

**TRENDING THE PATH OF PEACE IN AFRICA: A PHILOSOPHICAL  
INTERROGATION OF INTELLECTUAL CUM RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE  
BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*In this increasingly diverse cultural and multi-religious society of ours, the topic of religious tolerance has come to the forefront agitation of many people in the society as a resolution to diverse challenges bedeviling the entire world. Right from inception, man's motive has been towards seeking self-preservation, not to this life alone, man hopes to live eternally hereafter even in the face of death, but he also believes he has to merit a happy life in the world by living well here which eventually bring about conflict within his fellow human being. However, despite various human intellectual efforts towards resolving conflict, it appears that intellectual misunderstanding of religion which ought to promote peace and harmonious relation contributes to conflict and insecurity that most nations are experiencing in the contemporary period. This paper through its philosophical expository models alongside synthesis methods and critical analysis, focus on the importance and significance of intellectual tolerance in the human community and its impact on harmonious living and peaceful co-existence among different religious groups within the society. As regards this, it harps that religious tolerance which is rooted in human intellect should serve as an antidote to conflict and insecurity that bedeviled the nation.*

**Keywords: Religion, Philosophy, Intellectual Tolerance, peace, society.**

**Introduction**

The attraction of living in peace and harmony is so strong in man's mind that it has ignited both learned religious leaders and scholastic discussions throughout the academic field, with interfaith dialogues among different religious communities as well as mainstream academic conferences. While divers' opinions have been put in place by different intellectuals toward achieving a tolerance society through the use of religious preaching to the society, it is very glaring that the deeper people go in their religion the more intolerance they become. Although supporting the position that it is possible and prudent to practice religious tolerance in the 'genuine sense', may be rationally defensible provided certain clauses are rationally considered, however, one must also put into consideration that man is a rational being; a rational animal so to say, it is rationally impossible for man to reason equally, thus to defend the position of religious tolerance without given consideration to the intellectual aspect of man will sound anomalous. Thus, the concept of genuine religious tolerance is at best re-examining in line with the intellectual aspect of man to develop a genuine tolerant society

which Plato describes as an ideal society. As regards this, it is proper the paper harps that religious tolerance which is rooted in human intellect should serve as an antidote to conflict and insecurity that bedeviled the nation. In arguing this position, the paper is divided into different sections; the concept of religion and issues relating to a religion shall be conceptually clarified, Sanctity of human life in the face of religion, the role of intellectual tolerance in society, and many more will also be discussed and finally marry religious and intellectual tolerance for peaceful co-existence

### **An Overview of the concept of Religion**

Religion as a concept and practice has been so prostituted that its major definition and significance becomes undermined and chartered in a certain crucial and social situation. There is no doubt saying that while some people know the essence, some are bamboozled into it, but ignorant of its essence. Others perpetually demand the practical relevance of religion on an individual, society and communal development, whether religion has any goal to society and man well being, thus instead of a man looking at what religion says, mode of religion becomes dominant to man. The primary goal of religion as asserted by Oladipo (1995;5) is to provide an orientation to life both for individual and communities which invariably centered on two core values; namely self-realization and social harmony which will eventually pave ways for the condition of existence guided by a longing for the discovery of the ideal possibilities of human life. Despite this conception, it is heart-rending that people hide under the guise of this same religion to perpetuate social vices, especially when one sees the startling revelation that accompanies a catalog of vices perpetrated in the name of religion in our country since the inception of democratic administration still present. For instance, one could remember the Okija shrine discovered during Obasanjo's administration, where evil atrocities are being perpetrated by the so-called religious sets. Hence, for us to have an in-depth understanding of the concept, it becomes a philosophical imperative to examine and possibly absolve religion as a major instrument for mutual co-existence and national development.

The paper is not devoted to a particular religion nor comparing a particular religion with any of the existing ones, as it might be assumed by the commonsensical belief, an attempt to do so lead to an infinite regression as against the position of the work. However for clarification seek, without mincing word, it has been asserted by some exponents of moralist in religion that religious proliferation is among a tool for moral re-armament in any country. Unah (1993:54) buttress this position by asserting the need for decentralization of religion, but a philosophical look at the doctrinal foundation of most religions in the country reveals that all religions are a subtle attack on what they perceived as inconsistency of other religions; mode of religion now outright religion; these exist in intra-religion and inter-religion diplomacy. In another situation, there are results of fanatical inflexibility and a bid to build a formidable institution that can divert and silence perceived enemies of such religion. In contrary to mindset, the paper examines religion in the general form which asserts it as conviction of people in relation with morality. It is obvious that without any reference to morality, the religious creed is impossible because it is logically connected. Perhaps it will amount to naturalistic fallacy equating morality to religion, but for the richness of the work, the religion which has its deep root in morality in line with human intellectual tolerance on matters related to his fellow human provide resolution to national problems, there seems to be at least prima

facie validity in distinguishing between the broad classifications views about what constitutes a religion. For one to have a better term there is a need for conceptualization.

### **Conceptualization of Religion**

The word "religion" is one of the controversial concepts to human understanding, from the point of origin to the very scope of meaning. In this regard, there are lots of tendencies and positions that must be thoroughly glanced at before a working definition can be put in place. A workable definition may not be reached in a unilateral point of view, however, the subject matter may be defined from different speculative ranges from objective to subjective religion, but the most fundamental aspect is the fact that religion is essentially a relationship, links established between two-person; human and divine or supernatural being believed to exist. It is something that links or unites man with a transcendent being believe to exist and worshiped by man, thus religion is a bi-polar phenomenon. On the one end is the man (the religious man) while on the other end is the transcendent being, the deity, he believes to exist and which he worships. This implies that religion is an embracing and complex concept which permeates all spheres of human life. Religion is a human intellectual discovery that shows a link between man and a transcendental being believe to exist. Durkheim (1951) even asserts that religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things. While Odumuyiwa (2001) posits that religion is man's effective desire to be in the right relationship with a sacred transcendental order, controlling human destiny and events in life with prescribed systems of rituals and of belief. This implies that religion is essentially a relationship between man and deity, a transcendent being believe to exist in the supernatural realm. Invariably behind the concept of religion is man, man is the measure of all things, determining what does and what does not exist through his consciousness and intellectual understanding of his environment. That is, man constitutes what is called religion, without which religion does not exist. Going through various notions on the concept of religion, it can be asserted that religion is made for man and not man is made for religion. It is a voluntary subjection of oneself to the Supreme Being. It must be subsumed that religion answers to a deep-felt need in heart of man. Hence religion in its outward worship is a social function. Besides, it aims at providing an orientation to human life, both for individuals and the community. Oladipo (1995) consents that the types of orientation giving he worships.

However, Religion should be centered on two core values namely self-realization and social harmony which is the ultimate purpose of communal existence, but it is deplorable at times that religion is used for the destructive purpose most especially in this current dispensation. Religion has a very dynamic role to play in the socio-political integration of humanity. By self-realization it does not simply mean a state of economic, social, and cultural well being, although this is equally important, rather what it means is a condition of existence or a state of being which is guided by longing or desire for the discovery of the ideal possibilities of human life. Religion is not only sought to protect and enhance our humanity, but the socio-political conditions for the realization of their core value are more so the same. This being the case, the struggle for respect for human rights in any society should also be a struggle for the various religions in that society. There can be no genuine brotherhood in a society of unequal opportunities. Thus, to be able to realize the core value of religion, we need a socio-political order which takes liberty, equality, and justice seriously as human ideals. These precisely are

the ideals which the universal declaration of human and people's rights seeks to promote. The rights insist that;

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in the spirit of brotherhood (culled from Oladipo, 1996).

Besides, natural law theory complements this by affirming everybody's rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Considering various functions and values being highlighted about religion, it seems as if it has failed to realize its essence particularly in Nigeria and the continents at large. The more religious Nigerians become the nastier, brutish, and short human life in society becomes. Regardless of Freedom of religion and religious tolerance as basic values present in every country, acts of discrimination based on religion have not yet disappeared. Then among crucial questions that are begging for an answer is why do people of different religions and in some cases, people of the same religion seem to hate each other so much in the name of their religion? in another form, is the mode of religion that must be put into consideration and emphasis by the spiritual leaders or deeper intellectual understanding of the concept and basis of religion?

There is no doubt saying, Nigeria is evidently at a critical phase in its march to political and economic development for quite some years, the country most especially the Northern part has been experiencing incidents of violence and conflicts mainly as a result of ill-defined religious and political reasons. Recently there emerged a faceless Islamic sect called "Boko-Haram" in the North-East zone of the same Northern region, most especially in the following states, Borno, Bauchi, Yobe of the same geopolitical zone. The truth of the matter remains that the sect Boko Haram is being blamed for everything because for every outbreak of violence and destruction of life and properties in Nigeria, the Boko Haramists have always claimed responsibilities. All these atrocities are being performed in the name of religion, but why is this case, why has it not been possible for our religion to make many contributions to advancement in Nigeria of a human community in which the individuals act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood ?. Why are some Islamic sects known as Boko Haram turn to be terrorists while the book of Islamic never allows so? In the holy book of Islam, Quran 4:29 reads "O you who believes, consume each other's property illicitly, only mutually acceptable transactions are permitted, you shall not kill yourselves, God is merciful towards you."

Many problems lie beside the unsuccessful campaign in bringing religion into the greater height especially in Nigeria among which include: intolerance (which includes, spiritual, moral, and intellectual), incessant fanaticism, politicization, and manipulation of the religious question for personal political gains. These attributes have spread over to the two major religion that was borrowed into the country i.e Christianity and Islam which has more so influenced indigenous African religion. The two had also joined hands in derogatory thereby rendering the religion useless. All these are traced to two major factors which are described as intellectual and religious intolerance. It is on this premise that the paper focuses on how the two concepts: religion and intellectual tolerance, can be used as pivotal for a peaceful existence.

### **The concept of Tolerance discussed**

Intolerance is one of the most common forms of human rights violations and abuse which is affecting millions of people every day and it is more one of the easiest concepts to recognize within human society. The concept of intolerance is a derivative from tolerance, while it is generally plausible to conceptualize intolerance and tolerance as an attribute being a concept experience in our society on daily basis, it is not so usual to conceptualize tolerance based on the fact that human rationality differs. Notwithstanding, the word "intolerance" can't be given a straightforward definition as it is expected of some other concept related to human existence. Generally, Intolerance is seen as an attitude of man as a means of showing discomfort, which appears to be even more common than tolerance in our society, intolerance constitutes the oldest problem of human existence. It is a mental attitude, portrayed by an individual being toward a particular situation or matter at a point in time.

Intolerance in most cases can manifest informs of discrimination, though discrimination and intolerance are closely related concepts the two are not synonymous, while in discrimination, people are treated less favorably than other people in a comparable situation only because they belong, or are perceived to belong to a certain group or category of people. In this situation, people may be discriminated against because of their age, disability, ethnicity, origin, political belief, race, religion, sex or gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, and on many other grounds. Discrimination, in this sense, is often the result of narrow-mindedness people hold, this act makes people powerless, hinders them from becoming active citizens, and restricts them from developing their skills and, in many situations, from accessing work, health services, education, or accommodation.

On the other hand, the word intolerance is the sub-fix of the word 'tolerance', which derived its origin from the Latin root "tolero" meaning to bear, endure, sustain, etc. So, tolerance can be interpreted as a means through which one is putting up with something, suggesting that one who practices tolerance will accept the burden of another, presumably for a greater good. It must be deduced that by its very nature, tolerance is neither pleasant nor desirable, and as such is merely a means to an end. It is a consequential action. In other words, tolerance is an action that is taken for duty's sake. Tolerance is further conceived in terms of utility which is considered the total number of people that will derive happiness or satisfaction in the action as against personal desire. Intolerance is described as an act of lack of respect for opinion, practices, or beliefs other than one's own. It also involves emotional and physical rejection of people whom we perceive as a different clan, for example, members of a social or ethnic group other than ours, or people who are different in religion, political or sexual orientation. Thus, Intolerance can manifest itself in a wide range of actions from avoidance through hate speech to physical injury, disobedience, or even murder. It can further involve acts of denying people the rights of another religious faith to practice and express their beliefs freely.

Despite the recognition of freedom of religion according to the fundamental human rights act as basic value for human existence, yet acts of discrimination and intolerance based on religion have become an impediment for a mutual peaceful existence among people of African. In our contemporary society, this act of intolerance is often linked with many factors among which include racism, tribalism among others, which, therefore, tend to involve multiple discriminations. Religious intolerance is expressed in discrimination, repression, and religious

rivalry, and results in or results from persecution. This acts in most cases leads to war and persistent hatred between nations and between peoples within the nations.

Philosophically, intolerance is considered to be a result of ignorance, and such ignorance and intolerance are often passed down to the next generation when people in positions of authority (parents, teachers, religious leaders, etc.) remain ignorant. This implies that intolerance is not a spontaneous action, rather it is instinctual acts developed by man based on his ignorance, Ignorance often leads to fear, fear then leads to hatred, and hatred finally leads to violence. The origin of intellectual intolerance is therefore traceable to unconstructive valuation which originates differences between one or more people, Knowledge is therefore the basic key to avoid going down this path.

### **The quest for Human Value in the Society**

Man according to Awolowo cannot live alone but associate himself with others in society (Awolowo 1981:60). However, It is not only in the society that man realizes himself but it is in the state that man does so fully. Awolowo was of the view that the state is like an extended family. The state is the creation of man and it emerges from several natural and economic administrative factors. Since the state is created by man, its purpose is to ensure that man can realize his natural desire and aspiration. To achieve his desire in the state man needs to associate with his fellow human and as well struggle for his needs among his fellow being. This implies that man struggle for his want amid his fellow being, in the course of doing this crisis emerges.

Awolowo in his work divided the social class in the state into two; the rich and the poor with a geographical distinction. The urban dwellers are rich and they enjoy a comparatively higher standard of living and can add comfort to necessities. The poor, on the other hand, are people who have the means to satisfy only the necessities of life and live in rural areas. The poor class constituted the majority in society while the rich men are few and exploitative. The implication is that there would not have been any problems if everybody is equal no rich, no poor in society. But because the rich are few and yet exploit the masses, after a while the poor class which has been exploited and badly treated will resent. However, the dominant class which wants to continue to attain and maintain their selfish objective at all cost will also resent any move of the poor class, consequently, socio-political crises emerge in the state.

We can speak about a crisis of moral values, economic or political crises. Socio-political crises can be described as a form of social disorder and lawlessness including social uprising, political assassination, ethnic or religious violence, and national disasters. Socio-political crises also include financial scandals and corrupt practices involving political officers.

In an attempt to define social crises, Nnoruga (2000:132) asserts that crisis is poverty, prostitution, occultisms, corruption, and unemployment. It also represents armed robbery, abuse of office, and communal clashes. These social malaises generally culminate in violence, killing, and insecurity which are the hallmark of the kind of crises that are widespread in Africa countries with an emphasis in Nigeria. The crisis stems in the society whenever there is intolerance between the parties involved, thus crisis is seen as the aftermath of intolerance within a given society.

In most cases, during crises social and economic activities are disrupted and the consequences shape the future of the parties involved (Vasudeu2002). Social crises are often a result of fear of ethnic domination, discrimination, or religious persecution and when such fear becomes so overwhelming, it then manifests in conflict hostility, and violence. In Nigeria, social crises have been a result of religious intolerance, boundary disputes, resistance to perceived injustice or exploitation, and other political reason. Vasudeu even maintains that Ethnic and religious conflict represents a convergence of events that result in a new set of circumstances (Vasudeu 2002). In the political scene, the Nigerian experience has shown that military government is not only an aberration but also a crisis in itself. Seeing military overthrowing or overseeing the affairs of government either for a positive motive or the other is no longer tolerated by the citizens.

### **Religious tolerance and the problem of Intellectual Intolerance**

In these increasingly diverse cultural and multi-religious societies of ours, the topic of religious tolerance has come to the forefront agitation of many people in the society as a resolution to diverse challenges bedeviling the entire world. This concept of religious tolerance permeates the notion of hope for harmony and projects the utopian livelihood view that humans, despite their religious differences, can live together in peace. Freedom of religion and religious tolerance are basic values present in every country, yet acts of discrimination based on religion have not yet disappeared in society. Often Religious intolerance is linked with racism and xenophobia most particularly with Islamophobia

The attraction of living in harmony and peace is so strong that it has ignited scholastic discussions throughout the academic field, with interfaith dialogues among different religious communities as well as mainstream academic conferences. Although supporting the position that it is possible and prudent to practice religious tolerance in the 'genuine sense', may be rationally defensible provided that man is consciously aware that he creates the so-called religion out of his consciousness, however on the other side, one must also defend the opposite since not all human is rationally conscious of his action. Thus, genuine religious tolerance is at best if the sense of intellectual tolerance is more so given room to operate in human society. While the idea of toleration in the contemporary world has come to be synonymous with being civilized and fulfilling one's civic duty, key virtue, in some rare cases the same is thought of intellectual (and in some cases physical) intolerance. Surely, most people agree that we should not be tolerant of racism, bigotry, genocide, or child abuse.

How do we define genuine intellectual tolerance? This has to do with intellectual cum moral tolerance. Knowledge is the key to avoiding going down the path of intolerance. Most often, Conflict between people of different religions begins with simple ignorance. People who do not know anything about other religions just assume the others are very different without the knowledge that many religions share the same basic ideas Let us take, for example, genuine tolerance to means, when two individuals looking at a ball agree that it is a ball and not a wood, or agree that the chairs they are sitting in our chairs and not rocks. Such agreements do not require tolerance in the sense of 'putting up with' something; such positions are natural and genuine. Tolerance on the other hand is non-genuine when I say "God is Allah" according to the Islamic position and the Christian on the other side claim that "God is Jesus" or "Jesus is the son of God". Since neither of us wants to hurt each other's feelings or escalate the conflict,

we simply smile and move on. No agreement or acceptance of the other side is believed, in this case, there is a form of intellectual intolerance or a non-genuine sense of tolerance.

The synopsis of this contention is that religious tolerance in the intellectual sense is a desirable quality, but a vice. It is the intellectual tolerance of religious beliefs that is both a virtue and a moral imperative, for the sake of society's greater good. The position of the paper thus implies that it is imperative to emphasize that while there is a need to call for an intellectual practice of tolerance, practically speaking; everyone should tolerate people of other religions irrespective of the ethnics or race.

### **The way forward**

Ordinarily, one could have affirmed that no problem could ever arise with the policy of secularism adopted in Africa with multi-religious people, a policy that adopted no state religion but enjoys the freedom of choice by all and sundry in religious matters, but the other is the case. Every individual in society is seeing his religion as the ultimate as against others. The particularism of religion thus becomes the order of the day in the human intellect. For an effective peaceful society resulting from genuine religious tolerance, the particularism of religion should be avoided, no particular religion should take a total belief based on the teaching that anybody inherits salvation or perhaps the kingdom of God; this in many times had generated into open confrontation among different members and at the end developing to intolerance.

Furthermore, the existing religion should see one another as brother and sister in other to pave ways for social integration and peace among others. Since religion helps in the internalization of the norms and the value of the society, it should be psychologically impressed pedagogically strengthen to enhance good character formation in Africa children. Through this, the commitment of religion will impact positively the other components of national life, politics, economics, education, and culture, etc. categorically speaking, religion is one of the principal custodians of morality, it internalizes moral norms and reinforced the quest to be moral. When thoroughly practiced it can be a social binder but when mishandled it can destroy the whole foundation of universal brotherhood.

### **Conclusion**

The synopsis of this contention is that religious tolerance in the intellectual sense is a virtue that must be pursued by all. The position of the paper thus implies that it is imperative to emphasize that while there is a need to call for an intellectual practice of tolerance with what religion tolerance preaches, practically speaking, everyone should tolerate people of other religions. Intellectual tolerance of religious beliefs brings about social peace and harmony. There is no need for us to separate political and cultural influence from religion, in other for us to understand what religion is really about. The fact is that through religion we can do something about how we respond to life, how we live our lives in the neighboring, religion legacy is the concern for human well being, the affirmation that we are free to act for what we believe in and to change the situation in which we find ourselves, through these efforts, the defense of reason, the acceptance of responsibility. The power of religion is in minds that are to change, hearts that are open to each other. It can be concluded that this world has no ultimate meaning, but it is clear that something in it has a meaning and that is human because



we are the only creatures to insist on having one. Jean-Paul Sartre asserts that even if I think it is God that I obey it is I who decided it was God who spoke to me (1982). This is what we called relying begins and ends in human experience. Hence human action should be based on the maxim which says act in such a way that can be universalized

If there cannot be a place for intellectual intolerance in scientific enterprise despite their intellectual differences; why then should human creates intellectual intolerance on the mystery that is beyond human comprehension in the name of religion. If the scientists are not tolerant toward different hypotheses, it is obvious that it will not be able to move even a step forward as it is being experienced. Likewise, Philosophy, in particular, grows out of critical thinking which has its feet on argument yet there is always room for tolerance despite various criticisms in their philosophical analysis. This is true since ancient times till the present. Today, in Analytical Philosophy central place is given to clarification of concepts and logical evaluation of beliefs, this has given a firm foundation to philosophical enterprise. If we are not tolerant enough even to listen to one another's arguments, how are we going to logically evaluate it? In fact, in Philosophy, knowledge grows out of a clash of opposite ideas and intellectual struggle. There is no place for intellectual intolerance neither in the scientific method nor in philosophical discourse, hence why should there be the act of intolerance in society. Religion and intellectual tolerance are therefore the basic tools that can promote a peaceful society.

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