

## Review Article

## The Role of Islamic Studies in Combating Political Violence among the Diverse Muslim Groups in Nigeria

Dr. Lawal Abdulkareem

Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria

\*Corresponding Author  
Dr. Lawal Abdulkareem

**Abstract:** It is a basic fact that the corporate existence of Nigeria has over the years been threatened by disunity, instability, lack of peace and political violence among the diverse ethno-religious groups. The contemporary situation is even worse over that which prevailed two decades ago. The period of the present democratic regime for example, is the period which the generality of Nigerians has the impression that political violence has been accepted as a way of life in Nigeria and could happen anytime and anywhere without anyone getting sanctioned. In the last nineteen years of this political era, Nigeria has witnessed various forms of organized carnage in almost all parts of the country. The most serious effect of this phenomenon which shall be the focus of this paper is that this political violence has put the unity, stability, and peaceful co-existence of the diverse Muslim groups under a serious threat. This is because the politicians use the differences of the Muslim groups to instigate conflicts among them for their political gains. The paper makes a finding that for Nigerian Muslim Community to become united and live peacefully under this political dispensation, moral guidance should be adequately taught to all Muslims especially the youths who are mostly used as political thugs. It is in the light of this that this study examined the role of Islamic Studies in combating political violence among the diverse Muslim groups in Nigeria. In this regard, the paper conclusively recommends the enforcement of Islamic Moral Education at all levels.

**Keywords:** Islamic Studies, Political Violence, Muslim Groups, Moral Education.

### INTRODUCTION

It needs no emphasis to state that political violence is one of the effects that causes disunity, enmity hatred and lack of peaceful co-existence among the diverse Muslim groups in Nigeria. For this problem to be solved effectively, Islamic Religious Education is necessary. 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. Thus, the most effective instrument, which if adequately studied and applied will bring sustainable peace, unity and

political stability among the Nigerian Muslims in spite of their ideological differences is Islamic Religious Studies. The role that is being-played by this important discipline is therefore what this paper intends to study. However, a brief explanation of the effects of political violence involving Muslims shall first be highlighted below:

Political violence has indeed destabilized the unity and harmony of the Nigerian Muslim community. The effect of this phenomenon cannot be overemphasized. This is because political differences have turned friends, neighbors, close relatives and above all, Muslim groups into rivals and enemies. Tribal, sectional, political and sectarian prejudices are normally

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stirred up by politicians and their supporters during political campaigns. To the extent that Muslims can support and vote for Christian candidates at the detriment of their Muslim counterparts because of ethnic, sectarian or political differences. The cases of 2003, 2011 and 2015 presidential elections respectively are clear examples in this regard. Many Muslims supported and voted for non-Muslim candidates because of tribal, sectarian or political partisanship.<sup>i</sup>

Another problem causing political violence that mostly involve destruction of lives and properties is political power struggle not only between different political parties but also within the same party. The clashes use to occur between the campaigners of different candidates. Commenting on the effect of this political violence between Muslims, a renowned religious scholar in Koko, Kebbi State said:

The effect of this phenomenon is so serious and so surprising. Muslims, within same political party chasing and injuring one another with dangerous weapons. What will it be the situations between supporters of different political parties during elections come 2019? (The religious scholar asked.)<sup>ii</sup>

This is the situation in almost all parts of the country as further explained by Dr Sani Saghir:

Many Muslims have now turned enemies to one another including intimate friends, neighbours and close relations. Muslims killing Muslims just because of internal political differences within the same political party or otherwise.<sup>iii</sup>

This is a kind of *Jahiliyyah* practice which the Prophet (SAW) warned Muslims against. One of such warnings was his statement against the quarrel that took place between one of the Khazraj tribe of Madinah and a *Muhajir* from Makkah during the battle of *Bani Mustaliq*. Jabir Bin Abdullah narrated what happened thus:

We were on a raid when one of the *Muhajirun* kicked one of the *Ansar* (on the buttocks with his foot). The *Ansari* said, (calling his tribe) 'O *Ansar*! Help me! And the *Muhajiri* said, (calling his tribe also) 'O *Muhajirun*, help me! The Messenger of Allah (SAW) heard them and said, 'what is that?' They said, 'a man from the Emigrants kicked a man from the *Ansar* (on the buttocks with his foot). On that the *Ansar* said, 'O the *Ansar*!' and the Emigrant said, 'O the Emigrants!' The Prophet said, 'Leave it (that call) for it is detestable thing'.<sup>iv</sup>

As seen above, if not for the intervention of the Prophet (SAW), the quarrel could have turned to a tribal dispute between the *Muhajirun* and the *Ansar* since each one of them called for the assistance of his group just as they used to do before the coming of Islam. Through his noble teachings therefore, the Prophet (SAW) was able to overcome all the forms of prejudices during his period.

### **The Role of Islamic Studies in Sustaining Peace, Unity and Stability among Muslims**

The moral guidance (*Tahdhib*) studied under Islamic 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*, we shall examine the following sub-topics which if judiciously learnt and practiced, political violence prevalent among the Nigerian Muslim community will be overcome. They are:

#### **1) TRUTHFULNESS**

Truthfulness is one of the most important qualities that is studied under Islamic Studies. 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:

O you who believe! Be afraid of Allāh, and be with those who are true (in words and deeds). (Qur'an 9:119)

#### **In another verse**

**He says:**

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.) says:**

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.<sup>v</sup>

Truthfulness, if adequately studied therefore, highly disciplined, responsible and reliable students will be produced who will always be ready to benefit, help and become united with their fellow Muslim brothers and sisters. They will also strive to safeguard their country and protect its integrity and unity. The corresponding opposite of Truthfulness which is also learnt under Islamic Studies is lying. Telling lies is considered one of the basic qualities that distinguishes hypocrites from the real believers. The Prophet (SAW.) said:

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.<sup>vi</sup>

Lies (*Al-Kazib*) which is the contradiction of truthfulness (*Al-Sidq*) involves:

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

Who is more 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? (Qur'an 39:32).

#### **The Prophet (S.A.W) Said:**

Who lies against me intentionally should prepare for his abode in the Hell fire.<sup>vii</sup>

- ii. Lies that injure others in their lives, property or their honor. This also is naturally dangerous. Most of the political violence prevalent in Nigeria today emanate from false hate speeches by politicians. They deliberately tell these lies against their political opponents in order to persuade the electorates vote for them. That is why the punishment of false accusation is heavy. Allah the Almighty says:

Those that defile honorable 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 (Qur'an 24:5-6)

These lies especially those that are broadcast or sent through both conventional and social media are seriously affecting our moral and cultural values which need to be addressed through Islamic moral education.

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

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, (Qur'an 9:42).

- iv. 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 Muslims inclusive.

We learn from the above-mentioned topic that Truthfulness is taught under Islamic Studies in order to produce righteous citizens who are always truthful in their utterances. Citizens who not only shun away from telling lies but also restrain themselves from hate speeches that are likely to cause violence and disunity among the citizenry. By adhering to this topic of truthfulness, Allah will make the Muslims who are trained to have righteous character and that will eventually make them shun all political partisanship and violence. They will in turn become peaceful and responsible members of their society.

## **2) JUSTICE**

Justice is another important subject taught under Islamic Religious Studies. Teachers of Islamic Studies attach too much attention to this topic. Justice in Islam means putting everything in its due and right position. Justice is based not just on some mere experience of the day to day life, but also 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:

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. (Qur'an 3:18).

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

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. (Qur'an, 57:25)

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

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 (Qur'an, 4:135)

**In another verse He says:**

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. (Qur'an, 5:8)

The principle of justice learnt in this moral education is a very good solution to the menace of partisan politicians and their supporters. No amount of differences will lead them to fight or kill one another just because of their political affiliations.

Similarly, Justice in Islam covers even the unbelievers. During the period of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), someone among the Muslims called Tu'mah stole an 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.<sup>viii</sup>

**For that reason, Allah the Almighty revealed the following verses:**

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. (Qur'an4:105-106)

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 exaggerate in describing its weaknesses. This is exactly the attitude of our politicians today. That is why Allah the Almighty 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 wrong, we cover them. In other words, the concept of justice as we study it within the context of Islamic Studies 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. In addition, there is no difference between one political party and the other. All are equal before the law. It is therefore obvious that if the lessons derived from the basic principles of justice are rightly studied and applied by the Muslims, there will be sustainable peace, unity and stability among the Muslim community in particular and the country in general.

**3) TOLERANCE**

Tolerance is also one of the most important topics that students of Islamic studies learn under Moral Education. From the Qur'an and Sunnah, the students learn how their relationship should be. Example of how the Prophet (SAW) related with his companions has been given in the following verse:

And by the Mercy of Allâh, you (Muhammad [sal-Allâhu 'alayhi wa sallam]) dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about you; so pass over (their faults), and ask (Allâh's) forgiveness for them; and consult them in the affairs. Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allâh, certainly, Allâh loves those who put their trust (in Him). (Qur'an, 3:159)

Therefore, the Muslims should be kind and gentle in dealing with one another. They should be tolerant and soft-hearted. Their jurisprudential differences should not lead them to be severe and harsh against one another. The students also learn how the relationship between Muslims and Non-Muslims should be. The basic foundation of this relationship which the teachers of Islamic Studies draw the attention of their students to, lies in the following verses of the Qur'an:

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 (Qur'an 60:8)

In the above-mentioned verse, Muslims are enjoined to deal with non-Muslims 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 the treaty of Hudaibiyyah with the unbelievers of Makkah.<sup>ix</sup> As for the people of the Book, i.e. the Jews and the Christians, the students' attention is focused on the special position given to them 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:

And dispute you not with the people of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation). (Qur'an, 29:46)

In addition, the students learn how religious tolerance should strictly be adhered to, as the Glorious Qur'an prescribes in the following verse.

Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error. (Qur'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:

If one amongst the pagans ask for asylum, grant it to him so that he may hear the word of Allah, and then escort him where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge. (Qur'an, 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. In other words, the non-Muslims living within the Muslim Community should be safeguarded from all threats, tyranny and persecution. Similarly, the Prophet (S.A.W) did not only treat the non-Muslims very kindly but also, he enjoined his Companions that they must not be oppressed by any ruler. In the following Hadith, he says:

Whoever oppresses a non-Muslim subject or taxes him beyond his capacity, then I shall be the opposite part to him in the litigation.<sup>x</sup>

It is a known fact that lack of tolerance is one of the factors that occasionally cause ethno-religious crises and political violence in Nigeria. And that is also one of the reasons why there is no sustainable peace and unity among Nigerian citizens. However, it is the belief of this paper 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 not only among the Muslims but also the Nigerian people as a whole.

#### 4) UNITY AND BROTHERHOOD

This is another significant topic that is studied under Islamic Studies. Students are taught that Islam enjoins 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:

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

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. (Quran, 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.<sup>xi</sup>

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 intolerant 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.<sup>xii</sup>

From the above, it could rightly be said that the problems of disunity, hatred and above all, political instability that pervade the Nigerian Muslim community could easily be combated if the lessons derived from the concept of Unity and Brotherhood under Islamic Studies are faithfully adhered to.

#### CONCLUSION

From the forgone discussion, this paper tried to explain that, for peace, unity and political stability to reign among the diverse Muslim groups in Nigeria, certain basic principles (i.e. Truth, Justice, religious tolerance, 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 apply those principles. Looking at the lessons derived from each topic discussed within the context of Islamic Moral Education therefore, the paper concludes that Islamic Religious studies should be used to combat political violence among the diverse Muslim groups in Nigeria. Thus, the paper recommends that both Federal and State Governments should make Islamic Moral Education a compulsory subject at all levels.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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