

**THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF UNITY IN ISLAM: LESSONS FOR THE NIGERIAN
MUSLIMS**

By

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Abstract

Dwindling or lack of unity among the Nigerian Muslims has become a serious matter for which a lasting solution is much more needed urgently to avoid a complete breakup of Muslims within a nation called Nigeria. It has gone to the extent that Muslims are no longer interested in offering prayer behind or with others as Islamic salutations are also limited to those who are familiar or are having affiliations such as in the same area, profession, or Islamic and other organisations. The argument is always based on flimsy and insignificant issues or complains without valid proof backing the action taken. Politics, ethnicity, misunderstanding and lack of Islamic education have been described as the stumbling block for the Muslims' unity in Nigeria. Consequently, unity is antidote to security, peace and justice in every society. Unity is considered as fundamental for the consolidation of position for the religion and its adherents, the Muslims on the surface of earth. This paper draws the attention to the present state of unity among the Nigerian Muslims, examines the concept of unity in Islam alongside its practice by the Islamic predecessors and addresses the unity issue based on its religious significance. It raises suggestions and concludes that the Nigerian Muslims can be united if the religious dictates on unity is practiced accordingly and history which its essence is to learn from the past for the correction of present situation and serve as lessons for the future generation, is followed in respect of Islamic required unity.

Introduction

An insight into the world environments and surroundings reveals a successful and a balanced nature emanated from the unity among the components concerned. For example, it is the united cooperation between seconds and minutes that makes an hour, hours make a day, days become a week, weeks become a month, months become a year. Nights, days and seasons like raining and dry periods including stars like sun and moon, among others also involved in these developments. It is the divine unity that makes them to produce a desired result. This suggests harmony, justice, peace and security among these natures. Any disagreement among them will lead to disharmony, injustice, lack of peace and security, repercussion of which will affect the life of mankind.

Consequently, no human being can live successfully without a united cooperation with others. Originally, men are equal in Islam irrespective of their colour, language, race and nationality. Their equality firstly rests on the religious fact that Allah is the God of all Who also sent Prophets and Messengers to them to remove all false barriers of race, colour, language

and wealth. Secondly, they are equal in terms of parental origin, nature and components. This implies that the unity of mankind starts from the unity of their Creator, Allah, then Adam and Ḥawāʾ, the progenitors of mankind. Nature and components of men like feeling, sweating, emotion as well as anatomy, are of no differences. All these prove that there must be unity among mankind due to their equality. Likewise, the unity of the Muslims is unique because it is a religious demand emanating from sincere brotherhood as mentioned in the Qurʾan and *Ḥadīth* (prophetic tradition).

However, barriers such as race, status, wealth, colour, language, rivalry and so on have succeeded in creating disunity among men in general and Muslims in particular. Lack of unity has gone to the extent of causing wars among the generations of the world. It was in connection of this that some unsuccessful measures have been taken to create unity among mankind by various international and regional communities like the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) and so on. With reference to Islam and Muslims in Nigeria, it is well noticed that the crack on the wall of the Nigerian Muslims continues to be widening every day. This is readable in the social media, national dailies and even reflects physically in the relationship between the Muslim North and Muslim South. The creation of tribal associations otherwise called socio-cultural groups in regions also compounded the issue of disunity of the Nigerian Muslims. This paper seeks to acquaint the Nigerian Muslims with the need for unity which is achievable through the adherence to Islamic teachings of brotherhood. It also prompts them to consider the positive things they can offer and not to look at the negative traits in others and to remind them that unity among them is a religious demand, for building a viable Muslim community which enjoys peace, harmony, justice and a joyous life. This is achievable when the unity is based on the Islamic faith, education with its practice.

Concept of Unity in Islam

Unity of the Muslim community is not limited to religious commands alone, it has to do with the obedience to Allah and His Apostle (SAW) since Islam is a complete submission to the will of Allah. Once somebody declares himself a Muslim then he has to follow the commands of Allah and His Messenger (SAW). Therefore, Allah has commanded the Muslims to hold fast to

His religion in unity without division, 'and hold fast, all together, by the rope of Allah and be not divided among yourselves', (Qur'an 3 verse 103). According to Ibn Kathīr, the rope of Allah as mentioned in this verse is the Holy Qur'an, tradition of the Prophet (SAW) and the covenant taken to worship Allah alone. This means that the strength of Muslims rests on their unity on the obedience of Allah and His Messenger (SAW), 'and obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not dispute (with one another) lest you lose courage and your strength departs, and be patient', (Qur'an 8 verse 46). Unity and cooperation are among the basic principles of Islam while every aspect of command or prohibition also indicates unity in Islam.

Imam Hasan al-Bana has spoken well concerning the unity of the Muslims when treating the institution of brotherhood in Islam. According to him, 'fastening of the hearth and souls of the Muslims together with the bond of faith is called brotherhood. Faith is also the strongest and most precious of all bonds. Brotherhood is the companion of faith while division is the companion of disbelief. The original strength is the strength of unity and there is no unity without love while the least degree of love is the soundness of the heart, its highest is giving preference to other brother's interest over oneself. A truthful brother will consider his brother's interest before himself because he can never be among the group other than that of the believers since wolf preys only the sheep which separates itself from flock. A believer to a believer is like a building which one part supports the other'.

Importance and Basis of Unity in Islam

There are several verses of the Holy Qur'an and texts of *ḥadīth* (Prophetic traditions) which educate or command the Muslim unity. Qur'an and *ḥadīth* are the basis for the unity and harmony of the Muslims as said by the Prophet (SAW) that 'I am going to leave two things for you; the Book of Allah and my *sunnah* (tradition). You will not be misleading as long as you hold them tightly'. There is no doubt that the Prophet (SAW) and his companions demonstrated the real meaning of unity as requested by Allah. Muslims are one single community who are commanded to unite in the highest service of Allah as contained in the Qur'an 21 verse 92, 'surely, this community of yours is a single community and I am your Lord, therefore serve Me (and no other)'. Equally, Islam means a state of peace through submission to will of Allah and as

such a Muslim earns that peace because of his submission to the will of Allah. This means that the Muslims lack submission or the submission is weak in quality when there is no peace among them. Allah warns the Muslims to fear Him and keep straight the relations between them as He also asks them to obey Him and His Messenger, if they believe truly (Qur'an 8 verse 1). Muslims are informed by Allah that disunity is based on loss of love which leads to breed of weakness.

In order to unite, there is need for patient and perseverance, 'and obey Allah and His Messenger, and fall not into disputes, lest you lose heart and your power depart' and be patient and persevering...' (Qur'an 8 verse 46). The unity in the mode of worship is important just as the unity of the Muslims because both man and jinn are commanded to worship Allah (Qur'an 51 verse 56). This means that the reason for man's existence is the same. The Creator, Allah is One, the Messengers preached one and same religion, the *qiblah* direction is one, the five pillars of Islam like performance of prayer, payment of *zakah*, fasting of Ramadan and the institution of pilgrimage (*hajj*) serve as basis for Muslim unity. It is on the basis of Muslim unity in worship that Muslims are called the best community, (Qur'an 3 verse 110). Unity is more enhanced if the duties of brotherhood are sincerely observed. According to the Prophet (SAW), 'the believers are like a single body. If eye complains, the whole body also complains and if head complains the whole body complains'. This is corroborated in the Qur'an 9 verse 71 where Allah says, 'the believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, pay *zakah* and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise'.

Conflict Resolution as a Means of Unity

In every given society, disagreement is inevitable because it is a nature and challenge created with mankind. Islam therefore recommended some processes to regulate it so that the unity of Muslims remains firm. Qur'an 4 verse 59 directs the Muslims when disagreement occurs, 'O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you do believe in Allah and the Last Day: that is best, and most suitable for final determination'. When resolving issues, unity of Muslims should be considered first, this is why

the aggrieved should be patient, accept the outcome of the judgment and stay with his brothers. It is in the record that the Muslims do disagree among themselves in matters during the time of the Prophet (SAW) and this did not divide them at all. Example of this was when the Prophet ordered them to go to Banū Qurayzah and told them that they should not allow the forenoon prayer (*Aṣr*) to meet them except at Banū Qurayzah's place. They were on their way when the time of prayer arrived. Some companions believed that they should observe prayer while others believed that they would not perform prayer until they get to Banū Qurayzah's place. Each one of them prayed according to their understanding of the Prophet's message. The Prophet did not disapprove any of the groups when they narrated the issue to him on their arrival (Al-Mubārakafūrī, 2003).

Furthermore, there was a man who grew up in the era of ignorance. This man had jealous of the Muslims in his heart. He hired a Jewish youngster to create a conflict between Hawz and Khazraj, the two major tribes in Madinah. He instigated them for clash and conflict by reminding them of the wars between them before Islam. The tribes were ready to resume fight with each other. The incident was reported to the Prophet who rushed to the site with some companions. On getting to the site, he said, 'O Muslim! Have you forgotten Allah by starting to improve the symbol of ignorance while I am still in your midst...? Allah raised your status by the light Islam, abolished ignorance, developed affection and fraternity among you. Do you want to go back to the state of disbelief?' Because of this warning, these parties put their weapons down and embraced themselves in tears, then they departed to their homes in love (Maqbool, H. 2015).

Foundation of Unity in Islam

Islam started with the emergent of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) who called people to Islam. He immediately assigned the newly converted Muslims with the responsibility of calling others in the manner in which he called them. These people joined the Prophet (SAW) in preaching in an astonished manner because they realized the feelings of general responsibilities towards Islam and Muslims. The major topics of the preaching were initially based on unity of Allah, belief in the Last Day, purification of soul and entrustment of matters to Allah.

Throughout the first three years, preaching was done secretly and few people who joined Islam were trained to be brothers who always assist themselves. During the subsequent years in Makkah, Muslims were persecuted but they endured and exhibited the spirit of brotherhood and unity among themselves until they migrated to Madinah where they were able to consolidate their faith and develop their Islamic unity with their counterparts in Madinah. It is important to mention that there was severe adversary between the two tribes of Madinah, Hawz and Khazraj for decades. The adversary ceased immediately they got in touch with Islam in Makkah while unity among them became stronger thereafter (Al-Mubārakafūrī, 2003).

Consequently, the first assignment carried out by the Prophet (SAW) in Madinah was the establishment of his mosque wherein the first Muslims were trained. The next step he took was fraternization between the Muslims from Makkah and Muslims in Madinah. The fraternization is unique in the history of brotherhood throughout the world. This is because the Muslims from Makkah were not made to feel like strangers by their host. Islamic government was formed with the Prophet as the Head of State, commander in chief and Imam. The Muslims displayed their sincere unity in support of Islam and in repelling every aggression from within or outside the city of Madinah. When victory came, people started trooping out to accept Islam in Madinah. It was power of faith then unity accompanied by patience that made it possible for the first generation of Muslim to succeed (Mashhūr, M. 2006).

Unity after the Death of the Prophet (SAW)

The set of people who took over the power of the Islamic authority after the death of the Prophet were people from Makkah. There was no dispute on selecting them as *khulafāu'r-Rasūl* (successors of the Messenger). This proves the strong faith of the people of Madinah who did not contest the leadership of these four people on the nationality basis. It is worth mentioning that the companions of the Prophet became governors of different provinces without considering their nationalities, race, colour, tribe or status. This confirms the sincerity of brotherhood of this generation. However, division among them started per se after the assassination of the third *Khalīf*, Uthman bn Affān (RA). The assassination was masterminded by the Jews and hypocrites who used the kindness and soft-mindedness of the *Khalīf* as an

opportunity to dismantle the existing unity of the Muslims. Muslims divided into four groups with different ideologies since that time (Ajani, M.A.A. 2013).

Division of the Muslims after the Prophet (SAW)

Divisions among the first generation of Muslims occurred as a result of the failure to identify the common enemies of Islam and hypocrites among them. The enemies of Islam, especially the Jews know that the weakness of the Muslims lies on their disunity that was why they engaged in every means of conspiracy to dislodge the Muslim community. The plan to cause problems among the Muslims started during the time of the Prophet. It also continued during the reigns of Abubakr and Umar. It only became practical at the end tail of Uthman's reign. This scenario was planned and spearheaded by Abdullah bn Saba, a Yemenite Jew who had accepted Islam for selfish interest and to destroy peace of the Islamic state. He could not do it alone. He tricked some Muslims and got their support. He fabricated and executed many evil plans with them. He did this by inciting people to forge complains against the governors of Islamic provinces, government officers and the *Khalīf* himself as well as calling the Muslim leaders irreligious, non-practical and bad Muslims. He also forged letters and sent them to places. The letters indicated lack of justice and peace in the places from where they were sent and that some leading companions were not in support of the *Khalīf*. When the *Khalīf* sent a letter to Egypt that the Egyptians should accept Muhammad bn Abubakr as their governor, Ibn Saba changed the content of the letter to read 'kill' Muhammad bn Abubakr. The word used in the letter is *iqbil* (accept) but he double-crossed the letter and changed the word to '*uqtul*' (kill). This letter generated anger from people and he got more supporters. The result of the insurgent led by Abdullah bn Saba was the assassination of the *Khalīf*. Madinah remained without government for three days after the assassination of the *Khalīf* However, Ali bn Abī Tālib after consideration, took over as the next *Khalīf*. But it was not easy for him because the Muslims had divided into parts. A group demanded that he should find out those who killed 'Uthman, bring them to book before he could be accepted as *Khalīf*. This process led to divisions of Muslims into four groups, namely; 'Uthmānīs (people of Syria and Basra, supporters of the assassinated *Khalīf*, they were led by Muhawiyah, (a governor appointed by 'Uthman),

Shī'a Alii, (supporters of Ali), *Murhibūn* (soldiers on the battle field at the time of 'Uthman's assassination), *Ahlus-sunnah wal-jamā'ah* (those who were neutral in their opinions as regard Ali and "Uthman, they considered two of them righteous people). *Khawarij* came to be during the time of arbitration. They were initially supporters of Ali but became opposition when Ali agreed to the arbitration. The lands of Islam could not be held together thereafter. (Ajani, M.A.A. 2013)

An Overview of Nigerian Muslims' Unity

Though differences and disagreements are natural and deeply rooted in man but should be guided by the Islamic principles based on faith and *Sharī'ah* (Islamic Law). It should also be mentioned that in this present world, human relations are interrelated and complex with numerous ideologies and the technological advancement which has made the world closer and smaller than ever, a situation that makes the Muslims being absorbed (Al-Qaraḍāwī, 1991). This has to do with the fact that the environment has great power to influence people and make them to adhere to the prevailing attitude, belief, culture and behavior of the people around them. But the Muslims can defer and disagree and yet remain brothers who love and respect each other and refrain from exchanging accusations despite the situation in which they found themselves. Here are few instances of threat to Nigerian Muslims' unity:

Weakness of *Aqīdah*

Islam is a complete way of life with all its comprehensive legislations but which are almost lacking in its adherents. *'Aqīdah* (belief, faith or creed) is the foundation of Islam. It is based on the statement of testimony which implies sincere belief in and professing faith in the Oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad (SAW). It is this statement that unites every Muslim irrespective of nationality, language, status, etc. The statement is concealed in the heart, pronounced by the tongue and practiced by the limbs of the body. The statement is comprehensive and therefore needed to be studied, practiced and spread among the people by every Muslim claiming Islam (Zarabozo, J.A., 2003). For example, love and hate which are agents of unity and disunity respectively should be for the sake of Allah. Likewise, loyalty and disassociating should also be for the sake of Allah. It is religiously required of a Muslim to love,

hate, please or displeasure for Allah sake. The soundness of *'Aqīdah* determines the soundness of an action because such action is for the sake of Allah and it is rewarded accordingly. The level of the Nigerian Muslims' faith according to their attitudinal behavior in the aspects such as belief in Allah and the Prophet (SAW), relationship with fellow Muslims or non-Muslims, acts of worship is suspicious and therefore affecting the unity which Allah prescribed in the Qur'an 3 verse 103. Unity of the Muslims is founded on unshakable belief in Allah and His Oneness otherwise called *Tawhīd* because Allah, the worshipped, is One and Universal therefore unity is required of the worship and worshippers. This should be imparted in the hearts of the Muslims as believers.

According to Adetona, L.M. (2013), *Shirk*, (idolatry, paganism and polytheism) is the opposite of *'Aqīdah* and the act of ascribing plurality to Allah, an act of associating partnership with Allah. *Shirk* is divided into three according to the Islamic scholars. These are major *Shirk*, minor *Shirk* and inconspicuous *Shirk*, each of which affects the *'Aqīdah* and religion of its adherents to some extent. It is a fact that the Muslims are involved in some of these types of *Shirk* to the extent that there are societies such as Chrislam and Chrislamherb which implies the adherents of Islam and Christianity and adherents of both religions and traditional religion respectively in our contemporary society. Some Muslims are members of secret cults, free masonry as they partake in some traditional rites like *Oro ile*. The involvement in any of these acts by the Muslims is a denial of Allah of His lordship right, unity and unity of mankind and Muslims specifically. This proves that the base, *tawhīd*, is no longer holding.

Faith which is the foundation of religion is ineffective today. This is because, unlike the Companions of the Prophet (SAW), the present Nigerian Muslims give preference to learning the scripture to learning of the faith and its practice (Zarabozo, 2003). The existence of long paper presentations on various Islamic issues with fascinating subjects, topics, stories and contributions by the Muslim scholars of different fields is a manifestation of learning of scripture without giving consideration to learning of faith. This is because the contents of the papers presented are not been put into practice by the writers or the readers, hence, no impact on the society. The longest verse of the Holy Qur'an is just a page while the longest text of

Ḥadīth is likely not more than a page also. The implication of this is that the action of the Prophet (SAW) and his Companions enticed people to Islam if compared with their admonitions, sermons and papers which are very short. Accordingly, the soundness of the faith of a preacher determines the acceptance of what he preaches by the listeners and manners to which what he preaches penetrates into the hearth of the listeners. In order to be firmly united, the Muslims have to study and practice *tawḥīd* first before any other thing.

Mosque as a Threat to the Muslims' Unity

The importance of the mosque to the unity of the Muslims is yet to be realized by the Nigerian Muslims. It is on the record that the first generation of Muslim was trained in the mosque of the Prophet (SAW). They were taught *tawḥīd* as well as the Qur'an, the tradition of the Prophet and they practiced the religion whole-heartedly to the extent that they became the best generation of the mankind. The companions always made themselves available in the mosque with their teacher, either during the prayer times or leisure times. During the prayers, they form straighten and well knitted lines with presence of their hearths. They believed in the mosque as an origin of unity among the Muslims. Today, mosques are been deserted by many of the contemporary Nigerian Muslims. This is based on the account of the Muslim's population in a given society comparable with those who normally attend mosques for prayer. Even those who attend the mosque do not arrange the files (*ṣufūf*) properly, failing to realize the unity spirit infuse in the mosque and file formation. It is reported that the Prophet (SAW) used to turn to face the congregation and say 'straighten your row (three times), for by Allah either you straighten your rows or Allah will create division among your hearths'. An-Nu'mā bn Bashīr who related this report said that he saw men standing shoulder to shoulder, knee to knee, ankle to ankle. There is no doubt that mosque and row formed in it for prayer (*ṣalah*) constitute a means of unity among the Muslims.

Unfortunately, enmity starts from the mosque today because of trivial issues which occur among the Muslims. For example, issue of keeping the found generated in the mosque into the bank or with the mosque treasurer caused an unprecedented crisis in a mosque among some Muslims to the extent that the Muslims in such area have divided into parts. The issue

escalated and became a community discussion, the treasurer's character became questionable and labeled 'thief' while those who supported keeping the money with the treasurer including the Imam were also subjected to ridicule in the community. The Muslims have become 'you think they are united, but their hearths are divided' (Qur'an 59 verse 14). The more mosques are founded the more the division among the contemporary Muslims today. Oja'ba Central mosque in Ibadan was the only place where majority of Ibadan Muslims used to observe their Friday prayers before. The exit of Shaykh Abdus-Salam Bamidele of *Zumuratul-Mu'min* and Shaykh Uthman Yusuf Akanbi Lanase because of some misunderstandings they had with the then local scholars marked the beginning of disintegration of the central mosque. Two of them formed their own congregations respectively and this gave birth to free formation of different mosques with different Imams of different ideologies. The unity that concentrated in one place has been scattered among various central mosques whose leaders are preferred by their followers to the general and recognised Chief Imam in terms of ideology and command. They cut off their affair of unity between them and formed themselves into parties, with each party rejoices in that which it is holding (Qur'an 23 verse 53).

Five pillars of Islam and Unity Threat

The abysmal absence of *tawhīd* leads to the inattentive and or negligence of the Muslims in core religious duties. The five daily prayers as basic act of social discipline are no longer offered properly with its requirements and conditions. Prayer contains statements and actions from the beginning to the end. It starts from the statement which confirms Allah as the Great and ends with the salutation which connotes peace. The question here is that is there any peace among the Nigerian Muslims who have divided themselves in their various mosques and communities due to trivial issues or misunderstandings? The absence of peace which proves disunity is a testify to the presence of shameful and evil deeds among the Muslims whereas this negates the aims and objectives of offering prayer which Allah says it will prevent the Muslims from shameful and evil deeds(Qur'an 29 verse 45).

Closely related to this is the issue of *Zakāh* (Compulsory due) which is not paid by the majority of the rich Muslims in Nigeria. This has reduced the brotherhood love expected to be

operating between the rich, who pays it and the poor, who receives it. It is believed that every heart loves money and wants to receive but hardly like to give. This is why payment of *Zakāh* reveals the truthfulness of the faith of the one who gives it. Instead of paying this legal due, majority of the rich Muslims prefer giving *ṣadaqah* (voluntary almsgiving), especially to show off. Some of them consider *Zakāh* unnecessary since amount they give out as *ṣadaqah* is more than the amount payable on *Zakāh*. These people fail to realize the obligatory of *Zakāh* and its conditions. It is a fact that through the institution of *Zakāh* the Muslim community can become a single family in Nigeria in which the strong helps the weak, and the rich helps the poor because the rich believes he has brothers to whom he has to be generous in the manner in which Allah is generous to him (Ahmad, K). If *Zakāh* is properly administer, revolution of the poor against the rich and community, financial crime, robbery, stealing and other evil acts will be prevented, hence peaceful and united community.

The extent to which the Muslim community in Nigeria is being threatened by the unnecessary disputes due to sighting of moon for the commencement and termination of Ramadan fasting and the announcement of the Islamic festival's day (*ʿĪdul-aḍḥā* and *ʿĪdul-fiṭr*) is hardly determined. *Sulṭān* of Sokoto, is the leader of Muslims in Nigeria and is also the President-General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA). He is responsible for the announcement of sighting of moon for the commencement and termination of Ramadan fasting and commemoration of the two festivals of the Muslims mentioned above. He should also be notified of the sighting of moon in any part of Nigeria so that he would order the Muslims in Nigeria to commence or terminate the Ramadan fasting or to observe any of the two festivals. Objection of the Muslims to the announcements of the *Sulṭān* started when some Muslims, especially from the southern part of Nigeria discovered what they term as ambiguity in sighting moon as always announced by the *Sulṭān*. They claim that the announcements of *Sulṭān* always contradict those of the Saudi Arabia. It was also discovered that the Nigerian Muslims do observe twenty nine days fasting whereas it should be between twenty nine and thirty days as in the case of Saudi Arabia and some parts of the Muslim world. They also argued that why is it that it is only in the North that the moon is always sighted?

It was because of these reasons and others that the southern Muslims founded the League of Imams and Alfas in late 1973 under the chairmanship of the then Chief Imam of Ibadan, Shaykh Muili Abdullah Basunu (d.1982) and Shaykh Adama Abdullah al-Ilori (d.1992) as the secretary. The League handles the issue of the moon sighting and other religious matters in the southern part of Nigeria (Adegoke, K.A. 2013). Aside this, there are other neutral Muslims who neither support the north nor south on the issue of moon sighting, they measure between the duo. For example, they commence or terminate fasting if the announcements of *Sulṭān* tally with the announcements from other parts of the Islamic world. Ramadan that is supposed to be source of peace, harmony, and mercy emanated from fear of Allah has become a threat to the Nigerian Muslim's unity. It is even funny that Muslims complain about the selection of the chairman, Nigeria Hajj Commission. Their demand is that there are other Muslims from other parts of the country who are also qualified to hold the chairmanship position of the commission.

Causes of Division among the Nigerian Muslims

Unity in Islam is founded on the submission to the will of Allah, obedience to His law and commitment to His cause. Unity has no border in Islam, it is international. It is realized when it is nourished and fostered by Islam. Qur'an informs that the Muslims are the best community ever raised because they enforce what is right, fight what is wrong and believe in Allah (Qur'an 3 verse 110). Where is that best Muslim community with all these attributes in Nigeria today? The community which does not consider *tawḥīd* in its activities, and does not practice Islam which ascribes those qualities to it. Politics and tribalism are the major causes of divisions among the Muslims in Nigeria.

Political Contributions to the Muslims' Division

Nigeria, like other countries is geographically demarcated into segments like wards, local government areas, states and into six geo-political zones. Basically, there is nothing wrong in these divisions carried out for easy administration. It is an act of ignorance in the part of the Muslims to divide themselves based on these national divisions meant for smooth administration of the country. The Prophet (SAW) placed the newly converted Muslims of

Madinah under twelve captains (*Nuqabā'*) to administer the affairs of their people in Madinah before he joined them later. He even took oath of allegiance from them during the second allegiance of 'Aqabah. It is observed that the more the country is divided into units for political or administrative reasons the more the divisions among the Muslims in Nigeria because everybody prefers to be identified with the zone or unit under which he falls to the spirit of Islam which considers every Muslim to be brother of the other Muslim irrespective of zone or unit from which he belongs. What compounded these divisions is the formation of political parties and the freedom to associate with or to disassociate from the political parties. Currently, there are thirty (30) dully registered political parties under the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria.

These political parties have manifesto and motto which entice the Muslims to join them. The manifesto contains some policies and ideologies of the party. The Muslims have been hitherto divided based on the beliefs of these political parties as it is reflected in some social media where political parties exchange various hate and amorality speeches capable of causing secession of the country. Muslims are also involved in these abnormalities since they love their political parties and ready to defend them with whatever means. They have forgotten the religion which mandates them to be brotherly with their fellow Muslims. They prefer the manifesto of their political parties to Islam because of the fear of expulsion from the party should they contradict the party's manifesto, forgetting that they can also be expelled from Islam through their unislamic activities in the party. When complaining against the bad activities going on in the political parties, a conscious politician remarked that adultery or fornication is considered a least sin by the politicians. Not only this, the politicians do not see any big deal in killing their opponents whom they considered stumbling blocks without considering the religion as they also take themselves on oath using materials such as cutlass, gun, and so on, in order to keep secret of their bad deeds. Which of these acts is commanded by Islam? Islam will never command abomination or evil. Allah commands justice, good deeds, and giving to kith and kin, and He forbids indecent deeds, evil and rebellion of the politicians (Qur'an 16, verse 90). The idea of ruling and opposition parties confirms the divisions among

the Muslims because both parties consist of Muslims and non-Muslims as well, each opposing one another without genuine cause most of the time.

Tribal Associations' Contributions to the Muslims' Division

Formation of socio-cultural organizations like Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) in the North, Afenifere in the South-West, Ohanaese Ndigbo in the East Urhobo Progressive Union in the South-South, is also a testimony to the disunity of the Muslims in Nigeria. Apart from these apex socio-cultural groups, there are other subordinate or militant groups attached to each one of them or operate independently. These tribal associations have grown to producing preachers of hate and purveyors of prejudice which is affecting the file of the Muslims across the nation. There are Muslims as members in each of these tribal associations, fighting against other regions without consideration for Muslims in the opposite regions. Each of these associations supports its people whether they are right or not, oppressed or oppressors. Membership of these associations is based on ethnicity, birth place, citizenship, school of thought or common interest. Tribalism has indirectly engendered the Nigerian civil war and indirectly gave birth to the present idea of quota system and state of origin. It brought about the growth of national inequality and anger of perceived injustice. The use of 'us' and 'we' becomes an order of the day among Nigerians, Muslims inclusive. Tribes look down upon one another. These resulted to crisis that affects the innocent people. All these are rejected by Islam. The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said, 'He is not one of us who calls to tribalism, he is not one of us who fights for the sake of tribalism and he is not one of us who dies following the way of tribalism (Abu Dāwud, 2011).

The danger posed by the activities of the indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) to the security of the nation and how the Federal government dealt with them is no more news. The reaction of the Coalition of Northern Youth Group is well known to the public as well. Muslims, whether minority or not, are found in both groups. This is causing divisions among the Muslims in Nigeria up till today. It must be reiterated that the politicians are contributing to the escalation of divisions of the Nigerians generally for selfish reason. They have succeeded in dividing the nation into classes, using the religion and tribe as instruments. In reality, Nigeria is

divided into two, namely the politicians, among whom are the Muslims and the rest who have been disunited by the former based on tribalism and religion.

Ignorance, Blind Imitation and *Takfir* (charge of Unbelief)

It is a fact that ignorance is a great decease. It is an act of ignorance that made some Muslims, especially the youth to seclude themselves from the community and settle in a remote bush or village with an illusion that it is the best option to make them perfect their religion. Only Allah knows how many seclusion camps have been created by these ignorant youth in Nigeria. The leaders of these camps go to these remote areas with their wives, children and their blind followers. They teach their followers what they believe is Islam and they come to the city to recruit some youth, males and females to join them in the bush. They have succeeded in separating Muslim youth from their families. They feed on vegetables and the farm products which they cultivate while they limit their medication to herbs and roots. They claim it is forbidden to eat any processed food and take pharmaceutical medicines as they deny themselves of using any manufactured material. They trek and also avoid riding cars and buses. It is forbidden to use all these things since the Prophet (SAW) did not use them therefore abandoning them is an act of renouncing worldly materials preached by Islam. It is this belief that prompt them to call anybody who is not with them or engaging in using any material similar to the aforementioned, *kāfir* (unbeliever). It is this type of ideology that led to creation of deadly sect called Boko Haram. These youth will never salute or respond to salutation because according to their philosophy, every other person is an unbeliever. There are similar youth in the various institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, preaching the same thing among the students. These students don't have respect for the lecturers and school authority. They practice Islam based on their philosophy. They have also changed the administrative system of the Muslim Students' Association of Nigeria (MSSN) to what they belief should be the Islamic administration. The worst part of it is that they conduct marriages among themselves without following the Islamic rules on marriage. They have brainwashed the girls to believe that their parents are unbelievers and as such the fathers cannot stand as *waliy* (guide). They also divorce

these ladies at will. In short, these youth and those who join them seek for an unprecedented Islam and that is why what is considered Islam by the Muslims is not Islam in their philosophy.

Secularism as a Bane of Nigerian Muslim Unity

Secularism has no base in Islam since the philosophy behind secularism is to separate religion from all walks of life. Islamic Law (*Sharī'ah*) consists of commandments set for religious and spiritual purposes. These have to do with the rules of faith and worship as well as rules and laws that have to do with administration and organization of state, the government and the community, relations between individuals and their communities and so on. Secularism is been used to divert the attention of innocent Muslims. It may be accepted in other religions like Christianity or Judaism because they are devoid of a *Sharī'ah* or a comprehensive way of life. Acceptance of secularism by the Muslim community means rejection of Islam as a comprehensive way of worship (*'ibādah*) and legislation (*Sharī'ah*). Likewise, it is denial of the divine guidance and a rejection Allah's injunction (Audah, A. 1978). In Nigeria, citizens have been made to know that democracy is superior to every religion and they have been governed so. Some Muslims also believe this assertion. Whenever there is conversation on a particular issue which has place in Islam, the remark is that this is not a religious issue. Recently, a discussion concerning whether the Nigeria Defense Academy should stop given admission to females or not is going on. The general opinion of people is that the Federal government being led by a Muslim wants to introduce Islamic religion to deny females of their right. The issue of *hijāb* has cause a lot of religious hatred and agitations against the female Muslim students using it. It is funny to mention that some Muslims do support non-Muslims, who object to use of *hijāb*.

Nigerian Muslims and Unity

Without mincing words, there are divisions among the Nigerian Muslims. This is as a result many factors which occupy their minds without focusing attention on their religion. The life of the Muslims in their relations with their Lord and fellow Nigerians is almost devoid of faith in Allah and in the messengership of Muhammad (SAW). Muslims are involved in racism, discrimination, tribal sentiments, intolerance, political and economic prejudices. Any nation in

which unity is lacking is close to destruction and doom. In order to make the Nigerian Muslims strong, there is need to adhere to the following points of wisdom.

Commitment to *Tawhīd*

One of the important things through which a person is recognized as part of a community is the belief of such community. Therefore, the first identity of a Muslim is the statement of testimony which confirms the Oneness of Allah and the messengership of Muhammad (SAW). The alliance and solidarity between individual of Islamic community is based on the unity emanated from unity of Allah and imitation of His Prophet (SAW). Therefore, Nigerian Muslims should learn and study this very important aspect of Islam and its core subject. It is the rope to which a sincere Muslim should hold fast to make him integral part of the Muslim community who is useful to himself and the community. Faith is a factor which notifies Muslim that as a Muslim, he belongs to any other Muslim, not only in Nigeria but throughout the world. Therefore a nation without faith will not develop because its citizens will tread the part of impiety in all walks of life (Oyewole, 2002). Killing, robbery, injustice drug trafficking and attack of people including the fellow Muslim will become simple things. This study has revealed the impact of faith on the development of Arabs through the exercise of unity among them when they embraced a new faith.

Avoidance of *Takfīr*

Labeling a Muslim or a group of Muslim irreligious is an innovation and a strange attitude introduced to Islam by some ignorant or enemies of Islam. Once somebody professes the statement of testimony, such person's blood, wealth and dignity are safe. Those who charge fellow Muslims and call them bad names have no prof. *Takfīr* is a tool used to gain personal interest on the basis of envy, hatred and prejudices. Those who use *Takfīr* for the Muslims are copying the *Khawārij* who introduced it in the history of Islam (Maqbool, H,2015). *Takfīr* cannot breed anything except disputes, hatred and intolerance. Some youth who are known with this phenomenal don't attend mosque and they don't mix with other Muslims. In fact, they engage in sinful activities like impregnating innocent girls without involving their parents. They are a group who will not cooperate with other Muslims. This attitude has to be

stopped. The Muslim scholars and leaders should find ways to suppress this movement, otherwise the unity of Muslims is at stake.

Identification of Common Enemies of Muslims

The common enemies of the Muslims are the threats posed to them by politics, economics and culture. It should be recognized that Islam is a way of life, and it has paths laid down for every action or engagement. Muslims should make sure that enmities and hatred created in the contemporary political or economic activities are not teachings of Islam, which emphasizes justice, sincerity and fair play in these activities and others. Accordingly, no matured Muslim should engage in any activity until he studies and knows the Islamic rules on it. Politics has become trade and a means of getting rich illegally. The politicians and government officials are used to luxurious life and they live above their legitimate incomes (Hassan, I.H.) 2010). They don't consider that they have denied the majority of poor Nigerians their right and that Allah will ask them the sources of their wealth. It is unfortunate that Muslims are also involved in this corruption. How then would they get the support of their fellow Muslims or unite with them? Surely the politicians have caused great disunity among the Muslims by classing themselves and discriminating against Muslims. A Muslim politician is more cooperative with his co-politicians of any religion and is ready to support them on any issue even if such issue will affect the Muslims and Islam.

Focus on Common Issues

The most common issue of the Muslims is their Allah symbolized by the religion which commands unity among its adherents. Therefore, Allah is the Muslim's goal, the Messenger is their exemplary, Qur'an is the constitution, strive in the cause of Allah and dying in His cause is their path (Al-Banna). Every legislated act of religion like believe, regular prayer, fasting, *zakah*, keeping relations, etc. are common issues among the Muslims which can earn them the desired unity (Maqbool, 2015).

Adherence to Islamic Brotherhood Teaching

Every Muslim is a brother to another Muslim, not only in Nigeria but throughout the

world. This is a blessing and favour from Allah on the Muslims. The method of the Prophet in teaching brotherhood is that he firstly anchored *aqīdah* into the minds of the believers and trained them the scripture practically right from Makkah and in Madinah. Therefore believing men and women who were overwhelmed by *aqīdah* which dominated their sensations and psychic forces and became everything in their life graduated from his school. He then fraternized and organized them and took covenant and promise from them to practice and defend the religion. This brought about power of unity which assisted them to triumph over their enemies and problems (Mashhur, M. 2006). Among actions which aid brotherhood and unity is that Muslims should form the habits of praying for the Muslims in absence, make visits, respect and honour invitations, love them, be cheerful when meeting them, donate or give gifts to them, be sympathetic with them during sorrow or problem and rejoice with them when they feel happy. Muslim should be concerned of other Muslim's problem because of the statement of the Prophet (SAW), 'he who does not have concern for the affairs of Muslims is not among them'.

Spread of Statement of Salutation

It is required to create peace in order to have a balanced society. This is why the words 'peace' and 'Islam' are derived from the same root and may be considered synonymous. *As-Salām* which means peace is one of the names of Allah. The last statements of daily prayers which indicate termination of prayer are words of peace likewise every time salutations of Muslims are expressions of peace. If the concept of peace is judiciously used among the Nigerian Muslims, there will be unity among them because of secret infused in this word. The prophet (SAW) urges us to be saying the statement of peace always (Abdalati, H.). Abū Dāwud related that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said, 'I swear by He who holds my soul, you will not enter Paradise until you have faith, and you can never possess faith until you love yourselves. Let me lead you to something that if you do it you will love one another. That is spread *taslīm* (statements of salutation) among yourselves (Abū Riyyah, 2010). Today, some Muslims ignore this good deed either intentionally or because of lack of Islamic knowledge. These types of

people are losing some rewards and what can enhance unity among the Nigerian Muslims. Peace is a symbol of unity of the Muslims.

Role of Muslim Leaders and Islamic Organisations

The Muslim leaders have greater roles to play in order to introduce unity among the Muslims. Working towards awareness of importance of unity is inevitable because lack of unity has made Muslims to be derogated and has made them to lose their focus. The Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) should take a lead. Others like Muslim Ummah of South Western Nigeria (MUSWEN), Jamā'ah Naşrul-Islam and other local organisations including the Arabic and Islamic schools should follow. One of the expected roles to be played is that they have to penetrate government and its agencies in charge of media to promote the Islamic mode of Unity and make sure that all words of hatred, religious prejudices, blackmailing are not propagated. These leaders can make use of the Muslim professionals to serve as check and balances for the social and on-line media because of their printable comments on Islam. Sermons and preaching should be judiciously checkmated. There is need also to work on the educational syllabi and curricula which almost exclude Islamic teachings on character building. The proprietors of Muslim schools should be persuaded to integrate Islamic thought of unity and related topics in their school lessons.

Avoidance of Injustice and intolerance

Islam commands goodness and forbids evil. Goodness earns its doer a reward while evil earns its doer a punishment. For this reason, A Muslim should try to be patient and tolerance with others and avoid displeasing or offending others. This is because it is better for him to offend Allah directly than to offend a fellow man. Allah forgives every sin provided one repents on time by observing the conditions of repentance which are; to regret of one's shortcoming, seek for forgiveness from Allah and decision not to engage in such sin. The fourth one is in connection with an oppressed. It is a required condition to approach the oppressed and declare an injustice done to him. If he forgives then Allah also forgives, otherwise the settlement is

deferred till the Day of Judgment when Allah will retaliate for him. It is believed that unity will exist among the Muslim community if there is understanding of evil of oppression.

Conclusion

The above submissions expose the disunity among the Nigerian Muslims and the factors responsible for such. The major factor is the weakness of their belief and practice of core Islamic mode of worship which possess some spirit capable of uniting them. Al-Mighty Allah knows His creature that it is impossible for them to live in peace because of the free will created with them and that is why He laid down commandments capable of restructuring them to fulfill the purpose for which they were created. Therefore, among the aims and objectives of Islamic law is to facilitate peaceful co-existence of man in general. The foundation of these commandments is faith in Allah and His Messenger which should reflect in other major mode of worships and social relation as well. Islamic concept of *tawīd* is the other name of the unity of Muslims (Jafir, 2002) and that is why Islam is the greatest unifying force in the world. As Muslims, it is high time to take advantage of Islam for a united Nigerian Muslims.

Various measures have been introduced by the world, continent, regional, national and local leaders to ensure peaceful co-existence of people but to no avail. But it is a clear proof that Islam has laid down uncommon methods of unifying people. The Nigerian Muslim should not lose hope because Arabs were worse in character and were not united. But when Islam arrived, it changed their status from been ignorance to refined, godlessness to faithful, divided to united. It is hopeful that the Muslims in Nigeria can also be more united by taking leave from the prophetic lessons on unity. Lessons should also be learnt from what accounted for the disunity of the Muslims after the death of the Prophet (SAW). It was lack of trust in the leader, chance given to the intruders and hypocrites among Muslims cum lack of investigation as regards the fake reports given by the insurgents who created hatred of the leader into minds of the Muslims through their evil propaganda. Lessons drawn from this study can assist the Muslims in Nigeria in terms of unity formation, restoration and sustenance.

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