

## **Global Politics and Muslim Unity in Nigeria**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

*Islam like Christianity has a very large number of adherents all over the world. Politics and religion are entwined. In Nigeria, religion plays a great and very significant role in politics and in many instances; it can dictate how the outcome of an election into political offices would be. It is undoubted that Muslims around the world are experiencing crisis especially bothering on disunity. So many Islamic sects and societies have sprung up over the years with different doctrines and teachings. At the global level, we have **Sunnis** and **Shiites** at the forefront of the disunity which is not unconnected with the problem of global politics. Other sects like **Tijaniyyah**, **Qaudiriyyah** and **Amadiyyah** are very pronounced in Nigeria. Islamic societies such as **Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN)**, **The Muslim Congress (TMC)**, **NASFAT**, **Qureeb** etc are not left out in this problem. The Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs was established to among other things, regulate the conducts of the Muslim groups in the country and foster unity among them. But disunity is still unabated. This paper examines global politics and its effect on the unity of Muslims in the world and particularly in Nigeria. The paper will further examine the role of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in fostering unity among the various Muslim groups. The paper concludes that the body, like its counterpart, Christians Association of Nigeria has impact in the country's politics and has struggled for self-reliance and acknowledgment whenever issues of national concern arise. The question now is: has the body been able to achieve its objective of uniting Muslims in Nigeria? The paper will provide an answer to the question and thereafter recommend solutions on how unity can be achieved among the Muslims in Nigeria and in the world.*

### **Introduction**

*“And hold fast all together, by the rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah’s favour on you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, you became brethren”.* Qur’an 3:103.

Islam like Christianity has a very large number of adherents all over the world. Politics and religion are entwined. In Nigeria, religion plays a great and very significant role in politics and in many instances; it can dictate how the outcome of an election into political offices would be. It is undoubted that Muslims around the world are experiencing crisis, especially bothering on disunity. So many Islamic sects and societies have sprung up over the years with different doctrines and teachings. At the global level, we have *Sunnis* and *Shiites* at the forefront of the disunity which is not unconnected with the problem of global politics. Other sects like *Tijaniyyah*, *Qaudiriyyah* and *Amadiyyah* are very pronounced in Nigeria. Islamic societies such as **Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN)**, **The Muslim Congress (TMC)**, **NASFAT**, **Qureeb** etc are not left out of this problem.

Many of these Islamic sects and organizations propagate irreconcilable ideologies and work at cross-purposes. While tremendous effort is expended by them in *dawah* work, the total effect is often zero and sometimes negative due to picking on one another’s mistakes, neglecting positive contributions, and belittling others’ achievements.

Although the history of mankind is replete with incidences of divisions and violence against each other, the strong message of the Qur’an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) are geared towards unity and brotherhood. This much can be gleaned from the Quranic injunction quoted above. Based on the realization of this, the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs was established to among other things, regulate the conduct of the Muslim groups in the Country and foster unity among them. But disunity is still pervasive.

This paper therefore examines global politics and its effect on the unity of Muslims particularly in Nigeria, with particular attention on the concept of Muslim *Ummah*. Fundamental Principles of unity in Islam will be discussed. In the same token, the factors surrounding disunity among Muslims will be examined. The paper will examine the role of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in fostering unity among the various Muslim groups. The paper concludes that the body, like its counterpart, Christians Association of Nigeria has impact in the country’s politics and has struggled for self-reliance and acknowledgment whenever issues of national concern arise. The question now is: has the

body been able to achieve its objective of uniting Muslims in Nigeria? The paper will provide an answer to the question and thereafter recommend solutions on how unity can be achieved among the Muslims in Nigeria and in the world.

### **Concept of Muslim Ummah**

The Community in Islam is not founded on race, nationality, locality, occupation, kinship, or special interests. It does not take its name after the name of a leader or a founder or an event. It transcends national borders and political boundaries. The foundation of the community in Islam is the principle which designates submission to the will of Allah, commitment to His cause. In short, an Islamic community is present only when it is nourished and fostered by Islam. The Islamic community has a historic mission far beyond mere survival, sheer power, breeding, or psychological continuity. Solidarity, cooperation and standing together are important and basic elements for constructing a sound Islamic society.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) initiated the concept of *Ummah* Madina, integrating individuals of different colors, races, ethnicities and social classes with equality into one united brotherhood, and as the Islamic dominions expanded, this *Ummah* assumed even a greater diversity and included a variety of people knitted together into common bonds, the likes of which the world has never witnessed, generated an open society for all to excel and where the only criterion worth consideration was human righteousness.

The *Ummah* today is divided into many divisions and sects despite the Quranic pronouncement in chapter 23 verse 51 that: “*And surely this (umamah) community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord, therefore be careful (of your duty) to Me*”. Each one has severed its relations with the other. There are differences due to political parties, different lineages, professions and trades. The differences of the poor and rich classes are also very apparent. This has brought the whole *Ummah* to brink of disaster. The Holy Quran in Chapter 6 verse 159 says:

*“Surely they who divided their religion into parts and became sects, you have no concern with them; their affair is only with Allah, then He will inform them of what they did”.*

Throughout the twenty-three years of his prophethood, the Messenger of Allah emphasized the unity of his nation and called them “my nation (*Ummati*)” The Holy Qur'an actually gives

six meanings to the word **Ummah**: a group of people, an example, adherence to a religion, a religion itself, the time, and a group that follows one tradition and one way.

The concept of unity itself is discussed in the Holy Qur'an on three levels. Foremost is the unity of humanity. The Quran in chapter 49 verse 13 says:

***“O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah is the one who has piety.”***

The aim of this unity is to direct all the racial, tribal, and religious differences into constructive direction. Thus the emphasis on “knowing one another” (*li-ta'arifu*) emphasizing that people find mutual understanding rather than conflict so that no one denies another's rights to life and prosperity.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also used the parable of the human body to describe the Muslim nation. If one part suffers, the entire body will suffer. One of the greatest achievements of the Messenger of Allah was to unite hundreds of fragmented Arab tribes throughout the Arabian Peninsula into a single, strong nation. When he united them, he did not eliminate differences of opinion between them, but he enabled them to have dialogue with each other and come to a sense of mutual understanding. Under this philosophy, the Muslim nation was a powerful nation in the past, and only with this understanding will it be able to return to this respected position among the nations of the world and have the same significant role it had in the past.

A modern example which the Muslim countries should examine is the European Union in which several states of different languages, cultures, ethnicities, religions, and political agendas have unified under one monetary system, economic agenda, and political front. The Muslim **Ummah** should be similarly united because this concept is a basic tenet of Islam. The Quran says: ***“Hold fast, all together, to the rope of Allah and do not become divided amongst yourselves”***. Also ***“And obey Allah And His Messenger, And do not fall into disputes, lest you lose heart and fail. Be patient for truly Allah is with those who are patient.*** Quran 8:46

In the same vein, the Quran says: ***“By time; verily man is at loss, except those who have faith, perform righteous deeds, and enjoin each other to truth and enjoin to patience”***. Quran 103:1-3.

The principle of coming together as a community on the basis of righteousness and obedience to Allah is a clear and indisputable principle of faith. The general acts of worship, like prayer, fasting, and the pilgrimage are all practical examples of this fact.

### **Fundamental Principles of Unity in Islam**

Islam promotes unity of its *Ummah* by tracing man to a single soul and emphasizing the equality of all people. The Qur'an traces mankind to a single soul from whom his partner was created and from the two, all nations were raised. However, the Qur'an does not ignore that people may be influenced by ethnic, tribal or linguistic affiliation; hence, it calls their attention that these differences are meant for identification only. No wonder then that Allah declares that *“this Ummah of yours is a single Ummah and I am your Lord and Cherisher: Therefore fear Me”*. Qur'an 22:67.

The Prophet himself (SAW) reminded people that superiority should not be made on the basis of colour, as they all are from the same source. He was reported to have warned thus:

*“Let there be no preference of an Arab over a non Arab or of a non Arab on Arab, neither of the red skinned over the black, nor of the black skinned over the red except by righteousness ... You all belong to Adam, and Adam is made out of dust.*

To substantiate the above, the Qur'an emphatically disapproves of unnecessary discrimination among the Prophets of Allah, stressing that they all belong to one family:

*“Say! We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Ibrahim, Isma'il, Ishaq, Ya'qub and the tribes, and that given to Musa and Isa and that given to all (Prophets) from their Lord, we make no difference between one and another of them, and we bow to God (in Islam)”*. Qur'an 2:136.

As part of the measures to promote unity within the *Ummah*, Islam has laid down some principles which will be discussed hereunder.

### **Faith and piety**

The unification of humankind based on faith and piety is the fundamental aspect Islam. However, conduct of vices in order to achieve unity is totally unacceptable in Islam. This is similar to making peace with the devil and his followers. The Prophet (SAW) on the authority of *Ibnu Abbas (RTA)* was reported to have said:

*“Anyone who delights humans by inciting Allah’s wrath, and so angers Allah towards him and Allah would make people whom had been delighted with Allah’s wrath to become angry towards him. And those who delight Allah and thus make humans angry with it, then Allah would make him delightful and Allah will also delight those who were angry towards him because he delights Allah. Until Allah will improve his personality in the eyes of those who are angry with him and improve his words and others’ views of him”*

Therefore, unity among humankind should be in relation to good deeds. In other words, to embark on any act of unifying people in Islam, the question must be asked, whether *Allah* is pleased or not with the action? Unavoidably, it must be in line with the perfection of *Iman*. On the authority of *Abu Umamah (RTA)*, the prophet (SAW) was reported to have decreed that: *“Anyone who loves someone because of Allah and hate because Allah, give because of Allah and attract grant also because of Allah, so indeed he has perfected the faith”*.

### **Obey leaders/rulers**

The unity of humankind also includes the cohesion between leader/ruler and the citizens/followers. However, obedience towards a leader is not as absolute as towards *Allah* and Prophets. There is no such thing as obeying a leader in matters that raises *Allah’s* and Prophet’s wrath. Quran says:

*“O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad), and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority (and) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you believe in Allah and in the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination.”* Quran 4:59

Obedience towards leaders in the context of governance of a country is vital to ensure a harmonious relationship within the community. Conflicts happen if the people who are being led disobey decisions/orders from their leader towards good things. *Abu Daud* narrated that:

*“One day we prayed with Rasulullah s.a.w., then Rasulullah s.a.w. gave advice that shed tears because of its greatness and beauty, every heart became nervous. Then one of us asked: Ya Rasulullah, as if this advice is last advice and what possibly that you trust to us?” Rasulullah s.a.w. decreed that “I will commend to you to fear Allah, listen and obey your*

*leader even he is a Habsyi slave, because whoever who live after my time will see a lot of conflicts, thus you must keep hold on to my sunnah, sunnah Khulafaur Rasyidin which bear guidance, hold on to it, bite it with your teeth. Stay away from creating new laws, because creating new laws is bid'ah and every bid'ah is astray.”*

Consequently, as long as the leaders' orders do not conflict with Islamic injunctions, give benefits to others, give protection to Islam and its followers and do not bring any loss to Islam, the leaders' orders must be respected and obeyed.

### **Respect the rights of others**

Conflicts among humankind happen because of misunderstanding of several people on the responsibilities to perform the rights of humankind. Recognition of human rights in the presence of Islam in the context of human relationships aimed to preserve the harmony within the community. Islam teaches its followers to attend to others' rights without even demanding for the rights. Allah said in the glorious Quran:

*“Worship Allah and join none with Him in worship, and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, Al-Masakin (the poor), the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is a stranger, the companion to your side, the wayfarer (you meet), and those (slaves) whom your right hand possess. Verily, Allah does not like such as proud and boastful.”* Quran 4: 36.

It is hard to unite humankind if human rights are disregarded. Respecting others' rights is a trust that cannot be betrayed. Since the betrayal of the rights of others can bring conflicts within humankind, thus it creates huge problems to those who infringe it. On the authority of *Abu Hurairah* (RTA), the Prophet (SAW) was reported to have said:

*“Do you know which persons are destitute? The companions (RTA) said “To us, the persons who are destitute/bankrupt are persons who have no money and life's necessities. “Prophet s.a.w replied:” Among my followers, persons that are destitute are persons who come in doomsday with prayer, fast, zakat, and other accepted practices, but he had done bad deeds to others, slander others, take other persons' property, shed blood without the rights, hit other people, thus all these vices will be redeemed from the good deeds proportionally to the vices/sins rate, then taken from the good deeds (and given to those oppressed). And if the good deeds are finished, while the*

*evils/sins have not yet been redeemed, thus would also be taken from oppressed person their sins, and burdened to him, then he will be thrown into hellfire”.*

## **Fairness**

Principle of fairness is prioritized in Islam. Being fair means giving deductive justification and being impartial to any party when deciding something. Fairness generally relates to knowledge and ability to place something or somebody in a right place and justified, truths that nullify the wrongs, offence, method or limitation, spiritual benefit over loss and truth over falsehood. *Allah's* commandment dictates:

*“O you who believe, stand you firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, be he rich or poor, Allah is a Better Protector to both (than you). So follow not the lust (of your hearts), let you may avoid justice, and if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, verily, Allah is Ever Well-Acquainted with what you do.”*

Quran 4:135

Fairness is to be upheld in the context of the relationship between Muslim community and non-Muslim community. Non-Muslim community is free to practice their value system with respect towards sensitivity of Muslim community. Clauses 16 and 25 of Medina Charter stated thus respectively:

*“That indeed Jewish who are loyal to us, have the right to get aid and protection. They cannot be reduced of their authority and cannot be separated from social interaction”*

*“That Jewish and Bani Auf are one people with Muslim: they are free with their own religion and Muslim with own religion as persons who allied with them and also themselves, except those who are cruel and commit sin so the case will not befall except towards himself and his own family.”*

## **Justice**

Justice in Islam evolves across limitations of origin, rank and race whereby there is no difference between any sentences passed on a sultan or king and common people, no difference between superiors and subordinates. *Al-Bukhari* narrated thus:



*“Indeed a woman had stolen in Prophet s.a.w. time during Mecca’s Opening. Then the tribe had met Usamah Bin Zaid r.a. to get the intercession for their daughter’s forgiveness. Urwah said: “When Usamah met Rasulallah s.a.w. and told the Prophet on the request of those tribe, Rasulallah s.a.w. face turned reddish and he said: Are you arguing Allah’s punishment (to change and to take it lightly?)” Usamah then said: “Forgive me ya Rasulallah.” In the evening, Rasulallah s.a.w. rose lecturing in front of the public. He praised Allah s.w.t as usual and decreed: “Amma ba’du! Indeed the earlier tribe was destroyed when a person among them stole and they are not punished. But when persons who were lowly among them stole, they punished them. For He who holds soul of Muhammad in His hand! If Fatimah Binti Muhammad steals, definitely I am going to cut her hand.”*

### **Maintaining ties of kinship and brotherhood**

Breaking the ties of kinship is a huge sin. The sin will prevent a person to go to heaven, unless the person is forgiven before his death. *Jubair Bin Mut’im* narrated that he listened to prophet (SAW) when he said that: *“Person who break a kinship bond, are not going to be in heaven.”*

Connecting the ties of kinship even though with the parties who intended to break the ties is something that is commanded by Islam. This is because, the meaning of kinship ties itself is to bond between two ties which are already broken.

As narrated by *Abdullah Bin Amr* , the Prophet (S.A.W) was reported to have said that:

*“And the person who patches up an existing relationship is not silaturahmi. But the silaturahmi is one who connects kinship that had been severed and conjoined again.”*

In Islam, a person is perceived as not yet fulfilling his faith if the person does not preserve the ties of kinship and relationship. On the authority of *Abu Hurairah*, the Prophet (SAW) was reported to have said:

*“Whoever who is faithful to Allah and Final Day, should he ennoble the guest and faithful to Allah and the Final Day, should he establish silaturahmi (do well to relatives) and those who are faithful to Allah and the Last Day, should he be nice or quiet.*

The commandment states that the ties of kinship should be claimed even with relatives who are non-Muslim. An individual has to show good virtue, as such with parents even though they are not Muslims. *Asthma Binti Abu Bakar* said:

*“During Rasulullah s.a.w. time, my mother is still in infidel state (had travelled from Mecca to Medina) to meet me. I asked Prophet s.a.w., “My mother came to meet me, can I affiliate with her?” He then answered: “Yes you can affiliate with your mother.”*

Taking care of the ties of kinship that are already broken is the main basis to reform the unity among the *ummah*. In any context, even with enormous quantity, unity is not guaranteed if the ties of kinship are broken. Therefore, there are other assurances which are specifically related to maintaining the ties of kinship among humankind.

### **Nigerian Muslims and Challenges of Disunity**

Disunity within the Nigerian Muslim *Ummah* has a long history. Upon the spread of Islam on Nigerian soil, a spirit of brotherhood and unity was instilled among its adherents. Unfortunately, this spirit deteriorated to the point of enmity among them. This was as a result of the high level of syncretism flourishing among them.

Discontented with this situation, *Sheikh Uthman bin. Fudio* launched a *jihad* for the purpose of extricating Muslims from un-Islamic practices promoted by *Sufi* leaders.

The *jihad* was initially successful but when same was extended to the northeastern Borno territory, it was met with opposition from the Islamic scholar and political leader *Sheikh Muhammad El-Kanemi*. The opposition created a dichotomy amongst Nigerian Muslims at the relevant time. A tussle over which view should be accepted between them began with the attempt of the jihadists to capture Borno. *El-Kanemi* could not see any justifiable reason for a Muslim to take up arms against another Muslim community in Borno, a Muslim community. He recognized the perpetuation of social ills in Borno but saw that they were not peculiar to it, and as such were insufficient reason for Borno to be tagged as *kafir* community. He concluded that the *jihad* was meant only for attaining political hegemony over another community and had no religious purpose.

*Sheikh Uthman bin Fudio* and his son, *Muhammad Bello*, however, reacted harshly to the allegation levied against the jihadists by *El-Kanemi*, and accused him of tribalism and weakness in taking no steps to correct the un-Islamic practices of his people. Although the

two parties consequently agreed to live peacefully with each other, the incident was said to have led to the emergence of two separate and autonomous Islamic communities.

Apart from the above setting, the emergence of Sufism could be seen in a positive light in Nigeria, as it was one of the vehicles for the propagation of Islam in the nation. The members of any *tariqah* were taught a high sense of loyalty to the leadership and other members of the brotherhood. The relevance of the *tariqah* in Nigeria can be succinctly observed in a statement made by a writer thus:

*“There is no gain-saying the Sufi orders have at different times, especially at the beginning of Sufism, assisted in returning people who hitherto have gone astray back into the fold of Islam. Many Muslims who were in obeisance to the devil were tamed through the supplication, asceticism and seclusion taught by the Sufi orders. Human passions and urges were also said to be tamed by some of the practices of the Sufis. Sufism emphasizes close ties between members and so assisted in engendering an unreserved spirit of brotherhood among its adherents. Another sphere of interest relating to the Nigerian scene is that it has in the past drawn and sustained some sets of unbelievers into the fold of Islam. This may not be unconnected with its ecstatic nature of worship or the claim of sure acceptance of prayers often made by Sufi scholars”.* 4

In spite of the numerous achievements of *Sufi* brotherhood in Nigeria, the rivalry for supremacy among Sufi brotherhood has undermined their standing and fostered disunity within the Muslim *Ummah*. It is generally believed that the *Qadiriyyah* brotherhood came to Nigeria before the *Tijaniyyah* brotherhood. However, members of the *Qadiriyyah* migrated immensely to the *Tijaniyyah tariqah* especially when they discovered that spiritual development in the *Tijaniyyah* brotherhood was much easier than in the *Qadiriyyah*. The *Qadiriyyah* leadership took steps to check this ‘unpardonable’ development.

It was reported that this development led to an order made by the then *waziri* who was *Waziri Gidado* that *murids* should not be allowed to move from the *Qadiriyyah* to the *Tijaniyyah*, and non-compliance with this order of the *Waziri* consequently led to the exile of *Emir Lawal Kwasau* and *Emir Aliyu*, the two successive Emirs of Zaria, to Lokoja.

The seeds of discord between the *Tijany* and the *Qadiry* were also planted in Ilorin during the tenure of Emir Ali, who was a *Qadiry*. A report revealed that the Emir ordered the beating of one *Mallam Muhammad Wali*, a native of Ilorin who introduced the *Tijaniyyah* to the city. The *Mallam* was said to have died shortly after the beating.

Apart from the dissonance or rivalry and internal conflict within the *Sufi* orders, and in spite of the successes of the orders in the propagation of Islam in Nigeria, the brotherhoods further encountered bitter opposition from some scholars who saw the teachings of the *Tariqah* as un-Islamic. These scholars vehemently criticized some claims and practices of the *Tariqahs*, such as the virtues attributed to recitation of *Salatul-fatih* and *Jawharatul-Kamal*, excessive veneration of the

Prophet and the *Sufi shuyukh*, the celebration of *Maulud in-nabiyy* as well as the practice of spreading a white cloth during the *wird* of the *Tijaniyyah* order, among others. This, in no small measure; fosters disunity within the Muslim *Ummah*.

The emergence of the *Jama'atul Izalatih-Bid'ah wa-Iqamatis-Sunnah* popularly called the *Yan Izalah* in the seventies marked another serious campaign against *Sufi* orders in Nigeria. The activities of this body have had damaging effects on the unity of Muslim *Ummah* in Nigeria. The negative effects of the *Izalah* activities on the Muslim *ummah* across the nation are so numerous.

It was reported that in Funtua, one Imam, *Mallam Muhammad Mustafa Jibril*, had to renounce his membership of the *Tijaniyyah* and join the *Izalah*. The Council of *Mallams* in the town was not happy with this development as well as his allowing the *Izalah mallams* to preach against *Sufism* in the central mosque; hence he was removed and the *Izalah mallams* were banned from preaching in any mosque in Funtua.

Where the *Izalah* people were not given a free hand to operate, they resorted to establishing their own mosques. Where they were not allowed to establish one, as was the case in Zaria and Bauchi, they chose the house of their *mallams* as a substitute mosque. The *Izalah* and the *Tariqah* started to arm themselves, inflicting bodily injuries on one another, not reflecting on the saying of the Prophet that: “*when two Muslims draw swords against each other, each one of the two would be an inmate of the hell-fire.*” This led to clashes which caused public disorder with loss of lives.

In addition to the above, the operating system of the *Tablighi* Movement seems offensive to some *tariqah* members. Some *Sufi* leaders so detest the *da'wah* approach of the *Tablighi* Movement that they publicly condemn them. There was an occasion at the *Maulud* of *Tijaniyyah* in Ila-Orangun, a town in Osun State, where a prominent *Sufi Sheikh* from Offa gave an unfounded *fatwah* that any member of the order whose child decided to join the *Tablighi* Movement should have such a child killed, and that such killing would attract special reward in Allah's sight.

The case of moon sighting for the commencement and termination of *Ramadan* has also generated hot disunity within the Muslim *Ummah* in Nigeria. What is surprising is that there are differences in the commencement of the fast based on tribal sentiment. Until recently when the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs was reorganized, the body under the headship of the Sultan of Sokoto would call 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 in the not distant past would simply announce the commencement of the fast while giving little weight to the sighting of the crescent. This exposed Muslims to ridicule by non-Muslims when such matters could have been resolved amicably in the name of unity. *Alhamdulillah*, this is becoming a thing of the past with better coordination by the NSCIA. A misunderstanding regarding the sighting of the moon between the leadership of *Zumratul Muminin* in Ila-Orangun and the Chief Imam of the town at one time resulted in the separation of the *Zumratul-Muminin* members from the mainstream Muslim community and its decision to have its own separate *Juma'at* mosque and *Eid* praying ground.

Due to lack of unity amongst Nigerian Muslims, some issues which could have been of benefit to the nation have eluded the country and Muslims, as they could not talk with one voice. Nigerian membership in the Organization of Islamic Co-operation has not taken the country anywhere because Muslims who could have spoken out decided to keep quiet while the Christians were mounting serious opposition against our membership.

The cacophony of voices against the non-interest banking system by the Christians is another instance of Muslims being on trial in Nigeria. Except for some individuals who tried to educate the uninformed about the banking system, Muslim bodies did not come out to enlighten the people as expected.

The connection of Muslims to *Boko Haram* uprisings and their indifferent attitude to numerous insinuations made by the media is perhaps an offshoot of Muslim disunity in the country. In the realm of education, Muslims could not raise their voices as they could not compete with their Christian counterparts in tertiary education. Out of the existing sixty plus private universities in Nigeria, the percentage owned by Muslim groups and individuals, is insignificant. Muslims are also nowhere to be found in terms of proprietorship of media houses, be it print or electronic. They are therefore voiceless and cannot air their opinions on any national issue as ordinarily needed. These are not unconnected with the problem of disunity.

The point must be made that many Islamic organizations were created for the purpose of uniting the *Ummah* in Nigeria. It is sad that these organizations have succeeded only in creating more divisions than ever. Different umbrella organizations like the *National Council of Muslim Youth Organizations (NACOMYO)*, the *Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN)*, *National Joint Muslim Organizations (NAJOMO)* and the like, were also established. These organizations achieved minimal success due to ego trip resulting in proliferation of umbrella organizations; the segregation between Muslim elites and the Imams and Alfas; parochialism, narrow-mindedness ethno-centrism, intolerance; personality conflicts and ineffective conflict-resolution mechanisms.

### **Factors Militating Against Unity within the *Ummah***

Numerous factors could be advanced for disunity within the Muslim *Ummah* in Nigeria, some of which are discussed below.

#### **Political discord about succession**

Cases of *Imamship* tussles have torn many Muslim communities apart. Some families who believe that their great grandfathers were the harbingers of Islam in a particular town would want to retain the position of the Imam in their family. 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 animosity to the extent that the central mosques have to be under lock and key for months. This is true of some towns in Yoruba land like Okuku, Obaagun, Offa and Ila-Orangun where cases of disputes over *Imamship* were brought to courts.

Closely related to this is the situation where traditional rulers assume the duty of *Imam* Makers, appointing their favourite candidates as the Imam without due consultation. This is true of Ajase-Ipo, Kwara State, where the traditional ruler of the town, was said to have imposed one *Muqadam Mustapha* as Acting Chief Imam on the town. This was not appreciated by the Muslim community of the town, who saw the action as a deviation from the traditional way of appointing the Chief Imam in the community, which was through recommendation by the *Ratibi Imams*. Such was also the situation in Offa where a group of Muslim scholars objected to the imposition of an Imam on them by the traditional ruler of the town.

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.) being 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*, 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.

The negative effect of political affiliation on the unity within Nigerian Muslim *Ummah* cannot be ignored. This has been used as an instrument of polarization amongst Muslims. The pertinent event that clearly demonstrates this assertion was what transpired in the Offa Muslim community where one *Alhaji Jimoh Arowasi* was appointed as the Chairman of the Offa Muslim Council and was later removed and replaced with *Alhaji Sani Aba Balogun*. While the former was a loyalist of the then unpopular political party in Kwara State, the Unity Party of Nigeria (U.P.N), the latter was a loyalist of the then ruling National Party of Nigeria (N.P.N). The removal of *Alhaji Arowasi* and his replacement with *Alhaji Sani Aba* was therefore given a political undertone and this consequently divided the Muslim community into factions.

There was also a case where a mere misunderstanding between the Chief Imam and the ruling king of a town on the issue of translation of the Friday *Khutbah* caused rancor and

pandemonium in the Muslim community. It was believed that this minor misunderstanding led to a major crisis in Ajase-Ipo to the point that the king's prestigious palace and flashy cars were burnt to ashes by those believed to be supporters of the Chief Imam. The Muslim community became divided: the Central mosque was under lock and key for months, while a prominent and flourishing Arabic school in the town was closed down. The intervention of the State Government in the crisis through the State's Shariah Court of Appeal, and the death of the monarch, eventually brought an end to the crisis.

### **Cultural and Doctrinal Interference**

It must be pointed out from the outset that the presence of this as one of the factors militating against the unity of the *Ummah* in Nigeria is not so surprising. This is more so because the Arabs who had lived and observed the Prophet (SAW) first-hand could also slip back to their former pre-Islamic practices soon after the death of the Prophet. Therefore, no one can reasonably doubt that those who accepted the religion from other places would not easily forget their cultural backgrounds as well as the doctrinal principles of their former religions. They thus mixed up their former religious rites and doctrinal practices with the new religion they embraced.

It is a known fact that in the cause of the spread of Islam, various people of various cultures and backgrounds embraced Islam. These people of different cultural backgrounds therefore mixed Islamic teachings with their cultures. This practice is rampant especially 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.

There was a case in Offa where one *Alhaji Shehu Sambaliyu Popo* was said to have preached vehemently against Muslims' participation in the *Onimaka* festival on a Friday during *Juma'ah* sermon. He was said to have been met with strong opposition by some Muslims who opined that rather than being idol/hero worship described as *shirk* in Islamic parlance, the whole activities of the whole *Onimaka* festival should be seen as celebration of cultural heritage which is without any consequence in Islam and therefore be allowed.

Similar scenario played out in Osi, a town in Kwara State where a cultural festival called '*Inkan*' is celebrated at seven years intervals indicating that certain people of certain ages fall into same age group. The idea is that once a man or a woman is between 50 and 57 years of



age, he or she is qualified to partake in the ceremony indicating that he or she is old enough and even if he dies then, he would not be so much mourned. At a time, one Islamic preacher, **Alhaji Raji Adeniyi** preached that any Muslim member of the community who participated in the ceremony was no longer a Muslim and will not be allowed to come to the mosque. This incidence caused a lot of disharmony among the Muslim *ummah* in the community as some other Islamic preachers did not subscribe to this view. This singular occurrence led to the conversion of some Muslims who participated in the ceremony to Christianity. The Christians were readily available to welcome them upon their excommunication from Islam by **Alhaji Raji**'s preaching.

### **Role of The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs**

As stated on its website, the NSCIA was established to cater for; preserve, protect, promote and advance the interests of Islam and the Muslims throughout Nigeria. Therefore, to achieve this, the most important role is to foster unity among the Muslim *Ummah* since Islam as a whole is founded on unity of its adherents.

Without doubt, the NSCIA is the umbrella body representing the Nigerian Muslim Community. It has and continues to provide leadership and inspiration to the Muslims, young and old, in Nigeria. For instance, the frenzy controversies that often trail the sighting of moon at the commencement of Ramadan were minimized over the years by the efforts made through the moon sighting committee put in place by the NSCIA. Appreciable progress on unity within the Muslim *Ummah* has been recorded in recent times in this regard. But there is still much room for improvements in some other areas. The truth must be told, the NSCIA has not utilized its mandates to the fullest in fostering unity among the Muslim Ummah. To achieve this important role, some other roles which are ancillary to the unity roles must also be undertaken by the NSCIA. These include:

### **Advocacy and mentoring for Muslims**

The NSCIA needs to be at the fore front of advocacy for the rights of the Muslims and providing a clearly defined direction for the *Ummah* through mentoring.

To facilitate a robust discharge of this role, the NSCIA needs to improve its presence, especially on the Internet which is where most Nigerians spend the most of their time now. It

was recently observed that the Sultan who is the President General of the NSCIA does not have a Facebook page. Neither does the NSCIA itself. For proper outreach, it is suggested that the NSCIA should have a Facebook page, a twitter handle, a TV station and a radio station (if practicable).

### **Establishment of Muslim institutions**

The grave consequences of having too few or no Muslim hospitals, schools, libraries, mosques, research institutes and the Qur'an in local Nigerian languages currently stare us in the face. The NSCIA should step in to fill these voids. Wealthy Muslims should be mobilized and motivated to provide sponsorship for implementation of projects which will solve these challenges.

### **Crises management**

The NSCIA is currently playing an almost insignificant role in managing crises like the *almajiri* problem and the *Boko Haram* insurgency. It is disheartening that tussles over leaderships of mosques are being brought to courts and more disheartening and demoralizing is the fact that most of these cases are being presided over by non-Muslim judges. NSCIA should stand up to define a crisis management mechanism in this regard.

### **Conclusion/Recommendation**

All Muslims know the value and importance of unity in Islam. We have read and heard many times the famous verse quoted above from Quran Chapter 3 verse 103:

*“And hold fast all together, by the rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah’s favour on you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, you became brethren”.*

Delivering long speeches about the Unity of Muslim *Ummah* does not tire our leaders, Imams and scholars. However, as days are passing by, Muslims are getting more and more divided. The division is multidimensional. Muslims are divided based on languages, ethnicity, regional preferences, nationalism and above all sectarian beliefs in the name of Islam. In spite of so many movements of unity, Muslims are getting further divided. The reasons for this disunity have been discussed in this paper. What therefore needs to be

discussed is recommendation for tackling the problem of disunity. It is on this basis that the following recommendations are made:

### **1. Commitment to Towheed/Faith**

Faith has been discussed as one of the fundamentals of unity in Islam. The shared beliefs of people in a nation can play an important role in their alliance and solidarity for the nation. Particularly as in Islam, when it based on the belief in Allah's oneness and our duties to Him as one single *Ummah* since Qur'an invites believers, to be united on Towheed including all aspects of it.

### **2. Identification of Common Enemy**

All Muslims, scholars and intellectuals should be aware of any risk from common enemy and should recognize such elements. Today the *Ummah* is faced with serious threats in terms of politics, economics and culture. The enemies are trying to create doubts in beliefs of Muslim young generation by cultural invasion. The earlier we appreciate the antics of our detractors the better for us to know that our strength especially in Nigeria lies in our being together as one *Ummah*.

### **3. Focus on Common Issues**

An important issue that may lead to the unity of the Muslims is that the Muslim community should focus on common issues and problems. Because their common issues are too high and there are very few differences .But alas, common beliefs and principles have been completely ignored. Towheed /Monotheism, Prophethood, Hereafter/Maad, Prayer, fasting, Zakat, Hajj, Jihad, Qibla, Quran and many other subjects are common to Muslims. Such common subjects should lead us to the unity of the *Ummah*.

### **4. Adherence to Islamic Brotherhood**

Islam declares all believers as brothers, as the Prophet (SAW) was reported to have said: "*All believers are brother of each other*". 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 we are one will help in achieving the unity of *Ummah*. Muslim world is one unit though on geographic and political terms scattered in many countries. All Muslims must work together to change the fate of the *Ummah*. Followers of imperialism are trying to shake the foundation of our

brotherhood and to destroy the Muslim faith, soul and future. We should work together in order to disallow them from achieving that.

### **Conferences and Seminars**

Other steps to attain unity are to hold regular conferences and seminars which are held by Muslim intellectuals and scholars and aimed at bridging the gap between the schools of thought. There are many reasons for Muslim unity. It is enough that we all direct ourselves towards same Qibla for prayer; we all believe that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad (SAW) is the Messenger of Allah; we are satisfied with Allah as our Lord with Islam as the true religion in the sight of Allah and with the Quran as our standard. Only those knowledgeable about Islamic teachings should be allowed to preach in public places. The ordinary Muslims yearn for true knowledge about the *deen* not about sects or schools of thought. There is need to proliferate the true teachings of Islam in the different languages spoken in Nigeria.

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