

The Fatherhood of Abraham: A Basis for Peaceful Co-Existence between Christians and Muslims

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Abstract: *The major function religion ought to be playing is the role of fostering unity and promoting peace in the society. This is most especially incumbent on Christians and Muslims who claim same ancestry in the person of Abraham. But the experience of Religion in Nigeria has proved other wise. There have been cases of religious acrimony resulting in destruction of lives and property. The question arising is that can two brothers not live together in peace? This single question has motivated various interest groups to comment on news media; write academic treatise on finding solution to this monstrous episode. This also has inspired the writers to write on this topic, "The fatherhood of Abraham: A Basis for Peaceful Co- existence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria in order to realize meaningful development, which religious crises disrupt. To realize the objective of this paper the writer adopts, descriptive, historical, analytical and phenomenological methodology. The paper discovers that Christians and Muslims living together in peace justify their claim as children of Abraham; this will also lead to the realization of the ideal function of religion in the society.*

I. Introduction

Religion is the heart of the society. There is no society any where in the world without religious beliefs and practices. Religion plays a key role in enhancing national peace and development. In Nigeria for example, majority of our nationalists who fought for the political independence of Nigeria from the British attended Mission schools established by Christian Missionaries.

It is no gain saying the fact that every home in Nigeria belongs to one religion or the other. There are some case where members of the same family are Muslims, Christian and traditional worshipers, yet they live in peace and harmony in eastern, southern and western part of Nigeria. This is because religion is meant to promote peace and thus foster peaceful coexistence among any adherents most especially Christians and Muslims who claim ancestorship of Abraham.

Today in Nigeria the reverse is now the case; religion has become an instrument of destruction in the hands of the unenlightened minds, Christians and Muslims are always at logger heads with each other. Every now and then, we hear of religious riots or disturbances between Christians and Muslims especially in the North. These riots usually result in the death of so many people and loss of property worth millions of naira. The unpleasant experiences associated with these riots put fear in the mind of people and also puts religion in jeopardous status in the society to the extent that recently Gaddafi of Libya recommended that Nigeria should be split in two countries of Muslims North and Christians South. He later changed his mind to say it should be split into six countries following the Yugoslavia model. Gaddafi proffered this solution as a result of the recent religious riot in Jos. With these happenings in Nigeria, one therefore begins to wonder whether Muslims and Christians have forgotten that they have a common ancestry in the person of Abraham. This paper, therefore seeks to demonstrate that Abraham is the father of both Islam and Christianity as revealed in their scriptures respectively. The paper will further examine Christian/ Muslim Relations in Nigeria today and proffers solution for a peaceful co-existence between them in Nigeria.

Abraham As Father Of Islam

Islam (Ishmael) the first son of Abraham was born by Hagar, his wife's handmaid (Gen. 16:1-15). The Arabs do not see it that way. As far as the Arabs are concerned Abraham married two wives namely: Sarah who was barren and hajir (known as Hagar in the Bible) whom he had married for the purpose of begetting a son with his wife's consent.(Kaidi et al 1980)

According to the Qur'an after the call of Ibrahim (Abraham), Ibrahim later ask God for a son in Palestine. "O my Lord! Grant me a righteous son". (Qxxxvii:100). God answered Ibrahim and the boy was born. Ibrahim therefore named him Isma'il meaning "the Hearer", because God heard his prayer. From both the Bible and Qur'an certain facts about the birth of Isma'il have emerged. Firstly, Isma'il's mother was Hagar and not Sarah. Secondly, the legitimacy of Isma'il as Abraham's son was not in doubt and thirdly Hagar gave birth to Isma'il fourteen years before Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

The character of Isma'il like that of his father is that of a person ready to suffer and forbear (Qix:114). It is said that right from the time Isma'il was born out of jealousy; Sarah and Hagar were always at logger head with each other. **Hamza** Kaidi puts it this way:

Sarah never misses an opportunity to make
Haajir life wretched; and was not satisfied
Until she had devised a way to get ride of the woman
Who had given Abraham a son (Kaidi et al 1980).

In the Bible we also read that Sarah did not want her son (Isaac) to be co-heir with Isma'il the son of the slave woman. The jealousy became so strong that Sarah pressurized Abraham to send Hagar and her son Isma'il away. Though, Abraham was displeased with Sarah's suggestion, he did Sarah's bidding through divine intervention, after God's assurance that he will bless Isma'il too. According to Genesis 21:13, God promised Abraham in the following words: "I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring."

It is argued that Abraham had a vision to sacrifice his son. According to the Arabs the son that Abraham was to be scarified was Isma'il born fourteen years before Sarah had Isaac for him. It therefore follows from this argument that Isaac could not have been the "scarified lamb" but Isma'il. They also claimed that the place for the sacrifice was near Mecca that is the valley of Muria, six miles north of Mecca (Kaidi et al 1980).

It is generally believed that the sacrifice was demanded of both the father and the son as a test of faith which both of them passed. The Qur'an justified this belief as follows:

On my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice;
Now see what is thy view? (The son) said "O my father!
Do as thou art commanded.... (Q. xxxvii:99ff)

In fact, it is this symbolic act of submission to God's will that earn Isma'il the appellation "Zabuhullah", meaning "the chosen sacrifice of God" (Kaidi et al 1980). Apart from the parental relationship between Abraham and Isma'il, the history of the Ka'bah strongly connects them. The Ka'bah is the religious place of the Arabians before the advent of Islam, traced even as far back as to the time of Adam and Eve. But it is believed to have faded out with the passage of time, only to be rebuilt by Abraham and Isma'il.

According to Hamza Kaidi et al (1980), Abraham and his son Isma'il guided by divine revelation, rediscovered the foundations of ancient temple, built by the father of humanity, Adam and they used them for the rebuilding of Ka'bah. Moreover, the sacred stone is believed to have been found by Isma'il who in turn gave it to his father to place it at one of the Ka'bah.

From the above discussion, it is clear, that Isma'il did not grow up with the father, yet God (Allah) still watched over him and made a great nation out of him, just as he promised Abraham. He became a great warrior and the father of twelve princes. The Arabs honour Abraham as their ancestor.

As noted already in this paper, Isma'il the eldest son of Abraham was driven away from home with his mother Hagar as a result of pressure from Sarah the first wife of Abraham. According to Genesis 21:19, mother and child wandered in the desert. During this period they become thirsty after their water got finished and the mother (Hagar) searched for water desperately for her dying child. Both the Bible and the Qur'an agreed that the child was providentially saved from thirst. The Muslim version of the source of water is what is known as the zamzam spring. This spring became the celebrated zamzam well, where pilgrims now quench their thirst (Kaidi et al 1980)

Kaidi et al (1980) voaches that it is interesting to observe that today, a village has grown around the zamzam well known as Bakkah, the ancient name of Mecca. As Isma'il grew in the desert under divine grace, he became a good archery and eventually his mother gave him a wife from Egypt (Gen.21:22).

According to Harry (1982) in fulfillment of God's promise to make Isma'il the father of twelve princes, Isma'il had sons, one of whom was Kedar. They dwell from Havillah unto shur, which is the present day Arab nation. He also reveals that Kedar, one of the twelve sons of Isma'il is used in the Bible and the rabbinic literature,, to refer to Arabs, who inhabits 'Syro-Arabian desert. Also in Jer. 49:28ff. Kedar is used in reference to Arabs, South East of Damascus. Furthermore, the Assyrian inscription mentioned Kedar with the Arabs. (Harry 1982).

From the above discussion, Kedar one of Isma'il sons represent Arabs. This is why, up till today, the Arabs still honour Isma'il and accepts Ibrahim (Abraham) as their ancestor through him.

We have noted in this work that Ibrahim gave birth to Isma'il and that the descendants of Abraham through Isma'il and Kedar can be traced to Prophet Mohammed who is also an Arab and founder of the Islamic religion.

It must be noted at this juncture that there is no where in the Holy Qur'an where the lineage of Abraham is directly traced to Islam. However, Abraham was the first to worship the only true God (monotheism). This monotheistic worship of God (Allah) was brought back to Mecca through Mohammed. So Mecca follows the steps of their ancestors (Abraham and Isma'il) by been monotheistic in their worship of Allah. In Islam therefore, Muslims believe that they should live and die in the faith of one God, just like their ancestor Abraham. Therefore, Abraham, being the first monotheist has greatly influenced Islam as a monotheistic religion. In this connection, Douglas (1962) has this to say: "As a prophet and recipient of divine covenant, Abraham lays a unique role in Muslims tradition".

Thus Islam followed Abraham's creed, which is monotheism, belief in one God, because it was revealed to Mohammed. Hence the Abrahamic ancestry of Islam has been established on two grounds. First, biologically speaking, Abraham through Isma'il became the ancestor of Arabs through which Mohammed the founder of Islam came, second, spiritually speaking, Abraham was the first person to move away from idolatrous nation to a place he worshipped the one true God. This monotheistic practice of Abraham is also the teaching of Islam.

ABRAHAM AS FATHER OF CHRISTIANITY

According to the priestly tradition, Abraham left Haran for Canaan sixty years before his father's death. (Gunkel 1901) He reveals further that although no explicit reason for Abraham's journey is given, the priestly concentration upon this one family is not at odds with the Yahwehists chronology of Abraham's call and election (Gen. 12: 1-3).

The Abrahamic theme continued in the Old Testament and received significant expansion and interpretation in the New Testament. Thus, Abraham was the father of Israelites according to flesh. Abraham also became father of all whom, after the spirit share in faith (Matt. 8: 11-12; Luke 13:16,16:24; Rom. 11:1, 4:16; Gal. 3:29). The Bible recorded that God "swore an oath" with Abraham, sealed with promise of a son, land and people (Luke 1:73; Acts 7:5-6) (Napier 1955). He wrote further that God proved himself faithful, because at Abraham's old age God gave him a son named Isaac according to his promise. Abraham responded in faith to God's covenant by circumcising his son Isaac. Here, Abraham partially experienced the fulfillment of the second element of the patriarchal promise of seed and land.

Abraham was an hundred years old when he had Isaac (Gen. 21:1-6). When the son was born, Abraham called him Isaac (i.e Laughter) and on the eight day Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded (Gen. 22:4). Isaac was the promised son of Abraham and the son of covenant.(Kazer 1985).

The Bible recorded how God tested Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice his only son. The Bible puts this way: Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you have loved, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as burnt offering.

God later provided a ram as a substitute for Isaac (Gen. 22: 12-13). As the son of his inheritance, Abraham loved Isaac so much that he gave him everything he had (Gen. 25:1-16). Having inherited his father's flocks and herds, he became very rich, peaceable but his life was not very blissful (Kazer 1985). He had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. In order to carry on the covenant of Abraham in his descendants, God chose Jacob the youngest of the twins as the heir apparent. Esau the first born of Isaac was naturally the heir and the inheritor of the Abraham promises. But God, knowing before hand qualities of two men, chose Jacob to be the heir of the precious heritage a decision which he (God) limited to their mother (Morrison 1990). This was the background of Jacob's deal with Esau.

According to Morrison (1990) judging from the history of Abraham's descendants up to Jacob, God chose in each case of a particular lineage from which the Abrahamic covenant would be fulfilled. For instance, in the line of promise (that to the promise God made with Abraham) all Abraham sons were eliminated, except Isaac. Of Isaac, Esau was eliminated and Jacob was chosen. With Jacob, the elimination process stopped, for all of Jacob's descendants were included in the chosen nation. Thus, his name was changed from Jacob to Israel (Gen. 35:9).

Jacob has twelve sons among who was Judah. This tribe of Judah produced David, whose lineage can be traced to Jesus Christ. This fact is supported by the scriptural account of Matthew as follows; "The book of the history of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham" (Matt.1:1)

The next verses in Matthew 1:ff further spell out Abraham's line of descendants down to Jacob, who became the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. Therefore, Jesus the founder of Christianity was really a descendent of Abraham. (Herry1984).

At this juncture, it is necessary to discuss the religion of the Jews as a way to add illumination to our discussion. The religion of the Jews is Judaism. This religion of the Jews is one of the oldest religions of the world. The religion like Christianity and Islam is monotheistic in nature and practice. This religion was practiced by Abraham, according to Henry (1984).

God bless David like Abraham. He was a man after God's heart like Abraham, God made a lot of promises to David among which are how the Hebrew nation, and infact all the nations of the world would be blessed through his family. The blessing would come through a great king, who would one day be born to the

house of David. The child would live forever and would establish a kingdom of endless reign. According to Prophet Isaiah, the child would be great and would reign for everlasting. Isaiah said thus:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace. (Isaiah 9:6-7). This messianic prophecy of Prophet Isaiah was fulfilled in the New Testament in the person of Jesus Christ. An angel appeared to Mary the mother of Jesus in Luke 1:30-33 to finalize the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.

In this child of promise, the Davidic covenant found its fulfillment. The child was Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity. From the foregoing discussion, we have established that Christianity grew out of Judaism, which the Jews claimed to be the religion of Abraham. Moreover, the lineage of Jesus Christ is traceable to Abraham. Abraham can therefore be rightfully referred to as both physically and spiritually, the father of Christianity.

Christian-Muslim Relations In Nigeria Today

As we have demonstrated in this work already, the parental link and spiritual relationship between Christianity and Islam are never in doubt. It is not also debatable that of the three major religions practiced in Nigeria. Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Christianity are predominant. New churches and mosques are spring up daily in Nigeria. Nigeria has more Churches and Mosques than factories. It thus means Christianity and Islam have more adherents in Nigeria than ATR.

It must be observed at this point that one would have thought that because of the wide spread of Christianity and Islam, and also because of the common ancestry of both of them, there is supposed to be a cordial relationship between the two religions. But experience has shown that this is not so as evident in many parts of Northern Nigeria. In the southern part of Nigeria where ATR is predominantly practiced tolerance prevails because of the influence of ancestral worship. For instance, the Yoruba and some part of Edo state where these three major religions are practiced, little or no religious riot has been practically recorded.

Over the years, there have been reported cases of religious riots between Christians and Muslims in the North especially Jos the Capital of Plateau State. Since September 2001 when its first major riot broke out, Jos has not known peace. In November 28, 2008 for three days, violence was let loose on the streets of Jos. Youths burnt down about 20 car marts containing no fewer than 200 different types of vehicles on Zaria road. (Suleman 2008). Churches, Mosques, and private houses were also touched. The city of Jos went up in flames and the cry of anguish of the bereaved rent the air. Citizens who found themselves in hostile neighbourhoods ran with their families to nearby military and police barracks for safety. (Suleman 2008). At the end of the fracas, not less than 500 people were reported dead, while thousands had been displaced and property worth millions of naira had been destroyed. In places where more in number attacked the Muslims, while the Muslims also attacked the Christians in communities where they are larger in population (Suleman 2008)

Again in January year (2010) there was fresh outbreak of hostilities in Jos. According to media reports, the cause of the disturbances this time was on account of a house that was being renovated. As the story goes, the noise at the site of the building that was being renovated was disturbing ongoing service at a nearby Catholic Church that Sunday morning. Worshippers at the Church went to plead with the workers to suspend work until after the church service. They refused and instead pursued the Christians into the church premises, where a fight ensued. Alarms were raised and fresh conflagration started. (Suleman 2010)

Within a twinkling of an eye, words had gone round that Hausa youths had attacked a Catholic Church in Nasarawa, Gwon, killing some Christians. The situation degenerated into a war situation between Christians and Muslims. According to the Nigeria Red Cross not less than 4,000 people were displaced about 250 people dead and property worth millions destroyed in the conflagration. (Suleman 2010).

By March 7 year (2010) another orgy of violence was let loose on the village of Dogo Nahawa still in Jos. Fulani herdsmen entered the village in the early hours of 3am to 6am, when people fast asleep and set their houses on fire, killing men, women and innocent children. By the time they retreated, the three villages of Dogo Nahaawa, Ratsa and Zot had been reduced to rubble. According to Gregory Yenlong Commissioner for information Plateau State, about 500 people were killed during the attack. (Suleman 2010). Some of the Fulani herdsmen that were arrested claimed that it was a reprisal attacks from the January incident. It was this crises that made Gaddafi the Libyan Leader to suggest that Nigeria should be slit in two separate countries of Muslim North and Christian South.

Boko Haram an Islam religious group founded in 2002 in Maiduguri by one Ustaz Muhammed Yusuf has since become a major threat to peace in Nigeria. For instance on 26th July, 2009 this set attacked a Police Station in Bauchi which led to the death of an estimated. 700 people (<http://www.rte.ie/news/2009/Nigeria.html>). Boko Haram saga has become a principal threat on security in Nigeria. Although the conflict has generated to all facets of Nigerian structure, it is note worthy that the major target are Christians who claim the same ancestral descendants of Abraham (Ibrahim). The literature expresses surprise why those who are suppose to be in brotherhood tie should degenerate to such ignoble hatred. Children of the same ancestor –

Abraham ought to live cordially in spite of religious and geographical location take adherent of ATR. Thus the incessant Boko Haram attacks have led to human lives over 10,000 people (2012 0650439.html) Guardian retrieved 7th Sept 2012. What an overwhelming experience!

II. Recommendations

It is necessary at this point to make some recommendations in this work for peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria:

- i. First, both Christians and Muslims must emphasize their common ancestry in the person of Abraham and not their doctrinal differences. This will go a long way to engender peaceful relationships between the two dominant religions in Nigeria.
- ii. Second, human values must be taught to the adherents of these two religions by their leaders. Human life is the image and likeness of God according to the Bible and as such no individual has the right to take the life of another person. Human life must be seen as sacrosanct.
- iii. Third, promoters of religious disturbances must be prosecuted and if found guilty sentenced to prison no matter how highly placed and connected they are in the society. This will serve as a deterrent to others who would be sponsors of religious riots. We have had in this country the Miss World Tragedy of 2002, Mohammed Cartwright riots, of 2006 Boko Haram clashes of 2009 and recently the Jos riots, in all of these riots nobody has been jailed for the breach of peace in Nigeria by the government of the day. And this emboldened others to continue without fear of being prosecuted. This inaction of the government must be discouraged by well-meaning Nigerians. The government must be made to protect life and property as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution.
- iv. Fourth, Religious education should be made compulsory for all children in school from primary school to secondary level. This will help them to learn about different religions in Nigeria with the sole aim of tolerating one another's religious views. The truth is that in real life situations there is no business or work place that one will not come in contact with adherents of Christianity and Islam.
- v. Fifth, Christians and Muslims should embrace religious ecumenism. This will make room for dialogue and also engenders unity and love.
- vi. Lastly, government should provide employment for youths who are unemployed. The truth is that the level of unemployment in Nigeria is a contributory factor for religious clashes. Some of these youths because they have nothing doing, they are willing instruments of destruction in the hands of religious bigots. A youth with a job and a decent pay will be too busy to involve in religious disturbances, because he wants to keep his job and continue to enjoy life.

III. Conclusion

In this work we have demonstrated that Islam and Christianity have the same ancestry in the person of Abraham. And in doing this we examined both the Qur'an and the Bible to justify our claims. We also examined Christian – Muslim relations today in Nigeria. And we find out that it is a relationship characterized by mutual suspicions and hostilities as exemplified by the Jos and other sporadic crises in the North. And then we offered recommendations, which we believe will guarantee peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims if strictly followed.

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