Research Article

The Contemporary Challenges of Unity Among Muslims

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Abstract. More than five decades, the Muslim *ummah* have been facing different challenges from within and outside the Muslim world. The challenges cut across the political, socio-economic, educational, and scientific technologies. Additionally, sectarianism and the absence of tolerance among the adherence of each sect have a greater impact on the unity of the Muslim *ummah*. Many reasons are adducible for the high rate of disunity among *ummah*. These include misperception of Islamic Teachings and distortion of some of the teachings of Islam by the western world who studied Islam to destroy it. The findings revealed here that the aforementioned challenges can be tackled if the basic teachings of the Qur'an and *sunnah* is given high preference in all Muslim communities. Also, there is the need for a regulatory body on Islamic affairs, which will be empowered to see to Dawah activities of individual scholars. It would go a long way in preventing the spread of falsehood around the Muslim world. It is recommended that the Teachings of Islam be conveyed to the people through Scholars who are well grounded in all the components of knowledge that constitute the

Islamic knowledge such as Arabic, *Usul fiqh, Uluml Qur'an* etc. This fundamental measure would drastically reduce the challenges facing the Muslim world. The theoretical method is adopted in this work for the proper earning of many literatures.

Keywords : Muslim, Ummah, Islam, Islamic Teachings, Qur'an.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the unity is the pillar of human sustainability.[1] The Oxford Dictionary describes unity as the state of being united or joined as a whole[2]. Conceptually, unity of an entity to society refers to the situation whereby ethnic groups, religious groups and people from different location live in harmony[3].The global peaceful atmosphere lie on its unity; only those regions and continents here unity exist are clearly experiencing peaceful environments. The unity of mankind globally is not tantamount to the advantages of a national identity, race, ethnicity and religion but it is based on the belief of having a universal justice and harmony[4].

In the contemporary time, the search for unity is seen as a global problem which serves as an impediment to the creation of a harmonious social atmosphere[5]. The Muslim Ummah is still navigating on ways that will lead to a sole unity among the Muslim community. According to some, the implication of unity in Islam is that, all Muslims must relinguish their peculiar ideologies and doctrines and act according to the common principles accepted by all Islamic groups, societies and organizations and to ensure that whatever ideology to which one adheres, he/she must follow the unanimous ideology[6]. Some believe that, this Ummah cannot be cohabit together due to sectarian ideology, all forms of sect, group and organization must forcefully align with the practice of the prophet. Anything contrary to that should be neglected, fought to a large extent, if not eradicated.eradicated[7].

Meanwhile, Islam has been seen as a succor the entire humanities that is perfectly molded to ensure both animal and man enjoy peace and unity among its adherents[8]. Indeed, Islam has been universally conceived as "a state of peace that come through submission to the wills and guidance of Allah"[9] and Muslim who live together asa community are those who earn that peace through submission to Allah's will. Apparently, he who threads the path of peace, enjoins peace, behaves peacefully and interacts peacefully is regarded as a Muslim. This however is interpreted to mean that the absence of unity or peace in any Muslim community is an indication that there is no enough submission to Allah or lack of the qualities of being good Muslims. A conscious Muslim would not take glory in the disunity of Ummah he would be fearful of not working against the directive message of Allah and His prophets:

$$\text{وَٱعۡتَصِمُواْ بِحَبۡلِ ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعٗا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُواْ... [سورة آل عمران,١٠٣]}$$

And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be not disunited... [Al 'Imran, 103].[11]

To this end, the concept of unity among the Muslim in the world and particularly in Nigeria has become a recurring subject across the media. Despite all the efforts of some Muslim organizations and some concerned Muslim leaders (Imam)who are seeking ways to unite the Muslim through media outlets and other forms of communication, the challenges still persists in high rate, mostly in Muslim dominated regions[12].It is not that Muslim do not love to be a united Ummah but it is owing to the fact that there is a gap of quality information about the teaching of Islamic concept of unity or the sources of the available are shrouded in controversies. These are parts reasons why the problem has remained unsolved to the Ummah. This paper therefore assesses the causes of the disunity among the Muslims which has posed serious challenges to the Muslim Ummah globally.

Islam and The Concept of Unity

The unity of Muslim Ummah is possible only under the flag of "Tolerance"[133] Almighty Allah commands the Muslim to observe patience to retain unity among themselves. The success of any nation is concealed in the mutual unity and harmony among its inhabitants. Any strongly united entity becomes an invincible force and overcome every hindrances which intend to come in its way, therefore no enemy dares to confront such a tide and strong nation. The holy Quran educated us thus at the time of its revelation that: you by this (strength and unity) distressed the enemies of Allah and yours (Q.8, Anfal, verse 60).

وَأَعِدُّواْ لَهُم مَّا ٱسْتَطَعْتُم مِّن قُوَّةٍ وَمِن رِّبَاطِ ٱلْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ......

And prepare against them what force you can and horses tied at the frontier...[14]

In so many other verses Muslims are not only advised to take unity as important ways he also commands them to hold on the rope of unity among themselves. Q.3, Al-Imran, V. 103.

وَٱعْتَصِمُواْ بِحَبْلِ ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُواْ ...

And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be not disunited...

Going by the intent of the teaching of these verses one would understand thatAllah in his fore knowledge knows that Muslim would come to a state of disunity like what we are experiencing today, hence the addresses the whole Ummah generally instead of an individual. The verse emphasized on harmony and unanimity by employing the word "JAMICA" "جميعًا" (Altogether) and it negates the partition by adopting the plural verb"ولا تفرقو". This verse alone has prepared the mind of all Muslims that Allah desires nothing from the Ummah but to be united[15].However, "unity" does not dictate that one should suppressed or be dogmatic in his thought and his substantial right of expression and will, but it means to have honour, respect

tolerance or others' thoughts and/or opinions thought as it explained to display a kind of broadmindedness and to prevent any form of exaggeration[16]. The companions knew that it is obligatory on Muslims to strive for single Ummah, in the same way, that they are obligated on the basis of tawhid to worship one God as it has been stressed in the verse of the Quran thus: "Intend" this (community) of yours is one community, and I am your Lord so worship me Q21 v92.

$$إِنَّ هَٰذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَٰحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَٱعْبُدُونِ$$

Surely this Islam is your religion, one religion (only), and I am your Lord, therefore serve Me[17].

It teaches Muslim to emulate the companions of the prophet. In spite of having so many academic differences among themselves, they remained friendly and respected each other's thought because the two basic sources of Islamic laws are wild (Quran and Sunnah) so its easy to have different opinion in as much it is not out of these two basis. Therefore, Islam frowns at any act of disunity between the Muslim as it contained Q3 V 65.

$$يَٰأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لِمَ تُحَآجُّونَ فِي إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَمَآ أُنزِلَتِ ٱلتَّوْرَىٰةُ وَٱلْإِنجِيلُ إِلَّا مِنۢ بَعْدِهِ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ$$

O followers of the Book! why do you dispute about Ibrahim, when the Taurat and the Injeel were not revealed till after him; do you not then understand?

The Muslims are to believe that all the teachings are contained in the verses of the Qur'an the practical aspect of it can only be seen in the life of the prophet. He (prophet); on many occasions educated his followers in various ways on the essentiality of unity and frowned at disagreement and conflict among the Ummah. He said in one of his narration to disabuse the mind of people from seeing themselves as being special above other":

"All humans are equal like the teeth of a comb"[18].

Apart from the aforementioned teachings of the prophet, there are many common characteristics that are symbolically unifying Muslim Ummah, globally. These common but fundamental features are accepted by all Muslims regardless of their background or sectarian affiliation[19]. These important unifying concepts include:

- **Hajj:** Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is one of the most important practices in Islamic creeds. It is compulsory for all capable Muslim faithfuls from all over the world to simultaneously converge on the Masjid Al-Haram in Makkah at least ones in life of every capable Muslims. Practically, Muslims are unanimous by this practice and act equally, jointly at the same time, days and place of hajj. This uniformity cuts across the number of circumbulation, performing of Ihram and all other exercises of Hajj. At this state all pilgrims enter a state of Ihram at the same time to show they have one common goal (intention of performing the Hajj for the only God). This is a very strong visual display that brings to bare both the

physical and mental capacities of everyone; from poor, servant to prince, to an equal stage before the Almighty Allah[20]. This however symbolizes the concept of unity in Islam by bringing the international community of Muslim worshippers together regardless of the race, ethnicity or social status. Quran 3 verse 97 says:

- **Ramadan (fasting):** Fasting is also one of the pillars of Islam that all capable Muslims must participate. It means abstinence from eating, drinking and any sort, smoking, and sexual exercise[21]. It is another unifying service to Allah that symbolizes the concept of unity in Islam. Muslims from different Islamic sects, organizations and societies hold similar view on the main rule relating to Ramadan. No one can assign another month different to Ramadan to perform his/her fasting because the law establishing it is sacrosanct in the Quran thus Q2 V 183.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

O you who believe! fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard (against evil).

- **Quran:** There is no controversy of any sort among the Muslim globally that the Qur'an is the word and the book of Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad through the Arch of Angel Jubril. within the period of twenty three year and that no verse or even a word has been added to or omitted from it[23].Qur'an 15, Verse 9 read thus;

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا ٱلذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَحَٰفِظُونَ

Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian.

The uniformity of the textual message of the Quran has been a miraculous phenomenon. Despite series of efforts from the orientatists nothing has changed in terms of the verses and numbers of the chapters in the Quran[24]. The copy of Quran in Eastern part of the world would not be different from the one in the western world. There is nothing like the old or new version of the Qur'an; it is simply one across the verse that is read in Africa is the same with what is read in London. All these are being regarded as a symbol of the unity of Islam. Furthermore, Ibn Kathir in his book of Tafsir. He explains verse 103 of chapter 3 (ال عمران) the word "الله جعل" to mean the Book of Allah, i.e. the Qur'an[25].

- **Qiblah:** Unanimously, all Muslims turn towards the Ka'abah while observing their prayer. There is no one among Muslim who prays facing another direction. No matter your sectarian affiliation; as a Muslim, you must face the same direction no matter where you are, that is, the Qiblah. This is seen as intentionally designed by Allah to show man the concept of unity in Islam.

- **Solah (prayer):** Solat is the second, hierarchically, pillar of Islam. It is a philosophical mode of communion between the servant and his God[26]. Apart from being the second pillar of Islam it plays an important role in uniting the

Muslim. Therefore, Islam places congregational prayer in an utmost position. It is contained of many benefits apart from uplifting man's spirituality, it serves as a mean of creating love, unity, and respect among the worshipers. This can be observed in the congregational prayer where the rich and the pauper, high and low in social status stand shoulder to shoulder before Allah in a congregational prayer[27].

- **God (Allah):** worship other than Allah is known as act of polytheism[28]. The concept of monotheism in Islam is to believe in the only one, the omnipotent[29]. This mission and sameness of purpose is emphasized in Q21 V22 says:

$$لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَآ ءَالِهَةٌ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا۟ فَسُبْحَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلْعَرْشِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ$$

If there had been in them any gods except Allah, they would both have certainly been in a state of disorder; therefore glory be to Allah, the Lord of the dominion, above what they attribute (to Him).

Causes of Contemporary Challenges of Disunity Among the Muslims

There are several factors that can be attributed to the disunity among the Muslim in the contemporary world today; some are major while there are minor ones. The major factors include:

Politics

First and foremost, Muslim need to free themselves from politics of perilousness[30]. This is because Religion cannot be separated from politics; religion should be seen as politics and politics should be also seen as religion. This holds because Islam does not exclude of a system of government whoever aims at separating Islam from politics is doing one harm or the other to the religion. It is more or less denying the strength it gains by providing a system of government[31]. The system of government and politics played from the beginning of Islam had united the first generation of Muslim Ummah throughout the history of Islam the path of unity became disrupted.

Such era began during the prominent dynasties that practiced some elements of rivalry with one another. Examples are Barri Umayyad and the Khawarij Bani Abbas and Umayyad clan and many others[32]. This era could be regarded as the period of when disunity among the Ummah began. All these caliphates and dynasties powers have played a major role in the creation of disunity among the Muslims[33]. Therefore, Muslim must embrace the kind of politics that unite the first generation as one entity, one soul, as has been described by the prophet in the Hadith:

"المسلمون كالبنيان يشدّ بعضها بعضاً"[34]

Based on this, Muslims are therefore advised to shun the politics of divide and rule, evil politics and unhealthy politics that rocking the Islamic World today, the consequences have been dire on the entire Ummah.

Second Major Factor is the Issue of Firqah

It is essential to briefly explain what is meant by Firqah and or madhhab and to what extent it can cause discord.

- The dimensions of beliefs that ignite the formation of the theological sects of the Ash'ari, Mu'tazili, Shi'I, etc whereby each founder and its followers maintain the belief that the path to true religion is their path[35]. Indeed, the historical record of sectarianism surfaced in 632A.D., shortly after the death of the Prophet Muhammad when the Muslim disagreed over who should succeed him.

- The second dimension is literally called madhahib (schools of jurisprudents), that is the practical fiqh (jurisprudence)[36]. At any point in time the word madhab is mentioned the first thing to come to mind is jurisprudence differences. This has limited discord when it comes to disunity among the Muslim. Because the four recognized school are regarded as the main sources of law in Islam, whichever one belong does not oppose the main sources of Islamic law (Qur'an & Sunnah) as different from the first set where philosophy and reasoning prevail upon the Qur'an and Sunnah[37].

● Cultural Interest: The cultural separation has been in existence as far back as the period of the first generation of Islam. The companion, immediately after the demise of the prophet, displayed a kind of cultural and tribal discrimination among themselves[38]. If it is possible for them to slip back to what the prophet has totally eradicated in many of his sayings; though this practice is well known during the pre-Islamic era, soon after death of prophet it surfaced again, then one wonders if such attitude could not have its way at this contemporary life of Muslims. Though Islam had spread far east and west at the end period of Ummayad dynasty, at this period various people with different cultures had embraced Islam. Those people came into the fold from different background of culture which mixed Islamic teachings with their culture. This however will be very difficult to separate. The examples of these are common among specific regions of Africa, for instance the Yorubas, who see nothing wrong in participating in the Egungun festival and later return to masjid immediately after the festival[39].Also in some other regions like the north, it is believed that wearing long dress and turban can be regarded as a sign of good practicing Muslim whereas the dressing of a man cannot be dictate to its religion nowadays.

There are some minor factors that also contribute to the disunity of Muslims in this contemporary world. These include:

1. **Proliferation of Islamic Organizations**: The proliferation of many Islamic organizations in the world today has succeeded in creating more division than ever.

Different organizations in the world like OIC, was formulated in the year 1969 to bring about unity coordinating and seeing to the affair of Muslim world[40]. It is been seen as a symbol of brotherhood of the Muslim countries but unfortunately its internal challenges has left it an underperforming body. The sectarianism played a major role in creating such problems for example Saudi Arabia, where it serves as the headquarters for the organization, is a conservative Sunni absolutely and some other members like Iran who is known to be predominantly a Shi'ah Islamic republic. This alone is commonly believed to be the root of the challenge since decades[41].

This recent incident of Palestine is a clear and living example. The US's support for Isreal in Palestine is not unknown to the world, Saudi Arabia, being the Qiblah (Direction of the Muslim) and a dominantly Muslim country, is neither raising serious concern or voicing out against the USA. This attitude alone and others have let other OIC member countries in discomfort with Saudi Arabia In fact it has create clash between countries which may eventually escalate.

2. **Lust for power:** The love of leadership and materialistic interest of some local and foreign scholars has created a big difficulty for the effort being taken by individual or organization in uniting the Ummah. Imamship for example has torn many Muslim communities apart in different parts of the world. Some cases arise when a particular family believes it is entitled to be Imam since his forefather were the harbingers of Islam to a particular town. He therefore believes that Imamship should be retained forever in their family even if the successors lack the qualities to be Imam. Till today the unanswered question of whether Imamship position should be hereditary or by appointment of competent one regardless of family connections still persists mostly in some West Africa and Nigeria in Particular. Records have shown that cases where hereditary or family connection is not adopted has led to serious rancor to the extent of closing down some central Masjid[42].

3. **Misperception of Islam by the media:** The western media have been the major architects of causing disunity among the Muslim Ummah. Because western media have associated Islam with terrorism, Islamic Jihadism, fanatic Islmaism and many other negative impressions which have posed fear into the mind of new converts or growing up Muslim brother who would see some groups of Muslim as their enemies[43].Not only that, the use of social media by some Muslim scholars had also contributed immensely on the challenges of unity among ummah. It has become daily activities of social preacher on social media whereby Islam has been perceived as a Religion that lack co-ordination. Today a scholar will appear telling the whole world certain things and tomorrow another will appear doing a rejoinder to the form. This notion has created irrational fear into the minds of the populace. Some personalities have been condemned and eventually resulted in enemity and disunity among the Muslim.

Suggested Solutions Toward the Attainment of Muslim Unity in the World

- The Muslims disunity is a visible and undeniable challenge of this period; therefore, the following tips have been suggested as possible way out to the problems:

1. Extremism Management

For Islam to get its unity and glory, both the government and individual need to put their hands on desk to control and manage extremism and the extremists at all levels[44]. Method should be formulated by the government to fish out the lingering problem of Islamic extremismand lookout how to manage it with the help of eminent scholars and intellectual bodies. This would help by looking vividly into the root and genesis of the extremism in our Community.

2. Identification of Enemy of Islam.

Muslim should see whoever that professes "*Kalimah*" *LailahaIlla Allah* and belief in it as a Muslim. He or she should also be seen and recognized as a good friend and brother in Islam[45] and avoid prognosis into the secrets life of others. The common enemies are those who do not belief in Allah among the Christian and Jews. The Qur'an says:

$$\text{"هم العدو فأحذرهم"}$$

"They are the enemy be careful of them"

Even though the unbelievers are not together they envy each other, they hate each other they are divided in terms of faith, practices, etc. But once their enemy is Islam or Muslim they come together against Islam. Therefore, to become a united community, as stressed by the Qur'an, Muslims need to identify their enemy.

3. Upholding the spirit of Brotherhood.

The prophet (S.A.W) has said in his Hadith that Muslim is a brother to his Muslim brother. Going by this Hadith, all Muslims are brothers to one other. Mawdudi in his analysis on Unity of Ummah emphasizes that the hearts infested with hatred can never unite, hypocritical associations can never produce real unity; friendship based on selfishness is the precursor of discord; and only a dry association of business purposes cannot become a basis for sympathy[46].

In Islam, "a believer, whatever is his racial link, place of origin mother tongue or colour is regarded as a brother to another Muslim. The World has experienced the universal brotherhood of Muslim during the early stage of Islam. The story of Salman Al-Faris, a non Arab; just because of Islam became a brother to arab[47]. Also the King Najashi of Abyssinia died after he had become a Muslim and the prophet and all other believers of the World observed salat Jannazah for him with great feeling of brotherhood[48]. Islamic history is still being repeated till this moment with instances where a Muslim went out of his country and lived another country freely without any restriction; even to some extent, secured the highest government post in that country and got married without any difficulty[49].

Obviously, this mutual relationship, and good interest may pave way for unity in the present Ummah.

4. Providing solution to system of Education

This is another solution which may closely pave way for the unity of ummah. This has to do with getting some Muslim to be reoriented in the area of their education belief or policy. There are the kinds of conflicting system of education both of which have a significant impact on the Muslim Unity. The first fails to prepare people to face the responsibilities of worldly life while the second fails to provide any religious platform and moral orientation[50]. This conflicting system of education have presented Islam in a different dimension which till today still endanger the internal peaceful atmosphere in the Muslim Community. The combination of good ones out of the two conflicting system of Education is what the Muslim World used to today. We cannot run away from the study of Technology and all other related knowledge and at the same time technology, sciences and others should not deter both men and women of the Muslim World from punishing them hereafter.

5. Establishment of a regulatory body

The need for the Government to empower some Islamic bodies with the responsibility to monitor the Daw'ah activities of the Imams and preachers is very crucial to the Unity of Muslim in the World. This is because these scholars are dealing directly with society and their preaching's have a high effect on their followers[51]. Government should embark on either yearly or periodical training session for them with the help and consultation of high rank Ulama'. People's respect to these set of scholars are being seen as effective; so to get lasting solution to the unity of Ummah, there should be rules and regulation that would guide who and what to preach to the propulace[52].

CONCLUSION

The contemporary Muslims world has been facing diverse challenges due to different reason in which disunity is being seen as the major. One of the major factors behind the disunity of Muslim community has been identified that many Muslim have not much idea of what Qur'an teaches and how it should be implemented in their lives. This has led to increasing Sectarian ethnocentrism. Today disunity has caused Muslim world to suffer from numerous problems, due to sectarian hatred, lust for power, political issues, cultural interest and many other worldly interests. All these are confirmed to be the causes to deprive them their glory and power. On the other hand, the enemies of Islam are United when Islam became their target, hence they are working to put division between them. Therefore Muslim of today should take lesson from the generation of the prophet as a model in maintaining their unity and the utmost emphasis should be on reviving and strengthening Universal spirit, concept of Muslim brotherhood. The unity of

Muslim Ummah is possible only under the flag of the spirit of Universal Brotherhood and tolerance for each other.

Findings

It is discovered during the course of this work that unity in Islam is not an option to the Muslim Community rather it is a blessing from Allah.

It is revealed that there would be surely disagreement among Muslims; what matters is to have tolerance and forgiveness.

It is also obtained that the internal challenges facing the Unity of Muslim spread through the wrong uses of the social media by those half-backed scholars of nowadays.

Recommendation

It is recommended that all the identified problems be resolved.

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