

## Muslim Youth and the Quest for Spiritual Regeneration: An Insight into the Activities of *Ratibi* Mosques in Ogun State

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### Abstract

*The alarming rate of spiritual degeneration particularly among youth in Ogun State, Nigeria provides the fertile ground for this academic research. This ugly situation provokes a fundamental question on whether religious institutions particularly in Islam are actually playing the roles of shaping the spiritual lives of its youth for a better society. This paper probes the activities of the mosques on the spiritual development of the youth and the impact of these contributions on the state. Ratibi ; the grass root mosque of conventional type was the specific target of study where twenty-five each were selected across the four zones of the state to make a total of 100 using random sampling technique. Two sets of questionnaires and an interview were the instruments used for information gathering. One of the questionnaires was designed for Muslim youth and 400 copies distributed to same number of respondents. The other was designed, copied and administered to 100 mosques at twenty five copies per zone. Eighty-nine copies were returned. Data collected were presented in table using simple percentage. Findings indicated among others that only very few mosques had specific programmes on the teaching of the fundamental spiritual way of life to the youth both theoretically and in practice. The study recommends that the mosque engage its members in constant spiritual devotion particularly the youth with the aim of improving their level of piety.*

*Keywords: insight, Muslim youth, ratibi mosques, spiritual regeneration,*

### Introduction

That the rate of vices particularly among the youth in Ogun State, Nigeria is alarming can be considered as a story in irony in a country where passion for religion has given rise to increase in the number of mosques and churches, multiplication of followership and increase in *da'wah* propagation and evangelism. Cases of rape, armed robbery, kidnap and several other vices provoke the contemplation on the part of these writers to assess the roles of a vital Islamic institution; the mosque as one of the stakeholders in Nigerian religion firmament. *Ratibi*, the grass root mosque, was the specific target for thorough examination of its contributions to the spiritual development of the youth in Ogun State. By technical definition, *ratib* (pl. *rawatib*) mosque is a house of

God for the performance of daily *salawat* (sing. *salat*) and other meritorious services to Allah. The grass root definition given in this study arises from its closeness to the people by proximity. One of the references to *ratib* mosque as a concept is contained in *Suratun Nur* chapter 24 verse 36 where Allah States:

In houses which God hath permitted to be raised to honour; for the celebration in them, of His name: in them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings, (again and again)

Based on the above quotation, while fundamental roles of Islam is to serve as the ideal template for a God-conscious and God fearing society, the mosque is to serve as a medium for the realization of this ideal. The spiritual aspect of these roles is to increase the level of devotion of average Muslim youth through daily *Salawat* (ritual prayers), *tilawatul qur'an* (recitation of Qur'an); *Dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) and *I'tikaf* (seclusion during the month of Ramadan) among others. These are aimed at strengthening their soul to attain some degree of *taqwa* (piety). But is the mosque playing these roles? To answer these questions, some issues were raised which include

- i. Whether *Ratibi* mosques have major roles to play in the spiritual development of the youth
- ii. Whether the *Ratibi* mosques in Ogun State have specific programmes on the teaching of the fundamental spiritual ways of life
- iii. Whether the *Ratibi* mosques engage their youth in constant practical spiritual activities Whether there is a link between mosques' inadequate theoretical and practical spiritual teachings and the decline in youth's engagement in spiritual activities in the mosque

It is necessary to discuss few concepts as background for thorough understanding of the title under discourse.

### **Spirituality and Religion: A Discourse on Symbiosis and Antithesis**

An academic adventure into the conceptual field of spirituality revealed an epithet that is totally enmeshed in complexity both by definition and by usage. Literally, spirituality is derived from the word 'spirit', which is defined as 'the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021). In other words, when a man is fully involved in deep thought rather than to his body and physical surroundings, he is said to be spiritual. Quoting *Merriam Webster dictionary*, Hatcher (1982) introduced the religious dimension to his definition when he sees spirituality as 'something deeply religious; something relating to the spirit and sacred matters'. A critical look at these definitions provoked

some fundamental questions which include asking whether there is any nexus between religion and spirituality and if yes; whether being religious can be translated as being spiritual and vice-versa. More fundamentally is also to know whether spirituality in religion involves common spiritual experience of people of different religious dispensations or rather it is specific to an individual irrespective of his faith. When analyzing the views of the two opposing schools of thought on this concept; Shahid Athar ([www.islamonline.com](http://www.islamonline.com)) categorizes those who believe in spirituality in religion into two. First are those who see spirituality in religion as connoting 'the believers' faith being more personal, less dogmatic, more open to new ideas and myriad influences and more pluralistic than the faiths of established religions'. 'The second category of this school are those who see spirituality in religion as the 'nature of a believer's personal relationship or 'connection' with their god or belief system, as opposed to the general relationship with the deity understood to be shared by all members of the faith'.

As for those who hold the view of spirituality as opposed to religion, they believe that there are numerous 'spiritual paths' and that there is no objective truth about which is the best path to follow. In this wise, adherents of this view emphasise 'the importance of finding one's own path to whatever-god-there is rather than following what others say work'. To them

many adherents of orthodox religions who consider spirituality to be an aspect of their religious experience are more likely to contrast spirituality with secular 'worldliness' than with the ritual expression of their religion Shahid Athar ([www.islamonline.com](http://www.islamonline.com))

Athar stated further that belonging to the same school are others who hold that 'spirituality is not religion *per se*, but the active and real connection to a force, spirit, or sense of the deep self'. He concludes by making ample reference to Thompson who observes that religion is not identical with spirituality; rather religion is the form spirituality takes in civilization (1981). Clearer information can be obtained from the approach of Hinterkopf (1992) who believes that the complexity and confusion that arose from the definition of spirituality can be traced to the inability of scholars to distinguish between spirituality in term of its content and its process (Toyib, 2009). In distinguishing between the process and content definitions, Hinterkopf describes process as 'paying attention to vague, implicitly, bodily feelings in a special way so that they unfold and bring new explicit meanings that result in physiological relief or release'. As for content, he saw this as involving symbolizations or what the

process is all about. He stated as an example that “applying this distinction to spirituality, content might involve words such as God, Christ, Mother Earth, Allah, Higher power and post life, near death.”

### **Islam perception of spirituality**

In Islam, spirituality as a ritual process is an aspect of worship that involves Muslims’ duties and obligations to Allah. These duties and obligations which are subsumed under faith and worship are the six articles of faith (*iman*), the five cardinal principles of Islam and other sundry rituals (*Ibadah*). The third of the tripod is Good Deeds (*Ihsan*). However, all the above are not enough as the essence of spirituality lies more on the impact they have on the lives of individual Muslims. For example, fasting, ritual prayers and other duties are to no avail if one’s private life is dirty. To understand and appreciate the essence of worship therefore, one needs to know the purpose for which he was created. Allah (SWT) reminded us of this purpose when says in *Quran* 51:56 : I have not created the Jinn and Mankind, expect that they should worship Me’. Therefore, apart from the compulsory form of worship stated above, other spiritual activities like *Tahajjud* (night vigil), *Dhikr* and *Tilawatul Quran* are important in ones effort at moving closer to his Lord. Constant remembrance of this verse will keep man on his toes on his responsibility to his Creator and enhance his level of spirituality with Him. After understanding why he was created, Islam instructs him to resign himself to Allah’s will by obeying Him and by holding fast to His commandments. When Muslims adhere strictly to these injunctions, his faith becomes complete. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, cited in Abayomi (2005), faith is not complete until there is total concordance among what the mind harbours, what the tongue professes, and what the body performs as rituals.

### **Conceptual definition of youth**

*Collins Concise Dictionary* (2001) provides six definitions of this concept:

First, as the quality or condition of being young, immature or inexperienced; Second, as the period between childhood and maturity; third, as the freshness, vigour or vitality characteristic of young people; fourth, as any period of early development; fifth, as a young person especially a young man or boy; and sixth, as young people collectively.

For the purpose of this study, youth shall be defined in the very general sense,

as a period of life in-between childhood and adulthood commonly described by Henze (2015, 5) as 'a time of experimenting with roles and identities, still void of the burden of social norms and obligations, yet slowly preparing the youngsters for their lives as full members of the social collective'.

### **Brief history of Ogun State and the Advent of Islam**

Ogun, a state located in the South Western part of Nigeria lies within latitude 6°N and 8°N and longitude 2.5 E and 5°E (Oyesiku 1992). It shares a border with the Republic of Benin in the West and Ondo State in the East. To the North of the State is Oyo State while Lagos State and the Atlantic Ocean are to the South. By land mass, Ogun State covers an area of about 16,409.26 square kilometres and has an estimated population of 4,054,272 (FOS 2007). The state, popularly known as gateway of Nigeria as a result of its international boundary with the Republic of Benin comprises predominantly Yoruba population with the Egba, Yewa, Ijebu and Remo as major inhabitants (Oyesiku, 1992).

The historical advent and growth of Islām in Ogun State has followed the same general pattern of incursion into all other parts of Yoruba land with the natives playing significant roles in the spread of the new dispensation. The two exceptional cases however were Ilaro and Sagamu towns where recent findings have proved to the contrary the earlier ones on the advent and spread of Islām in the area. Egba and particularly Abeokuta is claimed to have been the first in Ogun State to have contact with Islām. This occurred when many of the Owu people some of whom were Muslims fled their towns in the 1825 war and were said to have later formed a whole quarter preponderantly Muslims in Abeokuta (Gbadamosi (1978).

Islām was said to have been little known to the Ijebu until the last two decades of the nineteenth century when it began to filter rather unobtrusively into the areas (Gbadamosi, 1978). The conversion spree climaxed when Balogun Kuku, an energetic man and foremost Muslim sympathizer publicly declared for Islām taking the name of Momodu Bello. Introduction and early practice of Islām in Remo land could be traced to Hausa domestic servants some of whom were brought by the Remo themselves and were found in many parts of Remo towns like Iperu, and Ikenne after its advent in Sagamu, the headquarters of the Remo as far back as 1869. The historical account on the establishment of Islām in Yewa and particularly Ilaro is said to have been provided by Seriki (2004, 34) who writes that

The first place to be reached by Islām in Yewaland was Ilaro ... in

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about the year 1860... it was one Alfa Mūsa Kannike who was a guest of the then Olu of Ilaro... that first prayed in the Muslim way in the town. He was said to have been a native of an area now known as Bornu State of Nigeria.

This view is corroborated by Musa (2009) who gives a comprehensive report of the roles played by the Kanuri scholars in the advent and development of Islam in Ilaro and its environs.

### Methodology

*Ratibi* mosques of conventional type in Ogun State were the specific target of study. Conventional *Ratibi* is defined within its narrow scope as the one owned by communities rather than those owned by Muslim societies or individuals. The choice of conventional mosque emanates from the conviction that numerically, it has the largest population than other categories. This view though not based on any statistical study but it is apparent. 100 mosques were selected across the four geo-political zones of the state at an average of twenty five per zone using a random sampling technique. The instruments used were interview guide and two sets of questionnaires designed and distributed to 400 Muslim youth in the state. One of the questionnaires was for the mosque, titled *Ratibi* Mosques Survey Schedule (RMSS) and the other for the Muslim youth known as 'Muslim Youth Research Questionnaire' (MYRQ). The two sets of questionnaire have four items each. For each of the items are two alternatives of either 'Yes' or 'No' provided. Respondents were expected to express their views by drawing a ring round what they thought was the correct answer. 100 Copies of the RMSS were administered to the one hundred mosques selected at twenty five copies per zone, but eighty nine copies were returned. Similarly, 400 copies of the MYRQ were administered on the equal number of the youth respondents selected and 350 copies were retrieved. Data collected were presented in table using simple percentage for analysis.

### Results

The following are the results of data collected from the field and their analysis

**Table 1: Distribution of ratibi mosques survey schedule and responses by zone**

Zone	Distrib.	%	Responses	%
Ijebu	25	25.0	20	22.5
Egba	25	25.0	26	29.2

Zone	Distrib.	%	Responses	%
Yewa	25	25.0	23	25.8
Remo	25	25.0	20	22.5
Total	100	100.0	89	100.0

Table 1 above shows that out of the 100 (RMSS) questionnaire distributed, 89 mosques responded and this represents 89 percent of the total questionnaires administered which indicates positive responses on the part of the respondents. Details analysis shows also that variation in the percentage of mosque respondents per zone is not significant which also indicate a well balanced representation across the zone.

**Table 2: Distribution of *imam* respondents by level of education**

S/N	Qualification	Responses	%
1	Degree/NCE	24	27
2	<i>Thanawi</i>	33	37
3	<i>Idadi</i>	15	16.9
4	Others	17	19.1
	Total	89	100.0

From table 2 above, 33 respondents representing 37 percent constitute the majority of the Imams who represent the mosque with *Thanawi* qualifications, 24 of them or 27 percent possess Degree/NCE results in either Arabic or Islamic Studies or both while 15 (16.9%) possess *Idadi*. 'Other' shown above with 17 responses are those whose identity by qualification could not be ascertained because they attended non-formal Arabic/Islamic Schools. This shows an improvement in the number of the Imams who possess further qualifications from what obtained in earlier research conducted in 2009.

**Table 3: Distribution of muslim youth respondents by zone**

Zone	Distribution	%	Responses	%
Ijebu	100	25.0	93	23.3
Egba	100	25.0	88	22
Yewa	100	25.0	86	21.5
Remo	100	25.0	83	20.8
Total	400	100.0	350	87.0

In table 3 above out of the 400 questionnaire distributed across the four

geo-political zones of the state, 350 youth representing 87% were recorded to have responded which of course is significant.

**Table 4: Distribution of muslim youth respondents by age**

S/N	Age-Group	Total	%
1	10-14	50	14.6
2	15-19	100	28.6
3	20-24	125	35.7
4	25-29	75	21.4
	Total	350	100.0

Table 4 above indicates that 125 youth respondents or 35.7 percent fell within 20-24 years age bracket, and 100 (or 28.6%) fell within 15-19 years age bracket with both constituting 225 (64.3%) of respondents within 15-24 age brackets. These form the core age-bracket of the youth whose spiritual development is vital to the society.

**Table 5: Distribution of muslim youth respondents by sex**

Gender	Responses	%
Male	152	43.4
Female	198	56.6
Total	350	100

In this table, male respondents (152 of them) account for 43% of the total number of respondents while 198 or 56.6% were female.

**Table 6: Distribution of Muslim youth respondents by qualification**

S/N	Qualification	Responses	%
1	Primary school	50	14.3
2	WASCE	221	63.1
3	NCE/Graduates	79	22.6
	Total	350	100.0

Holders of primary school leaving certificate account for 14.3% (50) of the total respondents, West African School Certificate holders constitute 63.1% while NCE/University graduates make up 22.6%. This infers that holders of West African School Certificate were in the majority of those who responded.



**Table 7: Opinions of the mosque and the youth respondents on the vital roles of mosque in the spiritual development of the youth.**

Response options	Mosque	%	Muslim youth	%
Yes	89	100	350	100
No	-	0	-	0
	89	100.0	350	100.0

Table 7 shows that the mosque and youth respondents were of the opinion that *Ratibi* mosques have major roles to play in the spiritual development of the youth.

**Table 8: Many *ratibi* mosques constantly engage their youth in the teaching/training of Islamic spiritual way of life.**

Response options	Mosque	%	Muslim youth	%
Yes	20	22.5	129	36.9
No	69	77.5	221	63.1
	89	100.0	350	100.0

Table 8 shows that 20 mosques representing 22.5% claimed that they constantly engaged their youth in the teaching/training of Islamic spiritual way of life while 69 others (or 77.5%) stated otherwise. Similarly, result indicates that only 129 Muslim youth believed that many *Ratibi* mosques engaged their youth in the teaching/training of Islamic spiritual way of life while 221 others or 63.1% stated otherwise. This means that only few mosques have specific programmes on the teaching of the spiritual way of life to their youth.

**Table 9: Many *ratibi* mosques constantly engage their youth in practical spiritual activities like *tahajjud*, *tilawatul-Qur'an*, *dhikr* etc**

Response options	Mosque	%	Muslim youth	%
Yes	23	25.8	128	36.6
No	66	74.2	222	63.4
	89	100.0	350	100.0

Table 9 above shows that 23 mosques representing 25.8% claimed that they constantly engaged their youth in practical spiritual activities like *tahajjud*, *ti-*

*lawatul-Qur'an, dhikr* etc while 66 others (or 74.2%) stated otherwise. Another result indicates that 128 Muslim youth believed that many *Ratibi* mosques engaged their youth in practical spiritual activities like *Tahajjud, tilawatul-Qur'an, Dhikr* etc while 222 others or 63.1% stated otherwise. This means that only few mosques constantly engaged their youth in practical spiritual activities like *Tahajjud, tilawatul-Qur'an, Dhikr* etc.

**Table 10: There is a link between mosques' inadequate theoretical and practical spiritual teachings and the decline in youth' engagement in spiritual activities in the mosque**

Response options	Mosque	%	Muslim youth	%
Yes	39	43.8	328	93.7
No	50	56.2	22	6.3
	89	100.0	350	100.0

Table 10 above reveals the belief among 39 Imam respondents (43.8%) that there is a link between mosques' inadequate theoretical and practical spiritual teachings and the decline in youth's engagement in spiritual activities in the mosque while 50 others representing 56.2% held contrary opinion. On the other hand, 328 of the Muslim youth respondents agreed that there is a link between mosques' inadequate theoretical and practical spiritual teachings and the decline in youth's engagement in spiritual activities in the mosque. This shows that there is a link between mosques' inadequate theoretical and practical spiritual teachings and the decline in youth's engagement in spiritual activities in the mosque

### Summary of Findings

The summary of the results obtained from the data analysed showed that

- i. *Ratibi* mosques have major roles to play in the spiritual development of the youth
- ii. only few mosques played these roles because majority of them do not have specific programmes on the teaching of the spiritual way of life to their youth.
- iii. only few mosques constantly engaged their youth in practical spiritual activities like *Tahajjud, tilawatul-Qur'an, Dhikr* etc.
- iv. there is a link between mosques' inadequate theoretical and practical spiritual teachings and the decline in youth's engagement in spiritual activities in the mosque

## Discussions

Findings indicate that *ratibi* mosques have major roles to play in the spiritual development of the youth. This does not come as a surprise because of its fundamental value to Muslims as an important institution in Islam. *Masjid* (an Arabic epithet for mosque) is a place meant for the performance of *Sajdah* where '*Sajdah*' connotes the act of total humility, obedience and submission in front of the supreme Source of all creations (Ansari, 1984). Simply defined therefore, a mosque is a place usually a building with all the facilities for congregational prayers and it is meant for the observance of all daily and weekly *Jum'ah* prayers. Writing further on the mosque, Nasr cited in Toyib (2009: 80) states:

The most intelligible material symbol of Islām, the mosque is a building with a space in which all elements of subjectivism have been eliminated. It is an objective determination of the Truth, a crystal through which the light of the spirit radiates. The spiritual ideal of Islām itself is to transform the soul of the Muslims, like a mosque, into a crystal reflecting the Divine light.

Based on the above, mosque is the centre of all Muslims' religious life which begins with spiritual purification that involves the body and the soul. Purification of the body entails cleanliness through major and minor bath and both its theoretical and practical teachings are primarily done in the mosque. The soul purification on the other hand comprises performance of daily *Salawāt*, remembrance of Allah (*Dhikr*), constant recitation of the Qur'ān (*tilāwat al-Qur'ān*), and Seclusion (*Itikāf*) during the month of Ramadan (Ansari, 1984). The mosque particularly the *Ratibi* type is the primary avenue for imparting these spiritual values on the Muslims. The significance of *Ratib* mosque as earlier mentioned is presented here again in *Suratun Nur* chapter 24 verse 36 for the sake of emphasis:

In houses which God hath permitted to be raised to honour; for the celebration in them, of His name: in them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings, (again and again)

Corroborating this, Ali (1986) remarks that mosque is not a place where a man may visit once a week for spiritual idea, which he is likelihood forget during the six days to follow. He sees it as a place where the blood of spiritual life, hour after hour, is transmitted into the veins of the Muslim, and therefore keeps his mind imbued with higher thoughts, and his heart alive in a real sense.

All the above spiritual values are geared towards strengthening one's soul

for attaining the highest stage of *taqwa* (piety) (Yūsuf & Abdur Rahīm, 2004). Majority of these spiritual activities which are fundamentally of essence in the mosque encompass faith with five of its components entrenched in chapter 4 verse 136 among others where Allah states

O ye who believe! Believe in God and His Apostle and the Scripture which He Hath sent to His Apostle and the Scripture which He sent to those before (him). And who denieth God, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers and the Last Day hath gone far, far astray.

The sixth article that bothered on Predestination is also contained in several chapters of the Qur'an one of which is *Sūratul-Qamar* Chapter 45 verse 49 that reads: 'Verily, all things have We created in proportion and measure'. The aspect of worship also encompasses principally the five pillars of Islām viz: belief in Allah, five daily ritual prayers, alms to the poor, fasting during the month of Ramadan and pilgrimage to Makkah. The ultimate goal of these spiritual values are to build a Muslim who will not only be spiritually conscious of God always but will also revere Him and that all these would in the long run shape his/her life towards good and made him/shun evil.

Another finding showed that only few mosques have specific programmes on the teaching of the spiritual way of life to their youth. This finding is not surprising as well. It is obvious that majority of *Ratibi* mosques in Ogun State only witness large turn out during *subh* and *Isha'* prayers every day. In some cases, many of these mosques are under lock and key during the *Zuhr/Asr* prayer periods perhaps due to non-availability of the Imam. The essence of coming together for these spiritual devotions is contained in *Sūratu Ta Ha* chapter 20 verse 132 where Allah strictly instructs the Prophet to 'enjoin prayer on his followers and to be constant therein.' It is also for the same purpose that the Prophet is constantly available at the Prophet's mosque in Madinah when he was alive. In an hadith transmitted by Al- Tirmidhi, the Prophet likened congregation to the meadows of paradise by saying, "If you pass by the meadows of Paradise, then rejoice". They asked, "What are the meadows of Paradise, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Congregations for mentioning Allah." In view of the above, it is important that mosque engage their followers in constant spiritual teaching and invocation to make them useful citizens of the society.

Further finding equally showed that only few mosques constantly engaged their youth in practical spiritual activities like *Tahajjud*, *tilawatul-Qur'an*, *Dhikr* etc. This finding also is not surprising as the only period for serious engagement of Muslims in most of these activities is during Ramadan. Finally, find-

ing indicated that there is a link between mosques' inadequate theoretical and practical aspects of spiritual teachings of the youth and the decline in the engagement of the youth in the spiritual activities in the mosque.

### **Conclusion**

In view of the foregoing, it can be concluded that the *Ratibi* mosque in Ogun State had not done enough at engaging their youth in spiritual activities either in theoretical or practical teaching. This had serious negative effect on their spiritual development as many of them had been led away from the mosque or even the religion itself in order to seek the assistance in other faith. This situation becomes more pathetic when we consider the fact that the *Ratibi* mosque is the grass root mosque in Islam where a large percentage of the Muslim youth are supposed to converge five times every day and that the youth constitute the largest percentage of the able bodied men who are needed to carry the banner of Islam as the ambassador of the religious dispensation. If the situation has been as depicted above, it means that there are problems which may be of either inadequate knowledge of the historical roles of the mosque in the past, the legal rulings concerning the administration of the mosques or the inability of the mosque managers particularly the Imams to observe the rate of spiritual depreciations that have permeated the entire lives of their youth.

### **Recommendations**

As recommendations therefore, the mosque should engage its members in constant spiritual devotion particularly the youth. The idea of waiting till the period of Ramadan for serious spiritual activities does not augur well for the youth in the society in which moral and spiritual problems occur every day. They should also organize a forum for constant counselling for the youth so as to enhance their spiritual development for which the Muslims were historically known. Finally, they should organize seminars and workshops constantly for the Imams not only on Islam but also on some other mundane matters that affect the Muslim *ummah*. If these recommendations are strictly adhered to, *ratibi* mosque would have contributed its quotas to the development of the Muslim youth and the society, and for this the society will owe the mosque a lot of gratitude and all shall be better off as Allah's committed servants both in this world and in the hereafter.

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