



THE HERITAGE OF ISLAM *In Nigeria*

ESSAYS IN MEMORY OF
DR. DAWOOD ADEKILEKUN TIJANI
1942 - 2006

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

ENGENDERING RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE FOR NATION BUILDING: THE VIEW OF DAWOOD ADEKILEKUN TIJANI

By

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Introduction

The Noble Qur'an contains numerous stories of both virtuous and evil people. The essence of this is to expose readers of the Book to these personalities for them to emulate and learn lessons from. In the same Qur'an, stories of some Prophets were narrated for the specific roles played by them for men of understanding to borrow a leaf from. For instance, the story of Prophet Musa (A.S) was narrated to reveal the high-handedness of Pharaoh and how the Israelites were rescued from his persecution. It further explicates how political activists, social workers and nation builders should help the down trodden members of the society.

The story of Prophet Yusuf (A.S) was narrated to teach the plight of Yusuf in the hands of his kith and kin. The story of Yusuf while in prison; his interpretation of the king's dream and how he consequently became the Minister for Agriculture at the end of the day, all teach prudent and effective management of resources for sustainable development. In the same vein, the story of Sulayman(A.S) could be a source of inspiration for leaders to use their wisdom in governance. The wisdom in this narration therefore is not only to document and immortalize those whose histories were told, but to serve as reference point for the incoming generations to learn one lesson or the other from.

In view of the above, it is a worthwhile venture to document the life, works and views of a scholar par excellence who during his life time had used his speech both in oral and written forms to improve the lots of many students who passed through him, worshippers who listened to his sermons and readers who read and are still reading his numerous works. The personality is no other than Imam Dawood Adekilekun Tijani of blessed memory. Though, it is commendable to honour some heroes while still alive; such a honour may be an eye service and such personality may be excessively eulogised for the purpose of winning personal recognition or for any other reasons. However, honouring Dr. Dawood Adekilekun Tijani with piece of this nature is not meant for any reason but for the livings to learn some lessons from. For this reason, we examine his perspective on the major challenges facing Nigeria as a nation in contemporary period, namely, religious intolerance which the Imam had approached and discussed in

some of his pulpit sermons as well as in his presentations at conferences and workshops.

Religious Intolerance in Nigeria: A Brief Exposition

Religion which is expected to be a veritable instrument of unity and development in Nigeria has been turned to an instrument of polarization, disunity and instability. Going through the history of crises in Nigeria, a large percentage of instances of these are attributed to religion. Insecurity of life and property, social ills, political instability, all are attributed to religion in Nigeria to the extent that some thinkers submitted that elimination of religion from Nigeria scene will be a means to ensuring stability of the nation.

A major cause of religious bigotry in Nigeria is unhealthy rivalry between the Muslims and the Christians in Nigeria. Giving a succinct description of the nature of the rivalry, Adebayo submits:

Experience has shown that adherents of religions are not tolerant enough to allow some religious injunctions to prevail for the benefit of mankind. As such, they agitate for what they feel could benefit them individually and raise unnecessary dust on what they feel is of no direct benefit to them. Or why should the Muslims in Nigeria demand for declaration of Fridays as work free days, when the Qur'an has clearly commanded them to disperse through the land seeking the bounty of Allah as soon as they conclude the *Jum'at* services (Q 62: 10). This request is nothing but a demonstration of rivalry and jealousy of the Christians who enjoy Saturdays and Sundays as work-free days to observe their religious duties. This same spirit could be said to be the reason why pilgrimage to Jerusalem has recently crept into Christianity as a principle, just to emulate the Muslims' annual pilgrimage to Makkah and Madinah, a core pillar of Islam.¹

Non-Islamic Finance and Non-Muslims

In the same vein, the spirit of rivalry and jealousy has trailed the reactions of some non-Muslims to the provision of guideline for the establishment of non-interest banking system in Nigeria by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to kick vehemently against such step as if taking or giving of interest is allowed in the Holy Bible and as if non-Muslims are compelled to open non-interest bank account with non-interest banks in Nigeria. One equally wonders the reaction of

the Osun State Christian Association of Nigeria to the court ruling on case filed by the Osun State Muslim Community and the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria seeking an order of the court to allow female Muslim students enjoy their fundamental right to use *hijab* in public primary and secondary schools. The court's ruling which favoured the use of *hijab* in public schools was personalized by the leadership of Christian Association of Nigeria in Osun State to the extent of it directing all Christian pupils to appear in schools in their full church attires.² This reaction implies their non-readiness to allow Muslim students to use *Hijab* in public schools erroneously taken to be mission schools.

Religious intolerance and bigotry goes beyond different religions, as there are instances of intra-religious misunderstanding and conflicts. In the pre-colonial Islam of the geographical zone now called Nigeria, the Shaykh of Borno was not in good term with Sokoto *Mujahidin* to the extent that El-Kanem criticized the basis of the Sokoto jihadists as he was not convinced of the attack of the jihadists on his territory on the basis of the social ills in the land which had not made them *kuffar*. In the same vein, Olayiwola identifies some reasons why the Northern Muslims discriminate against the Yoruba Muslims. These included syncretic practices among the Yoruba Muslims, their intimate interaction with the Christians and chorus singing of *adhkar* after congregational *salat* among others.³ There is also the rift between the *AhlTariqah* and *Yan Izalah*. These and many other instances are indications of intolerance which breed disunity and rancor within the rank and file of adherents of religions generally and Muslims specifically.

It needs to be noted that cases of religious intolerance have been chaotic in some instances. The reactions of some Christian leaders to the adoption of Islamic penal codes in some states in the northern part of the country have led to religious crises claiming lives and property and throwing the nation into mourning. However, the major reason for these crises and hullaballos is intolerance which is a bane to national development. A good example of demonstration of religious intolerance happened on September 10, 2001 when a woman in the city of Jos insisted on driving through a street barricaded by a group of Muslim worshippers during a Friday service on the basis that no one had the right to block a public road. The pathetic aftermath of her insistence was reported by Lateju and Adebayo in the following sentences:

Jos which was hitherto a serene town had become a mass grave of decaying corpses nose-wrenching odours and paratrooping vultures as arrows, machetes, swords and guns of varying sophistication were employed (freely used) indiscriminately. Human bodies were strewn on virtually every street in Jos. People who were not blown up by bullets were simply

hacked down and their throats slit in the manner of slaughtering of an animal. Many others were sprayed with petrol and set ablaze. The stench of burnt bodies was suffocating. Buildings and vehicles were not spared. A particular car dealer in Jos metropolis lost all the vehicles on display in his fleet to the mayhem.⁴

Some reasons have been advanced as the causes of religious crises in Nigeria. Achunike attributed the incessant instances of religious crises to wrong perception of other people's religion or faith, selfishness of some religious leaders, wrong religious orientation, low literacy level of religious adherents and poverty to mention but a few.⁵ In the same vein, Oloyede acknowledges indoctrination and outright ignorance as causes of religious extremism and violence. Such extremist perception by a few individuals led to the Boko Haram phenomenon in Nigeria similar to the use of Christianity by Joseph Kony who for the past two decades waged a devastating war on the people of northern Uganda.⁶

The above notwithstanding, the need to embrace peace amongst adherents of different religions in Nigeria has been stressed by many religious scholars of Islam, Christianity and African Traditional religion. Opeloye for instance compares the Bible and the Qur'an from the standpoint of Muslim/Christian relations using thematic approach,⁷ while Noibi addresses the plight of the Yoruba Muslim youth in the Western school system.⁸ Dawood Adekilekun Tijani was another distinguished Muslim preacher and teacher who had made his impacts felt on religious understanding in his powerful pulpit sermons as well as in his writings. His powerful oratory ability was demonstrated every Friday at the University of Ibadan Central Mosque, while his writings were and are still being read all over the world. This chapter therefore attempts to explore his submission on religious tolerance for national development.

A brief profile of Dawood Tijani

The forefather of Dawood Adekilekun Tijani, Alfa Nuh Adekilekun (d.1902) was an itinerant Muslim scholar and preacher. This mission took him to Ede around 1850 and through his religious activities he became the first Chief Imam of Ede. This implies that Dawood Adekilekun Tijani was a direct descendant of the first Chief Imam of Ede. He was born in 1942 in Ile-Imole - a house which produced the first Chief Imam and the first indigenous Alfa Tafsir in the town in person of Shaykh Dhul-Qarnayn Adekilekun.⁹ Like the practice in those days, Dawood started his Qur'anic education at a tender age under his

uncle, KhalifatJamiu Abdul-QadriAdekilekun who also initiated him to Tijaniyyah brotherhood.

The fear of conversion of Muslim children to Christianity which griped many conscious Muslim parents and so decided not to enroll their wards in the then available missionary schools was equally responsible for the objection of Dawood's parents to allow him attend the Western school system. He was therefore seriously involved in Arabic lessons and tailoring entrepreneurship. The intervention of some family friends of his father who persuaded him to allow Dawood attend school and the gesture of the Chief ObafemiAwolowo's policy of education for all, facilitated his enrolment into Young Tajudeen School in 1955. He and his cousin, AlhajilbraheemAdekilekun were enrolled the same day and the two performed brilliantly well in their primary education endeavor that they spent only just three years and four months to complete their primary education in 1957. Despite his brilliancy, the promising Dawood was not allowed by his father to proceed to a secondary school probably due to the fear of being converted into Christianity by the missionaries. He however had the opportunity of furthering his studies when in 1959 there was a call for recruitment of Arabic teachers to teach in the public primary schools by the government of the southwestern Nigeria. He therefore applied, successfully wrote the qualifying examination at Ibadan and was eventually employed as a *Mu'allim*.

Dawood demonstrated that he was a genius by the time he gained admission into the University of Ibadan in 1977. By 1980 he bagged his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Arabic Language and Literature with First Class Honours. He obtained Master of Arts Degree in Arabic and Islamic Studies in the same University between 1982 and 1983. Between 1986 and 1991, he enrolled and completed his Ph. D programme in the same University.¹⁰ DawoodTijani was a born-teacher who had taught at all levels of education. He was a Malam at Young Tajuden Primary School, Ede between 1960 and 1975. He also taught Arabic and Islamic Studies at Ede Muslim Grammar School, Ede between 1976 and 1977. He had his NYSC programme as a Lecturer in the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin between 1980 and 1981. He became a lecturer in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan in December 1984 and there he became the Chief Imam of the University's Central Mosque in 1991.¹¹

DawoodAdekilekun was a prolific writer. This might probably be the reason why he obtained the London Diploma in Journalism. The spirit of journalism might also be responsible for many poems he composed during his life time. His eloquence and prolificism were demonstrated in 1963 when he composed a welcome song and delivered a welcome address in dual language of Arabic and English in honour of the first Arabic lecturer, Abdur-RiddhoDirhaeni,

a Lebanese from the University of Ibadan who paid a visit to Ede at that time.¹² He was also said to have translated the famous *Merchant of Venice* of Shakespeare into Arabic language and also supervised the dramatic presentation of the play by his students when he was teaching in Adekilekun Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, a school established by the 5th Imam of Ede and the then Khalifah of the entire Adekilekun dynasty between 1946 and 1972.

As a seasoned scholar and a linguist who mastered Yoruba, English and Arabic languages, Dawood Adekilekun had to his credit an Islamic Studies Series Books 1-VI in Yoruba for Muslim pupils in the primary schools. He wrote another Islamic Studies Series Books 1-III in English language for Muslim students in the secondary schools. In addition to this, he translated a number of books from Arabic to English and Yoruba. For instance, he had an adaptation of *Mukhtasarof Akhdari* in the form of questions and answers which he translated to English and Yoruba languages.¹³ He was said to have translated the publication of Imam Muhammad Ali As-Sabuni on Islamic law of inheritance into Yoruba language for the purpose of bringing the Islamic mode of estate sharing to the doorstep of the Muslims in Yorubaland. The 188 page book was titled: *OgunPinpinniibamu liana Shari'ah Islam*. He also had a number of original Arabic poems.

Dawood was a strong follower of Tijaniyyah brotherhood. He was a great admirer and student of Shaykh Ibrahim Niyass al-Kawlakhi through whose eminent discipleship he received further training in *Tasawwuf*. He wrote quite a good number of works on Sufism in general and Tijaniyyah brotherhood in particular. He for instance wrote: *A Handbook on the Doctrines and Rites of the Tijaniyyah in Question and Answer Form*, which was published in 1997.

The View of Dawood on Religious Tolerance and Religious Understanding

From all indications, religious tolerance can be seen as being offensive, as it may imply holding the hand of the one being oppressed for the oppressor to continue to oppress. In other words, tolerating another person's belief system may be a bitter pill to swallow, hence understanding such belief system will assist in having positive feeling for those who uphold such religious stand. Imam Dawood Adekilekun therefore preached proper understanding of not only one's religious teaching, but other religions different from one's. Little wonder then that the Imam did not mince words in one of his Friday's pulpit sermons when he appealed to the sensitivity of the Muslims Students Society to review their excesses and urged them to learn more about Islam. This, to him was an antidote to the incessant rancor prevailing amongst them at that period. To enhance this, he called on religious leaders, teachers and preachers to lay greater emphasis on the need for their youths to have sound education because according to him, "quite a good number of Muslims have little or no knowledge about the true

teachings of their faith."¹⁴ In addition, Dawood saw all divine religions having the same source and so have the same focus. He therefore submitted:

The aims of all the divinely inspired religions are to ensure peace, justice and equity on earth, through the worship of one true God who is the creator and the Sustainer of the universe, and to establish a universal brotherhood of man. The teachings of all the prophets and apostles through the ages are that man should serve one God and should live together righteously as brothers of one another, and that we should harness all the natural resources which God has provided for us on the surface of the earth for our common good.¹⁵

Furthermore, the sense of religious understanding which to Adekilekun is a prerequisite for religious tolerance was demonstrated by him when he, Adekilekun paid a visit to his brother Shaykh Abdul-Lateef Adekilekun in Ilorin in the early 70s. It was reported that a Muslim brother sold some plots of land to a Christian in Sawmill area of Ilorin. While many people were condemning the action, Adekilekun softly advised that land generally belonged to Allah and He disposed it to whomever He liked and that if the Muslims were patient enough, they might be the one to inherit back the land in Allah's will.¹⁶ The informant confirmed that the land was later sold to another Muslim by the Christian who initially bought it from a Muslim some years after.

In the view of Adekilekun, religious leaders have left their religious responsibility of educating their followers; hence the followers are acting ignorantly like sheep without a shepherd. By implication, he extended the responsibilities of religious leaders beyond the four walls of their places of worship. He therefore attributed the deplorable condition of most African countries not only to the negligence on the part of the political leaders but also the religious leaders. He submitted:

At the dawn of the 21st century, almost all the countries of West Africa, and indeed of all the third world, are faced with challenges of colossal magnitude. Problems of poverty and disease continue to ravage the region. There are problems also of insecurity of life and property.... Education and health-care systems have almost collapsed... greed, avarice, fraud and corruption are stock in trade for some of our leaders. Not only political and traditional leaders are to blame for these woes; religious leaders, too have a share.¹⁷

Furthermore, Imam Dawood Adekilekun frowned at some extremists' practices who take religious teachings beyond boundary by interpreting such in

accordance to their whims and caprices. Such practices to him are one of the reasons for intolerance arisen from misunderstanding of religious teaching. Adekilekun cited the stand of some Muslims on the position of women in Islam as an example. He observed that many Muslim preachers teach their followers that women in Islam should not be seen and heard in public to the extent that some female Muslim university students sat their backs at lecture rooms and in the mosques while they listen to talk on Islam especially when such talk is given by a man. He therefore made reference to Qur'an 24:30-31 which enjoins lowering of gaze for both men and women and not to turn back at the speaker. He equally made reference to a situation where 'Umar b. al-Khattab the second caliph was addressing the community in the city of Madinah and a woman had to raise up her hand on a point of order; she was recognized by 'Umar, and with her observation, 'Umar remarked: "This Medinan woman understands the point better; she is right and 'Umar is wrong."¹⁸

One of the bane to religious tolerance in the view of Adekilekun is the reaction of some religious leaders to some steps taken to improve the lots of the society. He cited an example of the reaction of some Christian leaders to the steps taken by some state governors to introduce Shari'ah in their respective states. To him, such opposition was borne out of religious bigotry and religious politicking, as Shari'ah operation did not affect the non-Muslims residing in the states concerned. He therefore advised that religious leaders, both Christian and Muslim should join hands together to preach peace, unity, equity and justice, and avoid being manipulated by clever but mischievous politicians who want to set them one against another to satisfy their own selfish political ambitions.¹⁹ In conclusion, he advised:

...teachers, preachers and religious leaders should demonstrate, by their own practical example, the spirit of universal brotherhood of man, and nobody should be discriminated against on account of his religion.²⁰

Poverty is considered a strong cause of religious intolerance, as a hungry man is considered an angry man. As such, Adekilekun believed that empowering the youth would help in no small measure to check youth involvement in religious crises. He saw the institution of zakat in Islam a veritable tool for economic emancipation of the less privileged. In view of this, he suggested the creation of a Muslim Trust Fund in Nigeria, which would see to the collection of zakat and sadaqah for the purpose of poverty eradication. This fund according to him would be used for the establishment of educational and health institutions; provision of credit facilities to the unemployed; provision of scholarship to brilliant but needy Muslim pupils at all levels of education; setting up of orphanage centres and rehabilitation of the poor among others. To put this idea to practical utility, he used the Leagues of Imams and Alfas' forum in Yorubaland

to influence the contribution of ordinary twenty naira by each Muslim worshipper in all Jum'at mosques every Friday. He was therefore the brain behind the establishment of the Islam Trust Fund which was registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission Abuja, and he was a member of the Board of Trustee of the body.

It needs to be mentioned that Imam Dawood Tijani was a strong member of the Tijaniyyah Sufi order. His Sufi experience no doubt influenced his thought on religious tolerance. He admitted that Sufism is a controversial issue in Islam and so urged the Sufis to know how to engage non-Sufis in dialogue so that it would not generate rancor in the society. He advised:

When preaching the teachings of Islam, or teaching and explaining its exoteric dimension, the preacher or the teacher needs to be very careful so that his audience can get him correctly. He needs to be wary of his choice of words and constructions so that his listeners may not misunderstand him.²¹

Unlike some groups in the Sufi order who handle the main pillars of Islam with levity, Imam Dawood avoided extremism in his practice of Sufism. He avoided unnecessary clash between the pillars of Islam and practice of Sufism. For instance, he advised that the time for Wazifah should not be fixed in such a way that it would clash with the time of the congregational prayer and that the Muridis should stop the wazifah when the call to an obligatory prayer was made for them to join the congregation. He concluded:

A *murid* must also not stay away or fold his arms while the obligatory *Salat* is being performed. On no account should a *murid* refuse to join the congregation.²²

Bases of Dawood's view on Religious Tolerance

Undoubtedly, the Qur'an is the primary source of Islamic law and a manual for every conscious Muslim. In it, religious tolerance is emphasized, while peaceful co-existence between and among religionists is encouraged. The *Qur'an* clearly states that religion emanates from a source, and all the prophets preached that, when it says:

The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Nuh, the which We have sent by inspiration to thee and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: namely, that ye should remain steadfast in Religion, and make no divisions therein.... (42: 13)

The above Qur'anic verse serves as the basis of religious tolerance in Islam and so Imam Dawood was guided by this. He believed that though the

existence of many religions was man-made, as everybody was proud of the one propounded and confessed by him, this did not call for religious crises and hullabaloo. To him, every human being is a servant of Allah and whoever becomes ungrateful to Him, should be left for Allah to decide his case.

Apart from the above, Imam Dawood was guided by the Sunnah of the Prophet. The Prophet was a great paragon of peace and peaceful co-existence with others even with those who did not believe in his preaching. It is on record that the Prophet cemented his relationship with the Jews he met in Madinah and he engaged them on theological debate and especially with a prominent Christian delegation from Najran. The extent of his religious tolerance was also demonstrated when members of the delegate wanted to perform their religious rite and he allowed them to do this in his mosque. In addition to this, the companions of the Prophet, particularly the Rightly Guided Caliphs followed the step of the Prophet in their dealings with non-Muslims in their domains. The four Islamic Juristic Imams equally preached tolerance in their teachings. These important personalities influenced the thought of Imam Dawood on religious tolerance. Confirming this statement, Abdullah (et.al) compiled the lectures of some Imams in Nigeria including on how they were guided by the teachings of their predecessors in Islam. They concluded:

They were the original owners of this secret; it was from them that our own Imams learnt their perfect belief and best deeds, it is their standard of living they copy and path of guidance they are treading. They led by example, lived by their words and left remarkable impacts for their contemporaries and for the succeeding generation in terms of faith, worship and deeds. It is difficult to find in our own generation, Muslims like these blessed and foremost Imams.²³

The above shows that despite the fact that many religious leaders have been influenced negatively by materialism, while some have fallen victims of all sorts of irreligious practices. That notwithstanding, there are few of them who are rightly guided by the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet, operating within these premises and are shining examples to their followers.

Conclusion

The celebration of Imam Dawood is a worthwhile venture not because he was an Imam but also because, he lived a worthwhile life and laid a good foundation for the generation yet unborn. His legacy on religious tolerance was premised on the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet. This he demonstrated in his speeches as an Imam of a mosque in a great citadel of

learning, his writings in academic outlets and in his actions everywhere he found himself. From his submissions, Imam Dawood demonstrated that peace should be maintained with people of other religions, while non-Muslims should be accommodated and protected against aggression. This would afford such non-Muslims the opportunity to know more about Islam and so convince them to accept Islam. In essence, Muslims are expected to make Islam more attractive to non-Muslims through their character, accommodation and generosity. No one can accept a religion if its adherents are hostile to him.

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