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STRATEGIES FOR RELIGIOUS CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN ḤASAN AL-BANNĀ'S *AS-SALĀM FIL-ISLĀM* AND ITS RELEVANCE TO NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria is a multi-religious society with diverse culture and practices which threaten the peaceful co-existence and social rest. Scholarly works have been written, suggesting strategy for curtailing the ugly situation but the result is less felt as the country records more religious conflicts. This paper examines the views of Ḥasan Al-Bannā as contained in *As-Salām Fil-Islām* by highlighting some strategies for the management of the religious conflict in Nigeria. The paper uses historical method to identify some causes and effects of religious conflict in Nigeria. Findings of the work reveal that there are various factors that are responsible for religious conflict in Nigeria and if any suggested solution will be effective, it must be religious in nature and the study recommends that the adherents of the major religions should persevere, tolerate one another mutually and be ready for reconciliation as discussed in the book in order to have meaningful effect.

Keywords: *As-Salām Fil-Islām*, Ḥasan Al-Bannā, Religious Conflict.

Introduction

Religious pluralism is considered one of the major causes of discord in the nation since the inception of missionaries around 19th century. Nigeria harbors three major religions namely; Islam, Christianity, and Traditional religion. Though Islam and Christianity have a larger percentage of followers, the two religions play a rivalry role.¹ Muslims who practise Islam see the religion as a ritual and a service to Allah alone; little do they know that the religion provides solution to all worldly problems ranging from economic to

political. This is probably why the Muslims seek for conflict resolution strategies outside the religion of Islam. Instead of the Muslims to occupy the front role in managing conflicts in a multi-religious community like Nigeria, they wander about in seeking for what is within their religion. This is the reason Muslims in Nigeria disagree with the non-Muslims on constant basis. The likes of what was experienced in Kaduna and Jos in the 1990s. Ignorance of the Muslims to the available strategies for conflict management in Islam is likened to the

situation with Muslims in Egypt between 1922-1944; a situation which led Hasan Al-Bannā to propound Islamic alternatives to European fascist tendencies.

Egypt (1922-1948) and the Writing of *As-Salām fil-Islām*

Hasan Aḥmad ʿAbdur-Raḥmān Muḥammad Al-Bannā, popularly known as Hasan Al-Bannā was born on Sunday, 14th October, 1906 / 25th Shaʿbān, 1324H to a traditional Muslim family in Maḥmūdiyyah, Nile Delta town in the Buḥayrah Governorate, 90 miles northeast of Cairo. His father, Shaykh Aḥmad ʿAbdur-Raḥmān Al-Bannā was a watchmaker, an Islamic scholar and a local Imām (Prayer Leader) of the Maḥmūdiyyah mosque.² He learnt how to repair watches and acquired rudimentary religious education from his biological father right from his childhood. Hasan Al-Bannā received education from numerous mullahs and teachers, which exposed him to various areas of study such as theology, sociology, and political science. When he finished the primary school education, he joined *Dārul-ʿUlūm* (School of Sciences) in Cairo in 1923.³

At the age of seventeen, Al-Bannā pursued higher education in Egypt contrary to his father's wishes of joining typical Islamic conservatism.⁴ Hasan Al-Bannā graduated with distinction and became a qualified teacher in the year 1927. Afterwards, he was appointed a teacher in *Ismāʿiliyyah* town of Egypt which gave him the opportunity of establishing an Islamic organisation named *Al-Ikhwānu Al-Muslimūn* (The

Muslim Brotherhood) in collaboration with his likeminded men.⁵ Hasan Al-Bannā was exposed to political scenes right from his young age. He actively partook in the demonstrations against the British invasion of Egyptian land and their vacation in 1919. His exposure to various activities and rigorous debates between Western modernists and traditional Islamic revivalists and his city life contributed immensely to his missionary works. He carried out his activities vigorously with the use of possibly available machinery from 1928 to 1949 when he died. Prior to official independence of the Kingdom of Egypt on March 15, 1922, British troops occupied the country for their aggrandizement and retained the status afterwards which was seen as a threat to the Egyptians. After series of government, a new government as prime minister was formed by Abdul Khaliq Sarwat on April 18, 1927. Abdul Khaliq was a member of "Liberal Party (LP)" against "Wafd" which was then ruling party of the country. The formation made the British government to propose treaty formally with Egypt on July 18, 1927 requesting her military to occupy the country for another ten years. The offer was rejected by the Egyptian government due to pressures from the people of Egypt.⁶ In 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood was established by some like-minded Muslims who saddled Hasan Al-Bannā with the headship and coordinator-ship of the society.⁷ The society was said to have been created to liberate and enlighten the Egyptians against mundanity which was viewed as effect of British life-style. The existence and fast growth of the organisation between

1939 and 1946 was greatly precipitated by political and social factors in Egypt at the time. This earned Hasan Al-Bannā much opportunity to become a public figure in action and writing. The rising nationalist sentiment, during the Second World War, was frustrated by British government's refusal to evacuate the Suez Canal, Egypt. As a result, numerous violence and war occasioned between 1939 and 1948 in which wanton destruction of lives and properties of indigenes and foreigners was recorded and Members of Muslim Brotherhood involved actively. In this sense, there was political roar!^{8&9}

It was during this period, King Faruq, who had the power to appoint into the government, dissolved the parliament and suspended the constitution in 1934. Sir Miles Lampson, the British High Commissioner in Cairo from 1936 to 1946, described King Faruq as a man that is "...uneducated, lazy, untruthful, capricious, irresponsible and vain."¹⁰

The dire economic situation after the wars, the corruption of politicians, and the incessant squabbles of political parties provoked a feeling of disillusion and frustration among many sectors of the population at that time. As such, there was a vacuum in the political arena to be filled by an inspiring, radical and religious movement under a charismatic leadership.¹¹ As the revival activities of the Muslim Brotherhood continued under the leadership of Hasan Al-Bannā in March 1948, some members of the group were alleged assassinating Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi Al-Nuqrashi on December 28,

1948. The Minister is said to have earlier dissolved Muslim Brotherhood and sentenced its member to prison for attacking British soldiers.¹² The occurrence triggered an allegation among Egyptians that the Al-Bannā's group was out to achieve its mission by force or through some acts of terrorism. As a reaction to the development, Hasan Al-Bannā published his stand on the situation in a write-up titled *As-Salām fil-Islām* in the year 1948. This was just a year to his demise re-affirming the peaceful nature of his mission and to serve as a denouncement of the terror acts that were alleged and perpetrated opportunistically by a faction of his group.

The perennial religious uproar in Nigeria calls for a need to examine the position of Al-Bannā in his book (*As-Salām fil-Islām*) and see its applicability to the management of religious conflict in Nigeria. This task is necessarily considered worthy because as the matter he responded to was tagged religious and was duly addressed from Islamic perspective.

Strategies for Conflict Management as Contained in *As-Salām fil-Islām*

Hasan Al-Bannā, in his writing, identified ten ideas of the fundamentals of the religion of Islam, which in his view are better than other ideas in bringing peace to human society vis-à-vis:

1. Hassan Al-Bannā positioned that Islam teaches human brotherhood and discourages racism and hatred on the ground of religion which are capable of causing conflict in the society. He therefore called for

- a strong human brotherhood to resolve crisis in the society.
2. In the work of Al-Bannā, he entrenched that among the ideas of the fundamentals of Islam is that it preaches peace and not war. He argued that it is ignorance for anyone to assume Jihād to mean war. A Muslim, according to him, does not initiate aggression but resists it.
 3. Islam, according to Al-Bannā discourages slavery and propagates freedom so that individuals in the society would live the life of a stake-holder and contribute to the development of his community.
 4. The stand of the Islamic state is to be sure that the wealth of the state is evenly distributed and the less-privileged is properly taken care of. When this is done in a community, members will be socially protected and crime will be subdued.
 5. Al-Bannā suggested that the individuals under the government should have an access to good life with enhanced standard of living which guaranteed access to basic amenities.
 6. The family set up should be such that will take care of the rights of women, polygyny and divorce. A call for gender balance is a responsibility of any government because oppression at any time and in any place begets rancor.
 7. Individual in the society should be engaged and idleness should be discouraged.
 8. There should be access to knowledge acquisition and religion should not be used to encourage ignorance.

9. Everybody should be at the top of his responsibility in the society and discipline should be enforced.
10. The faith in Allah should be built in individuals without any compromise.¹³

Al-Bannā, in the above stated strategies, posited that Islam strongly recognises diversity of mankind in term of variety of things, yet it recommends several things sharing the same origin simply to inculcate the spirit of unity among man. To him, conflict among adherents of faiths is human design that is temporal. Islam recognises Christianity and Judaisms Abrahamic religions and their adherents should see one another as brothers.

Religious Conflict in Nigeria: Causes and Consequences

Religion is a concomitant entity to mankind as it had been in operation since the emergence of living creatures, though it takes various forms to appease the Creator and Sustainer of everything.¹⁴ Religious conflict is described as a means of vigorous claiming of spiritual superiority, opposing aggression, and exterminating religious opponents.¹⁵ Religious conflict is much rampant in Nigeria that its factors are observed in many ways and some of them are enumerated below:

Ethnocentrism is considered responsible for some inter-faith clash in Nigeria. Osaghae and Suberu documented some incidents that portray the fact that Nigeria has been in a chaotic situation of ethno-religious violence from time immemorial.¹⁶ Equally, fear of

domination and extermination contribute in no little way to religious conflict in Nigeria. The Chief Imām of Ikun-Ekiti central mosque, Ado-Ekiti and prospective prayer performers were severely injured by masquerades while preparing *Ṣalāt Al-Maghrib* (canonical prayer in the sunset) on the 30th May 2017.¹⁷

Aggressive Da'wah and Evangelism is also a factor to religious conflict. From Islamic perspective, every proselytiser is enjoined to be an embodiment of desirable qualities but the reverse is the case in Nigeria where preachers preach with enthusiasm. Poverty which connotes the state of having little or no money and material possessions made it is easy for some individuals to be cheapened to initiate aggression that could be associated with religion.¹⁸ Adebayo aligns with this when he argued that the level of poverty among various adherents of the major religions in Nigeria is a major factor of the religious conflict which has resulted in *crimes and other deviant behaviours*.¹⁹

The impact of abuse of Mass-Media cum Information and Communication Technology (I.C.T.) processing, production, dissemination and receipt of information to instigate adherents of religions against one another is very high in Nigeria. All these and many others made the rate of religious conflict in Nigeria to be at a differently higher level.

***As-Salām Fil-Islām* and Religious Conflict Management in Nigeria**

It is evidential that incident of religious conflict is immemorial and

approaches recommended by religions that are practised in a given society differ. The approaches of scholars to the matter are also according to their perspectives.

Hasan Al-Bannā, in *As-Salām Fil-Islām*, sees generality of mankind as off-spring of a couple; 'Ādam and Ḥawā'. He emphasises the idea as an element of Islamic ideology that puts every human being under a single umbrella in order to insure diplomatic tranquility. He observes:

... (Islām) has reinstated the unity of races and ethnicity of all mankind, hence (every) man is of 'Ādam and no Arab has preference over non-Arab, as well no black man has (preference) over a red man save in piety. The sagacity attached to the division (of mankind) into nations and tribes is to become acquainted with (one another) not to discriminate, to assist not to forsake, and the preference is (mainly) based on piety cum righteous deeds which in turn would benefit masses and individual, meanwhile Allah, the Lord of all sees over such brotherhood and cares for it, yet implores every servant of His to establish and follow it up as such.

Hasan Al-Bannā substantiated his stand with the following verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ
مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا رُؤُوسَكُمْ وَتُؤْتُونَ

مِنْهُمْ رَجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي
تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ
رَقِيبًا.

O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam), and from him (Adam) He created His wife (Eve), and from them both He created many men and women and fear Allah through you demand mutual (rights), and (do not cut the relation of) the wombs (kinship). Surely, Allah is watching over you. (Q.4:1)

In a multi religious country like Nigeria, brotherhood must be extended above those with whom one shares the same faith. Religious brotherhood must be seen in the context of origin and not of branch. Concern should be the origin of all from the father of faith, Prophet Ibrahim who is believed by all to be the father of Islam and Christianity. Non compromise should be viewed only when it comes to the aspect of devotion but in other aspects, Muslims should consider the recognition of people of the book by the Qur'an as a pointer to the recognition of human brotherhood by Islam.

Al-Bannā's recognition of freedom and social justice as a strategy to remedy religious conflict is a true indication of his recognition of the negative effect of servitude and oppression to the psyche of citizens. In Nigeria, evidences abound on the fact that most of the crises witnessed are reactions to oppressions

Al-Bannā understands equal distribution of wealth as a strategy for curbing religious conflict in a given society. The outcome of a research carried out on the causes of ethno religious conflict in Kano in 2003 revealed that a major cause of the conflict is poor economic base of the populace.²⁰ The alarming rate of unemployment in Nigeria has shot up the tendencies for conflict in the country. By implication, most of the attacks on non-Muslims in Kano at the time of the research were not because the people are of different faiths but because some hoodlums are interested in creating fear in the owners of some property so that they could take over their valued property.

The relevance of education in the curtailment of religious crisis as discussed by Al-Bannā is very immense. Illiteracy in the area of religions have made some people to either misunderstand the position of Islam on war and the meaning of *Jihād* or to make some individuals mislead others and subject them to killing or to being killed. The likes of this is what is experienced in the *Boko-Haram* fold in Nigeria. Some gullible individuals are made to believe that the fight is *Jihād* and anybody who dies in it is going to paradise automatically. Little do these people know that the unjust killing of innocent souls attracts the wrath of Allah and makes the criminal to become a condemned individual in the hell fire.²¹

Conclusion

From the fore-going, it is apparent that the occurrence of religious conflict is historical everywhere,

Egypt and Nigeria inclusive. Though conflict is considered as having negative and positive effects as the case may be but in Nigeria, it could only relay its negativity on the lives and properties as documented above. In essence, *As-Salām fil-Islām* of Hasan Al-Bannā is examined to see its relativity to the management of the religious conflict in Nigeria. In conclusion, the following points are recommended to realise a harmonious community where every adherent of the major religions would enjoy freedom of religious practice:

1. Governments at all levels should take a reconciliatory and unrelenting step by orientating and re-orientating every adherent of the major religions, creating an Inter-Religious Matter Board that would be saddled with the responsibility of enforcing preservative measure against the religious conflict and reconciling between conflicting groups without any sorts of favouritism, and the governments should punish any arrogant adherent who might have caused the collision to serve as a deterrent to others.
2. Non-governmental Organizations should collaborate with the government in realizing a peaceful co-existence among the adherents of the three major religions in Nigeria.
3. Adherents of various religions must realise the essence of religion which is to serve God and humanity in a peaceful atmosphere and this could be achieved by being patient, tolerant and shifting ground for reconciliation. Religious leaders should eschew hypocritical evangelism which is

always a consequence of their interest in making money from the gullible followers even if their action would cost the followers their lives and faith. By doing so, religious conflict will be minimized drastically.

4. Education is important in the development and peaceful living in any country. The attention given to education in Nigeria is still very low and this is seen as a factor contributing to the rising religious conflict in the country. More attention needs to be given to education and more importantly, religious education. The school curriculum needs to be reviewed and in so doing, the government as well as the masses should know that the significance of education is beyond getting appointment with the government.

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