

THE RIGHT TO LIFE AND CONTEMPORARY SECURITY CHALLENGES: AN ISLAMIC POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract

Islam, as a complete way of life, attaches high value to human life and property. This is because man need to live in order to carry out divine obligation to serve the purpose of his existence on earth. It is however lamentable that the contemporary human society despises the right to life which Islamic tenet considers sacred. Despite numerous rights, which Allah gives to man to enjoy, the present paper is an attempt to focus on right to life because it appears to be the most fundamental concept in the discourse of human right. Effort is also made in this paper to affirm the position of Islam on the sanctity of human life irrespective of his socio-cultural, religious, geographical or ethnic attachment.

Introduction

The Holy Qur'an gives an account of incidence between the two sons of Prophet Adam when they were divinely required to offer sacrifice to Allah. The older son Qabil committed murder against his younger brother Habil simply because the offering of the latter was accepted by Allah:

﴿ وَأَتَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأُ ابْنَيْ آدَمَ بِالْحَقِّ إِذْ قَرَّبَا قُرْبَانًا فَتُقُبِّلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمَا وَلَمْ يُتَقَبَّلْ مِنَ الْآخَرِ قَالَ لَأَقْتُلَنَّكَ ۗ قَالَ إِنَّمَا يَتَقَبَّلُ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ

Recite to them the truth of the story of the two sons of Adam. Behold! They Each presented a sacrifice (to Allah.: it was accepted from one, but not from the other. said the latter: "Be sure I will slay thee." "Surely," said the former, "(Allah) doth accept of the sacrifice of those who are Righteous.(Q5:27)

This Qur'anic account is invariably a testimony to the first violation of human right to life on earth. Because- of this violation, Allah likens the enormity of unjust taking of human life to a murder committed against the whole of humanity².

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ
فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنَا
بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ثُمَّ إِنْ كَثِيرًا مِنْهُمْ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْأَرْضِ لَمُسْرِفُونَ

On that account: we ordained for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief In the land - it would be As if He slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be As if He saved the life of the whole people, then although there came to them Our apostles with Clear Signs, yet, Even after that, many of them continued to Commit excesses In the land.

However, this implies that Islam hold human life dear and with great respect. It is for this reason that Qur'an warns against unjust killing of people. It considers a person who value the life of other as honorable servant of Allah:³

وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَدْعُونَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ وَلَا يَقْتُلُونَ النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا
يَزْنُونَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ يَلْقَ أَثَامًا

Those who invoke not, with Allah, any other god, nor slay such life As Allah has made sacred except for just Cause, nor Commit fornication; - and any that does This (Not only) meets punishment.

In other words, respect to the life of individual is one of the golden messages of Islam which

Muslims should be conscious of it. Both the Qur'an and prophet tradition are unequivocal about the sacredness of human life. That is way no Muslim has a justification to terminate the life of other person expect in accordance with the stipulation found in Shari'ah legal system. Thus, this leads us to examine the legal status of the right to life under the Shari'ah jurisdiction.

According to Islam, the second group freedom, which is particular to man, is the main basis of social, political and even individual life of the human person. In addition, the Divine laws (known as Shari'ah) are fixed based on this external reality for man. A perfect man is he who transcends the realm of animal life, uses his inexhaustible power and attains worldly and spiritual bliss or in philosophical terms, the second inherent perfection and the second nature

of the creation of Adam. All manners and traits of man must emanate from his basic natural dignity, in other words, man should have the commendable traits he is expected to have.

In the story of the creation of Adam in the Qur'an, when God tells the angels, "I am setting in the earth a viceroy." The angels reply, "What, wilt Thou set therein one who will do corruption there, and shed blood, while we proclaim Thy praise and call Thee holy?" Then God answered, "Assuredly, I know that you know not".

In other words, Adam is distinctive from other creatures because God is setting in the earth Adam and his descendants as his viceroys; it is manifest that in Islamic and Qur'anic sense, Adam is a creature endowed with a faculty and aptitude to be God's viceroy and not a wild one. In addition, the goal of

Islam is to build the very same chosen man, not an animal one. Islam agrees to the first group freedom and the rights relative to it to a large extent, for it is the selfsame gift granted by the Lord to man: however, as I said earlier, Islam limits it to individual and social welfare; for instance, if it says, "Eat and drink" it also enjoins extravagance in these acts.

The nature of animals is such that they do not know extravagance and unlike man they act on their unconscious nature, which is harmonious with their welfare and real needs, and the general system of nature.

This limitation exists even in the realm of liberalism and absolute liberalistic freedom is a clear matter, for with regard to the common freedom of animals and the special freedom of man, they mix it with civil and penal laws of each society and inevitably limit it. Hence, the limitation of freedoms is not particular to Islam or to other religions in as much as anywhere any society is established based on a social convention, freedoms are limited.

The Place of Right to life in Shari'ah

Khallaf states that protection of life is one of the five objectives of Shari'ah The other objectives are *din* (religion), *aql* (intellect), *'ird* (reputation) and *mal* (property).⁴ Despite the fact that protection of religion is considered by many scholars as the first propose of the Shari'ah with a view securing the interest of man that pertains to the hereafter. Nyaze explains the submission of Al Ghazali that preservation of life known to be the second purpose of the Shari'ah may be considered by some scholars to have a higher priority than *din* (religion). This is because of the fact that without life there would be no religion.⁵ We consider the pre-eminence of right to life over *din* (religion) because -the Shari'ah law allows Muslim in extenuating circumstances to ever violate some of the religion principles in order to safeguard human life. For instance, Islam allows a Muslim to eat a pork in order to protect his life during the scarcity of food and in absence of any lawful food to eat:⁶

مَنْ كَفَرَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِهِ إِلَّا مَنْ أُكْرِهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ وَلَكِنْ مَنْ شَرَحَ بِالْكُفْرِ
صَدْرًا فَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

Anyone who, after accepting Faith in Allah, utters except under compulsion, His heart remaining firm in Faith -'but such as open breast to Unbelief, on them is wrath from Allah, and theirs will be a dreadful

It is against even allows a Muslim to pronounce apostatizing statement it such Muslim falls under duress⁷. This tends to show that the Shari'ah law place high premium on the life human being because when one is alive, one would be able to carry out the religious responsibilities in a normal way after the removal of coercion. It is for this reason that Islam lays down concrete penal system in order to prevent want on killing of innocent souls.

The Qur'an deals in many passages 'with man's relationship to Allah and the concept of life which naturally follows from that relationship Its message is epitomized in the follow verse:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَى مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ بِأَنْ لَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
فَيُقْتَلُونَ وَيُقْتَلُونَ وَعَدَا عَلَيْهِ حَقًّا فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ وَالْفُرْقَانِ وَمَنْ أَوْفَى بِعَهْدِهِ مِنَ
اللَّهِ فَاسْتَبَشِرُوا بَبَيْعِكُمُ الَّذِي بَايَعْتُمْ بِهِ وَذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise): They Fight in His Cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him In truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Qur'an: and who is more faithful to His Covenant than 'Allah. Then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme. (Q9:111).

In the above verse, the nature of the relationship which comes into existence between man and Allah because of Man (the belief, trust and faith in Allah) 1S called a bargain This means that Man in Allah is not a mere metaphysical concept" it is in the nature of a contract by which man barter his life and his possessions in exchange for the promise of Paradise in the Hereafter. God as it were, purchases a Believer s life and property and promises, in return the reward of Paradise in the life after death. This concept of a bargain and a covenant has important implications, and needs to be clearly understood by human being.

Everything in this world belongs to Allah. As such, man's life and wealth, which are part of this world, also belong to Him, because He has created them and has entrusted them to even man for his use. Looked at from this angle, the question of 'selling' or 'buying ' may not seem to arise at all; Allah does not need to buy what is already His and man cannot sell what is not really

his. But there is one thing which has been conferred on man, and which now belongs fully to him, and that is *freewill* which gives him freedom to choose between following or not following the path of *Allah*. This freedom of will and choice does not automatically make man the real owner of all the power and resources over which he has command, nor does it give him the right to use them just as he likes. This bargain thus does not mean that *Allah* is purchasing something, which belongs to man. Its real nature is this: all creation belongs to *Allah* but He bestowed certain things on man to be used by him on trust. *Allah* wants man to willingly and voluntarily acknowledge this. A person who voluntarily renounces his freedom to reject *Allah's* supremacy and instead acknowledges His sovereignty, and, in so doing, 'sells' his 'autonomy' (which, too, is a gift from Allah) to Allah, will get in return Allah's promise of eternal bliss in Paradise. A person who makes such a bargain is a *Mu'min* (Believer) and *Man* (faith) is the Islamic name for this contract; a person who chooses not to enter into this contract, or who, after making such a contract, does not keep to it, is a *Kafir*. The avoidance or abrogation of the contract is technically known as *Kufu*.

Islamic Sanction on Violation of Right to life

Ibn Raji explain that the first and foremost right granted to man by Islam is the right of security of life. This is because life is one of the most important and sacred human rights. Even if the life is to be taken on just cause, Islam enjoins that the life is to be terminated through execution in a human manner. According to late Shaykh Shaltut, as reported by El Awa, the prophet ordered the believers to improve the method of killing even for slaughtering of animals. Hence, whatever quick, easy and efficient means of execution can be found should be used'. Moreover, Islam lay down of retaliation (*Qisas*) as preventive measure against killing of people. Ibn Raji rightly observe that Islam lays down hardest punishment as deterrent for those who may, necessary endanger the right to life other people." However, numerous tradition of the prophet and Qur'anic injunction establish that even if a Muslim commits manslaughter, blood-money must be paid to the relative of the victim. "This is understood by us a divine purpose of curtailing frivolous attempts of man in violation of human life.

سَتَجِدُونَ عَآخِرِينَ يُرِيدُونَ أَن يَأْمَنُوكُمْ وَيَأْمَنُوا قَوْمَهُمْ كُلًّا مَا رَدُّوا إِلَى الْفِتْنَةِ أُرْكَسُوا فِيهَا ۚ فَإِن لَّمْ يَعْزِلُوا لَوْ كُمْ وَيَلْقُوا إِلَيْكُمْ أَلْسَلَمَ وَيَكْفُرُوا أَيْدِيَهُمْ فَخُدُّوهُمْ وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ تَقْفُوهُمْ ۚ وَأُولَئِكَ جَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطٰنًا مُّبِينًا

Others you will find that wish to gain your confidence as well as that of their people: every time They are sent back to temptation, They succumb thereto: if They withdraw not from you nor give you (guarantees) of peace besides restraining their hands, seize them and slay them Wherever ye get them: In their case we have provided you with a Clear argument against them.

The Islamic Ordinance against Suicide

Committing suicide is considered in Islam as a deliberate attempt to violate the right to life. Al-Maududi stresses that “Islam forbids suicide and impresses on man that life belongs to God. He maintains that life is a trust, which has been bestowed on man for a certain period of time so that man could make best use of it”.¹² Therefore, it is not meant to be harmed or destroyed in a frivolous way. Through some people commit suicide due to encounter with life challenges, Islam exhorts Muslim to put reliance on Allah as a solution to numerous challenges one might face in life. In the same vein, AbdAti relate that man is given right to life by God in order to fulfill the purpose of life and realize the goal of existence. He adds that life on the earth should be considered as a chance provided for them to make the best use of it which is, in living the life in accordance with the dictate of Allah and to make it a safe passage to the life of eternity.¹³ In this respect, Muslim are severely warned in the Qur’an not to commit suicide because it is a grievous sin, punishable with admittance into hell fire.

The position of Islam on Terrorism

Terrorism involves series of violent attacks against the life of people. Islam totally abhors terrorism because it negates its very pristine teaching of peace. That is why Islam considers it an abominable act. Hashimi aptly observes when he says:

Every soul has an absolute right to life except for a just cause, and Killing one soul is like killing all mankind because it is a transgression against right to life¹⁴.

From the above quotation, it could be deduced that it is against the teaching of Islam to intimidate people let alone terrorizing their life. In other words, terrorism cannot be justified with the pretext of embarking upon physical jihad. The jihad in Islam is for defensive purpose to safeguard life of Muslim when it is aggressively threatened. We, at this junction, put forward that the Boko Haram social challenge Nigerian climate has nothing to do with the teaching of Islam. This is because Islam does not authorize killing of innocent people or resort to physical violence in attempt to air out ones grievances. In relation to this, Quadristresses the fact that it is part of prophetic teachings that Muslim should live peacefully together and settle any problem that may arise amicably without resorting to physical fight.¹⁵

Muslims’ Relation with People of other Faith

Islam enjoins Muslim to respect the right of religions adherents to life. According to Islamic Education Trust, Islam enjoins believers to respect the life of every human being irrespective of religious affiliation, by virtue of even your possessing of soul and spirit from Allah¹⁶. It was on record that the prophet once stood up for Jewish corpse in the presence of the companions”.

The implication of this prophetic attitude is to teach the Muslim value of human life, and that persons should be respected whether a Muslim or non-Muslim. It is also an indication and precedent for present day Muslim to live in harmony and peace with other people of religions affinities.

Recommendations

The escalating religious violence ravaging the country on daily basis have been attributed to misconception of beliefs and doctrines of the other religion, the unemployment syndrome among Nigerian youths and antagonistic open air preaching session or evangelism. In view of this the following recommendations are vital to keep Nigeria a united country.

1. Opeloye (2001:33) Government should legislate a code of ethics for religious evangelism. This should also contain punitive measures against any religious preacher whose preaching ignites religious violence.
2. Government should by principle maintain neutrality in inter-religious affairs because Nigeria is a multi-religious society. Religious violence is escalated because some religious affairs are believed by some people to be favoured by government at the expense of other. A good example is the involvement of government in the Muslim and Christian pilgrimage.
3. There is need for regular organized conferences and seminars on religious dialogue to enhance participants the required skills to quench religious intolerance. Conferences on inter-religious dialogue have been carried out by some Nigerian Universities.
4. The Press has important role to play in fostering inter-religious peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. They should maintain mediatory and reconciliatory reportage.
5. Religious education is fundamental to Nigeria peaceful co-existence. To this end, fanatical tendencies on the part of youths can be rid of when ideal religion religious education such as Islamic Studies and Christian Religious Studies are made compulsory at all levels of, Education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper explains the concept of Islam on right to life to contemporary security challenges in the country. Islam attaches great importance to human life. For this reason, it lays down deterrent measures to prevent unnecessary killing of people except on a just cause. The outlook of Islam on respect of right to life is very broad, as it accommodates the people of other religions or ethnic differences.

Therefore, it is a sheer misunderstanding of the teaching of Islam if the right to life is violated on the pretext of exhibition of grievance or promoting the message of Islam through an

offensive physical jihad Muslims are frequently cautioned by Allah not to terminate their life or lives of other people but to live in peaceful co-existence with their near and distant neighborhood.

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