

Fundamentalism and the Elusive Quest for Religious Peace in Nigeria: A Historio-Religious Study

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Abstract: *The amalgamation of 1914 brought together under one Nigeria two monotheistic religions of divergent views and visions. Fervent Christians aim to persuade all individuals in the world to the lordship of Jesus Christ who one day will return to purify the earth and to reign. Impassioned Muslims envision a military-type takeover of all nations of the earth to restore a united and fabulous Islamic Caliphate under Allah. It will be a theocracy with all in submission to Allah and his Sharia law. This is the prime goal and motivating factor propelling fundamentalist Islam. Terrorism of the kind witnessed in Nigeria is one way to achieve that end. As long as Christians want to evangelize and persuade men to Jesus Christ and Islamists strive to takeover the nations for Allah, there can never be religious peace in Nigeria. Christians in Nigeria are part of the worldwide effort to convince humans unto the lordship of Jesus Christ just as Nigerian Islamist fundamentalists cooperate with their worldwide counterparts to advance the course of Allah. Inter-religious dialogue of the type some Muslims and Christians experiment on in Nigeria is ipso facto a mirage that can hardly yield the anticipated results. The paper regrets the amalgamation of Nigeria and berates its authors for closing their eyes to the dangers inherent in the merger of these parti-coloured religious adherents.*

Keywords: Amalgamation, Nigeria, Religion, Muslim, Christian, Fundamentalism, Peace

1. Introduction

Religious fundamentalism is the belief in the literal interpretation and application of holy texts, and among the more hardline groups, it represents the desire to replace secular laws with religious ones.¹ It is the tendency to reduce a religion to its most fundamental tenets based on strict interpretation of the core texts. Gershom Gorenberg submits that “fundamentalism is a modern reaction against modernity; they react against the idea that the truth is not certain....” Peter Berger defines it as “an attempt to restore the taken-for-grantedness that has been lost as a result of modernization”. He also adds, “We are constantly surrounded by people with other views, other norms, other lifestyles. . . . Some people live with this quite well, but others find it oppressive, and they want to be liberated from the liberation”.² According to S. Bruce, “Fundamentalism is the rational response of traditionally religious peoples to social, political and economic changes that downgrade and constrain the role of religion in the public world....”³

The term fundamentalism has a Christian origin. It was coined in 1910 by a Baptist clergyman Curtis Lee Laws who took the name from a series of pamphlets, “The Fundamentals: A Testimony of the Truth,” published in the United States from 1910 to 1915.⁴ These pamphlets defended traditional belief in the Bible’s literal truth against modern ideas such as the evolution theory of Charles Darwin and outlined the fundamental, nonnegotiable aspects of the Christian faith. According to Curtis Lee Laws, fundamentalists were those “who still cling to the great fundamentals and who mean to do battle royal for the faith.”⁵

Although of Christian origin and earlier worn proudly, the word, ‘fundamentalism’ more recently conjures up negative images of blood bath and suicide bombing, making many

religious people to no longer be at ease being addressed as fundamentalists. As Baptist minister Richard Land said, “While most evangelicals support fundamentalist principles, it is unfair to compare them to the Islamists who take up arms and kill people,”⁶ Religious Jews also express discomfort with it. Rabbi Avi Tawil, director of the Brussels office of the Chabad Jewish missionary movement, says “fundamentalism is about forcing people. We don’t do that. We strictly respect Jewish law, which says if someone would like to convert then you have to help them.” Muslims also try to stay distant from the label although many view “fundamentalism” as synonymous with radical Islamic extremism. Ahmad Dallal, a professor of Arab and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., notes that the Arabic word for fundamental—*usul*— was never used in this context historically. However, according to him, “There is some logic to applying the word ‘fundamental’ in an Islamic context since “both the Muslim and Christian fundamentalists emphasize a literal interpretation of the holy texts.”⁷

For those religious enthusiasts who adhere to the principles of fundamentalism, the whole world is seen as one large field that must be brought under a uniformed tenet of the religion espoused. Instead of respecting the diversities and varieties of the human society as found today, the fundamentalist rather views such non-uniformities as indicative of his not having done enough in his duties to his religion and the deity venerated. Thus instead of letting-be the beliefs of others, the fundamentalist is spurred more to action in the effort to upend other belief systems and bring all to the “true religion” or at least awareness of it. Religious fundamentalism therefore has a tinge of superciliousness. The religious zealot does not see anything wrong engaging in his fundamentalist ideals since all he cares about is to stay faithful to his religion. Religion is a thing of the conscience

and all that matters to the truly religious is to please the deity of worship. Often, a religious fundamentalist is one whose path is antithetical to the rest of the world. He backs where the world faces and faces where the world backs. Because all that matters to him is to offer an acceptable service, the majority condemnation of his zealotry does not seem to deter him but, instead, confirms to him how lost and ignorant the world around him is and hence his need to do more.

Scriptural and Doctrinal Basis of Fundamentalism in Christianity and Islam

Christianity and Islam are monotheistic religions which believe in the absoluteness of their own teachings. The two are also proselytizers which believe in preaching and winning non-believers to the faith. A proper understanding of Christian and Muslim fundamentalism cannot be arrived at without a glimpse of some of their scriptural teachings. Christianity teaches that humanity's hope of reconciliation with God and subsequent entry into eternal life lies in the belief and acceptance of Jesus Christ who is the Son of God sent to reconcile the world to God as Lord and Saviour. This the fundamentalist Christian believes passionately and seeing no other hope for the future and safety of mankind, do all within his powers to propagate it. Some of the biblical passages announcing this belief are found in the Bible's book of John, Chapter three and verses sixteen, eighteen and thirty six. (*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him*). In order that men would attain eternal life through Jesus Christ, he issued to his disciples what has been identified as the Great Commission—Jesus' command to his followers to go ahead preaching. The book of Mark Chapter 16, verses 15-16 has the record: *And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*. In Matthew Chapter 28, verses 18-20, the Bible again reads: *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, even to the end of the age"*. In light of the foregoing, the dyed-in-the-wool Christian who believes in the immutability of the words and commands of Jesus Christ sees the propagation of the gospel as his topmost priority, as "the whole duty of man". As Jack Wellman submitted:

*This is an imperative command, much like a parent commanding their child to get out of the street immediately, this command of Jesus is not negotiable. **There is no plan B.** To not be his witnesses is to live in disobedience to the Great Commission. Another crucial part of this commission is to make disciples of all nations by teaching them what Jesus taught the disciples. Today that is found in the New Testament. (emphasis mine)*⁸

In 1Corinthians 9: 16 one of the early followers of Jesus Christ, a Jewish lawyer-turned-Christian preacher submitted: *For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I preach not the gospel.* When the word 'woe' is used in the Bible, it is a term for sure judgment or impending doom (see Revelation 8:13; 9:12; 11:14; 12:12), therefore Paul of Tarsus shows that he was compelled to preach the gospel since he had no choice. If he failed to teach or preach to others what Jesus had commanded, he himself would face the judgment of God. The Gospel preacher thus takes to preaching in order to accomplish three objectives, viz : to obey the command of the Lord Jesus in the Great Commission; to save others from their lost state; and to escape personal harm and judgment. With the teachings and commands of Jesus Christ so close to the heart and psychology of the Christian, the task becomes daunting how anyone can talk him out of it. He must but be fundamentalist about it.

The Muslim shares similar commitment as the Christian but the content and tenet of his religion differ markedly. The Muslims are taught from childhood to regard the Quran as perfect and free from error. But this is where mostly the problem lies for a seeker for religious peace. The Islamic scriptures contain multiple incendiary pages and if the Quran is indeed free from error as the Muslims believe, then hardly can peace be achievable! If ever one believes the Quran to be the Creator's message to him, then, that one must of necessity be a threat to peace going by the contents of the Islamic scriptures. We shall consider some of those pages later.

Islam condemns the cardinal doctrines of Christianity such as the fatherhood of God, the Sonship of Christ and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here, these two monotheisms find their greatest grounds of conflict. Islam does not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God let alone that he is the Savior of mankind.⁹ The Quran contends that Jesus was a created human like Adam and did not share God's divinity. Muslims regard Jesus as one of God's messengers but whose message has been overtaken by the later revelations of Allah given to Prophet Mohammed. Muslims claim that where Judaism and Christianity are at variance with Islam, it is the Judeo-Christian writings and teachings which have been corrupted. The earlier revelations are true to the extent they coincide with or support the revelations received by Mohammed. Any contradictions must be rejected in favour of the Quran which they take to be the complete and final revelation. Therefore to the Muslims, Prophet Mohammed is to be believed rather than "Prophet" Jesus whose teachings they consider to have lost potency. Attributing fatherhood to God is condemned vehemently by the deity of Islam in the Quran. In fact, Muslims regard it as a blasphemy referring to Jesus as the Son of God. They believe that it was the Christians who inserted the verses proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God in the Bible and that Jesus Christ never at any time addressed himself as such. In the Quran, Allah handed down curses on Christians for calling Jesus Christ the Son of God: *...The Christians call Christ the Son of God. That is a saying from their mouth. (In this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. God's curse be upon them...* (Surat al taubah,30). Again, in the Dome of the Rock- Islam's third holiest mosque in Jerusalem, Muslims made a conspicuous

inscription that reads: “God forbid that He should have a Son”¹⁰

Also, Islam derides the Christian creed that Jesus died and resurrected. The official Islamic stand on the subject is found in Quran 4:155 “and for their unbelief, and their uttering against Mary a mighty calumny, and for their saying, ‘We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God’- yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them”. In Quran verse 4:157, Allah says: *therein are full of doubts, with no certain knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him (Jesus Christ) not.*

In lieu of the Christian creed of Jesus death and resurrection, Muslims believe that Allah put the similitude of Jesus unto another man who was crucified while Jesus was taken to heaven. To further strengthen this denial, Muslims have embraced the “swoon hypothesis”- a belief that Jesus survived the cross half dead and recovered afterwards. Prominent among the espousers of this theory was the Muslim sophist Ahmed Deedat of South Africa whose book *Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction* is distributed and celebrated all over the Muslim world. In that book and his numerous other anti-Christian writings one of which is the one entitled “Resurrection or Resuscitation”, Deedat put forward the theory that Jesus only fainted on the cross and later recovered in a spacious tomb. In propounding this theory, Ahmed Deedat only echoed what has been in Muslim thinking for years before him. Writing in the late 19th century, the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement of Islam, Mirza Ahmad Ghulan proposed that Jesus was only in ‘a swoon’(i.e in a state of unconsciousness) when he was taken down from the cross. He believed that Jesus had only lapsed into a state of unconsciousness similar to what Jonah suffered in the belly of the fish and was subsequently cured with a special oil he called the ‘ointment of Jesus’. In further strengthening his theory, the Ahmadiyya founder submitted that “God would never allow one of his true prophets to be brutally killed in such a degrading manner as crucifixion” In his 1899 book *Jesus in India*, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad further suggested that Jesus travelled to India after his resuscitation.¹¹

The swoon hypothesis was first advanced by German rationalists Karl Bahrdt (1741-1792) and Karl Venturini (1768-1849) but has been adopted by Muslims as their most potent explanation of the Resurrection of Jesus.¹²

The foregoing brings to bare some of the deep-seated differences between Christianity and Islam. The Sonship of Jesus Christ and his resurrection are cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith and, attacking those as Islam does is to aim at the root of the faith. Christians believe the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the culmination of God’s redemption plan for man and His Sonship as proof of His sinless nature and divine authority as Savior and Lord. To deny this is to discredit the Christ and Christianity entirely. In reaction to such gross misunderstanding, Christians have not spared Islam and in fact believe it to be a heresy and an unrelated, demonic cult. Many have questioned its divine origin. In 746 AD, John of Damascus (sometimes called St. John of Damascus) wrote his *Fount of Knowledge* part two of which he entitled *Heresies in Epitome: How They Began*

and Whence They Drew Their Origin. In page 106 of the book, he pummels Islam as follows:

From that time to the present a false prophet named Mohammed has appeared in their midst. This man, after having chanced upon the Old and New Testaments and likewise, it seems, having conversed with an Arian monk, devised his own heresy. Then, having insinuated himself into the good graces of the people by a show of seeming piety, he gave out that a certain book had been sent down to him from heaven. He had set down some ridiculous compositions in this book of his and he gave it to them as an object of veneration.... There are many other extraordinary and quite ridiculous things in this book which he boasts was sent down to him from God. But when we ask: ‘And who is there to testify that God gave him the book? And which of the prophets foretold that such a prophet would rise up?’- they are at a loss. And we remark that Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai, with God appearing in the sight of all the people in cloud, and fire, and darkness, and storm. And we say that all the prophets from Moses on down foretold the coming of Christ and how Christ God (and incarnate Son of God) was to come and to be crucified and die and rise again, and how He was to be the judge of the living and dead. Then, we say: ‘How is it that this prophet of yours did not come in the same way, with others bearing witness to him? And how is it that God did not in your presence present this man with the book to which you refer, even as He gave the Law to Moses, with the people looking on and their mountain smoking, so that you, too, might have certainty?’- they answer that God does as He pleases. ‘This’, we say, ‘We know, but we are asking how the book came down to your prophet.’ Then they reply that the book came down to him while he was asleep. Then we jokingly say to them that, as long as he received the book in his sleep and did not actually sense the operation, then the popular adage applies to him (which runs: You’re spinning me dreams.)¹³

Islam and Christianity in Nigeria

Before the coming of Islam and Christianity into the area now Nigeria, the Africans living in the vast land were adherents of the polytheistic African Traditional Religions. In keeping faith with the demands of their religions to evangelize the world and convert sinners to “true worship” the Muslim and Christian preachers ventured into the area. Islam came in the 11th century and Christianity in the 19th century. Islam came through the deserts of Northern Nigeria while Christianity swam through the coastal waters of the Nigerian South to get into the country. While Islam was brought by Arab preachers and Muslim traders and scholars from North Africa, Christianity was conveyed to Nigeria by Europeans and ex- African slaves who encountered and became Christians in the western countries and in Sierra Leone. The different routes and agencies

through which these religions came into Nigeria foreshadowed the belligerences and antagonisms that would characterize their convergence in the country (there has never been any love lost between the West and the East whence came Christianity and Islam respectively to Nigeria), neither was there ever peaceful coexistence between the Muslims and the adherents of Judaism and Christianity in the Middle East where they all originated. In Nigeria their relations have not fared better. Ever since Christianity and Islam met in the country, their relationships with each other have been that of quarrels, jealousy and antagonism. None of the two has shown itself pleased with the presence of the other in one Nigeria. Each would prefer to see the other removed from the Nigerian space and allowed to expand unchallenged, unhindered and exclusively in the land.

Modes of Expansion of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria

In seeking to outdo each other and conquer the hearts of Nigerians, Islam and Christianity have adopted measures and methods of operation and expansion. Christianity has mostly expanded through persuasions of the Nigerian peoples and through the parades of the gains of literacy over illiteracy and the introduction of medical and social welfare.¹⁴ The Christian missionaries arrived in Nigeria building schools and hospitals, teaching the minds and healing the bodies. That way they have made their greatest gains and won their majority converts in Southern Nigeria rather than in the North where Islam had preceded, conquered and dominated.

Islam has been mostly identified with violent expansionism in much of its known history. The root to this violence seemingly lays in the teachings of its sacred scriptures- the Quran and the Hadith. A perusal of Allah's revelations to Prophet Muhammed in the Quran and the Prophet's commentaries in the Hadith yields scary dossiers of incitement to violence. There seems to be no hope for peace between Islam and other faiths given the degree of the noxious prescriptions of violence in the Islamic holy books. Consider the following quotations from the Quran and the Hadith of Prophet Mohammed:¹⁵

Sura 2:193- *Fight them on, until there is no more tumult, seduction, or oppression, and there prevail justice, faith in Allah, and the religion becomes Islam.*

Sura 4:74- *Let those who would exchange the life of this world for the hereafter, fight for the cause of Allah; whether they die or conquer. We shall richly reward them.*

Sura 4:95-96- *The believer who stays at home- apart from those that suffer from a grave disability- are not the equals of those who fight for the cause of Allah with their goods and their persons. Allah has exalted the men who fight with their goods and their persons above those who stay at home. Allah has promised all a good reward; but far richer is the recompense of those who fight for Him.*

Sura 8:13,17- *I will instill terror into the infidels, smite them above their necks; smite all their fingertips off them. It is not you who slay them but Allah.*

Sura 9:5- *When Ramadan is over, slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them.*

Sura 9:14- *Kill the infidels, God will torment and cover them with shame.*

Sura 9:41- *Whether unarmed or well-equipped, march on and fight for the cause of Allah, with your wealth and with your persons. This will be best for you if you but knew it.*

Sura 9:73- *Prophet, make war on the infidels and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home: an evil fate.*

Sura 9:26- *Fight against those to whom the Scriptures were given as believe neither in Allah nor the Last Day who do not forbid what Allah and his prophet have forbidden and do not embrace the true faith until they pay tribute and are utterly subdued.*

Sura 48:29- *Muhammed is Allah's prophet. Those who follow him are ruthless to the infidels but merciful to one another.*

Sura 66:9- *Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and deal sternly with them. Hell shall be their home, evil their fate.*

In the Hadith, Prophet Muhammed taught his followers as follows:

Hadith 1.13- *I have been ordered by Allah to fight with people till they bear testimony to the fact that there is no God but Allah.*

Hadith of Sahih Muslim 19.4294- *Fight against those who disbelieve in Allah. Make a holy war.*

Hadith 1.35- *The person who participates in Allah's cause (namely, in battle), will be recompensed by Allah either with reward or booty or will be admitted to Paradise.*

Hadith 9.4- *Wherever you find infidels kill them; for whoever kills them shall have reward on the Day of Resurrection.*

Hadith 9.50, 57- *No Umma (a member of Muslim community) should be killed for killing a kafir (infidel). Whoever changes his Islamic religion, kill him.*

In order that there should be no ambiguities in the meaning and import of the above scriptures, Muslim teachers and historians have over the years made efforts to clarify them. The leader of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini submitted as follows:

Those who know nothing about Islam pretend that Islam counsels against war. Those people are witless. Islam says: 'Kill all the unbelievers just as they would kill you all!' Does this mean that Muslims should sit back until they are devoured by the infidel? Islam says: 'Kill them, put them to the sword and scatter them.' Islam says: 'Whatever good there is exists thanks to the sword.' The sword is the key to Paradise, which can be opened only for the Holy Warriors! Does all this mean that Islam is a religion that prevents men from waging war? I spit upon those foolish souls who make such a claim.¹⁶

The pre-eminent Islamic historian and social thinker, Ibn Khaldun also spoke in the same light. According to him:

In the Muslim community, the holy war is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the Muslim mission and the obligation to convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or force.

*The other religious groups (Christianity and Judaism) did not have a universal mission, and the holy war was not a religious duty to them, save only for purposes of defense.*¹⁷

Islam's violent credentials have been witnessed in Nigeria now and again since its introduction into the area many centuries ago. Islam's method of expansion in the country has, like in other areas of the world, been mostly through violence. A cursory look at the religion's history in the country attests to a faithful following of the teachings of the Quran and the Hadith as outlined above, and as well confirms the insightful expositions of Ayatollah Khomeini and Ibn Khaldun. Northern Nigeria, today the bastion of the Islamic religion in the country never acquired that status by any peaceful means. Although Islamists often describe Islam as a religion of peace, its domination in Northern Nigeria was never attained by its pacific dispositions or its preachers' powers of persuasion. It was achieved by sheer brigandage, the wielding of the sword and forceful conversions. For Islam, conversion to the religion can be first aimed at through any other means but when that fails, force is inevitable.¹⁸

In northern Nigeria, Uthman dan Fodio started out as a peaceful religious teacher and later ended a violent Islamic revolutionary. Because of the irreconcilable differences between his envisioned Islamic theocracy and the leadership of the Hausa states Fodio, between 1804 and 1808 organized an armed Islamic rebellion of Fulani warriors and overthrew the leadership of the Hausa kings and established the Sokoto Caliphate.¹⁹ The preponderance of Islam in Northern Nigeria came about through that Jihad which effectively wrested leadership out of the original rulers and steadied it in the hands of the mostly Fulani Muslims. This is the typical Islamic model and vision for mankind- a military-type takeover of the entire world for Allah, the struggle (jihad) for which must continue until it is achieved. Those who do not understand Islam's formula, even as Ayatollah Khomeini clarified, look at the religious problems in Nigeria as solvable. It is not! Conflict is a deliberate strategy of the knowledgeable Muslims to discomfit those of other persuasions especially Christians and Jews until all submit to Allah. Many wonder why religious intolerance continues to thrive in a supposedly secular state like Nigeria with its constitutional provisions for religious freedom. The answer is that a true Muslim does not recognize the modern governmental system. In fact the idea of a secular government is an abomination to a true Muslim whose religion does not separate the state from religion. It is part of the "evil system" that must be discarded to make way for Allah. In light of this, a Katsina State-based Muslim activist Mallam Yakubu Yahya made the following illuminating outbursts:

It is obligatory for us to protect the image of our prophet...you cannot be a real Muslim and a good believer, unless you put Allah first in whatever you do...If there is any grievance between Muslims and the government, we can only settle these grievances on the battlefield and not on a round table...We are operating our own independent system, guided and governed by

*Islamic principles, while governments are operating their own system too. We are two different things entirely.*²⁰

With all the incitements in the Islamic holy books and the Islamists faithful following of it around the world and in Nigeria, it would be foolhardy expecting peace or the easing of religious tensions in the country in the foreseeable future. Indeed many who know have long given up such hope. A true Muslim is ready to seal his faith with his blood. Hence, the many suicide bombings in Nigeria and elsewhere. As long as the nations have not surrendered to Allah and other faiths apart from Islam still gain adherents, there remains a jihad to fight.

It is also unthinkable that the mouths of Christian revivalists would be closed in Nigeria. Many Muslims have expressed their hatred against the Christians' preaching and evangelism and killed many of the preachers in Nigeria in order to silence them. Yet for a Christian who understands and believes the Bible, the Great Commission (Christ's command to preach) is the single most important work to do and nobody can stop it not even with the threat of death. History has witnessed the heroic deeds of Christians who have paid the supreme price in lieu of refraining themselves from preaching the Gospel. As long as Christians believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and there still are those who have not committed their lives to following the way of the Christ, preaching of the Gospel must continue.

In the eyes of both dedicated Christians and fundamentalist Muslims, dialogue of the religions is welcome to the extent it does not forestall peddling of their faiths. A devoted Christian wants to persuade men unto the Lord Jesus Christ even as a staunch Muslim wants to conquer all for Allah. For the reason of these divergent and extreme goals, religious peace can only be feasible in Nigeria if all Christians decide to be Islamic or all Muslims become Christian, both of which are impossibilities.

2. Conclusion

The political entity called Nigeria officially came into being on 1 January, 1914. The amalgamation brought together not only diverse Africans of varied political, cultural and social history but also people of diverse and irreconcilable religious differences and orientations. The amalgamated Nigeria is a country of three major religions—Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions (ATRs). The northern half of the country is predominantly Islam and the south majorly Christian with adherents of the African Traditional Religions fairly spread across all the regions of the country. It has been suggested that a negligible 2.8 percent of the people of Nigeria adhere to the African Traditional Religions while Islam and Christianity are almost tied at 48.9 percent and 48.3 percent respectively.²¹ At the centre of the religious troubles in Nigeria is the struggle between Christianity and Islam, the ATR is largely not culpable.

In view of the irreconcilable Christian and Muslim views, this paper is of the opinion that the amalgamation of Nigeria was a mistake. Knowing the religious and other differences

as the colonial masters did and yet amalgamated Nigeria shows that the colonial masters never envisioned peace and progress for the country. Many Nigerian nationalists who have considered the Nigerian situation have equally come to the same conclusion. Perhaps one Nigerian (a Muslim) who clearly understood the irreconcilable differences between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria was the late Sardauna of Sokoto and Premier of the Northern Region, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello. A story is told of how one time, the *Owelle* of Onitsha and the first president of independent Nigeria, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe paid him a visit with the message of peace and unity. When Dr. Azikiwe reportedly urged Alhaji Bello to “let us forget our differences ...”, the Sardauna (war leader) reportedly responded, “No, let us understand our differences. I am a Muslim and a Northerner. You are a Christian and a Southerner”.²² Alhaji Bello called the amalgamation of Nigeria “the mistake of 1914”.²³ The leader of the Muslim faithful in Nigeria also refused the office of Prime Minister of Nigeria when the party he led won the majority votes in the First Republic. He preferred to be the leader of the Muslim North instead of having anything to do with “infidels”. When on 27 October, 1999 the Governor of Zamfara State Alhaji Sani Yerima spurned the Nigerian constitution, and introduced the Shariah law as the accepted legal code in Zamfara State, he referred to the inspiration he got from Alhaji Ahmadu Bello. Alhaji Yerima remonstrated as follows:

*The Muslim Ummah in this nation had for too long been dormant, inactive and indeed, in a state of slumber which had given the impression that we are a silent majority. The Muslims have for long yearned for the freedom to exercise their full rights since the period they were invaded and colonized by the British. We only partially achieved victory with independence but our neglect of planning robbed us the fruits of our struggles...The struggle had not gone in vain for the Islamic order we envisaged has now emerged. What we have embarked upon now is the continuation of the struggle started by our foresighted leader, the late Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello of blessed memory.*²⁴

Sir Ahmadu Bello strictly pursued the sustenance of the Islamic reforms carried out in the North by Usman Dan Fodio and even “had boasted to eliminate the state of Israel off the map of the world and to dip the Quran in the seashore of Lagos.”²⁵ Another nationalist, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, commenting on Nigeria’s unfortunate amalgamation also describes Nigeria not as a country but as a “mere geographical expression”.²⁶ It then baffles all good judgments why Britain, with all her claims of taking up colonization as a duty of love, lumped together such far-parted people in a single political entity. Britain is callous, capricious, and wicked in creating such Nigeria, so do we think.

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