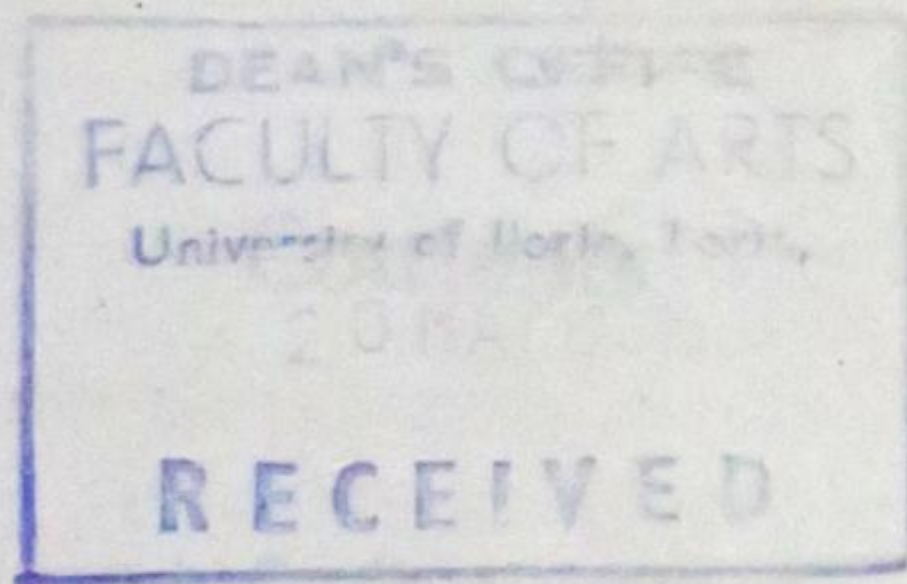


Dynamics of PEACE PROCESSES

Edited by
Isaac Olawale Albert
Is-haq Olanrewaju Oloyede



CENTRE FOR PEACE AND STRATEGIC STUDIES



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and

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Crises and Peace Initiatives in Ilorin Emirate Mosque

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INTRODUCTION

THE most popular religions in Nigeria are Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Religion is believed to be a solution to all problems. In fact, each prophet of God is believed to have been sent to the world to provide solutions to the problems of man at one time or another. In spite of these beliefs, there are intra- and inter-religious crises and conflicts in Nigeria. What could have been responsible for these crises? The simple answer to this question is the fact that crises are inevitable in the society of man. The prophets of God from Adam to Muhammad, who were said to be apostles of peace to mankind were quite unfortunately greeted by their fellow men, kith and kin with crises and conflicts. Most of the prophets lived and died in crises and conflicts. Since their deaths, their disciples continue to face some of these crises and conflicts which are affected by time. However, our concentration in this paper is on Islam with particular focus on crises and peace initiatives in mosques with particular reference to Ilorin Emirate.

Islam is believed by Muslims to be a religion of peace introduced to the world as a guide to mankind. The prophet of Islam was said to have been raised to address

issues of ungodly activities of man after the death of Christ, which created lawlessness and anarchy. Thus, Islam came to slam doors of corruption, discrimination, racism, nepotism and ungodliness. Islam which was introduced to humanity by Prophet Muhammad is based on some certain pillars and principles which are connected with attainment of peace among humanity and between humanity and the Lord of the Universe, which are the essence of the religion. One of these pillars is prayer known as *Salat*. Prayer is compulsory among Muslims and it is about the only spiritual activity that distinguishes Muslims from non-Muslims. Prayer is believed by Muslims to be a connecting string between the performer and the Lord. It is also through prayers that the unity of purpose and sincerity of oneness of Muslims are exemplified. Prayer which is second in the hierarchy of the pillars of Islam is believed to be a means of purifying the souls of Muslims and of keeping them away from the evils of the world (Mishad, 1970:239, 244 and 252). Although, Muslims are allowed to pray at any place the hours of prayers overcome them but the best of the places is the mosque. Thus, Muslims strive to say prayers in the mosque congregationally to benefit from the earthly and heavenly rewards promised for such in their holy Books.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

At this juncture, it is pertinent to briefly examine some concepts which are integral to this discourse in order to enhance our understanding of them in the contexts in which they are used and their interconnectivity. The concepts are crisis, peace, initiative (peace initiative), mosque and Emirate.

Crisis: A time of great danger, difficulty, uncertainty, a decisive moment, an unstable or crucial time or a state of affairs when problem must be solved or important decision must be taken to forestall the possibility of a highly undesirable outcome.

Peace: Is a state of tranquillity or a freedom from civil disturbance or a state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom. It is also a freedom from oppressive thoughts or deeds which brings about mutual agreement and harmonious relationship between those who have been at war.

Initiative: Is an attempt by an individual, group, community or organisation to address issues of interest to them using either law or customs. Peace initiative, therefore, refers to all steps adopted by individuals, groups or organisation at bringing about peace in a troubled environment.

Emirate: An area of land that is ruled over by an Emir.

Mosque: Is generally, simply and literally defined as a place of worship of Muslims or a building, simple or complex, local, national or international, where Muslims offer congregational prayers. However, mosque is not a monopoly of Muslims, other places of worship of other religions have also been referred to by scholars as mosques. This perhaps strengthens the argument of Muslims that 'the whole expanse of the earth has been made a mosque' (Doi, 1976:124-129) and the justification for

the adoption of other religious sanctuaries in Africa for Islamic worship (Hitti, 1984:261-262).

MAJOR CAUSES OF MOSQUE CRISES IN ILORIN EMIRATE

It is important to state here that one of the major causes of mosque crises and conflicts in Islam in general and in Ilorin in particular has to do with the traditions of origin of mosques. Islam encourages Muslims who have the wherewithal to build or contribute to the building of mosques, for Muslims to worship, with a promise of a befitting abode in the heaven. This admonition and promise led Muslim individuals, groups, communities, rulers, organisations; ethnic and professional groups, etc. into building of mosques for congregational prayers. Thus, for these reasons scholars of mosque history have categorised mosques into different types using their origins, functions, structure and importance. Since, the establishment of Ilorin Emirate in 1823, successive emirs encouraged Muslims to build mosques so that Islam could spread far and wide within and outside the Emirate. Thus, Muslim scholars, wealthy individuals, Islamic organisations and sects built mosques for worship. However, once the mosque is built and commissioned for prayers the mosque is named consciously or unconsciously either by the founder(s) or by the users. Again, the leadership in the mosque automatically becomes the responsibility of the founder(s) which he exercises or delegates to others. This is exactly the situation surrounding the origin of most mosques in Ilorin. However, today this age-long tradition is being challenged by some worshippers either for envy or for inclusion. While some are challenging the name for which the mosques are known, some are challenging the leadership of mosques. The third and very important issue is the issue of mosque maintenance. The fact that money is usually voted for the regular maintenance of mosques, some impoverished worshippers usually approach members for secret loans. Experience has shown that such loans are always very difficult to recover and so most often, the treasurer turns down such financial requests. For this reason, mosque maintenance committees are prone to untimely dissolution usually sponsored by those who are denied access to funds. On the other hand, some members of mosque maintenance committee loan one another the mosque funds in their care. This is usually discovered either when one of them decided to expose them or when they failed to carry out urgent repairs in the mosque. Among Islamic organisational mosques, leadership and maintenance are bones of contention and these have led to proliferation of organisational mosques.

PEACE INITIATIVES IN ILORIN EMIRATE MOSQUES

Islam as a way of life envisages crises and conflicts among its adherents, thus, the holy book unequivocally states the steps to take whenever it occurs:

If parties among the believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace between them, but

if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight ye (all) against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of God; but if it complies, then make peace between them with justice, and be fair, for God loves those who are fair (and) just (Q 49:9).

It is against this backdrop that some peace initiatives are organised to deal with crises and conflicts emanating from mosques in Ilorin Emirate.

As it has been mentioned in the introduction, the peace initiatives are organized and executed by individuals, group of individuals, Islamic scholars or religious leaders, opinion leaders or charismatic leaders, traditional political leaders, Islamic organisations and a host of others. In this section the different interest groups shall be grouped into two major categories — the informal and formal categories. The informal category comprises all efforts and ad hoc interest groups at local level which are not institutionalised or formally registered or recognised by the Emirate's authority and/or the Kwara State government. The second group shall comprise institutionalised groups charged with the responsibility of monitoring religious affairs in the Ilorin Emirate in particular and Kwara State in general.

In almost all the mosques in Ilorin Emirate there is elders' committee comprising Islamic scholars, charismatic leaders, traditional political leader(s) and responsible philanthropists among the worshippers in the mosques. The elders' committee is put in place in order to heed the Quranic injunction (Q42:38) which calls for consultation in the affairs of Muslims. The members are usually vigilant on the affairs of the mosque and those of the individual worshippers in the mosque. Anytime any abnormally is noticed in the mosque against any member, such thing is usually nipped in the bud but when it blows open they stand to resolve the crises and conflicts that may be associated.

Because of the existence of the elders' committee in most mosques and the unrelenting efforts of members in some mosques, many issues which would have resulted into violence were resolved without destruction of lives and properties.

However, the committee has to contend with problems of time wasting, energy, limited resources and insults on the personality of members as disputing parties are not easily brought together and issues are not easily resolved. The methodologies remain purely persuasion, negotiation, mediation and reconciliation devoid of any form of coercion.

Issues resolved usually lack records and are morally based. The disputing parties may accept or reject their decision. Furthermore, most members of the elders' committee today in most mosques are not really elders that can weather storms, most of them are in their 50s and would not stand their grounds when the chips are down. Thus, rather than tell the truth, they dance around it, thereby complicating the matter the more.

In the formal category, we have the League of Imams under the three principal Imams of Ilorin: Imams Fulani, Imale and Gambari; the League of Traditional Rulers

under each Balogun: Alanamu, Fulani, Ajikobi, and Gambari; the Emirate Council, Islamic organisations such as the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), the Jama'a, the Council of Muslim Organisations (CMO), and a host of others. For the purpose of this paper concentration will be on the activities of the Emirate Council, the CMO, the JNI, and the Kwara State Committee on Religious Matters.

THE EMIRATE COUNCIL

Until recently, the Emirate Council was the only council charged with the responsibility of giving approval for building of mosques and monitoring their affairs. Disputes, crises and conflicts in the Emirate mosques are resolved by the Council with the Emir as the head, assisted by the three principal Imams and other eminent scholars and *ijthigenes* of Ilorin.

This is the apex Council at the emirate level to which complicated cases which cannot be resolved at the levels of each of the principal Imams are brought. Any mosque crisis is first tried by the elders' committee within a mosque and from there to quarters elders', from there to ward traditional political leader(s) who may work independently or in conjunction with the ward chief Imam; if not, the case may be referred to him. The last place is the Emirate Council.

This Council has been very effective in its schedule of duties and the emirate Muslims have always abided by the verdict of the Council. However, the increasing pressure of work at the offices of the members have been making sittings very difficult, hence cases continue to pile up and justice delayed. Furthermore, the political violence of the first segment of the Fourth Republic infected the Emirate Council which led to a reorganisation of the Council. Since then, the affected segments of Ilorin prefer to seek judgment in the law courts on any case affecting them.

THE JAM'ATU NASRIL ISLAM (JNI)

The Jam'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) was formed in 1961 at Kaduna with branches all over northern Nigeria at the instance of the Emirs. The ninth Emir of Ilorin Dr. Alhaji Zuluqarnain Gambari realising the increase in the rate of mosque crises instituted *Sulhu* (a reconciliation committee) under the auspices of the JNI to complement the efforts of the Emirate Council. The Reconciliation Committee comprised seven members. The first chairman was Alhaji Alabi Makana and the current chairman is Justice Abdulkadir Orire, CFR and National Secretary JNI.

The Reconciliation Committee has mediated in over sixty cases of intra-religious crises in the last twenty years with 80 percent success. The method adopted is largely persuasion. However, the committee has (in line with the Quranic directive) instituted court action against some transgressors. The problem of the committee is finance.

THE COUNCIL OF MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS (CMO)

This organisation was formed in 1999 by Emir Alhaji (Dr.) Ibrahim Zulu Gambari with the advice of Alhaji Abdulkadir Orire. It was to coordinate the activities of Muslims and Islamic organisations and foster religious harmony among various religious groups in Kwara State (Jimoh, 2009). In keeping to this mandate, the Council in the last decade embarked upon rigorous enlightenment campaigns through lectures, workshops, symposia and excursions to prisons, hospitals and villages in order to reduce cases of intra- and inter-religious crises in the state. This Council has done so well in the area of prevention through enlightenment campaigns and not settlement of disputes.

THE KWARA STATE COMMITTEE ON RELIGIOUS MATTERS

This Committee was established in 2004 by the State Government to promote inter-religious understanding and to bridge communication gap among religious adherents (Koro, 2009). It is an 18-member committee of people of proven integrity chosen from all walks of life and headed by Alhaji M.S. Koro, OON. In keeping with its terms of reference, the Committee adopted enlightenment campaign as chief of its methodologies. Apart from its in-house activities, the Committee brings together annually stakeholders within and from outside the state, to discuss issues on religious understanding and peaceful coexistence.

In order that the Committee becomes successful in its assignment, the State Government promised religious balancing, justice, fairplay and urged adherents to shun bitterness and bigotry for tolerance, love, and understanding (Governor's speech; Jimoh, 2009:6).

The Committee's activities between 2004 and 2008 led to the settlement of 42 cases out of 64 cases of intra- and inter-religious crises brought before it which could have led to serious religious crises and conflicts. On the activities of the committee, the State Government observes:

One of the veritable tools in the promotion of peace in Kwara State today is committee on Religious Matters. Feelers from the people on the activities of the committee and the situation of the State today are indicative of the fact that it is up to the task (Governor's speech, Jimoh, 2009:5).

. . . In Kwara State today, religion is no longer a divisive agent but an agent of unity, stability, cohesion and prosperity. As a matter of fact, religion is a veritable source of power and strength in the governance of this State (Governor's speech, Jimoh, 2009:6).

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF THE PEACE INITIATIVES

First and foremost, modernity is affecting the status of the Committees. As much as

the world is thinking of giving ADR a trial, some individuals still have confidence in the law courts, in spite of their shortcomings. Such individuals look at the Committees as toothless bulldogs. This is so because warring parties are at liberty to accept or reject their verdicts. Partisan politics has compounded the problems of the Committees as warring parties are always suspicious of political interference.

The Committees are run on humanitarian grounds. Most of them except the Kwara State Committee on Religious Matters depend largely on the meagre resources of members. This would have been a good advantage, if the members are economically buoyant. It might free them from corruption of any sort. As it is today, members can easily be discouraged giving the uncooperative attitude usually witnessed from warring parties.

Furthermore, human beings respect age over and above all other qualities of man, because it is believed that wisdom accompanies age. Thus, words of the elders are laws to the young ones. Unfortunately, most members of the Peace Committees are occupants of traditional stools or retired high ranking civil servants or rich individuals who are not necessarily old but are respected because of their social status in the society. Most members also found it difficult to cut off totally from the influence of the warring parties in the interest of justice and fairplay.

The Kwara State Committee on Religious Matters is operating at the mercy of the State Government, thus, it is feared that its continuous existence and functionality depend on the mood of successive governments of Kwara State. It is also hoped that it will not become a missionary tool in the hands of the authorities to cushion the minds of the citizens who are not exempted from hunger, diseases and environmental problems caused by bad governance in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the institutionalised Committees are elitist in nature and scope and their enlightenment activities are limited to the State capital. Radio, television and newspapers jingles, advertisements and sermons can do little in bringing about positive attitudinal change of people, thus, face-to-face is far better.

The peace initiatives will be able to stand the test of time if all the members see their membership on the Committees as a divine call and a service to the humanity and discharge their duties without fear or favour as enjoined by the religions. Apart from age which should be a principal factor in choosing persons to serve on the Committees, people with outstanding personality, should be enlisted irrespective of their social standing or political inclination.

The Committees would need to have their ears to the ground to harvest early warning signals of mosque crises so that much of them could be prevented. This process would also afford the Committees the opportunity of collecting facts with which to cross-check reported cases.

The enlightenment programmes of the Committees should be taking to the grassroots where people are yet to be aware of the existence or feel the impact of such Committees. While there is the need for the informal committees to start documenting their proceedings for use both formal and informal committees would

need to work cautiously with the law enforcement agencies to effectively check transgressors.

Although, the financial state of most of the Committees is pathetic and indeed a big hindrance, more commitment on the part of the members, particularly the leadership of the Committees may likely play down the effects of finance to the minimum.

Finally, the Committees need to be alive to the root causes of the embarrassing increase in the rate of mosque crises in the Emirate and the State at large. The principal cause is poverty due to idleness. Thus, effective methods of collection and distribution of *zakat* (religious alms) should be put in place to reduce hunger. They should also liaise with the governments on how citizen friendly poverty alleviation programmes could be designed and executed through the Committees in addition to or in conjunction with other organs/agencies. If this is done, Government's efforts at reducing poverty would be felt at the grassroots and the rate of mosque crises would reduce drastically.

It is also an onerous duty on the Committee to sensitise the Government as the chief security of the State to adhere strictly to decorum and the rule of law against victimisation of the opposition, so that the fear of the opposition using religion as a cover to fuel political crises and causing disaster of unimaginable magnitude would be averted.

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