

Pentecostal Churches and Boko Haram: The missing link to War on religion in Nigeria (Part Two)

The first part of the article detailed the foundation of the fight between the Islamic fundamentalists and Christians in the North of Nigeria, it took a look into the emergence of the Pentecostal Churches after the end of the civil war, it also explained some hidden facts and today we will look at the opinions of the writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ola Rotimi and even look at the songs of Fela Kuti and how these people saw the problems years before us.

We will also look at the damage done by the emergence of the Pentecostal Churches spread on Islam and the culture of the North and how it destroyed even the South of Nigeria itself, the unity in families and years of bond and love in a nation with 225 tribes which was founded on empires like Oyo, Kanuri, Benin and Sokoto Caliphate before the British forcefully put it together as a country with fragile unity and suspicions and what can be done to fix what may likely be the end of the nation of 150 million people if nothing is done to address it now.

Chinua Achebe, the man after my heart in his book "Things fall Apart" which was written in 1958 wrote about the predicament of the main Character in the book, Okonkwo who returned from exile only to find his community Umuofia had been eroded with the white man ideas and his religion. I will summarize it as this, Okonkwo said "The White man came peacefully and we were amused with his teachings, and before we knew what happened everything that kept together had been broken and things had fallen Apart, " Okonkwo took action but his action was not supported by his kins men and women, he committed suicide.

Professor Ola Rotimi in his play, "The Gods are not Blame" said, when tortoise was going on a senseless and stupid journey, he asked when he was going to return, the Tortoise said, "Not until when I must have been disgraced "Is Nigeria journey the same as that of the tortoise? And when Fela looked at how we followed religion without respect for who we were and our culture and the foundation of love and respect given to us by our ancestors, he called many people and institutions unprintable names but today more than yesterday, Nigerians leadership have not been able to understand the problems ahead not talk of finding solution, expensive methods are used to solve simple problem, which respect, understanding, fairness and justice is the rule of the game.

Professor Wole Soyinka, in his recent article with the Newsweek Magazine titled "The Butchers of Nigeria" took a longer route, he saw the problem from the time of Akuka who was beheaded by the Northerners and how the North lacked temperament in understanding one single fact that when you are in a country of 225 tribes, your religion cannot be forced on others. Professor Soyinka looked at the problem of the Cross at the University of Ibadan and how the problem was averted, this writer was then a staff of the National Achieves of Nigeria inside the University of Ibadan, and as we had to walk on the grass that separated the Mosque and Church we just laughed away the problem, which only a funny screen between the Cross and the Mosque saved the problem that almost destroyed the center of excellence in those days.

As I read his article further, deep down in it, I could see the pain and tears of Wole Soyinka, that this is not the Nigeria of his dream, the dream of a man who first started the struggle for freedom in our universities and never stopped. What a society!! What a people!!

Okonkwo said, again, in “things fall apart”, if a man comes into your house and defecates on the floor what do you do? You take a stick a break his leg, that is what a man does”, Has our zeal for Christianity made us to defecate on the Northern Floor, or we fail to understand why the Old Churches never used spiritual and verbal confrontation on the North? Why do we see Islam as enemy of the Kingdom of God rather than another spiritual way to heaven?

If Islam and Christianity originated from the DNA of Abraham, and they fight each other for several thousands of years, must we make our land the battle field? What happened to us as Blacks Africans in the South of Sahara, what happened to our culture, our unity and the love we had for each other before the problem started?

Is the Religion of Islam not strong enough to stand intellectual and face to face mental stress of the Pentecostal encroachment unlike the way the Old Churches in the 21st Century? Is Islam not strong enough to challenge Christianity with intellectual approach to keeping members? Why is it difficult for the North to ask itself, why are we losing members to Christianity, maybe Islam is in need of reformation, like the Catholics and Anglicans did to keep congregations? Or Is it not wrong to use to tools of 17th and 18th centuries to expand our faith? This is where the North through Boko Haram and other fundamentalist are wrong; they need to understand Islam is no longer the only religion being practiced in old Sokoto Caliphate and Kanem Bornu Empire.

Islam in the 21st Century must go through reformation, to understand Nigeria of 225 tribes with different religions, and ideologies, as this nation progresses, the religion will understand those things that were alien to us, it will in future accept everyone for who they are or want to be, a Nigeria, that will allow you to be Christian and if you were born a Muslim or even atheist, without any molestation from any group or government, that is the future for Nigeria as a country, to think of Islam in a different way is to be ignorant, which is what Boko Haram has adopted, Professor Babs Fafuwa defined education as Freedom from Ignorance. Boko Haram is living and wallowing in Ignorance of knowledge and future which no financial compensation can fix, but a complete open of mind to ideas other than the primitive foundation of the group.

Nigeria must adopt the religious tolerance attitude of the Yoruba in the way we conducted ourselves, in a family, we can be anything we elect to be, we must learn to respect each other, and let use the power of positive persuasion to win each other, for anyone to see the beauty of our religion, it is not by blasting negative messages thorough loud speakers to our neighbors of other faiths. Jesus said, when you are not accepted in a place just dust you shoes and walk away, remembers the Lords Prayers, let us learn to forgive others like He said, the Pentecostals are as guilty as the Boko Haram for inciting and planting the seed of discord with hell fire request and cursing on the imaginary enemies which Jesus never authorized.

Nigeria government is also guilty by allowing all the problem to creep in, when Abuja the Federal Capital of Nigeria was conceived, we were told it will be for all, yet the government of President Shagari built Mosque inside Aso Rock, President Obasanjo built Church in the same place, our National Assembly looked like a glorified big Mosque, yet our attitude does not show we serve God, our leaders steal and enrich themselves without any regard for the soul of the nation, Wole Soyinka described the National Assembly as the center of corruption in Nigeria.

If President Obasanjo had behaved like President Abraham Lincoln did in America, who used Federal Soldiers to protect the freed slaves in America after the infamous trade was abolished, maybe we might have moved beyond the problem of Boko Haram now, when the Child molester, the former Governor of Zamfara state introduced Sharia, we kept quiet, the government said, it will use political solution instead of criminalizing it, if I were the President, I would have sent a copy of Nigeria constitution to any state Assembly of the Federation that planned to use Sharia to adopt the Constitution in entirety on the floor of its chamber as the only legal document Nigeria would be governed or be cut off from the Republic or a complete cut off from the Federal Revenue, like an octopus, the unsolved problem is now eating up the country as Nigerians continue to kill each other, and it is even becoming difficult to serve the God of your choice without being killed.

When General Gowon introduced the NYSC in the seventies, it was meant to bridge the gap of ignorance among Nigerians, the same method can be used here, we can make all our traditional rulers in South to spend at least two weeks in North more like sabbatical leave to understand the Culture before they can keep their thrown, same for the Emirs in the North more like an exchange programs, this will help to diffuse tension in the country, all leaders of faith must obtain a Federal License that must be updated with some spiritual temperamental classes that their preaching's is towards unity of the Nation.

Finally, like elders said, no one can clap with one hand, we need each other just the river needs the ocean, there is a lot beautiful things in freedom of religion, to the workers, and children, we have more holidays and festivals which every religion brings to the table, this is a time to reflect on future of Nigeria and how to manage the stress of 21st Century, and government on its parts must be neutral, but when the President is kneeling down in front of some Pentecostal Churches to pray, it does not demonstrate the freedom that will keep us together, let us first take religion out of government to see the light at the end of the tunnel, let President Jonathan send a copy of the Constitution to all the state Assemblies for formal adoption as the only legal document above any spiritual document, then we can start understanding how to fix Nigeria problem on Religion.

The beautiful Abuja, I saw and I wrote about in December 2012 may end up a time Bomb as the most of the people who owned the land were removed, so many settlements that may in future be a threat to Abuja itself, and which can easily be a recruiting ground for the Boko Haram, President Jonathan must not close his eyes to this potential Abuja threat he will be doing himself and his legacy a favor if he does not behave like OBJ who closed his eyes to the introduction of Sharia.

Zents Sowunmi is a New York based writer. He is the author "Not a Stranger anymore" to be released in March 2012

