

Towards Achieving Unity of Nigerian Muslims for National Integration: Obstacles and Remedies

Dr. Samuwilu Alade OWOYEMI

Department of Religious Studies,

Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria

alade.owoyemi@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng

samuwilualade2016@yahoo.com

+2348064488812

Abstract

In recent times, there has been persistence and insistence of a group of Nigerians clamouring for disintegration and restructuring of Nigeria. The clarion call suggests that unity and stability of Nigeria are being threatened. In fact, the vituperations, spurious and sinister comments of some individuals and groups over the corporate existence of Nigeria need urgent attention so as to address fundamental issues in order to avert disunity of Nigeria. Interestingly, the unity of Nigerian Muslims as one great bloc of the Nigerian nation is thus equally being threatened. Realizing the fact that one of the cardinal teachings of Islam is unity and indivisibility of mankind, the paper critically examines factors that constitute obstacles to achieving unity among Nigerian Muslims. This is done with a view to using such as a panacea to addressing Nigeria's imminent disintegration. Using the analytical method, the findings of the study revealed that proliferation of Muslim organizations and societies, doctrinal/ideological differences, leadership tussle, ethnic/tribal affiliations and diverse political interests are among the obstacles threatening the unity of Muslims in Nigeria. The paper concludes that indivisibility of Nigeria as a virile country should be paramount to all the stakeholders. Bearing in mind that the corporate existence of Nigeria as an indivisible country is preferable to its disintegration, the paper, based on Islamic teachings on unity, proffers a list of recommendations which include that Nigerian Muslims, irrespective of their societal/groups or affiliations, should put aside their doctrinal differences, and that Muslim scholars/leaders and their followers should respect the views and opinions of other Muslim scholars especially if they belong to different schools of Islamic jurisprudence and that Nigerian Muslims should not allow politics to divide them. These can only be done towards achieving not only unity among Nigerian Muslims but also to building a truly united country so that national integration and development can be enhanced.

Keywords: *Unity, Nigerian Muslims, obstacles, remedies, national integration*

Introduction

Unarguably, Nigeria is pluralistic in nature. Its pluralism, as a country, is manifested in its diverse culture, languages, tribes/ethnicity and religions. Nigeria is one of the most populous African countries. As at October 2017, the country's population was estimated to be 192,303,098 (www.worldmeters.info/world, 2017) with 250 ethnic groups and about 500 languages. It is a multi-religious country comprising 50% Muslims, 40% Christians and 10% African traditional religionists (Oloyede, 2014). Some Nigerian Muslims believe that they are more than 50% of the Nigerian population. This is due to the fact that some of them practise polygamy, whereby they marry more than one wife and bear more children compared to the adherents of other faiths in the country.

Following her independence in 1960, Nigeria has been witnessing socio-religious, economic and political hullabaloo due to bad leadership and followership. Though some remarkable developments have been made by few past civilian and military administrations, successive governments have been accused of not practising true federalism; this has made some minority groups in the country feel cheated and marginalized. In the North-East, *Boko Haram* insurgency is threatening the security of the country, while in the Niger-Delta region, it is agitation for resource control; which has led to series of kidnapping of foreigners in the oil industry. In the South-East, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) are clamouring for secession due to what they perceive as marginalization of the minority group. In the South-Western Nigeria, a group of people, particularly Afenifere Renewal Movement is calling for restructuring of the country. It is, indeed, obvious, that the center is no longer holding and things are falling apart in Nigeria.

However, Muslims, who form a significant number of the country's population, are involved directly and indirectly in the socio-economic and political affairs of Nigeria. Unfortunately, Muslims, as individuals and groups, have not been united due to a number of factors that have segregated and factionalized them. This disunity among Nigerian Muslims, no doubt, has serious implication for national integration. It is against this background that this paper aims at critically addressing the causes of disunity among Nigerian Muslims and proffering remedies with a view to averting Nigeria's imminent disintegration.

National Integration Defined

According to Baldev (2016), national integration is defined as the process of combining all the people of the country irrespective of the ethnic, socio-religious and political consideration into a single whole and undivided country. It is a concept that binds together all people in one common bond. National integration makes the nation strong and organized. It holds the people of various religions, sects, races and culture together. Onifade (2013) posits that national integration is made possible when ethnicities within a political entity achieve integration by consensus, social structure and function in society which brings about social order. David (2013) sees national integration as a sentiment which reflects solidarity or patriotism among the people belonging to a nation. It holds the people together and remains in mutual harmony with one another towards promotion of the state objectives. While examining the Islamic approach to national integration, Adebayo (2013) writes *inter alia* thus:

Islam promotes national integration and international understanding by tracing man to a single soul and emphasizing the equality of all people... 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 (pp.104-105).

Understanding the Concept of Unity in Islam

Islam, a world monotheistic religion, is a comprehensive way of life that regulates the affairs of this physical world and beyond. The concept of unity in Islam is traceable to the divine unity of Allah which is expressly stated in the *Kalimatush-Shahadah* (words of testimony) that is *La-ilaha illa-Allah* meaning no one deserves to be worshipped except God, Allah. It connotes that God is one in His person, one in His attributes and one in His works. Oneness of Allah negates plurality of gods. Oneness of Allah's attributes indicate that no other being possesses divine attributes in perfection and Oneness in His works implies that no human being can do the work which God has done or is doing (Ali, 1986:144-145). God is one and indivisible. This concept of unity of God is summarized in Q112:1-4. God is one, eternal and universal. He is the Creator of all men, Provider for all men, the Judge of all men irrespective of their social status, racial origin or colour (Abdalati, 1986:35).

The concept of unity is further seen in the worship of Allah particularly in the institutions of *salat* (ritual worship) and Hajj (holy pilgrimage to Makkah). Muslims, while observing their

daily prayers stand side by side, facing the same direction (Ka'bah), worshipping the same God, Allah and chanting the same formula-*Allah Akbar* (God is great) at the same. During Hajj rites, Muslims, men and women, young and old, numbering at times more than two million from every nook and cranny of the world, black and brown of complexion, yellow and white, Arabs and Iranians, Turks and Malays, Chinese and Africans, blacks and white Americans, blond and blue-eyed Europeans all coming together annually to perform Hajj rites that symbolize unity of mankind (Deedat et al, 1989).

Unity of mankind, which further clarifies the Islamic concept of unity, implies that human beings are created from the same source-Adam and Hawau and they have common origin-Allah. To Him is the ultimate return, the whole of humanity. The Holy Qur'an attests to the common origin and source of mankind when it reads:

"O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord who created you from a single person (Adam) and from him, He created his wife (Hawau) and from them both, He created many men and women... (Q4:1)".

In another place in the Glorious Qur'an, it is said:

"And among His signs is this that He created you (Adam) from dust and then (Hawa) from Adam's rib and then his offspring from the semen, and— behold you are human beings scattered (Q30:20)".

The creation of human beings into different colours, races, tribes, nations, languages etc is not to demonstrate superiority of one race or tribe over another but for human beings to recognize one another. What distinguishes one tribe, race or colour from another in the sight of God is piety/righteousness. Q49:13 attests to this fact when Allah declares:

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 honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa (piety). Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All Aware.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) corroborates the above quoted verse in his *Khubatul-Widai* (Farewell Sermon) when among others, he is quoted as saying:

O people! Your Lord is One and Your Father is One for all of you are from Adam and Adam was created from dust. Verily, the most honourable of you

with Allah is that (believer) who has Taqwa (piety). Verily, an Arab has no virtue above a non-Arab except by the Taqwa (piety)..... (Mujahid, 2000:32).

While commenting on the above Qur'an and prophetic tradition, Abdalati (1986) summarizes the concept of unity of mankind thus:

All men are created by One and the same Eternal God, all mankind belong to the human race and share equally in the common parentage of Adam and Eve. All people are born equal in the sense that none brings any possession with him/her and they die equal in the sense that they take back nothing of their worldly belongings (p.35)

It is on the basis of this unity of mankind that Allah (SWT) warns the Muslim Ummah (Community) of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) not to be divided but to be united purposely to carry out the task of *amr bil-ma'ruf waniha al-munkar* that is commanding righteousness and condemning evils and reprehensive deeds. This divine command is captured in the Qur'an where Allah commands Muslims thus:

And hold fast, all of you together to the rope of Allah (i.e. this Qur'an) and be not divided among yourselves and remember Allah's favour on you for you were enemies one to another but He joined your hearts together, so that, by His Grace, you became brethren...Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining Al-Ma'ruf (i.e Islamic monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do) and forbidding Al-Munkar (polytheism and disbelief and all that Islam has forbidden). And it is they who are the successful (Q3:103-104).

The above Qur'an passage gives the true picture of the concept of unity in Islam. It is a concept that the early Muslims, the companions of the Prophet practicalized during the mission of Prophet Muhammad in Makkah and Madinah (610-632CE) and they were able to triumph over their enemies and Islam became widely spread beyond Arabian Peninsula.

Threat to Unity of the Muslim Ummah: Historical Reflections

The divine migration of Prophet Muhammad and his companions from Makkah to Yathrib (later known as Madinah) in 622CE led to the establishment of a virile Muslim Ummah (Community) where Muslims saw themselves as one united family bonded by a strong faith in

Allah and in the messengership of Muhammad. However, with the passing away of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in 632CE, the Muslim *Ummah* (Community) was threatened and eventually divided on the basis of political and theological issues; thereby giving rise to the emergence of different sects and groups within the *Ummah*. Shortly after the demise of Prophet Muhammad, there was a disagreement on who to succeed him. The *Muhajirun* (the Muslim emigrants from Makkah), the *Ansar* (the Muslim helpers in Madinah) and the *Ahl-Bayt* (family of the Prophet) were contesting for the post of *Khalifatul-Rasul* (Successor to the Messenger). Each of the groups advanced some reasons for its entitlement to the leadership of the Muslim *Ummah*. In the long run, the choice of a successor to Prophet Muhammad as a *khalif* (Muslim leader) fell on Abubakr bn Abu Quhafah as-Sidiq, who became the first caliph in 632CE (Oloruntele, 2001: 24-25).

Unfortunately, there was an uprising in the Muslim *Ummah* shortly after Abubakr became the caliph. It was the period when some false prophets including Musaylimmah al-Khadhdhab, Toleiha, Sajah and Aswad, Ansi Ibn Sanja etc emerged claiming prophethood after the death of the Prophet (Rahim, 1987:59-60). Some Muslims, who had been paying *Zakat* while the Prophet was alive, also stopped paying *Zakat*. Consequently this rebellious act against the regime of Abubakr was quenched in the battle of *Ridah* (war of apostasy). Abubakr as-Sidiq was able to restore sanity to the Muslim *Ummah* and the Muslims became one family again (Abdul, 1986:55).

During the administration of the third caliph, Uthman bn Affan, another revolt and rebellious act occurred. Uthman's administration was accused of nepotism, favouritism and corruption as a result of which there was anarchy and pandemonium in the second half of his regime. The situation consequently led to the assassination of Uthman bn Affan in 656CE by unknown mob. Uthman's assassination paved way for the enthronement of Ali bn Abi Talib as the fourth caliph of Islam (Oloruntele, 2001:26-30).

Upon the appointment of Ali bn Abi Talib as the head of the Muslim *Ummah*, the family of Uthman bn Affan led by Mu'awiyah bn Abu Sufyan asked Ali, the caliph to produce the killers of Uthman. The inability of Ali to identify and produce the assassins of Uthman led to another series of rebellious acts against Ali's administration. The first rebellious act was championed by Talha bn Ubaydah and Zubayr bn al-Awwam. This revolt against Ali led to

the battle of camel in which Aisha participated in 656CE. Many Muslims lost their lives in this battle (Abdul, 1986: 61-62). Despite Ali's efforts to stabilize the Muslim *Ummah*, the family of Uthman did not give him breathing space as they persistently asked him to produce the murderers of Uthman bn Affan and they equally challenged legitimacy of his caliphate. Consequently, there was another revolt against Ali's regime by Mu'awiyah bn Abu Sufyan and this resulted in the battle of *Siffin* where seven thousand Muslims died. However, when Mu'awiyah saw that the battle was going to be won by Ali's forces, he called for a ceasefire. While some followers of Ali kicked against the ceasefire urging Ali to continue to fight by chanting the slogan-*La hukmu illa lillah*- (arbitration only belongs to Allah), other members of Ali's group supported the call for ceasefire (Oloruntele, 2001:38-40,).

The ceasefire between the forces of Ali bn Abi Talib and Mu'awiyah bn Abu Sufyan led to the setting up of an arbitration panel purposely to settle the disputes between the two warring Muslim groups. At the arbitration panel, Ali's group was represented by Musa al Ashari while Amr bn al-As represented Mu'awiyah's group. However, the outcome of the arbitration panel did not favour Ali's group. Consequently, some members of Ali's camp who had earlier kicked against arbitration panel seceded from Ali and became known as *Kharajites* while those who supported arbitration panel remain loyal to Ali and they were later known as *Shi'ites*-meaning supporters of Ali. The rest of the Muslim *Ummah* who did not belong to *Shi'ites* and *Kharajites* are known as *Ahl Sunnah*- the Sunni Muslim Community (Oloruntele, 2001).

The political turmoil in the Muslim *Ummah* gave rise to the disagreements among Muslims. There were usually hot arguments and debates on theological and political issues in the Muslim *Ummah* and this led to the emergence of theological sects like *Qadarites* (advocating freewill for man's action), *Jabarites* (arguing that man has no freewill), *Murijites* (all matters should be referred to Allah till the Judgment Day) *Mutazilites* (rationalizing all man's actions above revelation) and *Asharites* (upholding Sunni rational arguments on theological issues by refuting *Mutazilites'* arguments). These Muslim sects became divided on the basis of different political and theological doctrines. Each of the sects was giving different interpretations to the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*.

Later, between the 12th and 19th centuries, the Muslim *Ummah* also witnessed the emergence of some Islamic reform movements whose aim was to restore pristine Islam and to unite the Muslim *Ummah* based on the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). There emerged Muslim reformists preaching, teaching and writing on the need to practise pristine Islam and to condemn practices they perceived as *bid'ah* (heretical innovations). Among these Islamic reform movements are Wahabiyyah, Salafiyyah, Tariqah, Ahmadiyyah, Jafariyyah, Ikhwanul-Muslim etc. In the 20th century, there were individual Muslim reformers championing the cause of pristine Islam in the Muslim *Ummah*. These Muslim reformers were classified into four groups namely; fundamentalists, traditionalists, modernists and pragmatists (Husain, 1995:294). All these various sects, movements and individual reformers with different ideological and political doctrines as well as different interpretations of Islamic texts are seen as threats to the unity of Muslims in the modern world.

Obstacles to Unity of Muslims in Nigeria

It is on record that Islam got to areas now known as Nigeria over 1,200 years ago through the Trans-Saharan trade with North Africa. It reached Borno and then penetrated to Hausaland, Nupeland, Borgu, Yorubaland, Edo, Ebiri and Igala areas. Through the activities of Mandika, Islamic scholars in Kano and Katsina in the 15th century and the popular Islamic reform movement of Uthman Dan Fodio in 19th century, Islam spread across places that are known today as Nigeria (Oseni, 2015:121). Before the British colonization of Nigeria in 1861, Islam was firmly established especially in the Northern region and the Muslim *Ummah* was very strong and stable under the leadership of the Sokoto Caliphate. However, the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 by Lord Lugard brought a lot of dichotomies between the Northern and Southern Muslims; hence the Muslim *Ummah* became disunited. The following are among the major obstacles to the unity of Muslims in Nigeria.

Proliferation of Muslim Organizations and Societies: Since 1916, quite a number of Islamic organizations and societies were formed by individuals and groups of Nigerian Muslims across the country. It is reported that about 500 Islamic societies are in Nigeria (Oloyede, 2015). Some of these organizations have branches within and outside Nigeria. Notable among them are Ahmadiyyah Movement in Nigeria (1916), Ansaru-deen Society of Nigeria (1923), Nawair-udeen Society of Nigeria (1939), Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (1954), Jama'at Nasirul-Islam of Nigeria (1961), Jama'at Izalatul-Bid'a wa-iqamatis-Sunnah

(1977), Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (1985) and Nasrullah Fatih Organization of Nigeria (NASFAT) (1995) (Adua, 2014).

It is important to note that proliferation of these Muslim organizations and societies was premised on the commitment of some individual Muslims to address some fundamental issues affecting Nigerian Muslims before and after Nigerian independence in 1960. The challenges facing Muslims then were noted in the Christian evangelization of Muslims through the provision of western education in the early twentieth century and the need for Muslims to be united for the advancement of Islam in Nigeria (Adua, 2014). Unfortunately, the proliferation of these Islamic organizations and societies has brought about lack of coordination in *Da'wah* activities, lack of good leadership for the Muslim *Ummah* and ideological differences which consequently affected the unity of Muslims in Nigeria. On the adverse effect of proliferation of Islamic organizations in Nigeria, Adebayo (2013) comments thus:

Many Islamic organizations were created for the purpose of uniting the Ummah in Nigeria. These have succeeded only in creating more divisions than ever. These organizations achieved minimal success due to egoism resulting in proliferation of umbrella organizations (p.101)

Doctrinal and Ideological Disagreement among Nigerian Muslims: In the early days of Islam in Nigeria, the Maliki Sunni School of Thought was dominant and popular among Nigerian Muslims. However, with the passage of times, other Sunni schools of thought notably Hanafi, Shafi'i and Hanbali came to be known by some Nigerian Muslims who travelled to Islamic countries to acquire Arabic and Islamic education. Due to exposition to other Sunni schools of thought, there emerged *Ikhtilaaf* among Nigerian Muslims. *Al-Ikhtilaaf* denotes taking a different position or course from that of another person either in opinion, utterances or action. It is an expression of a different view, controversy or discord (Quadri, 2013).

Abdul Fattah (2007) cites a case of doctrinal difference on the practice of *Qabd* (folding of one's hand on the chest by a Muslim worshipper) and *Sadl* (dropping one's hand while standing in ritual prayer). This jurisprudential issue caused division among the Tijaniyyah members (Pro-*Qabd*) and Qadiriyyah members (Pro-*Sadl*). Due to these different approaches while praying, Quadri (2013) notes that there were violent reactions among the two Sufi

orders (i.e. Qadriyyah and Tijaniyyah) which led to the death of many people including eleven policemen in 1965 in the riots of villages of Toranke, Jankuku and Jaja in Yeldu district of Arungu Division of Sokoto Province. A popular anti-Sufi orders in Nigeria, *Jama'at Izalatul Bid'a wa-iqamatus-Sunnah* violently attacked and accused Qadriyyah and Tijaniyyah of *bid'a* (heretical innovation) for celebrating *Mawlad-Nabiyy* (Birthday of Prophet Muhammad), reading of *Dalaa'ilul-Khayrat* (a collection of prayer for the Prophet) and *al-Burdah* (a poem on the Prophet chanted as a means of warding off evil and attracting prosperity (Quadri, 2013).

Recently, there have been controversies and arguments among Nigerian Muslims on the use of *niqab* (veil) by female Muslims and the practice of *pardah* (seclusion of Muslim women). In fact a group of Muslims, known as *Salafiyyah* (those that claim to uphold the practice of the early Muslims/companions of the Prophet) preach against formation of *as-salatu* groups and other Islamic organizations, congregational *Tahajjud* prayer, celebration of *Mawlad-nabiyy*, celebration of *Hijrah* year, drumming of *bandiri*, *fidau* prayers with merry making etc which they consider among other practices of Nigerian Muslims, as *bid'a* (heretical innovation) and *shirk* (polytheism). All these doctrinal and ideological differences have brought disunity among Nigerian Muslims. Not until recent, Nigerian Muslims in the past have had date variations in the commencement and termination of Ramadan fast. Abdul Fattah (2007) captures this ugly trend when he observes thus:

Inter-region, inter-state, inter-town and even inter-group differences on dates of festivals have multiplied. Sometimes four consecutive days are observed differently by diverse opinion groups among Nigerian Muslims as being the first day of Ramadan. Group A begins or ends its fast today, B tomorrow, C day after and D the day after (p.24).

Exhibition of Tribal/Ethnic Superiority among Nigerian Muslims: It has earlier been noted that Nigeria is pluralized with diverse ethnicity, tribes and languages. It is estimated that Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups with 500 languages (Oloyede, 2014). Though the three tribes namely Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo are considered most populous and popular in Nigeria, there are other minor tribes that are playing key roles in the development of the country. On Islamic affairs, Northern Muslims are often seen as being superior over their Muslim counterparts in the South. The fact that Islam penetrated Nigeria through the Northern

region is indisputable but considering a particular section of the country as being more religious or knowledgeable in Islamic matters than others is disputable among contemporary Nigerian Islamic scholars. This, no doubt, has brought a kind of unnecessary dichotomy among the Northern and Southern Muslims. Some Nigerian Muslims see themselves first as Hausa, Yoruba or Igbo before considering themselves as adherents of Islam.

Imamship Tussle among Nigerian Muslims: The spread of Islam across Nigeria has given Muslims the opportunity of building mosques for the purpose of worshipping Allah. Mosques of various sizes in the compound for the observance of the five daily prayers are known as *Ratibi* Mosques while those for the observance of Friday prayer are known as *Jumu'ah* Mosque or Central Mosque usually built at the heart of town. There has been leadership tussle in some Muslim communities over the selection or appointment of Imams for these mosques. For instance, imamship tussle between *Naibul-Imam* (Deputy Imam) and *Mufassir* (Qur'an exegete) in Osogbo Central Mosque, Osun State has been well documented (Abbas, 2009). The succession problem on who to become Imam sometimes leads to disunity among Nigeria Muslims. Some mosques have been closed while Muslim Community divided over the appointment of a new Imam. The Muslim *Ummah* of South West Nigeria (MUSWEN) has recorded a number of leadership crises on the appointment of Imam among some Muslim communities in Jama'atu Ta'awunil Muslimeen Society of Nigeria, Osun, State, Wahab Folawiyo Central Mosque, Surulere, Lagos State, Rivers State Muslim Community, MSSN, Obafemi Awolowo University, Osun State. The Muslim Ummah of South West Nigeria waded into these leadership crises with a view to solving them (MUSWEN, 2017).

Non-Recognition of the Leadership of Apex Muslim Bodies in Nigeria: The Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), which came into existence in 1973, is government recognized apex body for Islamic affairs in Nigeria. The body was established with some cardinal objectives; among which is to promote Islamic solidarity through fostering brotherhood and cooperation among Muslims in Nigeria and other parts of the world. The body is also expected to coordinate external contacts, interests and activities of Muslims in Nigeria as individuals or groups (www.nscia.com). Besides NSCIA, Jama'atul-Nasrul-Islam is also a government recognized regional apex body in the Northern part of the country, while Muslim *Ummah* of South-West Nigeria (MUSWEN) is another regional apex body for Muslims in South-western Nigeria. MUSWEN was inaugurated in 2008 by Muslim

professionals comprising lawyers, academic, doctors etc purposely to articulate the collective Muslim interests under peculiar conditions of Yorubaland (Peel, 2016). There is also an apex Muslim regional body in the South-East coordinating the Islamic affairs of the Muslims in the region.

Unfortunately, the leaderships of these aforementioned apex Islamic bodies are not given due recognition by other prominent Islamic bodies. For instance in Yorubaland, there is a League of Imams and Alfas formed in 1962 by late Shaykh Adam Abdullah al-Iloriy and Islamic Movement of Nigeria founded by Shaykh Ibrahim al-Zakyzaky who was accused of propagating Shi'ites ideology in Northern Nigeria. These Islamic groups and other individual Muslims often challenge the legitimacy of the leadership of NSCIA arguing that it is based on hereditary succession which has no basis in Sunni Islam (Peel, 2016). As a result, there were always (except in recent times) conflicting and variation in the dates for the celebration of *'Idul-Fitr* and *Idul-Adha* among Nigeria Muslims due to non-recognition of the leadership of NSCIA by the League of Imams and Alfas in Yorubaland, Islamic Movement of Nigeria and other notable Islamic organizations and individual Muslims.

Diverse Political Interests among Nigerian Muslims: Nigeria, as a country, practices democracy; which is said to be a government that allows representation in the governance of a country through regular election into political offices. It is on record that formation of political parties started in 1923 with the emergence of Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay. By December 2002, the number of registered parties rose to 30 (Omotola, 2009) while during the 2015 general elections, close to fifty registered parties participated. Before the 2019 general elections, 92 political parties were registered. Prominent among the registered political parties in Nigeria are All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Accord Alliance (AA), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Alliance for Democracy (AD), Alliance Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN) and African Democratic Congress (ADC) (www.inecnigeria.org, 2018). It is important to state that Nigerian Muslims are members of these registered political parties and they have been belonging to different parties before Nigerian independence. Though, it is not possible for Nigerian Muslims to belong to one party, the fact is that they have been divided on the basis of political parties by abusing, fighting and killing one another due to their diverse political interests. When it comes to electioneering campaigns and struggle for

political offices/appointments, Nigerian Muslims are often seen at loggerhead; being divided and factionalized as a result of diverse political agenda. This, no doubt, is an obstacle to unity. How can these obstacles be removed? How can Nigerian Muslims be united for the advancement of Islam and for national integration? What are the remedies towards achieving unity among Nigerian Muslims? The next section of the paper will address these germane questions.

Remedies towards Achieving Unity of Nigerian Muslims for National Integration

National Integration has been defined as the process of combining all the people of the country irrespective of their ethnic, socio-religious and political affiliations into a single whole and undivided country (Baldev, 2016). It is gratifying to note that the Muslim *Ummah* especially in developing countries including Nigeria is suffering from poverty, injustice, discrimination, scientific and technological backwardness. Therefore, it is imperative for all stakeholders in the Muslim *Ummah* to take pragmatic steps towards addressing plagues confronting the Muslim World by coming together as one strong indivisible and united *Ummah*. In Nigeria, unity of the Muslims can be achieved if the following identified remedies can be taken into proper consideration for national integration.

Adherence to the Concept of *Kalimatush-Shahadah*: *Kalimatush-Shadah* simply refers to the words of testimony and affirmation of the belief in the unity and indivisibility of Allah as well as belief in the messengership of Prophet Muhammad. The expression and affirmation of *Kalimatush-Shahadah* i.e. *La ilaha Illa Allahu Muhammad Rasulullahi* meaning: No deity deserves to be worshipped except Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. Belief in *Kalimah* and its implication admits all Nigerian Muslims, irrespective of tribal or language affiliation into the fold of Islam and into the Community of believers. This *Kalimah* is expected to unite Nigerian Muslims under the same family and under One Indivisible Allah, who is expected to be worshipped through the observance of the five daily prayers. This brings Muslims together as one and equal before Allah. Nigerian Muslims can explore the opportunities of the five daily prayers, annual Ramadan fast and holy pilgrimage to Makkah to come together as one united family to address their challenges for national integration.

Adherence to the Concept of *Amr bil ma'ruf waniha al-Munkar*: The Arabic phrase “*Amr bil ma'ruf waniha al-Munkar*” simply means to command the doing of good things

(righteousness) and to refrain from detestable acts (shameful/wrongful deeds). The Muslim *Ummah* is described as *khayran ummatin* (best community) in the Qur'an (Q3:110) due to the fact that Allah has mandated them to enjoin mankind to be of good conduct and abstain from vices. Stakeholders in the Muslim *Ummah* in Nigeria such as Imams and missionaries are expected to adhere strictly to this concept with a view to preaching righteous deeds and virtues that will promote peace, unity and stability in Nigeria. Preaching on virtues like honesty, sincerity, kindness, generosity, good neighbourliness etc will engender moral values for national integration. Similarly, Nigerian Muslims including Imams and other Islamic preachers should condemn and preach against sharp practices that are inimical to national development. Therefore, vices such as corruption, kidnapping, injustice, insecurity, ritual killing and other criminal acts should be shunned by Nigerian Muslims. It is on the basis of this concept of "commanding righteousness and condemning ungodly acts" that Nigerian Muslims should unite for the advancement of Islam and fostering national integration.

Avoiding labeling Muslims as *Kufaar*: Due to differences in religious ideological and doctrinal practices among Nigerian Muslims, there have been accusations of *takfir* (i.e. unbelief) whereby a group of Muslims label another group as *Kufaar* (unbelievers). This has led to inter and intra religious conflicts among Nigerian Muslims especially among the *ahlu-tariqah* (Sufi orders such as *Qadriyyah* and *Tijaniyyah*) and anti-Sufi groups like *Izalah* and *ahlu-Sunnah*. This practice of accusing one another as unbelievers for doing what is perceived as *bid'a* (heretical innovation) has caused disunity among Nigerian Muslims. Quadri (2013) observes this ugly trend among Nigerian Muslims when he remarks thus:

Today, Muslims all in the name of God are divided among themselves and the major causes of differences are ignorance, deficiency in knowledge, overzealousness and holier-than-thou attitude. Everybody now sticks to his views and ignorantly declares a fellow Muslim a kafir thereby causing disunity of the Ummah contrary to the injunction in the Qur'an (p.4).

Nigerian Muslims should avoid labeling one another as unbelievers on issues that are not fundamental or expressly stated in the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah. Controversial or ambiguous theological/jurisprudential issues or doctrines should not be discussed with a view to dividing the *Ummah*. Rather, such issues could be left for Islamic scholars for academic discourse or for the *Mujtahid* (expert in the application of Islamic laws) and the *Mufti* (A

Muslim Jurist that can issue Islamic verdicts). As long as Muslims observe fundamental pillars of Islam like *salat* (ritual worship) *sawm* (Ramadan fast) and engage in righteous deeds and refrain from forbidden acts as stipulated in the Qur'an and authentic sunnah, any other acts he/she may do that are not clearly mentioned as in the Qur'an or Hadith as forbidden should not be castigated or condemned as act of unbelief. Labeling a Muslim as a *Kafir* (an unbeliever) or a *Fasiq* (hypocrite) without any clear injunction from the Qur'an or authentic Sunnah is condemned by some Muslim jurists. Kamali (1998) cited in Islamic Education Trust Nigeria (2015) is quoted as saying:

If it is clear and understood that a particular issue is not established by an undisputedly authentic text (from the Qur'an and Hadith) with a clear definitive meaning, it is then strictly forbidden to judge its committer or neglecter as kafir (unbeliever). It is equally not proper to see him/her as a fasiq or violator of Allah's injunction (i.e. for committing haram or omitting fard/wajib) if there is an element of speculations (zanni) in the proofs and especially where it is an opinion of a respected scholar. Such judgement should be left to the discretion of qualified scholars and not to their students or lay persons (Pp.156-157).

The above explanation shows that Nigerian Muslims should be cautious and extra careful in labeling one another as unbelievers due to differences in doctrinal practices. It is by seeing one another as believers in the worship of the same Allah that they can work together for national integration.

Recognizing the Leadership and Authority of Islamic Apex and Umbrella Bodies: It needs to be mentioned that there are recognized Islamic apex and umbrella bodies/organizations in Nigeria. Nigerian Muslims can achieve unity if they recognize and accept the leadership and authorities of the umbrella bodies/organizations like Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), National Council of Muslim Youth Organizations (NACOMYO) and Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN). The apex body is the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA). MSSN came into existence in 1954 purposely to bring all Muslim students in secondary schools and tertiary institutions into closer union in order to inculcate the spirit of brotherhood for the propagation of Islam in the Nigerian educational institutions (Adeleke, 2010).

NACOMYO was formed in 1983 in order to serve as a united front for all Muslim Youth organizations in Nigeria and to coordinate their activities with a view to fostering unity and promoting mutual relationships among the Muslim youth organizations in Nigeria (Adeleke, 2010). FOMWAN was established in 1985 purposely to unite and coordinate Muslim women's organizations in Nigeria in order to speak with one voice (Adeleke, 2010). NSCIA came into existence in 1973 and was subsequently recognized as the highest apex body for Islamic affairs in Nigeria. The body is expected to coordinate external contacts, interests and activities of Muslims in Nigeria as individuals or groups (www.nscia.comm).

It is, therefore, believed that if Muslims in the six-geo-political zones of Nigeria are united on the basis of Allah's injunction in Q3:103 which says "And Hold fast the rope of Allah and do not be divided..." Its implication for national integration is that it will forestall the agitation for dismemberment or secession of the country. The unity of Nigerian Muslims is imperative for national integration because of the fact that Nigerian Muslims' population is very significant. Thus, if Nigerian Muslims are divided and disunited, the country as a whole may be disintegrated; but if Nigerian Muslims are united on the basis of the Islamic teachings on unity, Nigeria will remain a united and indivisible country.

Conclusion

The paper has been able to establish the fact that the hallmark of Islam is unity, which is based on the unity and indivisibility of Allah. Despite the Qur'an and prophetic tradition on the essence of unity of Muslims, the Muslim *Ummah* (Community) became divided after the demise of Prophet Muhammad in 632CE due to leadership and doctrinal disagreements. This historical antecedent gave birth to the emergence of Muslim sects and various groups/societies; which consequently had adverse effects on the Muslim *Ummah* all over the world. Unfortunately, the pluralistic nature of Nigeria fostered disunity among Muslims on the basis of ethnicity, doctrinal differences, proliferation of Islamic societies and diverse political interests. Interestingly, the paper identifies remedies towards achieving unity among Nigerian Muslims for national integration. These include adherence to the concept of *Kalimatush-Shahadah*, *amr bil-ma'ruf waniha al-Munkar*, avoiding the labeling of Muslims as unbelievers and hypocrites and recognition of the leadership and authority of notable Islamic apex bodies in Nigeria. For the workability of the remedies identified in this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. The Muslim *Ummah* under the leadership of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) should continue to cooperate with the Nigerian Government in its efforts at fighting war against corruption and insecurity by continuously issuing press statements to condemn such abominable acts that could hamper development in Nigeria. NSCIA should further strengthen its membership by including members of the notable Islamic umbrella bodies in its various committees for the administration of Islamic affairs in Nigeria
2. Nigerian Muslims, irrespective of their societal/group affiliation, should put aside their doctrinal differences by coming together as *Khayrun Ummatin* (best community) to preach virtues and righteousness that could develop the country morally and at the same condemn vices and criminal acts inimical to the unity and indivisibility of the country.
3. The Muslim *Ummah*, under the leadership of Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) could set up a functional *Fatwa* Committee that will be mandated to regularly issue legal verdict on Islamic matters/issues in Nigeria so that the *Ummah* will be seen as speaking with one voice. Such *fatawa* (Islamic legal verdicts) should be published for the consumption of the Nigerian Muslims.
4. Nigerian Muslim scholars/leaders and their followers should respect the views and opinions of other Muslim scholars especially if they belong to different schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Nigerian Muslim scholars should note that besides *Maliki* School of Thought, there are followers of other schools of Islamic jurisprudence in Nigeria, namely; *Hanafi*, *Shafi'i*, *Hambali*, *Zahiri*, *Jafari* and *Zaidi*. Therefore, doctrinal disagreements/differences should not create disunity among the Muslims. Instead, Muslim scholars and experts in Islamic jurisprudence should be allowed to discuss controversial issues in academic circles.
5. Notable Muslim organizations/societies in Nigeria need to urgently re-strategize their programmes and activities towards the welfare of their members in particular and the Muslim *Ummah* in general by providing qualitative Islamic cum western education at all levels, accessible and affordable health services and economic empowerment for the advancement of the Muslim *Ummah* and for national integration.
6. Nigerian Muslim preachers, imams and other Islamic workers in *Da'wah* (Islamic proselytization) should endeavour to acquire basic knowledge in *Usul-al-Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence) and *Maqasid Shari'ah* (objectives and goals of Islamic law) so as to have

greater respect for diversity of opinions and multiple approaches to derivations of *fatawa* (Islamic verdicts) from the Qur'an and authentic *Sunnah*. This will no doubt reduce doctrinal disagreements and disunity among Nigerian Muslims.

7. Nigerian Muslims belonging to different political parties should play politics with the fear of Allah, hoping that they will render their political activities before Allah on the day of judgment. Hence, for the sake of the unity of the Muslim *Ummah*, they should shun politics with bitterness and hatred towards another fellow Muslims.

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