The Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) On Peaceful Coexistence and the Biblical Accounts; Lessons for Nigerian Society

By

Kenneth Sunday
Department of Christian religious studies
Taraba State University, Jalingo
kennethsunday612@gmail.com
08122328881

Laiyau Joel Pani
Department of Christian religious studies
Taraba State University, Jalingo
panijoel@yahoo.com
08069034841

&
Helen Yeleng Elisha
Department of Christian religious studies
Taraba State University, Jalingo
helenyelengelisha@gmail.com
09067463654

Abstract

Religious disagreements seem to take over the thought and the mindset of the people, the ideology that seems to be on sale is simply the song of attack and reprisal attack, going by this chaos, the sense of human coexistence is threatened by the common denominative factor of conflicts between the followers of Jesus Christ and prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). This is as a result of major and even minor disagreements over difference of religious belief of one group of people against another group. This paper aimed at examining the Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Saw) On Peaceful Coexistence and the Biblical Accounts of the Peaceful Conduct of Christians; Lessons for Nigeria, using historical and analytical method. Documented writings of Islam are filled with stories of sufferings and persecutions meted out on the early Muslims at the beginning of the Muslim era in the year A.D.622 called Hijira. It was a time when the prophet Mohammed did not ask his followers to do any harm to non-Muslims, Instead, they were instructed to "have patience with what they say, and leave them with noble dignity" (Qur'an 73:10) Jesus Christ on the other hand thought His followers to above all love everyone that life brings to them as much as they can love themselves (Luke 10:25),

all of the teachings in the Quran by prophet and those of the Holy scriptures are lessons for the Christians and Muslims in Nigeria who are always for the faith without practice.

Key words; Teachings, Prophet Muhammad (Saw), Peaceful, Coexistence, Biblical Accounts

Introduction

Amongst the most demanding challenges which the world is currently passing through include relying/tribal or ethnic conflicts, political oppression, social violence, and disharmony which were responsible for carnages. All of this misguidance could be attributed to deviation from God and the influence of devils. This resulted to the corruption of the minds and misguidance in thoughts. These complexities have made life so difficult and challenging for man. This is because records of successes, achievements and development are all associated with conducive environment and harmonious relationship among the people in a society.

Before now, both Christians and Muslims have lived a peaceful life. This can be seen in the fact that a Muslim man can go to a Christian home during Christmas celebration to celebrate with his fellow Christian. They will eat together and even go out to make merriment together. Similarly, during Sallah period, the Christians will go to their Muslim brother to celebrate Sallah with them. Not only that, a Christian can give his daughter in marriage to a Muslim while a Muslim also give out their daughters in marriage to the Christians (Kefas, Interview)

Suddenly, the situation deteriorated to another thing all together resulting to minor altercations between the two faiths. Now, it is hard for both Christian and Muslim to believe in one another even when they know that their past relationship has been cordial. Christians no longer want to give their daughters in marriage to the Muslims likewise the Muslims will not allow their daughters to marry the Christians. Eating from each other's home is no longer tenable as used to be the case in the past

Strategies of prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) to peaceful coexistence between Muslim and non-Muslim

We shall examines how Prophet promotes the spirit of good relationship among people of diverse religious backgrounds during his life under the following headings; Promotion of the Right to Security of Life and Properties. Right to Freedom of Religion, Love, Warmth, Tolerant and Sympathetic Relations, Promotion of Right and Justice, Muslims non-

Muslims in the Era of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs, Muslims, non-Muslims in the Era of the Umayyad, Muslims non-Muslim Relation in the Era of the Abbasid Caliphate.

Promotion of the Right to Security of Life and Properties.

In a bid to protect the life of everybody against unjust killing, the Prophet says 'The first thing concerning which judgment will be passed among the people on the Day of Resurrection will be bloodshed Muslim (Vol 4, No 4381, p443). To ensure further protection of the plight of the non- Muslims by the Prophet he says: In the real sense, such a person has committed an act of betrayal and the Prophet says: Every betrayer (treacherous and perfidious person) will have a flag on the Day of Resurrection." One of the two sub narrators said that the flag would be fixed, and the other said that it would be shown on the Day of Resurrection, so that the betrayer might be recognized by it." Bukhari (Vol 4 p261, No 3186).

To the noble Prophet, not only the soul of a non-believer is given due respect; his corpse is equally honored and greatly regarded. The following Prophetic tradition says: A funeral procession passed in front of them and they stood up. They were told that that funeral procession was of one of the inhabitants of the land, that is, of unbeliever, under the protection of Muslims. They said, "A funeral procession passed in front of the Prophet and he stood up. When he was told that it was the coffin of a Jew, he said, "Is it not a human being? Bukhari (Vol. 2 p231, No. 1312).

Right to Freedom of Religion

The teachings of the Prophet equally promote the right to freedom of religion as buttressed in the Qur'an. This freedom is clearly demonstrated by the Prophet in one way or the other. For example, Redah (172) narrates the following extract from the constitution of Madinah: The Jews of Bani A'wf are a community along with the believers. To the Jews their own religion and to the Muslims their religion. This also applies both to their servants and to themselves, with the exception of anyone who has done wrong or acted treacherously

Bukhari (Vol 5 No. 4339, p 381) explains further how the Prophet stood firmly with the idea of freedom of religion. Narrated Salim's father: The Prophet sent Khãlid bin Al-Walid to the tribe of Jadhima; and Khãlid invited them to Islam but they could not express themselves by saying: "Aslamna (that is, we have embraced Islam)", but they started saying: "Sabana! Saba 'na (that is, we have come out of one religion to another)." Khãlid kept on killing (some of) them and taking (some of) them as captives and gave every one of us his captive, till the day when Khãlid ordered that each man (that is, Muslim soldier) should kill his captive. I said, "By Allah, I will not kill my captive, and none of my

companions will kill his captive." When we reached the Prophet mentioned to him the whole story. On that, the Prophet raised both his hands and said twice, "O Allah! I am free from what Khãlid has done. All the aforementioned illustrations buttress how the Prophet promoted the right to freedom of religion throughout his life.

Love, Warmth, Tolerant and Sympathetic Relations

In his interaction with people in the society, Prophet (SAW) related warmly with everyone irrespective of the religious or social status of the people. This was his attitude right from his early childhood stage till the time of his death. According to Mubarakpuri (118-123) at the early stage of Islam, Makkah was highly inconvenient and uncomfortable for the new converts. In a bid to secure a way out for the Muslims, the Prophet instructed some of this early convert to migrate from Makkah to Abyssinia which was then under the Negus, a Christian King.

In Bukhari (Vol. 3, No. 2263, p254) the Prophet was said to have employed the service of a Jew of Khaibar for the purpose of irrigating the land. And also Narrated 'Aishah that the Prophet and Abu Bakr employed a (Mushrik) man from the tribe of Bani Ad- Dail and the trible of Bani 'Abd bin 'Adi as a guide. He was an expert guide and he broke the oath contract which he had to abide by with the tribe of Al-'Asi bin Wã'il, and he was on the religion of Quraish pagans (Mushrikun). The Prophet and Abu Bakr had confidence in him and gave him their riding camels and told him to bring them to the cave of Thaur after three days. So, he brought them their two riding camels after three days, and both of them (the Prophet and Abu Bakr) set out accompanied by 'Amir bin Fuhaira and the Daili guide who guided them below Makkah along the road leading to the sea-shore.

The above statement explains another dimension of tolerance in religion, which was displayed by the prophet (SAW). In another narration, the prophet (SAW) commanded to another nature of religious tolerance. The following incidence reported by Asma bin Abi Bakr buttresses the statement: My mother came to me during the lifetime of Allah's Messenger and she was a Mu/irikah (polytheist, idolatress, pagan). I said to Allah's Messenger (seeking his verdict), "My mother has come to me and she desires to receive a reward from me, shall I keep good relations with her?" The Prophet said, "Yes, keep good relation with her. (Bukhari vol. 3, No. 2629, p455)

The prophet (SAW) tolerated a non-Muslim, Jews, by accepting his invitation to eat from his meal with his wife Aisha (R.A). The narration of Anas (R.A) explain the episode, be said: It was narrated from Anas that a Persian neighbor of the Messenger of Allah was good at making soup. He made (some soup) for the Messenger of Allah, then he came to

invite him. He said: "And this one too?" - meaning 'Aishah - but he said: "No." The Messenger of Allah said: "No (I will not come)." He invited him again, and the Messenger of Allah said "And this one too?" He said: "No." The Messenger of Allah said: "No (I will not come)." Then he invited him again, and the Messenger of Allah said: "And this one too?" He said yes, the third time, so they got up and went to his house. Muslim (Vol. 5 No. 5312. p386)

After the demise of his wife khadijah and his uncle Abu Talib, Sallabi (521-528) notes that Prophet realized that his stay in Makkah was no more secured. In view of the above, he approached Taif thinking that his call could be accepted. Instead of gaining acceptance, he was molested by the people and pelted with stones. Prophet sustained many injuries and what he encountered was said to be more severe than that of Uhud. The Arch Angel appeared before him conveying the message of his creator as to whether he would like the people to be destroyed on this account. Prophet rather opted for them the guidance of Allah. The hadith according to Bukhari (Vol 4 No. 3231, p 285) says: Narrated 'Aishah that she asked the Prophet. "Have you encountered a day harder than the day (of the battle) of Ubud?" The Prophet, replied, "Your tribes have troubled me a lot, and the worse trouble was the trouble on the day of 'Aqaba when I presented myself to him, he did not respond to my demand. So, I departed, overwhelmed with excessive sorrow, and proceeded on, and could not relax till I found myself at Qarn-ath-Tha'älib, where I lifted my head towards the sky to see a cloud shading me unexpectedly. I looked up and saw Jibril (Gabriel) in it. He called me saying, 'Allah has heard your people's saying to you, and what they replied back to you, Allah has sent the angel of the mountains to you so that you may order him to do whatever you wish to these people. The angel of the mountains called upon me and greeted me, and then said, 'O Muhammad! Order what you wish. If you like, I will let two mountains fall on them." The Prophet said, "No, but I hope that Allah will let them beget children who will worship Allah Alone, and will worship none besides Him.

In another episode as reported by the prophet (SAW) demonstrated tolerance and forgiveness to a non-Muslim. The report reads: Narrated Jabir bin 'Abdullah that he fought in a Ghazwã towards Najd along with Allah's Messenger and when Allah's Messenger returned, he too, returned along with him. The time of the afternoon nap overtook them when they were in a valley full of thorny trees. Allah's Messenger dismounted and the people dispersed amongst the thorny trees, seeking the shade of the trees. Allah's Messenger took shelter under a Samura tree and hung his sword on it. We slept for a while when Allah's Messenger suddenly called us, and we went to him, to find a bedouin sitting with him. Allah's Messenger said, "This (bedouin) took my sword out of its sheath while I was asleep. When I woke up, the naked sword was in his hand and he said to me, 'Who

can save you from me?' I replied, 'Allah.' Now here he is sitting." Allah's Messenger did not punish him (for that). Bukhari (Vol. 5. No. 4136, pp276-277)

Ibn. Qayyim (691) relates that at a point in time, the Prophet received a delegation of 60 Christians from Najran. During their visit, he ate and slept together with them. In trying to create the spirit of love and affinity, the Prophet explained his close relation to Jesus as in the following report of Abü Hurairah said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah say: 'I am the closest of the people to the son of Mariam. The Prophets are brothers from different mothers, and there is no Prophet between him and I. Muslim (No. 6130, Vol 6 p 211)

It was narrated that Hammâm bin Munabbih said: "This is what Abü Hurairah narrated to us from the Messenger of Allah a." He narrated a number of AhadIth, including the following: "The Messenger of Allah ij said: 'I am the closest of the people to 'Elsa bin Mariam, in this world and in the Hereafter.' They said: 'How is that, O Messenger of Allah?' He said: 'The Prophets are brothers; their mothers are different but their religion is one, and there is no Prophet between us." Muslim (No. 6132, Vol. 6 p 212)

Promotion of Right and Justice.

Doi (432) states that during the Prophet life, a case of misunderstanding occurred between a Muslim and a Jew, and was brought before him. After investigation, the Jew was discovered to be right while the Muslim was wrong. The Prophet (SAW) decided in favour of the Jews. This was the foundation laid by the Prophet during his life.

According to Doi (433), during the time of the Prophet, the non- Muslims under the protection of the Islamic state even though they were requested to pay certain tax called Jizya for the services offered to them but were guaranteed freedom of religion, security of life and properties, and protection against heir enemy.

Muslims non-Muslims in the Era of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs:

The rightly guided Caliphs are four namely Abubakar, Umar, Uthman and Ali. During his reign, Caliph Abubakar (632-634 CE) followed the footsteps of the Prophet in his dealings with the non-Muslims. In view of the above, Abubakar ensured the rights of non-Muslims to freedom of religion, security of lives and properties and therefore safeguarded and protected them. Abu Yusuf (1933:79) narrates in the following quotation the treaty which the Caliph entered into with the people of Najran:

In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. This is the written statement of God's slave Abu Bakr, the successor of Muhammad, the Prophet and Messenger of God. He

affirms for you the rights of a protected neighbour, in yourselves, your lands, your religious community, your wealth, retainers, and servants, those of you who are present or abroad, your bishops and monks, and monasteries, and all that you own, be it great or small. You shall not be deprived of any of it, and shall have full control over it…

This was one of the guiding principles embraced by the Caliph in his relation with the non-Muslims. Before his death, Caliph Abu-Bakr nominated Umar and was later confirmed by the sahabah (R.A) as the next caliph. Umar reigned between 634-to 644 CE. Just like his predecessor, Umar promoted the rights of the non-Muslims under him. He therefore ensured that their lives were secured and their properties protected and enable them to enjoy freedom of religion. Abu Yusuf (136)

The right of non-Muslims living in an Islamic state was protected and guaranteed in his (Umar R.A) era and it formed part of his last words. According to Abu Yusuf (136), before his demise, Umar Commanded that whoever becomes Caliph after me to treat well the people of the covenant, to uphold the treaty, to fight whoever wants to harm them, and not to overwhelm them with burden.

The era of the fourth Caliph Ali bn. Abi Talib (656-661 CE) was known for tremendous achievements in Muslim - non Muslim relations. Ahmad (40) narrates the dispute over the ownership of armour between the Caliph and a Jew and was brought before the judge in Madinah.

The Qadi's court in Medina was packed to its capacity. The Qazi had summoned Hazrat Ali, the Caliph of Islam, to appear in a case filed against him by a Jew who had claimed the Caliph's armour. The Caliph arrived at the: court and stood by the side of the plaintiff without caring about his own exalted position. The claimant produced several witnesses in support of his claim.. The learned Qadi, then asked Hazrat Ali if he had to say anything in his defense. Ali replied in the negative. Thereupon the Qazi decided the case in favour of the Jew and awarded the armour to the Jew. Ali had actually purchased the armour from him. The Jew was taken by the impartial judgment of the Qazi and returned the armour to the Caliph saying that the illustrious Caliph had actually purchased the armour from him. He had filed the suit in order to test the impartiality of the Caliph and his courts which had magnificently withstood the test.

Lari (134) relates an incident in which Caliph Ali once passed by a helpless blind old man who was a committed civil servant during his youth. After being told about his situation,

he replied: You used him for work when he was young and cast him off when he is old and weak! He must be given a pension from the public treasury to ensure his livelihood.

On a general note, the following extract depicts the nature of Muslim-non- Muslim relations in the era of the companions. Ghauri (79) remarks that: The companions of the Noble Prophet (SAW) had never destroyed any shrine of the non-Muslims in the conquered cities. They allowed them to worship freely. It reveals that it is not a demand of Shariah to demolish already shrines of non-Muslims from the Muslim state. If it were so, the companions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) would have raised them with no hesitation. Instead of it they provided the protection to the shrines of non-Muslims. Many agreements and guarantees provided by Hazrat Khalid bn. Waleed to the people of Damascus (Dimashaq) and other non-Muslim conquered residents bear witness to this fact.

Muslims, non-Muslims in the Era of the Umayyad

The Umayyad dynasty came into being in 661 CE. /41 AH. The first Caliph of the Umayad was Muawiya bn. Abi Sufyan. This Umayyad caliphate lasted to 750 CE. The Muslim- non-Muslim relation in this era was in line with the earlier established practices. The non-Muslims in this era also enjoyed fundamental human rights such as the rights to freedom of belief and worship; right to acquisition of wealth and security of properties; rights to equity and justice and many other rights. Durant (131- 132) substantiates the statement in the following narration:

At the time of the Umayyad Caliphate, the people of the covenant, Christians, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Sabians, all enjoyed degrees of tolerance that we do not find even today in Christian countries. They were free to practice the rituals of their religion and their churches and temples were preserved. They enjoyed autonomy in that they were subject to their religious laws of their scholars and judges.

Furthermore, the letter written by Caliph Umar bn. Abdul-Aziz to his representative in Basra and Iraq during an occasion as related by Abu Ubaid (805) further affirm the good relationship which the Muslims held with the non- Muslims in the era of Umayyad caliphate. He said: Search for the people of the covenant in your area who may have grown old, and are unable to earn, and provide them with regular stipends from the treasury to take care of their needs.

Similarly, an exposition of quality of justice and fair treatment of Umar bin Abdul-Aziz to suffices as an example. Ahmad (64) relates that a Christian filed a case against Hisham bn. Abdul Malik who was a notable personality in the Muslim society. This personality was

the one who later succeeded Caliph Umar bn. Abdul-Aziz. Umar bn. Abdul-Aziz summoned the two of them before him in his court. Hisham felt embarrassed and hurled abuse on the Christian. Caliph quickly reprimanded him and promised to inflict severe punishment on him if he failed to stop.

Muslims non-Muslim Relation in the Era of the Abbasid Caliphate

This era commenced from 750 C.E. This was as a result of the murder of the last caliph of the Umayyad caliphate Marwan II in Egypt in the year 750 C.E and brought the emergence of Abul-Abbas As-Saffah (a descendant of the Prophet maternal uncle (Al-Abbas) as the new Caliph. The caliphate lasted to 1258 CE by the Mongols attacked in Baghdad.

It is interesting to note that during this period, the Muslim and non-Muslim relations also followed the precedence established by the great leaders of Islam. The non-Muslims were given fair treatment by the Muslims. In his book, Lari affirms that: The Crusaders held Jerusalem for 88 years, and lost it again after that period to the Muslim armies led by the great Kurdish General Salehuddeen Ayyubi, whom the Christians called Saladin. ... (87)This was in October CE 1187 (AHL 583, Rajab month). Instead of massacring all the Christians in imitation of the Christian massacre of its Muslims 88 years before, peace loving wise Saladin proclaimed a public amnesty and forbade the execution, the plundering, or the torture of any Christian, so adding another glorious page to the world fame of Islam. The true spirit of Islam governed all its troops in this as in its other wars. Saladin ordered a constitutional security for all the inhabitants of Palestine. He gave one dinar to every man and to every woman and two dinar to every child, with the permission to settle where they would. Security was greater in Jerusalem than in any other city, so that the Latin citizens preferred to stay there

The Biblical accounts of the peaceful conduct of Jesus; an example for all believers

The Biblical accounts of the peaceful conduct of Jesus Christ during his life here on earth has set an example for all believers to follow in attaining peace and for living peacefully with people from other religions and other nations. This is perfect peace because the Bible explains that Jesus is the 'God of peace' (Romans 15:33). This perfect example of peace as prescribed by Jesus is due to the fact that He is from the Father who Himself is the God of peace "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (John 20:21-22). The message he brought is also the message of peace, not as the world understands peace but the kind that is all- inclusive, affecting the totality of human endeavors. Concerning the perceived 'human enemy' Jesus Christ called on His followers to accommodate even those that set themselves up as their enemies by treating them kindly.

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom 12:18-21). Jesus urged his followers to expose themselves to their presumed enemies by showing them acts of mercy, hospitality and to allow the place of revenge to God alone. Even when it is clear that they suffer serious pains from what their enemies do to them, this is an obligation for the followers of Jesus to remain harmless even in the face of hostility. This is why the early believers were greatly persecuted and instead of fighting back, they willingly took the pains of sacrificing their lives just to prove how peaceful Christianity.

Christians are not to be in such situation as to refuse to endure hatred of any form for the sake of Christ whenever it may be necessary. And indeed we see that there are some who, are polite to all and peaceful with all, and despite being hated by Muslims, continue to show love to all on account of the gospel.

The epistle to the Hebrews urged Christ's followers to "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord". (Heb 12:14-15). This implies that though in most cases Christians are being subjected to persecutions and hatred which is a test of their faith by non-Christians, the command Jesus gives to his followers is to create an avenue for peace building, and in cases where such opportunities are not available, they should support the ideas proffered by the non-Christians for the sake of maintaining peace with them. However the need to maintain the fundamental elements of the Christian faith must not be compromised.

Conclusion

The research provides clarification on some mis-conconceptions and mis-applications of the teachings of Islam by some Muslims and Christians alike. The teachings of Islam on implications behind misguidance of followers by religious leaders and exhibition of all forms of injustice were enumerated and discussed. The research looks into the evils behind dissemination of false information among people in the society and its effects in the light of Islam during the Ottoman, empire, non-Muslims enjoyed equal treatment as the Muslims. The Ottoman permitted the Greeks, Armenians and Jews to establish their own religious, administrative, judicial and educational institutions such as Schools, Courts, Orphanages, Hospitals and others. In addition, they regulated institutions within the framework of their religions, language and traditions. In the time of Jesus Christ He urges us to live together in peace loving one another, in the Nigerian situation I do not know

which of the teachings we are really immolating for our relationship is suspicion without trust and with no harmony, we must lean as a matter of urgency to love each other as the teachings of the two founders of the faith we practices urges us to do.

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