

Religious tolerance: Nigeria as a case study

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Religion is described as belief in a god or gods and the activities that are connected with this belief, such as praying and worshipping. If this definition is adopted then, it means majority of mankind would be said to be religious because it is common in most sociological setting to see man looking up to an entity that is superior which he could seek help from or worship in a particular way.

I will beam my flashlight on ISLAM and CHRISTIANITY because they are the religions that are recognized by Nigeria's constitution. Before delving into the topic proper, there is need for us to know the definition of the mentioned religions.

Islam is described as a religion of peace with the notion that God is one and it was spread prophets sent by Allah and Prophet Muhammad perfected the jobs of the previous prophets. Christianity is described as a religion that is based on teachings of Jesus Christ and the belief that he was the son of God.

If these definitions are anything to go by, then it means the foundation for the topic of discuss has been well laid but it is imperative at this juncture to analyze the major message(s) brought by the two personalities mentioned above.

Jesus taught that there is only one God that should be worshipped according to Mark12:29, Muslims also believe this as

taught in Quran 6:171. Jesus greeted with 'Salam aleykm' (Peace be unto you) in John 20:21 just like the way Muslims greet generally. Jesus and other prophets prayed with their heads on the ground, according to Mathew 26:39. Muslims too do pray like this according to Quran 3:43. More importantly, virtually all the prophets mentioned in the Holy Bible are mentioned in the Holy Quran. For example Abraham is Ibrahim, John is Yahaya, David is Daud, Solomon is Sulaimon, Nuha is Nuhu, Jesus is Isa to mention a few.

To my Christian brethren, I want you to reflect on the under mentioned quoted chapters and verses of the Holy Bible and Quran i.e. Genesis 22:1-8 and Quran 37:100-107

"...Abraham reached out and took the slaughter knife to slit his son's throat. God's angel called to him from heaven and said 'Abraham! Abraham! Do not harm the boy for I know that you fear God'...Abraham looked up and saw a ram. He went and got the ram and sacrificed it in his son's place"

Quran 37:100-107 says:

"--- o my son, I have seen in a dream that I sacrifice you so what do you think? He said oh my father, do as you are commanded. And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead we called him 'Oh Ibrahim, you have fulfilled the vision, indeed

we thus reward the doers of good...and we ransom him with a great sacrifice”.

The quoted chapters and verses from the two holy books undoubtedly related the story of Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) when he was about to sacrifice his son but at the end of the day God gave him a ram to replace his son and ever since God commanded the believers to be commemorating the incident once in a year hence, the Muslim festival (Eid-el-kabir) which is characterized by slaughtering of ram was institutionalized.

To my Muslims brethren, I want us to reflect on the following chapters and verses of the holy Quran:

“And had your lord willed, those on earth would have believed-all of them entirely...”Quran 10:99

“Let there be no compulsion in religion, the right path has surely being made distinct from the wrong...”Q2:256

Going by the aforementioned chapters and verses, it is easily discernable that Allah do not want us to fight for Him. The import of this is that Islam recognizes freedom of religion and it is in the light I will like to ask a pertinent question, can we fight for God?

In a clearer term, the message in this article is that despite our differences we still owe ourselves a unique responsibility which is promotion of peace. Without peace no Christian can go to church, without peace no Muslim can go to Mosque, without peace we cannot achieve anything. Therefore if we all believe that this world belongs to all of us, it means we must all ensure that we co-exist peacefully. This could be achieved if we

exhibit mutual respect for one another and respect people for what and whom they are.

When the holy Prophet Mohammed admonished his disciples on the meaning of family, he explained that it is divided into these three categories:

- i. Your brother or sister from the same parent who is a Muslim and you both reside in the same place of abode.
- ii. Your fellow Muslim brother or sister that is staying with you in the same vicinity but not from the same parent.
- iii. Your neighbour who is neither a Muslim nor from the same parent with you.

The implication of the above quoted saying by Prophet Muhammad is that irrespective of other people’s affiliations, you should still accord them their due respect in the name of HUMANITY.

CONCLUSION:

Many a time when a man dies, people often say ‘may his soul rest in peace’ but what about those that are still living? Are they not suppose to live in peace too? If the desired peace is to be achieved, then our preachers should CENSOR their utterances while preaching because ‘there is power in their tongues’.

“And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge...”Q6:108

My esteemed readers, don’t you think there is need for us to be large hearted and be receptive if we desire to co-exist meaningfully? This is my humble submission!