

ON CAN'S LETTER TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Given the trajectory of the recent activities of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), like other informed groups and people in Nigeria, cannot but wonder whether CAN still remains a religious body or a political party in a religious garb. The Council is persuaded to believe the latter because of the Association's posture as the counterfoil for and opposition to everything Islam and Muslims in this country.

We cannot also but wonder whether Islamophobia has indeed not replaced the more important responsibility of giving direction to millions of our compatriots who are law-abiding citizens of the Christian faith. It is really benumbing that CAN appears to be giving credence and relevance to the rhetorical question asked centuries ago: "if gold rust, what should iron do?"

Specifically, the statement issued by Pastor Adebayo Oladeji (Special Assistant Media and Communication to CAN President) on behalf of CAN is the last straw to break the camel's back in the Association's ill-advised and ill-motivated interventions in the polity. The statement of CAN, addressed to the leadership of the National Assembly, partly reads:

As you prepare for your inauguration, CAN urges you to balance the appointments of your principal officers across religious divides to avoid domination and marginalisation of any kind in the interest of equity, justice, and fair play as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution (as amended).

Although both the Senate and the House of Representatives have several principal officers, our focus here are the Senate President, the Deputy Senate President, the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker. As it has been the practice since 1999, whenever the Senate President is a Christian, the Speaker of the House has always been a Muslim and vice-versa. And the same thing happens to their deputies.

Our quest becomes imperative due to the existing order in the two other arms of the government. Today, both the President and the acting Chief Justice of Nigeria are Muslims and our appeal is to let either the Senate President or the Speaker be a Christian to address the religious dichotomy. This will give all Nigerians a sense of belonging irrespective of their religious affiliations.

Is CAN suffering from selective amnesia or is it just obsessed with chronic mendacity? Was there no CAN between 2009 and 2011 when Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Justice Aloyious Katsina-Alu was the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Senator David A. B. Mark was President of the Senate and Senator Ike Ekweremadu was Deputy Senate President? Was there religious balance in 2007 when David Mark was elected Senate President and Patricia Etteh was elected Speaker? Was there no 1999 Constitution at that time?

Even prior to 1999, the two arms of the National Assembly were headed by Christians. For instance, while between 1979 and 1983, the Senate was headed by Joseph Wayas and the House of Representatives by Ume-Ezeoki, from October to December, 1983, Joseph Wayas and Benjamin Chaha

were leading the respective chambers. Furthermore, in the aborted Third Republic, the Senate Presidents were Iyocha Ayu and Ameh Ebote while the Speaker was Hon. Anakwo.

Meanwhile, the NSCIA welcomes with pleasure the fact that CAN has finally agreed that the correct interpretation of the Section of the Constitution quoted in its letter to the National Assembly includes religious balancing. It is in this spirit that NSCIA calls on the Federal Government of Nigeria to conduct a holistic census of all Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies, including higher institutions, to determine whether there is anywhere Muslims constitute up to 30% of the staff strength and thereafter ensure compliance with the sections of the Constitution cited by CAN.

The chronic intolerance and political partisanship of CAN and its alter egos are becoming alarming as they are ardent at purveying blatant falsehood and fake news. A few examples would suffice:

Prior to the 2015 elections, CAN agents, both Samuel Asemota and Pastor Bosun Emmanuel (the latter was a delegate of CAN at the 2014 National Conference) were going round churches preaching hatred against Muslims and Islam. Pastor Bosun said in one of such outings, "any Christian who planned to vote for the APC was directly sponsoring the Islamic agenda and contributing to the truncation of Christianity in Nigeria."

Pastor David Oyedepo's hatred-driven and embarrassing misinterpretation of a satire written by Professor Olatunji Dare which was used as a basis to excite and incite his congregation against President Muhammadu Buhari that the President had indeed died in London and that the present occupant of Aso Rock is a body-double by name Jubril al-Sudaniy from Sudan.

Many of those who claim to be "men of God" like Bishop David Oyedepo, Apostle Johnson Suleiman, Apostle Omotosho Tope, Prophet Muiyideen Kasali, Prophet Emmanuel Chukwudi and Prophet Samuel Akinbodunse proclaimed fake prophecies about President Buhari and the 2019 election with a view to inciting their followers to violence when their purported "word of God" is not manifested. Their South Africa-based colleague, Pastor Samuel Akinbodunse, even went a notch higher by claiming that God told him "President Muhammadu Buhari will not be alive to witness the 2019 elections." Nigerians and all men of goodwill thank God that the President is hale and hearty. These are clearly fake prophecies because the Almighty God cannot be associated with falsehood.

CAN also condemned Mallam Nasir El-Rufai for choosing a Muslim as his running mate and claimed that he had committed a political hara-kiri. The same CAN chose to turn a blind eye to Ekiti, Benue, Edo, Ondo and Plateau States where Muslims have a substantial number of indigenes and yet are denied the Deputy Governorship slots. Civilian Governors of Plateau State, for instance, prior to 1999, had Muslims as their deputies but since the advent of the Fourth Republic, Muslims have not been considered for the position of Deputy Governor. Yet, the NSCIA has chosen not to dabble into such political issues but our silence is now being taken as stupidity by CAN. The sheer impudence of CAN leaders and their chronic insincerity led them to release a statement that the leadership of parastatals under the Ministry of

Education was dominated by Muslims but were embarrassed when the statistics of the last ten years was presented to them by NSCIA.

Let CAN apply to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to be registered as a full-fledged political party as “politicians in cassock”, to quote the CAN President himself, rather than front for politicians who nurse the ambitions of holding political offices. In other climes such as Australia, Germany, New Zealand, etc., there are Christian political parties and CAN should rather be straightforward and apply to be registered as a political party, if the Nigerian Constitution allows that tomfoolery.

It is hypocritical for CAN and its alter egos to claim to be on the side of justice by forming the ‘National Peace Committee’ which is not surprisingly dominated by Christian clergymen. The pretense of the ‘Peace Committee’ had been exposed by the various comments/actions of their prominent members. For instance, a member, prior to the last election, took a partisan posture masquerading as a good doer and incited the people of Southern Kaduna against the government while another member, despite his level of education, could not avail himself of historical facts but rather chose to spit the dummy that “the low turnout at the gubernatorial election was a loud protest against the outcome of the 2019 presidential polls”. All these are not surprising as it is on record that CAN itself had maliciously referred to President Muhammadu Buhari as a ‘bad product’.

The NSCIA is also well-informed of the surreptitious pressure CAN is mounting on Christian judges serving in the various election petition tribunals across the country, under a pseudo-Christian organization, to ensure the victory of Christians and/or their sympathizers. Even the recent release of the so-called National Christian Elders Forum (NCEF) lends credence to this point when it stated thus:

It would be recalled that during the elections, Rev. Ayokunle presumptuously deployed a 1,000-man CAN Election Observers team to monitor the elections nationwide. The action was presumptuous since CAN does not have the constitutional responsibility of engaging in politics. Christian leaders deliberately established the Christian Social Movement of Nigeria (CSMN) for this purpose in 2001 as the socio-political arm of the Church.

The indecorous and outright partisan statement by CAN which is meant to polarize the country has created doubt in NSCIA and any right-thinking person about the genuineness of the partnership of CAN with NSCIA. What is the essence of conferring with hate-filled religious leaders whose wish is for Muslims to be exterminated from the polity and Nigerian society?

All these must stop! CAN should save itself of creating hatred in the minds of well-meaning Nigerians through its divisive and evil-impelled interventions.

Lo! You are the ones who love them but they love you not, and you believe in all the Scriptures [i.e. you believe in the Tawraat (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel), while they disbelieve in your Book, the Qur'aan]. And when they meet you, they say: 'We believe.' But when they are alone, they bite the tips of their fingers at you in rage. Say: 'Perish in your rage.' Certainly, Allah knows what is in the breasts (all the secrets). [Al'Imraan:118-119]

Signed

Prof. Salisu Shehu,

Deputy Secretary-General, NSCIA