesus Christ should not be understood in the classical sense of a sacrifice, a human action that restores divine relationship, but rather metaphorically. Jesus offered his life in opting exclusively for God, who tied his own prospective role as reconciler of the creation to the acceptance of faith on the power of love. In the same manner, one of the pillars of strength and faith in Islam is love. For love to continue among brethren there must be peace. Islam preaches that God sets his forgiveness out of love. If there was not assurance of forgiveness out of love, human beings would have remained helpless in the face of conflict and violence. The challenge Muslims and Christians has to take is on the freedom to believe in the power of the seemingly weak love, set against the destructive force of violence.

Peace can be restored between the Christians and Muslims through inter-religious dialogue and respect for one another. The two religions need time and again a radical interruption; and also they need the revelation of another reality of a non-violent God who needs no sacrifice. On the background of this view, violence can be perceived as a human reality that needs to be addressed both from within the religious worldview as well as on the practical level. Literacy has an important role to play here. As a result, literacy must be made to function effectively and dynamically. Its programmes must be made to sustain the drive for language and communicative proficiency (Otagburugu; 2006:9).

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