

RELIGION AND CULTURE: A CASE STUDY OF ILORIN EMIRATE COUNCIL, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Religion preaches peace and unity to humanity irrespective of tribe, race, and culture. Fundamentally, the core principles of the existing religions in Nigeria advocate for love, peace, tolerance and unity in the society. Islam, Christianity and African Tradition Religion were the three prominent religions that had co-existed in the world since time immemorial. These aforementioned religions strongly engage in various acts of evangelism using numerous methods, and space available before them to invite people to embrace the religions. It is against this background that this paper examined Religion and culture: A case study of Ilorin Emirate Council, Nigeria. This study adopted historical, analytical and phenomenological methods to do justice to this paper. The study revealed that inadequate understanding of religion, lack of scriptural information on religious condemnation, misconception of religious preaching, lack of total respect for the indigenous culture and traditions are among the notable factors that led to unfriendly co-existence among religious adherents in Ilorin Emirate Council. The study concluded that to enhance sustainable peace and harmony among the adherents of the three major religions in Ilorin Emirate Council, all the religious and traditional leaders need to team-work on actions capable of promote peace and harmony in the Emirate, while members should respect the culture and tradition of the host community (Ilorin Emirate Council). It is suggested that Kwara State Government

should be proactive in taken decision on issues of national interest that are capable of distorting peaceful co-existence in the state.

Keywords: Religion, Culture, Ilorin Emirate, Evangelism, Traditional Practices

Introduction

African indigenous religion known as African Traditional Religion is a system of worship that has been in existence for long among Africa peoples. According to Nweke (2020) African Traditional Religion is a way of worshipping gods that consist of religious beliefs and practices that is transferred among African people from one generation to another. This very religion had its own beliefs, customs and cultures like other prominent religions in Africa. The fundamental tenet of African Traditional Religion is classified to five and it is itemized as followed: belief in God, belief in divinities, belief in spirits, belief in Ancestors, and the practice of magic and medicine (Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2004).

Historically, Nigeria is a multi-religious country where total freedom of religious practices and evangelisation is regarded as one of the fundamental human rights that should be preserved. Balogun (2012) noted that Nigeria is a country that hosted many religions practiced by ethnic groups from different clans, languages, cultures and dialects and adherents of each religion is given right to evangelise their religion peacefully. However, Nigeria has laid down unified structure that promotes peace, unity and progress regarding religious evangelisation in the country. Shittu (2012) submitted that Nigeria has constitutionally described peace, unity and promotion as every citizen's duty regardless of religious practice. Therefore, planning to destabilise, distort and threat to any religious adherent is forbidden because that could affect peaceful-coexistence and unity among tribes of different faith living in Nigeria. Furthermore, the prominent tribes in Nigeria have peculiar language, customs, culture and norms that distinguish them irrespective of religion practices. Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are known everywhere in the world with their cultural ways of dresses, food, dialect and marriage and naming ceremonies and these cultural heritages are veritable to each tribe in Nigeria.

Therefore, ridiculously tampering any of these cultural heritages might prompt unrest in the country. According to Nweke (2020), African Traditional Religion in Yorubaland has separate symbols of identification and spiritual phenomenological leaders which guide their worship with concrete constitutional rules and regulations to promote their cultures. The same ideological and symbolic identifications are commonly attributed to other members from other prominent religions such as Islam and Christianity in Nigeria.

Geographically, Nigeria is divided into six geo-political zones irrespective of religion, dialect, custom and cultural heritage. Kwara State falls under North Central geo-political zone. Kwara State consists of three major Senatorial Districts (Kwara North, Kwara Central & Kwara South) with sixteen Local Government Areas. According to Jamiu (2014), Kwara State shared boundaries with Kogi State to the East, to the North, Niger State and to the South, Ekiti, Osun and Oyo States respectively. Similarly, the State accommodated various ethnic groups with different languages, practices and culture although Islam and Christianity prevailed African Traditional Religion in the state. Above all, Kwara State is symbolically described as State of Harmony and a place where peace always reigns. In the same vein, Jamiu (2014) pointed out that the prominent language among the people living in Kwara State is Yoruba, Ilorin dwellers are inclusive. Ilorin, the Kwara State's capital is situated geographically between the Northern and the Southern parts of the country (Sakariyau, 2019). The town became Emirate during the reign of Oba Abdu-Salam around 1828 A.D. and immediately the town was officially incorporated into the then Sokoto Caliphate (Gambari, 2020).

Ilorin Emirate: A Cosmopolitan City

Ilorin Emirate is a cradle of Islamic scholarship in Yorubaland (Jamiu, 2014). The emirate covered five major local government areas in Kwara State; Ilorin East, Ilorin West, Ilorin South, Asa and Moro Local Government Areas. Cosmologically, Ilorin Emirate people are not from the same tribe, rather they came from different places and settled down in Ilorin. The cluster in the municipality made the emirate unique, standard and different. According to Gambari (2020), Ilorin Emirate people migrated from diverse ethnic groups such as Hausa, Bornu, Yoruba, Gobiri, Kanuri, Beriberi and the host of others.

Saad (2021) explained further that the major quarters dominated by Ilorin dwellers before and after the arrival of Alimi were four and three out of these quarters were Muslims dominated areas. The quarters are Fulani quarter, Hausa quarter, Yoruba Muslim quarter and Yoruba non-Muslim quarter. More so, Saad (2021) extensively elaborated that these people had separate leaders; Olufadi, Bako, Solagberu and Tella for Fulani, Hausa, Yoruba Muslim and Yoruba non-Muslim respectively. Balogun (2012) commented that despite the ethnic and religious diversity among them they tried to control the peace and harmony in the community.

Consequently, peaceful co-existence among these people aided the establishment of ideal Islam in Ilorin and the entire Emirate. Yusuf (2018) submitted that simplicity, tolerance and understanding prevailed among them assisted the Muslim majority to systematically evangelise the teachings of Islam and imbibed them as culture. Similarly, Jamiu (2014) observed that Islamic teachings prevailed in all systems of life of Ilorin Emirate people by then and it continued to manifest till today. This shows that the religious evangelism and cultural practices of this people are fully influenced by Islam.

Ilorin Emirate As Center's of Islamic Evangelisation

Evangelisation is the process of inviting people to the adoption of certain religious ideologies and practices. It requires ways and methods that are human and humanitarian in nature. Religious evangelism is being practiced in Islam since the life time of the holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), his companions, successors and other prominent scholars in Islam till the present time. There is a portion in the Glorious Qur'an where Allah (Subhanahuwata'ala) commanded the Prophet (Peace be upon him) to adopt wisdom and soft admonition in evangelizing people to accept Islamic faith.

Shittu (2012) explained that Islam condemns application of compulsion during religious evangelism and concluded that humanitarian attitude convince people rapidly than compelling styles. This was numerously displayed by the Prophet (Peace be upon him) during the propagation of Islam through assisting the needy, feeding the hungry ones, rescue the losers and the host of others. Similar practices were recorded from Ilorin Emirate scholars and it passed different stages of evangelisation. The stage

is categorized into four according to Jamiu (2014) as; pre-Jihad period, Jihad period, post-Jihad period and modern period.

Evangelisation during Pre-Jihad Period in Ilorin Emirate

Pre-Jihad period is the period that witnessed the establishment of Islam in Ilorin. According to Gambari (2020), during this period, Oke-suna was chosen as the centre where Muslim scholars received training on how to propagate Islam, introduce it to others and demonstrate the beauty embedded in it. Furthermore, Jamiu (2014) equally stated that this period existed before the enthronement of Abdul-Salam the son of Alimi as the first Emir of Ilorin around 1828. There were very few Ulama (Muslim scholars) during this period and with that evangelisation was successful to certain extent. Ahmad (2017) submitted that early Muslim scholars settled at Oke-Suna were Shaykh Solagberu, Shaykh Muhammad Mambai, Shaykh Sazali, Shaykh Sanusi, and the host of others. Al-Qur'an, Hadith and Shari'ah were the major sources of Islamic knowledge during the early period of Islamic evangelism in Ilorin.

Evangelisation during Jihad Period in Ilorin Emirate

Jihad period began with the enthronement of Oba Abdul-Salam, the first Emir of Ilorin around 1830 A.D. (Jamiu, 2014). Evangelization of Islam had gained pervasiveness during this period due to unprecedented encountered between Muslim scholars and African Tradition Religion members popularly known as (*Elebo*) which eventually resulted to the collapse of old Oyo Empire around 1830 (Sakariyau, 2019). This period, according to Jamiu (2014), accommodated many scholars from different places to support the establishment and propagation of Islam in the town. Abubakare (2004) and Jamiu (2004) commented that evangelisation of Islamic faith faced many challenges from the African Traditional Religion supporters before and after the elimination of Afonja by Emir Abdul-Salam which contributed to the collapse of old Oyo Empire. In addition, Jamiu (2014) asserted that the triumph realized by the Muslims during that period strengthened the motive of evangelisation in the town and widened it to other neighboring places in Ilorin.

The coming of British colonialists to Ilorin affected military system already established by Emir Abdul-Salam and his crusaders. During this period, according to (Gambari, 2020), reputable scholars were trained and

instructed to continue the work of evangelism in Ilorin Emirate and its environ. Despite the fact that physical military combat was not common during the last stage of this period, intellectual war became something significant among the scholars in Ilorin to disseminate Islamic evangelisation to the far and near places in Yorubaland.

Evangelisation during Post-Jihad Period in Ilorin Emirate

Post-Jihad period is the period that witnessed the total rejection of western education introduced by the British colonialists to Ilorin people. During this Islamic evangelical period, erudite scholars who had just sprung up in Ilorin categorically rejected western education and saw no gain in studying it (Gambari, 2020). The unfriendly attitude of Ilorin scholars towards western system of education dragged Shaykh Adam Al-Ilori and Shaykh Kamaldeen Al-Adabiyy to the establishment of modern Arabic and Islamic schools that would formalize the system of Arabic and Islamic education in Ilorin (Sakariyau, 2019). This unprecedented establishment assisted many people in Ilorin to be well acquitted with necessary knowledge pertaining to Islamic culture, history and literature.

With sustainable idea of establishing Arabic and Islamic schools, the scope of Islamic evangelisation and methodology were properly rebranded and eventually the system appeared to be the teaching of Islamic religion, its basic elements, facts and figures and knowledge about the application of suitable methodology in evangelisation (Bala, 2015). In the same vein, Setewati (2020) noted that any Islamic evangelist during this period was expected to possess certain qualities that will aid the teaching of Islam spiritually, morally, socially and so on. The qualities were mentioned as sound knowledge of Al-Qur'an and its sciences, Hadith and its sciences, skills to identify psychological state and philosophical condition of the audience and proficiency in the areas of literature, oratory among others (Ridwan et al. 2022).

The system of Islamic evangelisation at this period, therefore, slightly differed in all ramifications to suit the need of the period. According to Jamiu (2014), Muslim evangelists were opportune to acquire varieties of erudition from scholars whom among them were Arab people. The scope of Arabic and Islamic knowledge which is the major instrument needed in becoming professional in Islamic evangelism was widened to capture some

areas that are more necessary and germane and this was done purposely to meet the need of the time and target of the people. Yusuf (2018) also pointed out that the amazing development in the field of Islamic scholarship in Ilorin paved way for many people from Yorubaland to embrace Islam and develop interest in learning Islamic knowledge. This aided the pervasiveness of Islam in Yorubaland, especially Igbominaland.

Evangelisation during Modern Period in Ilorin Emirate

Modernisation is the system of life administration that has been in existence in Islam for long. Socialization, civilization and others are among the system established by Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). The Prophet's mission was characterized by what is known in the present time as modernity, his political, social, spiritual, economic, and religious administrations reflected modernisation. It is against the background Yusuf (2018) explained that among the fascinating and attractive strategies developed in Islamic evangelisation during the digital period made it fantastic, impressive, vibrant and convincing. The use of friendship, wisdom, persuasion, cash and kind are among prominent method applied by Muslim clerics in Ilorin emirate. The situation has stylistically graduated to the use of computer devices such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, You Tube and the host of others to facilitate the work of Islamic evengelisation in Ilorin Emirate. Radio and television programmes are among the powerful and prominent media in spreading Islamic evangelism in Ilorin and this is not in any way disturbing public Da'wah usually scheduled in the town.

Peaceful Co-existence and the Sparking of Disharmony in Ilorin Emirate

Recognizing the inevitable significance of peace, tolerance, justice, charity, human dignity among others in sustaining peaceful co-existence in a place where religious pluralism is constitutionally recognized would push religious and traditional leaders to team-work on anything that would enhance peaceful reconciliation and avoid things that could lead to violence and extremism (Zayed & Harbi, 2020). This is the practice of religious, political and traditional leaders in Ilorin because there is always an echo of hospitality, tolerance and harmony in the town. In the same vein, Babangida (1992) submitted that adherents of prominent religions in Nigeria had foolishly failed the country due to their wrong thoughts and ideologies distorted the existing peace and harmony in the country. This implies that

Ilorin is a town well recognized in Nigeria to have accommodated people of different faiths since the establishment of the town till today and there was no any report of violence among religious practitioners in the town but today the precious national emblem of peace and harmony of the Emirate is about to break due to insignificant reasons.

It has been observed that inadequate understanding of religion, lack of scriptural information on religion condemnation, non-challant attitude to statements are among the notable factors that led to unfriendly circumstances among religious adherents in Ilorin Emirate Council (Shittu, 2012). Also, inability of religious leaders to control the unfriendly actions and utterances of religious fanatics, ignorance of the policies of Inter-religious Council of Nigeria contributed to religious intolerance in the Emirate (Jimoh, 2019). Furthermore, Zayed and Harbi (2020) mentioned intimidation of minority group in term of religious opportunity and evangelisation as part of the factors that led to religious violence in a state where religious pluralism is allowed.

Ilorin Emirate Cultural Heritages and Practices

Ilorin, like other towns, is popularly known with some peculiar cultures and practices that have become part and parcel of their life. Durbar, Bareke and Ileya celebrations are among the famous cultural practices embraced wholeheartedly in Ilorin. Durbar is described as cultural and traditional activities that strengthen unity, peaceful co-existence and harmonious working relationship among people of different ethnic in the town (Ahmad, 2019). According to Imam Shafi' (2023), Ilorin Emirate durbar is an annual cultural and traditional festival held in Ilorin. The festival is a week-long event that showcases the unity among Ilorin people. It is a tourist attraction that draws the attention of many Nigerians and foreigners. The events at this period include colourful parades, traditional dances, traditional songs, and horse riding displays among others are the major events.

Bareke on the other hand is a cultural and traditional festival observed by Ilorin people in government house. Durbar is more superb, entertaining and touristic in nature than Bareke because colourful parades and traditional dances are not observed. The Emir of Ilorin is the only one allowed to ride on horse from Emir's palace to government house and return in same manner during Bareke festival. The last peculiar culture to Ilorin Emirate is

Ileya admonition ceremony that is purely religious. Every year, Ilorin Emirate Descendant Progressive Union (IEDPU) invites erudite scholar from Ilorin Emirate to deliver lecture on the importance of peace, unity, and tolerance. This event is religiously fascinating, socially promoting the unity among people of the Ilorin Emirate and politically widening the scope of active participation in politics. Furthermore, Imam shafi' (2023) stated that Ilorin Emirate cultural and traditional festivals are always observed in tandem with Islamic rules and regulations. This means that Ilorin Emirate cultural and traditional festivals are Islamically based festival that promote Islamic cultures.

Conclusion

This study concluded that to enhance sustainable peace and harmony among the three major religions in Ilorin Emirate Council, all the religious and traditional leaders need to team-work on practices that will promote the peace and harmony in the town as well as preach strongly to their members to avoid anything capable of leading to disunity among inhabitants of the Emirate.

Suggestions

Based on the literature reviewed in the study, the following are hereby suggested:

1. Kwara State Government should be proactive on any issue that can distort peaceful co-existence in the State.
2. Appropriate sanction should be melted on any religious leader that facilitates thuggery and capable of breaking peace and harmony of the town
3. Rights of the minority religious adherents should not be denied.
4. Proper awareness on the significance of respecting the culture and traditions of the host community to maintain peace and justice to reign and supreme.
5. There should be a platform of religious dialogue among the leaders of prominent religions in the town
6. Religious evengelisation should be systematically restructured such that morality, virtues and good deeds shall be the top agenda in all religious preaching.

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