

# **The Concept and the Challenges of Muslims Unity in Contemporary Nigeria from Islamic Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

*The glory of Islam's past civilization clearly demonstrates the bond of brotherhood in a multicultural society that is sustained for such a long period of time. Such glory is a manifestation of the great messenger's determination and his companions who advocated righteousness and forbid evil based on the guidance from Allah. The concept of brotherhood and harmony commanded by Allah is well understood by them. The question is whether that methodology is understood by today's Muslims in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper briefly explores the concept of unity in Islam and its relation to a united Muslims and initiates a brief discussion on some selected findings that relate to the situation of unity and national integration in Nigeria. It will also examine the background to Islamic unity, the practical steps towards Muslim unity and the validity and the necessities of Muslim unity in recent times will equally highlighted. The research method is based on the exegetical and hermeneutics of the Glorious Qur'an and Ahadith, including the appraisal of the view of Islamic scholars. The paper comes to understand that unity in Islam is one of the greatest blessings granted by Allah to the Muslims is not an option. Anything opposed to this blessing such as tribalism and selfishness is an act of ingratitude with lasting consequences. It observed that, Muslims in Nigeria have reduced Islam to rituals and ignore other basic aspects of the faith that emphasize brotherhood. It s concluded that, unity is an obligatory duty for every Muslims.*

**Keywords:** Unity, Islamic perspective, Muslim, Nigeria, brotherhood.

## **Introduction**

Unity is primal to Islam and so it should be to the Muslim, both in spiritual and mundane existence. Unity colours the hue of the belief system constituting the onset and the outpost of faith. What Prophet Muhammad (SAW) toiled for and established was one single fortified family with one leader (himself) and one goal (Allah)<sup>1</sup>. This remained the character of the Muslims until inordinate desire for leadership tussle, tribalism, social differences, political insensitivity, cultural separation, ideological and proliferation of many Islamic organizations and interpretation of Islam jurisprudence crept in<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the rope of Allah that had hitherto bonded the Muslims together in love and compassion became severed and dissent, division and disunity became manifest in the body of the Muslims community. Nowadays also, the whole Muslim community in Nigeria is facing numerous problems in terms of politics, sectarianism and conspiracy of anti-Islamic groups. The entire situation has come to the present in such a condition where all the Muslims have fallen into disunity. How this lack of unity does affected Muslim community? Well, the enemies of Islam simply take advantage of Muslims disunity, and they attack and kill many Muslim brothers and sisters, whereas Muslims just sit and watch. Many fellow Muslims are abused and wronged and Muslims just make sure that their “society, sects” are safe. It is sad to see that every Muslim nowadays in Nigeria thinks in terms of “sects, tribalism, society and organizations” and not as Muslim community as a whole. Whereas, Islam is the gift from Allah that is perfectly molded to ensure peace and unity and Islam means “a state of peace through submission to Allah’s will” and a Muslim is one “who earns that peace through submission to Allah’s will”. Therefore, when there is no peace then the Muslim’s submission is either weak or it lacks quality. A Muslim would not take pride in disunity, rather would strive to unite the Muslims bearing in mind Allah’s warning in the Glorious Qur’an, 8:1: “.....*fear Allah, and keep straight the relations between yourselves: obey Allah and His Messenger, if you do believe*”. As a result of this, unity amongst Muslims in Nigeria has become a topic that will never grow old. It is discussed on a daily basis by media outlets, television programs, online and in most Islamic organizations. The majority of Muslim Imams and preachers from various sects, societies and organizations seek to establish unity among all Muslims in Nigeria. Realistically speaking, despite all these efforts, the results are not spectacular. The reason for this is not because Muslims do not want to unite with one another; but it rather their misunderstanding of the term ‘Islamic concept of Unity’. Owing to this ignorance, Muslims

are driving away from the right path of Qur'an, *Ahadith* and *Sunnah*, and falling prey to silly notions of and other man-made concepts. Unfortunately, nowadays Muslims have to talk about the need for unity among the Muslims' community, since unity is totally absent. This paper therefore, is about how Muslims in Nigeria can unite the Muslim community in order to uphold peace among them.

### **What does unity means in Islam?**

Some imagine that unity in Islam means that all Muslims must relinquish their particular ideologies and doctrines and act according to common principles accepted by all Islamic sects, society and organizations<sup>3</sup>. Others suppose that Muslims should agree with one of the Islamic sects, societies and organizations and that followers of other sects should follow that unanimously accepted sect, society and organizations<sup>4</sup>. The fact, however, is that none of these two groups interpretation is true. Firstly, by unity in Islam, one does not mean that beliefs and practical laws of the various Islamic sects, society and organizations must be welded or fused into one. Secondly, it is impossible for such a thing to be practicable. Unity in Islam means that followers of each of the different Islamic sects, should consider the sublime interest of Islam as regards their social, political and cultural relationships with other Muslims and stand in one line against the common enemies of Islam. At the same time, they should hold and adhere to the particular beliefs and injunctions. It is comparable to part of a body, each of which possesses characteristics that others lack. Each of them differs in functions from other parts yet, despite all these differences, all of them cooperate with each other and when dangers appear, they all unitedly confront that danger<sup>5</sup>.

The fact is that with regards to the common points that Muslims have in the field of major and minor questions, there definitely exist the possibilities of unity among Muslims in Nigeria. Such unity does not require the unity of Muslims views on all issues relating to ideology and doctrine. In principle, unity of views on the whole above mentioned issues is not only impossible among Muslims in Nigeria of course, if Muslims attain the said unity in such a way that with cooperation of their *Ulama* they profoundly strive to bring the beliefs and ideas of the various Islamic sects close together and reduce the differences as much as possible, this will be beneficial and ideal. It is hope that Islamic scholars attain could such a honourable position. But what seems now practicable is not the unity in this sense; rather it means the unity of expression of Muslims in preserving and safeguarding the sublime benefits of Islam and encountering the enemies of Islam.

## **The Ground for Islamic Unity**

When speaking of the grounds of unity among the Muslims, a question arises in the mind of an informed Muslim as to whether there exist any ground for discord among Muslims, as such a question which this section plan to discuss. The reason for this question occurring in the mind of an informed Muslim is that different Islamic sects enjoy so many characteristics in common, that it allows no possibility for the followers of that sect to feel dissension among themselves. If there may exist minor differences, they must abandon such. This is because, tolerable differences have existed amongst the Muslims from the beginning and it is regarding this same problem that Allah the most exalted has stated in the Glorious Qur'an: "And obey Allah and his apostle and do not quarrel, for them you will be weak in heart and your power will depart, and be patient, surely Allah is with the patient" (Qur'an, 8:46)

In this sacred verse, there are two significant principles for all Muslims, namely, obedience to Allah and his Apostle have been mentioned and recommended. It then concludes that if Muslims act according to these two principles, they will never rise against one another and their prestige and power will not be squandered. The mentioned verse, in the end, orders the Muslims to tolerate and solve their problems and any problem that defames the dignity of Islam. It also reminds them of a fact that if they do so, He will also help them. With regards to Allah's command in the above mentioned verse and in view of the fact that in present conditions Islam is being threatened by exploitative and atheistic powers more than ever before. Therefore, many Islamic countries are under military, political, and economic domination of the Western and Eastern Colonialists, a very heavy burden of duty rests upon Muslims. In such a situation, if any Muslim fails to bring the hearts of Muslims nearer to each other, he or she has committed a sin and on the other hand, if any Muslim intensifies the differences among the Muslims, it is a clear and unforgivable treachery against Islam.

## **The Basis of Unity in Islam**

It is a great fortune that after 14 centuries since the appearance of the holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) despite all plots that the enemies of Islam have made against Islam and the conspiracies that deviate persons concocted for distorting the fundamentals and command of Islam, there are common characteristics which are accepted by all Muslims regarding not

only the fundamentals of Islam but even concerning most of the minor problems. It can, thus, be said that there exists no unbridgeable differences among the Muslims and that there is nothing that can seriously hinder unity and solidarity among them. At present, Muslims in Nigeria like their counterpart in the whole world are in agreement with the related questions which surround the fundamental problems and the pillars of Islam.

**God:** All Muslims believe in the one, omnipotent, creator, All-knowing wise Allah with the attributes mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an. They know that Allah alone is to be worshipped. Worships other than Allah, all Muslims believe, is *Shirk* (polytheism)<sup>6</sup>. Clearly, the one true Allah that those millions of people all believe in commands this unison and sameness of purpose; "Verily", He the Most Supreme commands in the Qur'an; "this *Umah* of yours is a single *Umah* and I am your Lord and Cherisher; therefore serve Me (and no other)" (Q21:22) Fulfilling the obligation of worship of Allah in full submission is a daily practical demonstration of this oneness and the unity of the message. Now, five times a day, billions of worshippers in apparent unison do *qiyam* (standing), *ru'kuh* (bowing), *sujud* (prostration) and *tasleem* (salutation) at the same period, in the same manner, facing the same *qiblah* (direction) for the same purpose. Fulfilling the obligation of worship of Allah in full submission is a daily practical demonstration of this oneness and the unity of the message.

**Prophet:** The belief of all Muslims is based on the fact that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is the last Prophet of Allah and that no other prophet has come, nor will come after him, he is the messenger of Allah. Unity of all Muslims stems from the fact that all Muslims must follow two things, the Glorious Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

**Qur'an:** Among Muslims, there is no diversity of view that the Glorious Qur'an is the book of Allah which has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) through which he can guide the people. All Muslims believe that the Glorious Qur'an has been sent down to the Holy Prophet Muhammad by Allah, and that nothing has been revealed by Allah after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The fact that the Glorious Qur'an in its present pristine form at the disposal of the Muslim's is of the same Glorious Qur'an revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and that no verse or even a word has been added or omitted from the Glorious Qur'an, is believed by all Muslims. Also, there is no such thing as old Qur'an, new Qur'an or revised. There is only one version of the Holy book and that means what is read in Africa and what is read in United States are the same with what is read in Nigeria.

**Qiblah:** All Muslims turn to the *kaabah* which is located in Mecca as the direction which they face when they perform their prayers. There is no anyone among Muslim who believes

in any other direction. All Muslims must face the same direction when praying, no matter where they are. That is the direction of the *Qibla*.

**Prayer:** The second Pillar of Islam is prayer, or *Salat*. It is incumbent upon every Muslim to offer prayers five times a day: morning, noon, afternoon, evening and night prayer, all Muslims believe, is the most important act of worship of Allah. The act of praying is a spiritual moment for Muslims to worship and give thanks to Allah for what he has provided for them. It's a time for them to focus the mind and have a personal communication with him, as if standing directly in front of him. So far as the parts of prayers are concerned, all Islamic sects, organizations and societies share one and the same idea, namely, two *Rakats* (parts) at dawn, four in the afternoon and evening, three at dusk and four at night. All Muslims face the Kaabah during their prayers and have a common opinion not only on the number of *Rakats* of compulsory prayers but on the quality of their performance as well. If a Muslim prays without the right attitude of mind, it's as if they hadn't prayed at all. The set of rhythmic and repetitive body movements helps further concentrate the mind. No wonder, *Salat* reminds Muslims of their duties to Allah, in worshipping Him throughout their lives, and that all Muslims are equal in front of Allah. It brings Muslims together and makes them feel Allah is watching them at all times. It stops them from making everyday life more important than serving Allah<sup>7</sup>. This is because ordinary life stops for prayer. This is not prayer in terms of supplication. The term prayer in English is the closest translation. It is not prayer in the sense of sitting and making supplication but requires lots of preparation.

**Ramadan Fasting:** Fasting, too, is one of the important acts of worship which all Muslims perform in the holy month of Ramadan every year with the intention of obeying Allah's command. Different Islamic sects, organizations and societies hold similar view on the main questions relating to fasting. Fasting helps train worshippers in patience and self-discipline and it is an opportunity for them to express their gratefulness to Allah. Fasting covers abstinence from food and drink of any sort, smoking and sexual activity. Muslims should also avoid bad habits, bad deeds and evil thoughts. Many Muslims will take this time to try to become better Muslims by praying more or reading the Glorious Qur'an. During this time, Muslims believe their good deeds bring greater rewards than during any other month because Allah has blessed Ramadan. No one can create their own month because the matter has been clearly stated in the holy Quran. Allah says "They ask you about the crescents, say 'They are timing devices for the people as well as for Hajj'" 2:189

**Zakat:** The third Pillar of Islam is the compulsory giving of 2.5% of the money one has kept in their possession for one whole year. It doesn't include any gifts given out of kindness or

generosity. It teaches generosity and self-discipline and helps remind worshippers that Allah owns everything, not human. Since money can't be buried with anyone when he dies, those whom Allah has chosen to be made poor should be helped instead. It reminds richer Muslims of their duty to the poor and strengthens the feelings of brotherhood among Muslims.

**Hajj:** Hundreds of thousands of Islamic worshippers from all over the world set out on a journey to simultaneously converge at the *Masjid al-Haram* Mosque in Mecca, the birthplace of Islam. One of the most important practices in Islamic ideologies is *Hajj* which is compulsory for each and every Muslim to perform at least one in his or her lifetime. Fortunately, all Muslims are unanimously in agreement on the principle of this practice and its pillars. All Muslims share and act equally on one and the same view as regards the time and place of *Hajj*, the number of circumbulations of the *Hajj*, binding Ihram upon oneself, of walking seven times between the two hills of *Safa* and *Marwah*, throwing of stones at the three boulders, sacrifice, shaving of the head for men, cutting of a few lock of head hair for women. All pilgrims enter a state of Ihram, to show they have the intention of performing the *Hajj*. Male pilgrims drape two white sheets of fabric over their body, tied with a sash. With so many making the pilgrimage, it is a strong visual display which brings everyone, from paupers to Princes, to an equal level in the eyes of Allah. It brings the international community of Muslims together. They symbolize the unity of Muslims worldwide and help bring them closer to Allah<sup>8</sup>.

Again, Muslims from all parts of the globe, regardless of race, ethnicity or social status converge to fulfill this pillar of faith. Allah says in the Glorious Qur'an: 3:97, "And *Hajj* (pilgrimage to *Makkah*) to the House (*Ka'bah*) is a duty that mankind owes to Allah, those who can afford the expenses (for one's conveyance, provision and residence)". Hence, if today the followers of the fastest growing religion find themselves backward, divided, disunited and dictated to, there is need for them to look beyond the constant parameters of Islam and look into the changing ways of being faithful to the covenant of Islam.

### **Muslim Ummah**

Another important unifying concept among Muslims is the concept of *Ummah*, which represents a unifying classification to describe the community of Muslims faithful in the Arabian Peninsula during the life of Muhammad (SAW). Today, *Ummah* represents the unification of Muslims all around the globe. Islam preaches that all people are equal regardless of culture, race and gender. Allah says in the Glorious Qur'an: "And hold fast, all together, by the rope of Allah and be not divided among themselves" (Quran, 2:103). Also, the Prophet said in his farewell sermon,"

.... Arabs has no superiority over non-Arabs and Non-Arabs have no Superiority over Arabs, You are all equal except by piety and good action.... I leave behind me two things, the Qur'an and my example, the Sunnah and if you follow these you will never go astray”.

### **The Challenges Facing Unity among Muslims in Nigeria**

Several factors combine to inhibit the unity of Muslims in Nigeria today, like all around the world. They are so diverse and complex that this work cannot do justice to them. Some of these are discussed below.

1. **Historical Circumstances:** Nigeria is yet to become a nation in the true sense. The lack of homogeneity affects the inter-relationship among the Muslims as well. Thus, Muslims see themselves as different people, one from another, depending on their places of origin. These historic attributes die hard, even though Islam is supposed to dissolve such tribal and ethnic differences as might historically exist amongst Muslims<sup>9</sup>.

2. **Sociological Differences:** North is socially organized along Emirate lines which vest political and religious leadership on a single authority personified by the Emir. The social arrangements are totally different in the South West where religions have been severely separated from political affairs. Under the latter set-up, the administration of Islam is removed from the public domain and treated as purely private affair of Muslims, with the Imams taking full charge. However, the sphere is confined to the mosque. In the circumstance, the Southern Muslim Communities are scattered, grouped into as many Central mosques that exist in one town. In the circumstances, for very many years and until relatively recently, these Central mosques were never brought together under one umbrella<sup>10</sup>.

3. **Mutual Recriminations:** The political/ethnic divide between the Northern and Southern Nigeria often throws up religious ripples. For example Southern Muslims have persistently accused their Northern counterparts of unwarranted arrogance. They allege that Northern Muslims claim to be “purer” Muslims and would therefore not condescend to pray behind a Southern Imam. Reference is also made to the practice of Northern Muslims’ constituting themselves into separate Communities in their Sabo quarters, rather than integrating with their neighbours in one Central Mosque<sup>11</sup>. Northern Muslim leaders vehemently deny these allegations and explain that the convenience of language rather than ethnic arrogance dictates the separate arrangements that prevail. Although the excuse is not always voiced, many a



Northern Muslim would not warm up to South-Western Muslims, not being too sure that they have totally abandoned fetish tendencies since they believe that many still indulge in syncretism. Southern Muslims, on the other hand feel that their Northern brethren should be more forth coming in giving practical expression to the brotherhood of the Muslims as enjoined by Islam<sup>12</sup>.

**4. Leadership Question:** Perhaps the biggest issue dividing the Muslims today is the issue of an acceptable national leader for the entire Nigerian Muslims. Admittedly, the majority Northern Muslims have almost unanimously accepted the Sultan of Sokoto Sarkin Muslumi as the Amir-ul-Muminin of Nigeria. The Northeastern zone, which would have kicked against this posture, has been accommodated by being accorded the Deputy Leadership which is permanently conferred on the Shehu of Borno<sup>13</sup>. The South Eastern Muslims, though democratic in the tradition of their republican tendencies have acquiesced in the Northern arrangement, mindful of their significant minority position. However, the South West is almost unanimously averse to the idea of permanently vesting the leadership of the Muslim *Ummah* in the Sultan of Sokoto. Therefore, they have always seized upon any opportunity that avails itself to demand the deletion of the relevant clause in NSCIA constitution<sup>14</sup>. They would prefer a democratic and rotational arrangement. In as much as this leadership question remains unresolved, the universality of the authority and operation of NSCIA would remain in doubt and greatly limited.

**5. Political Insensitivity:** On the influence of party politics on Muslim unity in Nigeria, many Muslims are attached to partisan politics to the point of sacrificing their religion. In the history of Muslim involvement in politics in Nigeria, it has been observed that the Southern Muslims were ready to ally in politics with their Northern Muslim counterparts, with a body called the Muslim Congress of Nigeria (M.C.N.). it was formed in 1948. Unsatisfied with the non-appointment of Muslims into ministerial and other public posts in the first election held in the early 1950s, the M.C.N decided to become a full-fledged political party called the National Muslim League (N.M.L). But this proposal was said to have been foiled by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a Christian politician in the South-Western Nigeria. it was he who set up a parallel Muslim group to counter the first group and actually solicited governmental sanctions against the Muslim party. Muslims now belong to different political parties and are ready to support non-Muslim candidates against their Muslim rivals<sup>15</sup>.

It would have been possible to continue to prop up NSCIA, tolerate its fragile structure, and accept its leadership for some years to come, had the political events in Nigeria not taken a

very bad turn as portrayed by the June 12, Question<sup>16</sup>. The issue has devastated the Muslim morale especially in the South-West. Many a Muslim felt that if the NSCIA leadership was truly national, it should have stood firmly for truth and justice as enjoined by the Glorious Qur'an. It was inconceivable they argued that a Muslim leader should be sacrificed for personal and sectional interests, as MKO Abiola had been. Islamic unity would be an empty concept if it cannot be concretized on issues like the right of a Southern Muslim to lead this country especially when the Christian's accepted a Muslim / Muslim ticket for the President and Vice-President of the Republic. They also did not understand why Christian leadership could be so vocal in agitating for the actualization of MKO's mandate while the Muslim leadership is deafeningly silent and indifferent. The argument is also raised that when it comes to distribution of patronage and amenities, tribe and ethnic origin take precedence over Islam and that the Southern Muslims in this regard come off worse. They are discriminated against in their respective states and are at the same time ignored or neglected in the centre even when their Muslim brethren are in power. Indeed, the straw that has broken the Camel's back is in the realm of pilgrimage where Southern Muslims are virtually relegated to the background as Northern Muslims continue to dominate the organization and administration of *Hajj*<sup>17</sup>.

**6. Cultural Separation:** If the Arabs who had lived and observed the Prophet first-hand could slip back to their former pre-Islamic practices soon after the death of the Prophet, then no one can doubt that those who accepted the religion from other places could not easily forget their cultural background as well as the doctrinal principles of their former religion. They thus mixed up their former religious and doctrinal practices with the new religion they embraced. There was the fact that Islam had spread Far East and west towards the end of the Umayyad period and various people of various cultures had embraced Islam. These people of different cultural backgrounds, therefore, enriched Islamic teachings with their culture. This practice is rampant among some Yoruba Muslims who see nothing wrong with the participation of Muslims in traditional festivals because such are regarded as mere celebration of cultural heritage<sup>18</sup>.

Also, the northern Muslims claim that the person who does not wear long dress or turban is not as Muslim. They always keep themselves up busy in disputes with other Muslims. Sometimes, it is seen that the Northerner Muslims merge Islamic culture with their own existing culture and thus create a new semi-Islamic culture with a sense of pride to be identified distinctively as upholders of Islamic culture. For this reason, it creates separation

among the Muslim and weakens the strength in Nigeria. Certainly, there are cultural differences in an explicit manner among the Muslim in terms of dress, social manner and language, but they must not be taken as topics of argument<sup>19</sup>.

Furthermore, **disunity** among Nigerian Muslims can also be seen in the differences between the Northern and Southern Muslims. It is disheartening to note that tribal sentiments have been given such religious colouration that rarely would an Hausa Muslim condescend to pray behind a Yoruba Imam. The reasons for the North's discrimination against the Yoruba with reference to Islamic leadership are acts of syncretism, their involvement in Christian and atheist ceremonial rites, their un-Islamic marriage contracts, especially courtship for a long period, their congregational supplications after *salat* and their predetermination of dates for Islamic festivals and celebrations, among others<sup>20</sup>. The spirit of tribalism has grown to such an extent that Muslims no longer speak with one voice in the country. While the League of Imams and Alfas are operating independently in the southwest, the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs operates in the northern part of the country. Playing on racial differences has been considered a bane to national integration, which does not benefit any community involved.

**7. Jurisprudential Separation:** If a deeper study is made regarding the Islamic history and the development of Islamic Jurisprudence (The science of Fiqh), it will be realized that the four Ahlu-Sunnat Imams of Islamic Jurisprudence, Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Malik, Imam Shafi'i and Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal had very high respect and love for the family of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). They learnt Islamic Jurisprudence from Imams of *Ahlu-Bait* (family of Prophet Muhammad,(SAW). The major division among the Muslims in Jurisprudence occurred when the Science of Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence) became a formal subject and thus the Sunni Muslims became separated into four Madhabs (ways) like Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i And Hanbali. The Shi'a Muslims created a separate *Fiqah* exclusively for their own and called it Ja'fariah (from Imam Ja'ffar us Sadiq). In terms of Quran and Sunnah, jurisprudential differences among Imams and Islamic scholars based on the practice of Islam in different regional and cultural context come within the ambit of Islamic *Sha'ria*. But, later on, the followers of Imams and subsequent scholars made it a big issue. We still see such partitions among the Muslims<sup>21</sup>.

**8. Moon sighting Controversies:** The differing interpretation of some verses of the Qur'an by the companions of the Prophet has exacerbated the doctrinal disparity among the *Ummah*. In the same vein, some sayings of the Prophet are open to many interpretations and applications, based on the understanding of the Companions. A very good example of this is

the issue of sighting the moon before the commencement and breaking of Ramadan fast as mentioned by the Prophet. To this, a group of Muslims uphold that the commencement and termination of the fast are based on an individual community's independent sighting of the new moon. In another view; another group upholds that its appearance and sighting elsewhere in the world makes the fast compulsory. Still another group believes that all and sundry must sight the moon before commencing the fast, while Imam Malik, Imam Shafi'i and several others maintain that the fast could commence with the sighting of the moon by only two trustworthy male Muslims. For this multiple interpretation of the *ahadith* on sighting of new moon, the uniformity of commencing or terminating the Ramadan fast was not uniform in Nigeria<sup>22</sup>.

In Nigeria it has also generated hot debate amongst religious scholars in Nigeria. What is surprising is that there are differences in the commencement of the fast based on tribal sentiment. While the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, under the headship of the Sultan of Sokoto calls for people to be watchful of the crescent and to inform the authority upon sighting it, the Muslims of the Southwest under the tutelage of the League of Imams and Alfas simply announce the commencement of the fast while giving little weight to the sighting of the crescent. This has exposed Muslims to ridicule by non-Muslims when such matters could have been resolved amicably in the name of unity. A misunderstanding regarding the sighting of the moon between the leadership of *Zumratul Muminin* in South Nigeria and the League of Imams and Alfas resulted in the separation of the *Zumratul-Muminin* from the mainstream Muslim community and its decision to have its own separate *Juma'at* Mosque and *Eid* praying ground in Nigeria<sup>23</sup>.

**9. Proliferation of many Islamic organizations:** Nevertheless, many Islamic organisations were created for the purpose of uniting the *Muslims* in Nigeria. These have succeeded only in creating more divisions than ever. Different umbrella organisations like the National Council of Muslim Youth Organisations (NACOMYO), the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN), the National Joint Muslim Organisations (NAJOMO) and the like, were also put in place. These organizations achieved minimal success due to "egoism resulting in a proliferation of umbrella organisations; the divide between Muslim elites and the Imams and Alfas; a lack of buy-in and ownership; parochialism, ethno-centrism and intolerance; personality conflicts and ineffective conflict-resolution mechanisms." However, the Muslim *Ummah* of South West Nigeria (MUSWEN) was inaugurated on 10 August 2008 as a "product of a renewed concern for the lack of unity and absence of a generally acceptable leadership among the Muslims of the South West Nigeria." As laudable

as this idea is, one prays that this does not create a gap between the Muslim south and their counterparts in the northern part of the country, as an unintended consequence<sup>24</sup>.

**10. Imamship Tussles:** Cases of Imamship tussles have torn many Muslim communities apart in Nigeria. Some families who believed that their great grandfathers were the harbingers of Islam to a particular town would want to retain the position of the Imam in their families. In short, the question of whether the position of Imam should be by heredity or by appointment of competent persons regardless of family connections still remains unanswered in the Nigerian Muslim community. Instances where the hereditary approach is being challenged have led to rancour to the extent that the central mosques have to be under lock and key for months<sup>25</sup>.

### **The Practical ways Leading to Unity among Muslims in Nigeria**

Since unity is imperative, Nigerian Muslims must find the best ways of accommodating their differences and forging a true and lasting unity among themselves. Definitely, there are multiple ways for the attainment of unity among Muslims in Nigeria in the mind of most experts. But, perhaps the most major ways are briefly explained as follows:

**1. Negation of Racism:** The Glorious Qur'an considers all Muslims as a "Unified *Ummah*" and renders null and void all imaginary distinctions. It says: "*Surely this Islam is your Religion, one Religion (only), and I am your Lord, therefore serve me*" (Qur'an, 2:92). The enemies of Islam in order to create splits in the ranks of Muslims aggravated the racial and national problems and attempted to cause enmity amongst Muslims through investigation of racial and national issues, so that they could fish in troubled waters<sup>26</sup>.

Now, it's time that the Muslims should awaken and worship the one Allah instead of worshipping race and the like. As the Glorious Qur'an says: "*and I am your Lord, therefore serve me*" (Qur'an, 21:92) Under the protection of worshipping the one Allah and acting according to His instructions in the Glorious Qur'an, Muslims can attain to the unity of Islamic *Ummah*. This does not mean the Muslims must abandon their Society, sect, organization or society and sound national customs and traditions. They can preserve these and at the same time consider the sublime interests of Islam and the Islamic *Ummah*<sup>27</sup>.

**2. Muslim Unity has no option:** Islam declares all believers as brothers, as Holy Prophet said: "All believers are brother of each other."<sup>28</sup> Every Muslim is a brother to another; every Muslim should be aware of the situation of his brother and should share his pain and sorrow. They need to have tendency to grow a sense of sympathy and to promote the idea that

Muslims are one nation will help the unity of *Ummah*. Muslim world is one unit though on geographical and political terms scattered in many countries. All Muslims must work together to change the fate of the *Ummah*.

In Nigeria nowadays, many Muslims have reduced Islam to rituals and forgotten other important tenets. While it is crucial to practice the five pillars of Islam, for instance, Muslims cannot ignore other basic aspects of the faith that emphasize brotherhood. Muslim unity is an obligatory duty according to the Glorious Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet Mohamed (SAW). Let us consider the following references below from the Glorious Qur'an 49:10: "*The Believers are but a single Brotherhood: So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear Allah, that ye may receive Mercy*". Also from the Glorious Qur'an 3:103 Allah says:

“And hold fast, all together, by the rope which God (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude God's favour on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth God make His Signs clear to you: That ye may be guided.

The Prophet Mohamed (SAW) also said: *In their love, kindness and compassion for each other, the believers are like a human body: when one part of it is hurt, the rests sympathizes with it in wakefulness and fever*<sup>29</sup>.

**3. Reflection on Hajj as a time for Muslim unity:** This time should be used on a personal basis, as well as within one is family and community to remind Muslims of how the *Hajj* is a unifying factor for Muslims. Family meeting should be about this topic. Seminar could be organized at Mosques about how *Hajj* is a beautiful symbol of Muslim unity. It must be ensured that your speakers are those who have performed *Hajj* and can attest to this fact. To that extent, brainstorm on practical ways the lessons of unity from *Hajj* can be implemented in your community throughout the year and come up with an action plan in your community is imperative. While you're planning, make *Dua* for unity throughout this period (the first 10 days of *Zul Hijjah*, which is a blessed time)<sup>30</sup>.

**4. Learn Tolerance Towards other Points of View:** Isn't it interesting that to attend classes at College or speak with colleagues from work and discuss issues while being willing to disagree with them? But the minute one steps into a Mosque or Muslim community function, all that tolerance seems to be thrown overboard. Islam is very broad and wide, contrary to

popular belief, and one can find a range of scholarly views on issues as diverse as how to place hands during prayer to whether or not Muslims should participate in politics<sup>31</sup>.

**5. Learn to Criticize without hurting:** The way some Muslims criticize each other, you would think they were talking to an Islam-basher instead of a fellow brother or sister. This type of ignorant behavior is a sure way to create anger, hurt and dissension. It is no route towards unity. Muslims must learn the *Adab* (etiquette) of criticism, whether it is towards individual Muslims or leaders. Knowing and implementing this will not only help solve problems in a practical manner, but it will also lead to a greater sense of brotherhood<sup>32</sup>.

**6. Avoid taking a Strong Position on Smaller Points:** There is what is called a “*Fiqh* of priorities” and this essentially means that there are some aspects of Islam that are more important than others. For instance, it is more important to emphasize that Muslims establish prayer than whether or not there should be a curtain between men and women in Mosques. Knowing what our priorities will help to avoid making secondary issues of the faith factors of division among the Muslims in Nigeria<sup>33</sup>. It is even interesting to note that, in recent years, some books entitle “jurisprudence of the four sects” have been published, which contains the views of *Ulama* of the four *Sunni* sects on jurisprudence as well as the views of these *Faqihs* and other *Faqihs*. Study of these books and comparison between the views of *Faqihs* clearly shows that conformity of views among various sects is more than a diversity of views.

**7. Reaching out Across Ethnic Boundaries:** All of Islamic institutions, functions and communities in general must become more ethnically diverse and open to the needs and concerns of Muslims of all backgrounds in Nigeria. Muslim leaders and individuals have a duty to ensure that no Muslim, regardless of their ethno-cultural background, feels shut out of the community, ignored or neglected. This can only be done by Muslim leaders and individuals taking the first step and reaching out to Muslims who may have been traditionally isolated because of ethnicity in mosques and other institutions. It is not enough to just open the door to all. A direct effort has to be made to solicit feedback, advice and support from all Muslims so that they feel a part of the community. Another, more personal way of reaching out is to invite Muslims of diverse backgrounds to one’s home for food. It is equally good to extend this invitation to non-Muslims as well to break barriers and share Islam<sup>34</sup>.

**8. Heed the Advice Found in Surah Hujurat:** The 49th chapter of the Glorious Qur’an provides excellent guidance on the kind of behavior that Muslims should avoid establishing Muslim unity. For instance, Allah, advises Muslims to avoid mockery, defamation and suspicion. These are all things which serve to divide Muslims and create hatred, hurt and dissension. Discuss the themes of Surah *Hujurat* relating to Muslim behavior in Islamic

meetings, study circles and classes for young and old Muslims, *Khutbas*, talks, etc. in community to share this Divine wisdom with all. Whenever he or she recall that you have done *Gheebah* (backbitten someone) against a Muslim or non-Muslim, he or she should remember that there is need to seek that person's forgiveness. Doing this is a prerequisite to washing off that sin<sup>35</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

The paper comes to understand that unity in Islam is one of the greatest blessings granted by Allah to the Muslims is not an option. It also revealed that, there is no unbridgeable differences among the Muslims and that there is nothing that can seriously hinder unity and solidarity among them. At present, Muslims are in agreement with following questions which are the fundamental problems and the pillars of Islam. The paper highlighted several factors combine to inhibit the unity of Muslims in Nigeria today such as tribal superiority, proliferation of many Islamic Organizations, Moon sighting controversies, jurisprudential separation, leadership question, Imamship tussles, among others. Since unity is imperative, Nigerian Muslims must find the best ways of accommodating their differences and forging a true and lasting unity among themselves. Such as negation of racism, learn tolerance towards other points of view; learn to criticize without hurting among others. It observed that, Muslims in Nigeria have reduced Islam to rituals and ignore other basic aspects of the faith that emphasize brotherhood. It s concluded that, unity is an obligatory duty for every Muslims. It is concluded that anything opposed to the unity among Muslims is act of ingratitude with lasting consequences.



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