

In Search of a PEACEFUL SOCIETY

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BEING A SPEECH

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AT

EKO HOTELS, LAGOS

INTRODUCTION

Protocols

It may be inferred from the title of this address that Nigerians are in search of a peaceful society. It is also not unreasonable to conclude that one searches for only what one lacks. On the other hand, even if Nigeria enjoys peace, it cannot be said that our society, is just Nigeria, particularly in age in which the whole globe is already technologically reduced to a village in terms of accessibility and interdependence.

There are numerous societies within the area known as Nigeria, just as the Nigerian Society is only a part of the global society. From village to city, town, state, zone, country, nation, region, continent and the whole world, there are different systems, ideologies and cultures regulating the affairs of different societies of the various layers.

Experience has shown that different governments and powers control different segments of the world. Each of the components has its own territory over which it legislates. The jurisdiction of each government is limited and, in many cases, defined. International bodies, such as the United Nations Organisation, are bodies whose influence and control are normally subject to the concurrence of the sovereignty of the different National Governments. In addition, the structure and

operation of the United Nations Organisation and similar world bodies indicate that just as Nations are not equal in might so also is the degree of justice and fairness that could be enjoyed by the member Nations. As an illustration, few Nations who are permanent members of the Security Council of the organisation have veto power, which more or less places them above law and order of the organisation. If the organisation is not just and equitable, it will be too ambitious for one to expect it to enforce justice.

The ownership, creation and control of the world are Allah's. He provides the universal rules and regulations for the management of the globe and its different components.

Allah declares in the Glorious Qur'an:

Allah: There is none worthy of worship beside Him. The living, the self-sustaining, Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep can seize Him. His are all things in the heavens and on earth that can intercede in His presence except as He permits? He knows what is apparent and what is hidden to them (His creatures). They compass nothing of His knowledge except as He wishes. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving both, for He is the Most High, The Supreme (Q:2:256).

THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL NATURE OF PEACE IN ISLAM

It has been repeatedly observed that war-free situation is not synonymous with peaceful situation. Peace requires more than mere lack of war, physical violence or conflict.

Peace has been defined as "freedom from civil disorder¹, obeying the laws and refraining from disorder and strife"². It is often synonym of concord, tranquillity, friendliness or satisfaction. It is perceived by some other as "freedom from war"³.

"Peace" is related to Islam in many respects. The word "Islam" is derived from a root that primarily has dual meanings — "unqualified submission to the will of Allah" and "peace". It has been argued⁴ that the two are interconnected in the light of a verse of the Glorious Qur'an which states:

Nay-whoever submits His whole-self to God and is a doer of good - He will get his reward with his Lord, on such shall be no fear nor shall they grieve⁵. (Q2:112)

Submission to the will of God is not only just but also the only route to making peace with God, while doing good to others is a way of being at peace with man.

Consequently, one would also be filled with internal self-satisfaction or peace, which is depicted in the verse quoted above as freedom from fear or grief.

Furthermore, Islam teaches man that God, being the absolute source of peace, is Himself peace-personified, hence His name is peace⁶. A Muslim is taught by Islam to greet others with an expression of peace — **As-Salam Alaykum** (Peace be unto you) and the response is (And unto you be peace also). This expression is to strive to be at peace. The Glorious Qur'an emphasizes that one of the beautiful features of paradise is the expression of peace:

No frivolity will they (inhabitants of paradise) hear... only the saying of "Peace! Peace"⁷ (Q56:25-26). Similarly, the Glorious Qur'an also describes the atmosphere of paradise thus:

Their statement therein is "Glory to You Oh God", While "peace" shall be their greetings therein⁸. (Q10:10)

When a Muslim observes his ritual prayer, he ends it with the expression of "**As-Salam alaykun**" which is repeated twice or thrice. This again signifies the importance which Islam attaches to peace.

JUSTICE AS A PRE-REQUISITE FOR PEACE IN ISLAM

In Islam, peace is not an abstract or artificial phenomenon. It is a real and actual substance. It is related "law and order". The only peace to which Islam mobilises man is genuine peace, which is based on justice. Justice itself presupposes the existence of law, whether divine or human.

God, in various verses of the Glorious Qur'an, emphasizes that He is a just God who will neither do injustice nor condone it. He provides for man the **Sharia** — Islamic Law, to regulate the relationship between man and God; among men; and between men and other creatures of God. The observance of such rules are **Sine-quantum** for absolute peace. He has also delegated to man the right to make just regulations among themselves for the prevalence of peace on earth. The Qur'an states:

To each among you (Jews, Christians and Muslims) Have we prescribed a law and open ways⁹. (Q5:51)

The "open way" is a leeway to make what could be termed as bylaws, which are valid in, as much as they are consistent with Divine Law. The violation of inalienable rights of others is a violation of peace. This explains why God states that:

We sent our apostles with clear signs and sent down With them, the book and the balance (law), that men may stand forth in justice¹⁰ (Q57:25)

Man is God's vicegerent on earth¹¹. The vicegerency carries a basic responsibility of maintenance of peace through the upholding of justice. God told Prophet Daud (David):

Oh Daud! We indeed make you a vicegerent on Earth, so judge between men in truth (and justice)¹². (Q38:26).

Truth and justice are so important that God makes them a basis for His legitimacy.

God instructs Prophet Muhammad thus:

Ask: Is there any one of those you take as partners (to God) who can guide to the truth? Say, only God guides to the truth. Then does He who guides to the truth worthier to be followed or he who cannot guide? ...¹³ (Q:10:35)

The Glorious Qur'an further implies that justice is the precursor of peace and tranquillity when it commands justice before warning against disruption of peace. The Qur'an states:

God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin and He instructs you that you may take heed¹⁴. (Q16:90)

The verse, which is repeated in the Friday sermon every week, is very instructive. If goodness, fairness and justice are maintained by the affluent ones, there would be no justification for rebellion, any unbecoming behaviour or injustice from the less fortunate members of the society.

Islam takes cognisance of the fact that the weak might be an oppressor to the strong; the white might attempt oppressing the black; the poor might oppress the rich and vice versa hence Allah makes it clear that justice should be the watchword and not the position of any party. The Qur'an directs:

O ye who believe! Stand out for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your Kin, and whether rich or poor: For God can best protect both¹⁵ (Q4:135).

Thus, tyranny is detestable even if it is from the helpless or the governed against the powerful or the governor respectively. In order to have genuine peace, there must be obedience to law provided the law is just. Undue violation of fundamental or non-fundamental rights of others is a threat to, or a violation of peace.

THREAT TO PEACE IS CALAMITY

The attachment of Islam to peace underlines its opposition to any threat to peace. Islam considers an act of injustice as a threat to peace. It gives man a collective duty of ensuring justice and absence of threat to peace. The Qur'an warns man not to do injustice nor to allow others to perpetrate injustice. It states:

And fear tumult or oppression which affects not only those of you who do wrong. And realize that God is strict in punishment¹⁶ (Q8:25).

Furthermore, the Qur'an persistently calls man's attention to the fact that oppression, injustice, tumult or absence of peace is worse than death. It emphasizes thus: "Tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter"¹⁷ (Q:2:217).

The conception that the death of a person is better than his being under tumult and oppression, and the fact that a Muslim who is forced to make a choice of two evils is expected to choose the less of the two are indicators that a Muslim should prefer death to subjugation and oppression. He is not expected to commit suicide but to strive toward freedom and justice and if in the process, he is killed, he has earned two credits. The first, for not being complacent in the face of oppression and the second for making an attempt to discharge his responsibility of maintaining justice on earth as a vicegerent of God on earth.

REDRESS OF INJUSTICE IS A PATH TO PEACE

An armed robber who subdues a property owner to silence should not be deceived to take absence of resistance for prevalence of peace. Similarly, the resistance of the owner to the robbery is not a threat to peace but a genuine course to peace. War might be necessary to ensure peace. The existence of "peace-keeping forces" indicates that force, war or violence might be a means towards peace. Thus, fighting for justice is a just process of creating genuine peace. The Qur'an is replete with verses indicating that war should not be avoided if it is necessitated by assurance of peace.

Jihad, in Islam, implies striving against injustice or in the cause of God. It does not preclude armed-struggle, though it does not necessarily mean war or violence. A sincere appraisal of the Qur'an would reveal that Islam does not shy away from war in the face of aggression or oppression because it frowns at oppression, be it from a Muslim or against a Muslim. Prophet Muhammad said "No acceptance of harm and no harming (of others)"¹⁸.

In order to ensure justice on earth, God had equipped men with a means of checking injustice so that peace could prevail. When God was recounting the killing of Jalut (Goliath) by Daud

(David), He presents the killing as a means to justice and peace and that were it not for war, mischief, injustice and tyranny could have reigned:

Did not God check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief. But God is full of bounty to all the worlds¹⁹ (Q2:215).

It is of the bounties of God that He created resistance to oppression and injustice as a way of attaining genuine peace.

The Qur'an instructs Muslims to resist injustice, for injustice is a violence to peace. All the verses that touch on war emphasize that it should be our ensuring justice and peace. For instance, the Qur'an states as follows:

Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for God does not love transgressors. And slay them wherever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression (against you are worse than slaughtering (of them)... And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God. But if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practise oppression²⁰ (Q2:190-193).

In similar vein, the Qur'an shows that unbelievers, during the time of Prophet Muhammad were not fought by Muslims for being unbelievers but for their attempt to oppress Muslims and create tumult rather than peace on earth. This position, unfortunately, is yet to be grasped by many that condemns Islam for religious wars:

The Qur'an states:

*Let not the unbelievers think that they will have their way and they will not be hindered. Against them, make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into the enemies of God and your enemies and others ... and you shall not be treated unjustly. But if the enemy incline towards peace, you also incline towards peace and trust in God...*²¹ (Q8:59-61).

The Qur'an also prohibits waging war against those who neither oppress nor commit injustice:

*God does not prevent you from dealing kindly and justly with those who do not fight you and who do not drive you out of your homes. For God loves those who are just. God only forbids you from turning to them (in friendship i.e. not fighting) those who fight you on account of your faith, and drive you out of your homes and support driving you out.*²² (Q60:8-9)

God rhetorically asks for the justification of keeping artificial peace in the face of aggression.

Will you not fight people who violated their oaths; plotted to expel the Apostle, and became aggressive by being the first to assault you? Do you fear them?) Nay it is God, whom you should more justly fear. If you believe, fight them²³ (Q9:13-14).

The Prophet teaches that to prevent oppressor is assistance to the oppressor for resistance will curb him and reduce the weight of his due punishment²⁴

It is however disheartening that those who are unjust are also quick at shouting injustice or condemning as injustice or violence any violent reaction to their equally violent but silent act. For instance, the Western World considers as freedom of speech, the publication of '**Satanic Verses**' by Salman Rushdie, and at the same time, condemns Late Ayatollah Khomeini for exercising his own freedom of speech by also **verbally** sentencing Rushdie to death!. If, for argument's sake, Ayatollah's pronouncement infringes on, or threatens Rushdie's right to life, Rushdie's work must have also threatened Ayatollah's freedom of belief without any molestation. More importantly when Ayatollah's belief incorporates the following injunction:

You will not find any people who believe in God and the last day loving those who exhibit disregard for God and His Apostle²⁵ (Q58:22).

The lesson of the illustration is that undue assault on the sensibility of other creatures is a threat to peace and it ought to be deservedly repelled. This is because if a bad cause is removed, no unsalutary effect would be expected.

THE DIFFERENT FACETS OF JUSTICE IN ISLAM

It is often assumed that the society is made up of only human beings hence efforts for a stable, peaceful society are unduly restricted to inter-personal relationship among human beings. In reality, genuine peace can only be attained if human beings as custodians of the earth recognise and protect the rights of other stakeholders in the world. Just as we talk of human rights, so must we be conscious of Allah's rights, the rights of the environment and the other creatures. Allah, the Creator of all, who is best positioned to allocate rights and privileges of the different classes, stipulates the rights and duties of each class. A violation of any of these amounts to injustice, which breeds lack of peace in either the short or the long run.

A path to genuine peaceful society requires justice to Allah as the Creator, controller and source of regulation for the whole world. The Qur'an states:

... Who could be more unjust than one who rejects God's signs and turns away from them? In good time, shall we punish those who turn away from our signs with a dreadful penalty, for their turning away. Are they waiting to see the Angels come down to them or their Lord (Himself) or some specific signs of your Lord. The day that certain signs of your Lord shall come, no good will it do to a soul to believe in them then, if it believed not before, nor earned righteousness through its faith. Say: Wait we too are waiting". (Qur'an 6:57-58).

It is thus obvious that it is unjust for a creature to contest the dominion of Allah over His Creature. In fact, it is the foundation of all injustice.

Furthermore, man does not create himself and thus cannot claim to have absolute right over his own persons or others. The rights of human beings have been defined by Allah. The rights should not be violated unless through legal forfeiture of the rights. The inalienable rights include rights to:

- (a) life
- (b) property
- (c) integrity and honour

- (d) intellect
- (e) physical well being
- (f) discretion
- (g) progeny and family ties
- (h) spiritual well-being

Islam provides for the protection of these rights in the **Shariah**. As an example, Allah prohibits consumption of intoxicants as a means of protecting the intellect and the body of man from damage. It is one of the major duties of the society to prevent any undue assault on these human rights. Any government which does not enforce the prohibition of intoxicants, is shirking its responsibility to protect the mental-well-being of its citizens and should face the consequences of drug abuse, which include disruption of peace.

Similarly, man is charged with the responsibility of judicious use of the environment and natural resources including the animals. Desecration of the environment or waste of natural resources is a potential threat to peace now or in the future. As an example, the **Shariah** prohibits waste of water for it is a commonwealth of humanity, which must be properly managed, in the diverse interests of all beings of all ages.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE COMPLEXITY OF HUMAN BEINGS AND THE DIVERGENCE OF THEIR INTERESTS TO A PEACEFUL SOCIETY

The world has been partitioned into Nation-states. An insignificant percentage of conflicts in the world today are between nation-states. A large number of conflicts are intra-nation. This is occasioned by not just ethnic or geographical boundary disputes but also ideological interests and differences. Consequently, it will be in the interest of societal harmony to identify, recognise and accord equitable treatment to the different interest of the members of the society. One of such major interest is Religion. Religious issues arouse interest and sentiments across the globe most probably because the adherents of each of the major world-religions exist in virtually all parts of the world. Religion is, therefore, a veritable medium for international solidarity just as poor-management of religious issues portends danger to peace within and across nations. It is thus necessary that multi-religions National, such as Nigeria, should adopt just and equitable system for the management of religious interests of their citizens in order to ensure genuine peace and tranquillity.

History is replete with instance where governments have not succeeded in using Nationalism and Patriotism to subdue religious conflicts among citizens of the same Nation. Federalism or confederalism has proven to be more appropriate in the management of heterogeneous societies than unitary system. It is therefore unfathomable that certain world powers would expect that a singular unitary system called "secularism" would be effective in the management and harmonization of various religious interests across the world, more so when the system is a product of one particular faith-tradition. It is our candid view that the enforcement or imposition of the uniform system is responsible for many of the religious conflicts in recent time.

While Christians and Christianized interests propagate secularism as a universal and neutral system, Muslims reject it on the basis of its partiality in favour of Christianity and the West. Muslims, all over the world, cannot accept a system, which denies God the right to legislate and regulate the affairs of the world. This is the kernel of the sporadic controversies over Shariah in contemporary societies. Multi-religiosity is a kind of Federalism which allows for unity in diversity within a multi-religious society. The prefix of "common" to an Euro-Christian Law (common law) does not divest it of its origin and

purpose. Justice and fair play require that common law should be applicable only to those who formulated it and are, therefore, sponsoring it. Genuine peace in any society with Muslim population cannot be attained unless Muslims are accorded the right to administer their life in accordance with the dictates of Allah (The **Shariah**). It must not be assumed that Muslims who had been traumatized by Christian indoctrination/education such as the current Governor of Oyo State would ever recover enough to comprehend and fully understand the significance and sanctity of Islam as a way of life.

CONCLUSION

Peace is essential to the survival and harmonious co-existence of all creatures. It could not be attained unless there is justice and control. Islam encourages Man to long for peace through the observance of justice and it considers any appropriate step, be it peaceful or military, towards peace as justifiable. The world needs genuine peace but it is unattainable unless injustice is uprooted from the surface of the earth. Those who struggle against injustice are the sincere lovers of peace while the authors of injustice are the enemies of peace.

Justice is essential for genuine peace. Justice must be done not only to human beings but also to the Creator and other creatures. To Muslims, Justice to Allah requires that His expressed wish (The **Shariah**) be non-negotiable.

We, therefore, conclude by calling on the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to accept the reality of legal pluralism as the only applicable system of justice in Nigeria. Any attempt to insist that British Common Law should be the dominant legal system would continue to generate conflict and crises for the Nation.

CONCLUSION

Peace is essential to the survival and development of a nation. It is the foundation of all progress. It could not be attained unless there is justice and control. Islam encourages Muslims to bring about peace through the observance of justice and it considers any approach that is not peaceful or military, towards peace as ineffective. The world needs genuine peace but it is unattainable unless injustices are removed from the surface of the earth. Those who struggle against injustices are the sincere lovers of peace and the authors of justice are the enemies of peace.

Notes and References

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