

PERSPECTIVES ON THE VERSATILITY AND WHOLESOMENESS OF ISLAM IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

**FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF
PROFESSOR MUHAMMAD MU'AZU NGURU**



**Professor Dani Mamman
Dr. Ali Usman Ali**

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Professor Dani Mamman

Dr. Ali Usman Ali

Faculty of Arts, University of Maiduguri, 2023

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FOREWORD

I seize this opportunity, first of all to thank the Editors of this Festschrift for finding me worthy to write a foreword on it. It is a commendable act of the Faculty to promote the academic culture of writing a festschrift in honour of our distinguished professors to commemorate their achievements while serving the University-institution.

Professor Muhammad Mu'azu Nguru is currently one of the oldest Professors in the Department of Islamic Studies. The theme of the Festschrift "**Perspective on the Versatility and Wholesomeness of Islam in Contemporary Society**" defines the academic stature Professor Mu'azu occupied in the field of Islamic Studies. Having a career in the University system for a period of four decades, he has contributed tremendously in writing scholarly articles, books and in some instances engaged in definite *Da'awah* activities to educate the Muslim populace on contemporary issues affecting the *Ummah*. In his list of publications and courses taught, he has also paid attention to the arena of comparative religion to educate and enlighten a cross-section of Nigerians, Muslims and Christians alike.

Professor Mu'azu also participated in high level management in Tertiary institutions like the Atiku Abubakar College of Legal and Islamic Studies, Nguru, Yobe State, Nigeria and as Chief Executive Director in the Nigeria Arabic Language Village, Ngala, Borno State, Nigeria. This earned him respect and admiration among his colleagues. I believe, it is as a result of his successes in both academic and administrative management of the institutions of higher learning that motivated the Faculty Board of Arts to compile a Festschrift in his honour in which a cross-section of brilliant members of the academia wrote scholarly articles covering different fields of the study.

I strongly believe that the contents of this Festschrift will be useful to students, especially in the fields of Arabic and Islamic Studies, languages and Linguistics, History, English and the Humanities as well as the Social Sciences.

To me, a Festschrift in honour of one who is still alive to witness it while in service is one of the most monumental experience in one's career.

Professor Adam Muhammad Ajiri
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20th October 2023/ 3rd Rabi'uth Thani 1445 AH

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ISLAM AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: A STUDY OF MUSLIMS REACTIONS TO BISHOP SMITH MEMORIAL COLLEGE'S SOCIAL UNRESTS IN ILORIN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Peace is a condition for the development of a community even when conflict is inevitable considering the diversity in our society. Ilorin, the Kwara state capital has experienced manageable inter-faith face-offs. The most recent of these face-offs is the Bishop Smith Memorial College social unrest of 2019. The rampage appears to have threatened the peaceful coexistence of the city hence, the need for improved conflict management. This work attempts to study the causes, consequences and resolutions of the current Christian/ Muslims crisis in the city of Ilorin with a view to identifying the causes of the conflict among the two prominent religions and to suggest way forward. Historical research method was deployed for the work using a combination of structured interview, statutory records and observations for data collection and analysis. Findings of the work revealed that the struggle for dominancy by Christians in the Christian Missionary Schools is a major cause of Christian-Muslim crisis in the town and the respect for law have helped in mellowing the crisis. However, if the government should stand on the enforcement of its blue print on how grant-aided schools should be coordinated, peace in the various missionary schools could be extended to the town.

Key words: Christianity, Islam, Bishop Smith Memorial College, Conflict management, Ilorin.

Introduction

The development of any community depends largely on how peaceful such community is because peace, security and development are the tripod on which life is gently placed. If anything affects or destroys the tripod, things gradually fall apart and everyone living in such a community will no longer be at ease. It is a living fact that conflict is part of human being and it is indispensable especially in a multi-religious society because human being by nature, would want to assume dominance over the other and the group would want to resist it. However, when crisis is well managed, life and property becomes secured and the community becomes

developed. This is the situation with the Christians living in the city of Ilorin, a Muslim dominated city in the north central of Nigeria.

Islam penetrated Ilorin around the 17th century through *da'wah* activities of one Mallam Tahir Sholagberu. Sheikh Alimi who came much later, is recognised as the vanguard of Islam in the town because he overshadowed others with the knowledge of the religion of Islam (Suraju, 2015). The making of Ilorin as the capital of the state paved way for influx of non-Muslims with Christianity penetrating the town in the period around 1855 (Akande, 2018).

The co-existence of Muslims and Christians in missionary schools was initially peaceful with majority of students being Muslims but in the course of time, crisis erupted and the centre is finding it difficult to hold. Bishop Smith Memorial College, Ilorin, among other Christian schools began to have conflicts with the Muslim staff and students in the school. Christians in the town claim ownership of this school even when the school is being grand-aided by the government and so, they radically fought their way to achieve their aim of returning the management and policy making of the school to the hands of the missionaries even though Muslims in the community are not favourably disposed to it. This situation led to conflict/disagreement between the two parties.

Conflict Management in Islam

Islam preaches universal peace as could be understood from the assertion of Shittu (2012) when he posited that the religion of Islam enjoins Muslims to be accommodately tolerant, perseverant and above all, humble. These attributes are exemplified in the Prophet's drafted constitution on his arrival at Madīnah when he united the *Muhājirūn* (Immigrants) with the *Anṣār* (Helpers) and established a cordial relationship between the entire Muslims and the Christians living in the city of Madinah

Upon accepting Islam, Muslims are enjoined to maintain a healthy relationship with others regardless of their faith, colour or race. Quadri (2012) maintained that Islam envisions an exemplary imitable community as enshrined in Q.3:110. Islam recognises Christianity and Judaism among other existing religions because the two religions are recipients of divined scriptures. The two religions ordinarily enjoy much cooperation with the Muslims to the extent that Muslims are allowed to marry from their females and to eat their food (Q5:5) just as Muslims are enjoined to respond to their greetings accordingly. This confirms a spirit of genuine tolerance stressed by Islam towards the two religions mainly to nurture peaceful environment. Allah says:

Therefore, be patient as did those of determination among the Messengers, and be in no hurry for them. On the Day when they

will see that which they are promised, it will be as though they had not remained (in the world) except an hour in a day, a clear message. But will any be destroyed except the defiantly rebellious people. (Q.46:35).

Az-Zuhayli (1418 A.H.), commenting on the above verse, stressed that the spirit of perseverance is a special quality endowed to those who have strong determination to restore and re-enforce the law of Islam even if they are enormously cheated by their oppressors. The survival of a multi-religious society depends heavily on healthy religious tolerance which has the strength of bringing members of the society with diverse ideology together under an umbrella of peace and harmony. Allah enjoins religious dialogue with people of the book when He commands His Messenger thus:

Say, O people of the book, come to common term as between us and you, that we worship none but God, that we associate no partner with Him, that we erect not among ourselves lords and partners other than God. (Q.3:64).

The dialogue required of a believer should be such that will not lead to any sort of aggression. A Muslim is not expected to engage non-Muslims in a debate that is meant to hurt or injure their feelings (Q.29:46). Worthy qualities that a dialogist ought to possess include wisdom, beautiful admonition and convincing evidences and not being arrogant or boastful. Being logical and rational in interrogating with people is equally considered a quality of necessity (Q.18:37-38). Being leniently eloquent (Q.20:44), kindhearted (Q.25:63), affirming brotherhood of the Prophets and coherency of their messages (Q.29:46) and being firm in the course of the Truth (Q.10:89) are all required virtues of a religion advocator.

Conflict is understood to be an undesirable event (Robbins, 2002) with dysfunctional outcome that would minimize performance and cause malfunctioning; so it had to be avoided. (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2012). Wall & Callister (1995) define conflict as the process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party. It is therefore a living fact that the diversity of mankind make conflict inevitable in the society and so, it could be considered a system within a system especially in a community with pronounced religious diversity. The Qur'an confirms thus: "And if your lord had so willed, He could surely have made mankind one *Ummah* (one community following one religion), but they will not cease to disagree" (Q11:118). Managing our diversity is a responsibility of all and in a community that is Muslim dominated like the case of Ilorin, the responsibility rests more on the Muslims and such responsibility must be extended to institutions of learning owned by non-Muslims in the community like the Bishop Smith Memorial College (B.S.M.C), Ilorin

Bishop Smith Memorial College (B.S.M.C), Ilorin Unrest

Mall. Najimudeen, a onetime bursar of B.S.M.C, confirmed that the existence of B.S.M.C. in Ilorin is dated back to 1961. The school, according to him, is said to have been initially established in Offa Local Government in 1957 before it was finally moved to Ilorin. Early missionary schools in Nigeria were voluntarily handed over to the government by their respective proprietors to run them on their behalf. The school, even though owned by the mission (Christian and Muslim), is expected to operate independent of the religious group that founded it in the interest of an objective knowledge transmission. In July 26, 2011, there was a crisis between the Muslim parents B.S.M.C and the school stake holders with respect to a six-point complaints raised by the parents. A letter of protest was written to the government in respect of the following six points.

1. that Muslim students are being exploited,
2. that Muslim female students are disallowed using *hijab* (head veil) even while in the school mosque,
3. that Muslim female students of the school are harassed even outside the school when seen with *hijab* on the school uniform,
4. that Muslim staff of the school are held with suspicion when seen with a visitor in the school premises,
5. that Muslim staff of the school are not allowed to hold meetings among themselves in the school premises, and
6. that Muslim staff of the school are ridiculed before Christian visitors in the school.

A meeting was held between the state government, Muslims representatives and delegates of B.S.M.C in July 26, 2011. At the end of the meeting, the six points were resolved in favour of the Muslims because the school is a public school where religious restrictions of any type should not be allowed. This resolution was reached in line with the provision of the Kwara State Education Law of 2006.

In February 2013, another letter of protest was written by Muslims in the state to the then chairman of Kwara State Universal Basic Education Board, Ilorin in respect of the noncompliance of the management of the school with the directive of the government. Sequel to this, a circular was passed on the 2nd of June, 2014 by the Honourable Commissioner for Education and Human Capital Development as directed by the then state Governor, Alh. AbdulFattah Ahmed. The circular which was titled, '**Re-Observation of Morning Prayers in Schools in Kwara State**' gave seven major instructions on how morning prayers should be conducted on the assembly ground of public schools. The circular allows for freedom of the practice of religion and disallows preaching of any religion in the school premises. Dissatisfied with the decision of the government, Christians in Ilorin launched mass

protest in October 15, 2014. The Christian Association of Nigeria along with other claimants, filed a case against the state government at the High Court of Justice of Kwara State contending the right of the state government to take over the management and decision making on Christian Faith-Based schools in the state. The case via Suit KWS/178/2014. The judgment was made in favour of the defendant and record of the judgment is contained in suit No. KWS/20C/2015.

Still displeased with the judgment of the trial court, the claimant appealed to The Court of Appeal, Ilorin Judicial Division, Ilorin. The appellant in this suit contended the right of the defendant to control the faith-based schools. On page 7 of the trial record of the Court of Appeal CA/IL/108/2016, the case of the appellant was stated thus:

The case of the appellants, put briefly is that they are the owners of the over 150 schools, the subject-matter of the claim, having established same as deposed to at paragraph 13 of the affidavit in support of the amended originating summons but that the 1st-3rd respondents took over the schools under the cover of government grant-in-aid and have since then exerted control and management of the claimed schools to the discomfiture of the appellants, in that policies and practices inimical to the Christian doctrine were introduced to those schools by the government. Attempts made by the appellants to take control and management of the said schools by the appellants were rebuffed in utter disregard to rights available to them under section 38 of the Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) which allowed them to run the claimed schools in accordance with Christian religious beliefs and practices. The appellant also took the view that the Kwara State Education Law did not empower government as represented by the 1st-3rd respondents to take over, the control and management of the claimed schools, notwithstanding that the schools received grants from Government.

The Muslims were of the contention that the claim of the appellants in relation to the schools was discriminatory to them and their members who were not adherents of the religion practiced by the appellants. The main bone of contention was;

- 1- the missionary schools that are grant-in-aided are public schools statutorily under the management and maintenance of the government and so, the schools should be devoid of any religious discrimination
- 2- students admitted into such schools are posted to such schools indiscriminately by the state ministry of education and hence, they are in the

- school at the discretion of the government and not at their discretion and so, they should be allowed to practice their religion.
- 3- the staff of the schools who are either Muslims or Christians are posted to the school indiscriminately by the government and so, they should be allowed to enjoy the freedom of religion enjoined by their colleagues in other public schools.

The trial court considered the case as put up by the parties and in a judgment delivered on 17th May, 2016, dismissed the case.

The 2019 Christian-Muslim Face-Off at B.S.M.C, Ilorin and Muslims' Reactions

On September 20, 2019, the lingering crisis between Muslims and Christians in the city was finally adjudicated upon at the Court of Appeal, Ilorin Judicial Division with the judgment of the trial court affirmed and the appeal made by the Christians dismissed on the ground of lack of merit. The court ordered every missionary schools to allow members of their schools to practice the religion of their choice without any hindrance. B.S.M.C. Ilorin launched another protest in the early hour of June 21, 2019 against the right of Muslim students to hold morning prayers on the assembly ground of the school with about 80 Chaplains of the Anglican church invading the premises of the school and disrupting the school assembly activities. Mallam Abdullah Jibril Yahya, the Imam of B.S.M.C at the time of the incident confirmed that the Christian group assaulted some Muslim staff and arrested some. In a bid to resolve the long-existing interface between Muslims and Christians in the school, Muslim stake holders took the following steps;

- 1- A letter signed by the chairman, Muslims Stake Holders Association, Kwara State (MSAKS), retired Justice AbdulKadir Orire, addressed to Chairman, House Committee on Education and Human Capital Development, Kwara State House of Assembly on 4th July, 2019. The letter was written as an acknowledgement of a letter on the need to avert religious crisis in Bishop Smith School, which was earlier sent to the association by the chairman, house committee on education. Section 38(2) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was quoted to substantiate the right of the Muslim female students in the school to the use of hijab which is in accordance with the Islamic culture. The letter was a seven points request for prevention of crisis and among the request is the apprehension and prosecution of all those who master-minded the invasion of the school thereby creating an ugly atmosphere in the school.
- 2- A letter was forwarded by the Muslim stake holders of the state to update the necessary authorities with the noncompliance of the school authority with the directive of the government on religious tolerance in the school. The letter

was titled 'save Our Soul: Violation of Government Directive by the School Authority in respect of Conduct of the Student Assembly at Bishop Smith Memorial College: A Call for the Security of Our Lives at the Above School'. A copy of the letter was forwarded to:

- a- the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Human Capital Development, Ilorin,
 - b- the Permanent Secretary, Kwara State Teaching Service Commission, Ilorin,
 - c- the Honourable Commissioner of Police, Police Headquarters, Ilorin, and
 - d- the Director, Directorate of State Service, Kwara State Command, Ilorin.
- (The letter was prepared on July 15, 2019. After itemising about 4 issues, the letter was appended to by eight Muslim organisation stakeholders).
- 3- The concerned Muslims utilised media outlets to make their grievances known to the masses. The Daily Trust and National Trail papers of June 21, 2019 captured the ugly situation.
 - 4- Muslim individuals also relayed the incidence on radio. An example of this is the role played by Mallam Dan Maigoro on 5th and 12th of July, 2019 when he invited Pastor Samuel Aweda during *Hadyu Nabawiyy* (An Islamic program) on Sobi F.M. station (101.9F.M) for religious dialogue.
 - 5- Muslims further employed the use of WhatsApp text messages jointly signed by the president of Nigerian Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS) and the *Ameer* and the Secretary, Muslims Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), Kwara State Chapter, to update the populace of non-relenting efforts of Muslim stakeholders in keeping the situation at rest and to call the harbingers of the chaos into order as means of restoring harmonious coexistence especially between the members of B.S.M.C and Kwara State at large.

An Examination of the Claims of the Claimants in the Light of Peaceful Co-Existence

The Prophet (SAW) said in a ḥadīth reported by Ibn ʿAbbās that:

لَوْ يُعْطَى النَّاسُ بِدَعْوَاهُمْ، لَادَّعَى نَاسٌ دِمَاءَ رِجَالٍ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ، وَلَكِنَّ الْيَمِينَ عَلَى الْمُدَّعَى عَلَيْهِ

Were people to be given according to their claims, some would claim the blood and wealth of others! But the burden of proof is upon the claimant and the taking of an oath is upon the one who denies (the allegation) (Muslim, Ḥadīth 1711).

The ḥadīth established that in any judicial issue, there must be two litigating parties; the plaintiff and the defendant. The onus of proof is upon the plaintiff and the proof of a matter requires presentation of evidence until the matter attains degree of certainty. The claimant (Christians) directed seven points to the trial and the appeal courts for clarification. These points, which are all answered in favour of the defendants, are that;

- 1- they challenge the right of the government to interfere with and impose their presence and grant-in –aid on schools belonging to the Christians,
- 2- they challenged the right of the state government to control the Christian schools on admission of students and recruitment of staff to the schools,
- 3- they challenged the constitutional right of the government to exercise such power of control and management on the concerned schools,
- 4- they sought interpretation of the Kwara State Education Law 2006 as regards the right of the state government to manage the schools in any manner,
- 5- they argued their right to the exclusive ownership of their schools by the provision of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,
- 6- they argued their right to damages and compensation for the state government's infringement of their constitutional right, and
- 7- they argued their right to damages and compensation for the government's continuous use and occupation of their schools.¹

The concern in this issue is the interpretation of two relevant laws; the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Kwara State Education Law of 2006. In the 1999 constitution, section 38(1-4) and section 42. The two sections of the constitution guaranteed the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion of citizens of the country in or outside an educational environment. The constitution reads:

No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in, or attending any religious ceremony or observance, if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or a religion not approved by his or her parent or guardian. (See Section 38(2) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria).

While the complainants argued that in line with the provision of the portion of the constitution referred to, the Christians are being denied the practice of their religion in the school as Muslims also claim their right to the practice of their religion in the

¹ Report of judgement delivered by Saidu Tanko Husaini, JCA in the Court of Appeal, Ilorin Judicial Division on Friday, 20th September, 2019, (CA/IL/108/2016), 3 -4.

same school. The defendants argued that all grant-aided schools are public schools and Muslims share the same right with Christians in such schools. A cursory study of Muslim grant-aided schools revealed that such schools are treated as a public school. In an interview with a staff of Ansaru Islam Secondary School, Ogidi-Oloje, Ilorin, Christians were neither coerced to wear *Hijab* nor denied wearing beret which is the identity recommended in the school for the Christian learners. At the College of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Adewole, Ilorin which is another Muslim grant-aided school, physics teacher at the time of writing this paper, who is a Christian, confirmed the fact that Christian students in the school wear berets against the Muslim female students who make use of *hijab*. He further stressed that the Christians in the school are allowed to meet for fellowship without any interference.

The Kwara State Education Law of 2006 which was also referred to by both the claimant and the defendant has up to forty-eight sections. The sections that were frequently referred to are Section 30(2) which reads "it shall not be required as a condition for any pupil attending any institutions that he shall attend or abstain from attending any place of worship other than as approved by his parent or guardian" and Section 45 of the law which gives the administrator of the state, the right to make regulations with respect to (a) grant-in-aid in respect of institutions or for any other educational purposes (g) the management of institutions and (o) the establishment of staff and categories of teachers to be employed in various types of institutions. A study of the situation on ground reveals that secondary schools in the state are of the following categories;

- a) **Public Schools:** These are schools established and administered by the government.
- b) **Grant-in-Aid Schools:** These are schools established by religious bodies but handed over to the government for management. Hence, the schools become public schools because the financing, staffing, admitting students / pupils to the schools and regulations on them should be run under the jurisdiction of the government. The founding bodies however, have the privilege of nominating professional(s) for the leadership of the schools.
- c) **Private Schools:** These schools are established and administered by private individuals or organizations; religious or otherwise as the case may be.

B.S.M.C., Ilorin and similar others fall under category B and therefore, remains strictly under the administration of the Kwara state government and must adhere to the policy for Public Secondary Schools in the state while schools like Islamic College, Hajj Camp Area, Ilorin and Baptist Model High School, Ilorin both fall under category C and therefore, can decide on what shall be the policy of the school as it affects the uniform to be used and religious practice in the school. Nevertheless, their inspection is under the statutory duty of the Ministry of Education observing

their compliance with the state education law on general matter e.g. school calendar, curriculum, etc.

From the above, it becomes clear that the use of *hijab* by Muslim students in B.S.M.C, Ilorin and the use of berets by Christian students in Ansaru Islam Secondary School are better ways of creating religious understanding. More so that these places are institutions of learning, neither the *hijab* nor the beret have any effect on what students ought to learn in schools. Religious tolerance in schools lies under the degree at which managements of institutions of learning allow students to practice their religion without any hindrance. Various steps taken by the Muslims are considered peaceful since their request is for the management of institutions of learning to aptly adhere to the provisions of the laws made by both the state and the federal government on education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Religious conflict is inevitable in a multi-religious society even then the conflict should not be allowed to threaten the development of the society. Efforts to manage such conflict must be logically made. To mellow the escalation of religious conflict, the authority needs to be involved and justice need to be emphasised irrespective of which religion is dominant and which is recessive. With regards to the Christian / Muslim face-off in Ilorin, steps taken by the Muslims to avoid combat is commendable. The approach is considered an adherence to the teaching of the Qur'an on peaceful co-existence and an emulation of the practice of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in his relationship with the idolaters of Makkah and Christians in the city of Madinah respectively. Peaceful coexistence and tolerance which are cardinal to Islam had become a norm to the people of Ilorin, hence their ability to accommodate people of diverse faith is worthily commendable.

This paper identified a noncompliant with the provision of the existing law as a cause of the B.S.M.C religious unrest and therefore suggests that the guiding policy on the establishment of schools should be followed to letter however, in following the provision of the law, justice must be taken to be a watch dog. Whatever is good for the goose should be good for the gander irrespective of what religion dominates the community. If this is adhered to, there will be peace, security and development in the society.

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