

Àwa L'ókàn: When the blood of Jesus is not thick enough to bond his body



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In this article is examined the now famous political slogan particularly in the South-Western region of Nigeria: *àwa l'ókàn* [it is our turn] as grounded on political injustice and not resonating with competence as claimed. This has become critical, because it has generated heated debate among Christians across denominational lines. I traced the popularity of the slogan to Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) who claimed that, in the 2023 elections, the office of the president of Nigeria should be zoned to the South-Western geo-political zone, and then to him personally; hence *Emi l'ókàn* [it is my turn]. The theoretical argument in this article is that, although Christians are saved to live differently from the world, they still have critical roles to play in political affairs in ways that are consistent with their faith. The article used both primary and secondary sources that consist of books, articles, personal interviews and the social media. It discovered that the South-Western region has had at least a 15-year stint in the Nigerian presidency since 1999, the South-Southern region, eight years and the South-Eastern region, zero years. In addition, the article found out that the slogan, *Emi l'ókàn*, has resulted in theological disagreements which are not healthy for Christian unity and purpose in a multi-religious society such as Nigeria. It concluded that *àwa l'ókàn* politics is based on ethnic solidarity rather than oneness in Christ. This position has implications for the Christian body, because preference for ethnicity over justice and fairness, which are Christian principles, challenges sound Christian theo-political theory.

Contribution: This article is interdisciplinary in nature. It brings together theology, ethnicity and politics, and argues that these disciplines are dynamic. But in a situation in which conflict of interest arises, it is argued that Christian ethics should guide in taking a moral decision to abide by the principle of oneness in Christ (Eph 2:11–22).

Keywords: *Emi l'ókàn*; Muslim-Muslim; body and blood; Christian community; ethnic nationality; Cross; Jews and Gentiles.

Introduction

The political history of Nigeria has in reality never been devoid of religious politics, but the tonality it assumes in each election cycle becomes heightened in a different way. Religion plays critical roles in the Nigerian political discourse and identity. According to Clair and Williams (2019), for instance, Nigeria's election cycle always causes fear and tension, which the country strives to manage. As the biggest democracy in Africa, it is argued that Nigeria's past historical trajectories have continued to haunt it even though the country is making strides towards a more stable democracy.

Those who have studied electoral processes in Nigeria over the years have observed that religion and ethnicity are factors that have always affected electoral decisions. Taiwo and Ahmed (2015), Nyiayaana (2019), Lawal (2019) and Babalola (2020), among others, have noted that religion and ethnicity strongly determine the choice the electorate makes, which also affects political development in the country. Nwankwo (2019) observes that, at the beginning of the fourth republic which was in 1999,¹ religion did not play a significant role in the voting behaviour and pattern until 2011. In 1999, the country was more concerned about how to oust the military from politics than about religion. Religion is the discourse that comes after basic political stability has been attained in terms of a new democracy. The 2011, presidential election was vigorously contested between Muhammadu Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan, the Muslim North and the Christian South, respectively. This present article is relevant, because previous scholarship in presidential elections did not focus on the theological issues bordering on a same-faith or Muslim-

1. Since Independence in 1960, Nigeria has experienced four circles of return to civilian rule: 1960–1966, 1979–1983, aborted 1993, and the fourth republic started in 1999. The interregna were when the military interrupted civilian rule.

Muslim presidential ticket² and how Christians have particularly reacted to it.

For this reason, I examine how Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket is framing Nigeria's presidential election. Particular interest is paid to how Christians in the South-Western and Northern Nigeria are blurring the body of Christ on the one hand and bonding with it on the other hand. It is argued that the tension is anchored in three main factors: ethnicity, political affiliation and existential survival, and each are pivotal for the Christian community. Insisting that it is the turn of the South-Western region to produce another president in 2023, is politically unjust, divisive and disenchanting, just as Christians who support it can be thought to act more in ethnic solidarity than according to Christian ethical principles and unity. The implications that the affiliations have for the Christian community in Nigeria are then highlighted.

The concept of *Àwa L'ókàn*

The slogan, *àwa l'ókàn*, which has now become a popular political refrain and mantra for mobilisation among the Yoruba supporters of Bola Ahmed Tinubu's presidential ambition, used to be a common phrase meaning 'it is our turn'. Ahmed Green (2021) has sung a Christian song titled, '*Àwa l'ókàn*' in which he prayed before God to attend to them as his children. Green sang that it is their turn to be blessed by God who has always remembered his children. The popular song resonates a sense of Christian community that entirely places its hope in God in order for him to make a difference in the pluralistic religious community. He further stressed that when the blessings of God come upon him (changes to *Emi l'ókàn* [it is my turn]), he would invite people to celebrate with him. Between *àwa l'ókàn* and *emi l'ókàn* lies the thrust of community and individuality. Community, as it has been argued in Africa, entails the spirit of 'we-feeling' or the spirit of *Ubuntu*. It is within the community that the individual finds fulfilment and value. Living in isolation or succeeding alone, is to live a selfish life in terms of *Ubuntu*, which diminishes the vital life. Green's understanding of community first and foremost, although in the sense of the Christian community, carries a deep African spirit of togetherness under God. His prayer for God's blessings for them precisely shares similarities with the common faith that Christians express in corporate worship and co-existence. While Green's use and nuances of *àwa l'ókàn* is in terms of Christian unity, Tinubu's is ethno-political.

Tinubu, before winning the primaries³ of his party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), boisterously insisted to speak in Yoruba; thus, '*Emi l'ókàn*' (News Agency of Nigeria and Adenekan 2022). News Agency of Nigeria and John

2. A Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket means that both the presidential and vice-presidential candidates are Muslims. In the 1993 general elections, there was a Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket, but the election was declared inconclusive and annulled by the General Ibrahim Babangida military regime.

3. Primaries are elections conducted by individual political parties that afford their party members only to vote for the political aspirants that will eventually represent them in the general elections. These elections take place after each party would have screened each aspirant who must have declared their intention to run for office. The aspirants who win at the primaries become the party candidates.

Adenekan (2022) argue that Tinubu's expression implies a sense of entitlement to the Nigerian presidency. They point out that Tinubu's claim to the presidency is not based on any logic other than his personal assistance to other politicians in clinching political offices in the past elections in Nigeria by using his enormous wealth with which he has built a political support base over the years. The primaries of the ruling APC were characterised by political intrigues and uncertainties as President Muhammadu Buhari allegedly insisted on a consensus presidential candidate instead of open elections. Tinubu believed that if a consensus candidacy strategy prevailed, President Buhari would impose his favourite candidate on the party, which would jeopardise his ambition of becoming the next president. It was the uncertainty and fear of not being nominated via consensus that culminated in his verbal assault on President Buhari whom Tinubu publicly claimed he single-handedly installed as Nigerian President in 2015. Tinubu also accused the Ogun state governor, Dapo Abiodun, of not being loyal to him after helping him to win the governorship election in 2019: 'This one sitting behind me, Dapo, can he say he could have become a governor but for me?' (Musowo 2022a). Tinubu believes that President Buhari and Governor Abiodun ought to have reciprocated his efforts by supporting his presidential ambition rather than supporting someone else. Tinubu asserts:

He tried first time and failed. He tried second time and failed. He tried third time and failed. He even cried on television that he will never run for president again. I went to meet him and told him this is not a crying matter: 'we will support you and you will be president.' ... I didn't beg him for contracts, I never begged him for garri, I never begged him for fura and I never borrowed money from him. But I insisted it is Yoruba's turn and when it comes to Yoruba, it is my turn. (Musowo 2022b:n.p.)

Tinubu had to resort to rallying the support of his Yoruba people around him in order not to allow President Buhari to succeed in making him (Tinubu) an inconsequential personality in Nigerian history books. The reason, according to Tinubu, is, 'I don't want them to just mention me in history books for nothing' (Musowo 2022b). His motivation was that becoming Nigerian president was his 'life-time ambition' which nobody, not even the incumbent president, could stop.

Rotimi-John (2022) notes that Tinubu has unwittingly exposed his underbelly by ascribing national electoral successes to himself alone. This has resulted in criticisms of Tinubu's political interest in the Nigeria democracy:

[P]rogressive elements have quizzed that Tinubu has yet to prove by book evidence that he had served the cause of progressive politics rather than a personal predilection or a private penchant for power. (Rotimi-John 2022:n.p.)

He adds that Tinubu's insistence that it is the turn of the Yoruba to become the next president of Nigeria in 2023, does not altruistically reflect the progressive politics that his party appears to represent and, more critically, the Yoruba ethnic nationality. In other words, Tinubu is viewing his personal political success and interest as his region's political interest. To be sure, the Yoruba are not only religiously heterogenous;

they are also religiously very tolerant. In a country where inter-religious violence is common, the South-Western region is rarely involved in religious violence despite the presence of adherents of the three major religions in Nigeria – Christianity, African Religion and Islam (Igboin 2019). Rotimi-John (2022) further maintains that Tinubu hides his personal ambition under the cloak of ethnic solidarity, whereas he was not the only Yoruba person contesting the position. Tinubu's exclusion of other Yoruba presidential aspirants from laying claim to the Yoruba support, suggests that other Yoruba contestants such as the incumbent vice-president, Professor Yemi Osibnajo, governor of Ekiti state, Kayode Fayemi, among others, in the same political party are either not qualified by the standards that Tinubu himself set or are altogether less than, or not Yoruba at all:

A body of the nominally 'progressive' South-west elements for who Tinubu represented its alter-ego totem has been bitterly disappointed by Tinubu's *Emi l'ókàn* maudlin preachment in Abeokuta. Tinubu himself seems to have had a second thought on the matter even as he indicated that he was anxious to panel beat a clear and unambiguous diatribe. (Rotimi-John 2022:n.p.)

Tinubu's recourse to ethnic solidarity further threatens the uneasy ethnic tensions that have been difficult to manage since the country was amalgamated in 1914 by the British colonialists. The vitriolic reactions that followed his asseveration from within his ethnic Yoruba and other regions of the country, pressed him to resort to damage control measures by deploying media strategies to ameliorate the damage his ethnic recourse has caused. The fact that he spoke in Yoruba and not in English when he declared himself as the exclusive candidate, heightened the ethnic tensions and separatist agenda he had surreptitiously abandoned for his presidential ambition (Rotimi-John 2022).

However, Okunola (2022) argues that rather than misinterpret Tinubu's declaration of *emi l'ókàn* as an affront on the president or anyone else, it should be understood in context. Namely, Tinubu has undoubtedly helped many people to rise from political obscurity to political stardom as a good political and liberal strategist. This declaration should also be viewed as a timeous calculation to outwit those who have not recognised the fact that the best war is usually fought without a bullet. According to Okunola (2022), *Emi l'ókàn* is imbued with a responsibility rather than ethnic politics. Carefully espousing the difficult situation that the country is in at the moment, that is, in 2022, Okunola (2022) argues that Tinubu was only presenting himself as someone who has what it takes to solve the perennial Nigerian problems. Having concluded that those he had assisted in political offices in the past could not solve the country's problems, he felt that he could do differently by personally contesting the presidency. As an astute politician, Okunola (2022), adds that Tinubu knew that this is the auspicious moment to rise to the national stage to save the country. This attests to Tinubu's political ingenuity and sagacity in demanding rather than begging those he believed would have eased him out of the race. Tinubu 'did not need to fight, he only made a demand when he knew it was time' (Okunola 2022).

Olagunju (2022) asserts that Tinubu has lost focus. Before now, Tinubu had been at the forefront of the agitation of restructuring the country so that each federating state could manage their resources and develop at their own individual pace. Abandoning that national argument and recourse in favour of an ethnic political cocoon, he argues, betrays the sincerity he had flagged in the past. The Yoruba have been threatening to secede from the country if the country did not urgently restructure.⁴ Tinubu has been very vociferous about restructuring the country, arguing that it is only when the country is restructured that true democracy can be entrenched. But since June 2022 when he won the presidential ticket of the APC, the agitation for restructuring and separatist nationhood has apparently stopped, and the inclination is to strengthen a centralised country.

The Yoruba who have always been at the front in demanding a restructuring of Nigeria for the safety of all have dropped the elephant for cricket [*sic*] of opportunism. They are singing *àwa l'ókàn*. (Olagunju 2022:n.p.)

Logically, *àwa l'ókàn* does not represent fairness and justice in a multi-geo-political country such as Nigeria. Nigeria has 36 states and Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, which are grouped into six geo-political zones: South-East, South-South, South-West, North-East, North-Central and North-West. Since 1999, when Nigeria returned to civilian rule, the South-Western region, where Tinubu comes from has produced President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007), and the incumbent Vice-president Yemi Osinbajo (2015 –), which cumulatively resulted in 15 years of the presidency. The South-Southern region has produced President Goodluck Jonathan (2010–2015), who ruled five plus three more years as vice-president; thus, totalling eight years. The South-Eastern region has neither produced a president nor vice-president during this period. In fact, apart from producing the first indigenous president, Nnamdi Azikiwe (1960–1966) under Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister and the first military head of state, General Johnson Aguyi-Ironsi (January–July 1966), and Vice-president Alex Ekwueme (1979–1983), the South-Eastern region has not had a representative since 1999 at the presidency. So, when the presidency was relocated to the South in principle by the political parties, especially the APC and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the two dominant parties until recently, it was rational for people to think that the South-East (Igbo people) should produce the next candidate for the presidency in 2023. That is the reason why Rotimi-John (2022) argues: 'Igbo *l'ókàn* as deep-seated conviction for order and fairness has been cavalierly substituted for *Emi l'ókàn* without compunction. No thanks to the inclement season of money and power politics.' Put plainly, it is the turn of the South-Eastern region rather than the South-Western. Buttressing this point further,

4. Since General Babangida's military regime annulled the 12 June 1993 presidential election, won by Chief MKO Abiola, a Yoruba man, the agitation for a separate nation has been heightened. Since 2019 when the Fulani ethnic group has been terrorising the southern parts of the country, the agitation for secession took a more practical dimension. This is because of Federal Government's unwillingness to curb the activities of the Fulani. Championed by Mr. Sunday Adeyemo (aka Sunday Igboho) and Professor Banji Akintoye, the Yoruba Nation movement started mobilising the Yoruba people towards a declaration of a separate nation. The security agencies' attacks on Adeyemo, which made him to leave the country, seemed to have temporarily halted the agitation (Sunday, Ewuim & Sumumma 2021).

Aliyu Babangida, a former governor of Niger state, North-Central geo-political zone, reasons:

I don't think any person in Nigeria today of 200 million people, can say this is my turn. Now, it is never your turn. Even if you want to say it is the turn of the people, or of your own people, let's even put it that way, then put what has happened given all the ethnic groupings in Nigeria. The north-east has never had the presidency, the north-central has never had the presidency, or the civilian presidency, and the south-east has never had one. Even if there is a claim to be made, these are the zones that could make such a claim. But for you to think that you have helped someone ... therefore it is your turn ... that is your problem ... Nigerians will come to decide what is best for them given what we have gone through. (Aiyede 2022:n.p.)

The argument is that fair representation will be a recipe for peaceful co-existence in a multi-ethnic country such as Nigeria. The rotational political arrangement has been entrenched in Nigerian politics to ensure that no part is unduly marginalised. However, even in the Constitution, the principle of federal character, which has been serially abused, is enunciated to create an avenue for citizens in all parts of the country to be fairly represented in government. In my opinion, the federal character was entrenched to guard against social Darwinism. Rotational political arrangement also percolates to the state and local government levels, and each zone is expected to bring forth its best candidate to steer the development of the country.

However, the two major political parties have jettisoned the principle of rotational presidency in the build-up to the 2023 general elections. In May 2022, the PDP elected a presidential candidate from the North rather than one from the South. The APC elected a presidential candidate from the South-West even though it would fairly have been the turn of the South-East. In addition to this ethnic intrigue, there is a religious implication, which, in fact, is the main issue of concern here. Tinubu, the APC presidential candidate is a Muslim; he has also chosen a Muslim from the North, Kashim Shettima as his vice-presidential running mate; thus, heightening Muslim-Christian tension. It is these incidents that have been generating controversies in both ethnic and religious circles, which will be analysed subsequently.

In the meantime, Tinubu has argued that religion does not matter in Nigeria's politics. According to him, he has chosen his running mate based on competence rather than religious or ethnic affiliation. However, since 1999, and for the most part of the political history of Nigeria, religious tightrope walking has been a major destabilising factor in political development.

Religious identity has played significant (and adverse) roles in Nigerian politics. 'The influence of this religious code has led to deadly confrontations between Muslims and Christians over the years' (Olawale 2020:10). As Campbell and Page (2018:5) observe, 'Nigeria is at the junction between Christianity and Islam, and more broadly, where the modern

and the traditional overlap.' They (Campbell & Page 2018) further note:

First, they would identify themselves with a particular family, either nuclear or extended. Next, they would volunteer religion ... Then they would note their ethnic group. They might tell you of what State they were 'indigenes' – that is, where their families came from, not necessarily where they lived. And only then would Nigerians conclude that they were also Nigerians. (p. 8)

Campbell and Page's consecutive layer of identity is now being contested on ethnic basis, especially between the North in general and South-Western Nigeria. That is, while in the South-Western region ethnicity now comes first for some of the Christians, in the North religion comes before ethnicity. The argument of this article that will be analysed is this tension within the Christian community.

Conceptualisation of the Christian community

The point of departure is that Christians are a people bound together by Christ. The Christians are those who have turned to God through faith and obtained grace by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ rather than by their self-effort (Eph 2:8–9). The Christians are those whose sins have been forgiven, because Christ has paid the price with his death on the cross. By being saved, the Christian is reconciled to God. In Christ, both the Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God (Eph 2:11–13). By this reconciliation, the Christians, both the Jews and Gentiles, become a united community. Now as fellow citizens of the grace of God, the enmity that existed before as a result of their former ethnic identities as 'strangers and foreigners' is replaced with common sainthood in the household of God (Eph. 2:19). Brügger (2021:20) explains that viewing a Christian in this mode is important, because it indicates that, by Christian unity, an existential rather than a metaphoric bond is implied. This mode of nuancing the body of Christ relates to the immediate, real-life situation of the Christian, particularly in an ever-dynamic world they live in. This understanding also means that every Christian actually and consciously participates in the activities of the community defined by Christ's death and resurrection.

Although Aboyeji (2020) correctly argues that Paul's use of metaphors is most representatively manifest in his reference to 'the body of Christ' to describe the church, he equally notes that it should not be conceived in an absolutely abstract sense. The body of Christ must also be understood in specific contextual terms so that members can effortlessly imagine it and freely comport themselves in its community:

These facts should be regarded as quite strange if the true nature of the church was invisible and universal! However, if the true nature of the church is local and visible then these things are very supportive facts. (Aboyeji 2020:76)

The body refers to a community connected by the blood of Christ to become inter-related persons, bonded and united together. In other words, God has reconciled those who are saved by grace through faith to himself on the one hand, and

Jews and Gentiles on the other (Eph 2:11–22). The conspicuous diversity of the body does not adversely affect its unity and oneness but enhances it and ensures its expansion. This harmony of the corporate community is manifest in both belief and practice, as all members understand themselves in relation with others. This Christian *Ubuntu*, Shutte (2019) wants us to believe, enables individuals to be formed and then grows into full personhood. Ideally, and in African communal context, members of the Christian community collectively act towards achieving a common and defined goal for one and all.

However, the co-operative participation of members stems from their single-mindedness and unity. Thus, the community in its existential struggles works in a relationship with God in Trinity and a relationship with one another through Jesus Christ. This is expressly captured in 2 Corinthians 4:

For God, who said 'Let light shine out of darkness', is the one who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that the extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are experiencing trouble on every side, but are not crushed; we are perplexed, but not driven to despair; we are persecuted, but not abandoned; we are knocked down, but not destroyed, always carrying around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our body. For we who are alive are constantly being handed over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our mortal body. As a result, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. (vv. 6–12)

However, in reality, it has not been as easy as thought. Apart from different nuances of the body, its expansive cultural encounter has waned the love and unity that should naturally thread it together. Divergent voices have arisen on many occasions that have caused disunity in the community. Self-interest has affected the Christian community, so much so, that it sometimes becomes difficult to distinguish it from other communities to which it should have been a model. Scholars such as Tshaka (2007; 2014) and Sekkhaulelo (2022) have raised important issues in reconciling faith with ethnic and existential challenges. Tshaka argues that, as Christians, we need to handle the issues of faith and ethnic identity carefully, because they are delicate. According to him, we must recognise that there is an inner connectivity to God, as well as with one's community. Sekkhaulelo (2022), on the other hand, wants us to realise that self-interest has over-ridden the politics of common good. He adds that, as Christians, we do know what is good for all, irrespective of our social or ethnic differences.

Reinhold Niebuhr presses it home this way:

The ... error consists in defining a Christian in terms which assume that consistent selflessness is possible. No Christian, even the most perfect, is able 'always' to consider the common interest before his own. At least he is not able to do it without looking at the common interest with eyes colored by his own ambitions. If complete selflessness were a simple possibility, political justice could be quickly transmuted into perfect love;

and all the frictions, tensions, partial cooperations, and overt and covert conflicts could be eliminated. If complete selflessness without an admixture of egoism were possible, many now irrelevant sermons and church resolutions would become relevant. Unfortunately there is no such possibility for individual men; and perfect disinterestedness for groups and nations is even more impossible. (Wariboko 2022:120)

In Nigeria, for instance, Aboyeji (2020:86) observes that the Christian community does not often consider that moral harm to one person is moral harm to all the members of the body. Ethnicity, politics, denominationalism and pecuniary temptation, among others, have gravely affected the Christian body in Nigeria in such a way that it has sometimes become almost difficult to speak with one voice.

This has impacted how the Nigerian Christian community is currently reacting to the political-existential challenge it faces. Wariboko (2022) would want us to be careful by suggesting that such occasional dissonance or self-interest disrupts the organic unity of the community. According to him (Wariboko 2022:120), there are times when 'self-interest' pits members of a community against the whole, but what the whole community needs to do in that instance is to 'necessarily entertain it even as it resists it, that is, resists its illegitimate expressions'.

In recent times, there is nothing that brought the Christian community in Nigeria together more than the imagined or real fear of the Islamisation agenda, which is seen as an existential threat to the Christians' individual and corporate existence. Any political policy of government framed in terms of Islamising the country is rebuffed immediately with high velocity and tonality. In the build-up to the 2015 elections to 2015 elections, the Islamisation agenda resonated prominently when Buhari, a Muslim, wanted to choose Tinubu, also a Muslim, as his presidential running mate. The reaction from the Christian community was coherent and united, pointedly denouncing it as an attempt to Islamise the country. Buhari, whom Tinubu himself had described in 2003 as fanatically dangerous and poisonous to the unity of the country, had to back out from the Muslim-Muslim ticket in 2015, and instead allegedly sponsored Yemi Osinbajo, a pastor in the Redeemed Christian Church of God (Igboin 2021):

Buhari was perceived to be an Islamic bigot once reported to have told fellow Muslims in northern Nigeria to never vote for a non-Muslim ... He was also seen as a northern Muslim revanchist who would complete the Islamization agenda begun by two former Nigerian military dictators, also Muslims from northern Nigeria, Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. (Adelakun 2022:84)

Bishop David Oyedepo, the founder of Living Faith Church Worldwide (aka Winners' Chapel) was very vociferous against the Islamisation agenda and the need for the Christian community to watch and pray. Oyedepo framed his theological messages in war metaphor and prophetically challenged the Christian community against compromise and Islamic rapprochements. At a time when Boko Haram,

the insurgent group was demanding President Goodluck Jonathan to embrace Islam as a condition for peace, Oyedepo called the Christian community to rise against what he calls 'Islamic demons', who were bent on converting the country into an Islamic state (Adelakun 2022:72). Oyedepo openly warned the Christian community not to be deceived by Buhari's sudden romancing with the community, as it was a pretentious ploy to harm it if he won eventually. Buhari's unpretentious Islamic agenda over the last seven years has intensified the call for the Christian community in Nigeria to be even more aware now of a Muslim-Muslim ticket. With this brief background, the Christian community's current reaction to this political development is examined.

The arguments among some Christians in the South-Western region for and a Muslim-Muslim ticket-Muslim ticket will now be examined. According to Joshua Oyebamiji, the vice-chairman of APC Oyo state, South-Western region Nigeria, *àwa l'ókàn*, has a divine support, because it is a response to prayer. According to Oyebamiji (InsideOyo 2022),

We prayed and worked for the emergence of Asiwaju Bola Tinubu as the Presidential candidate of our party and God has answered our prayers because *'àwa l'ókàn'* [it is our turn] ... If you go out and talk about this (Tinubu's aspiration) to 10 people out there, hardly will you see two that will say otherwise. It simply means it is the turn of the Yorubas. Awolowo tried and failed. Abiola tried and failed. This time around that we (Yorubas) have the opportunity, you want us to lose it? (n.p.)

Two issues are raised here: Firstly, a Muslim-Muslim ticket in a pluralistic country such as Nigeria is a product of answer to prayer from a Christian God in a country where battles for God abound. In other words, God, as the argument goes, does not discriminate against individual's faith or ethnicity, because he is the creator of all humanity. Oyebamiji seems to argue that God in the Bible used non-Israelites to achieve his purpose for the children of Israel. He added that God has to specially answer the prayer of the South-Western Christians over and above other zones that have not had the opportunity to have their aspiration fulfilled. Grounding *àwa l'ókàn* in a Christian divine argument, as will be later espoused, raises critical questions. Secondly, the failure of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Moshood Abiola followed the same trajectory: Awolowo, a politician of the South-West and a Christian, chose another Christian from the South-East, Chief Philip Umeadi, as a running mate. In the case of Abiola, a Muslim of the South-West, he chose a Muslim of the North-East, Alhaji Babagana Kingibe, as running mate. Both failed, perhaps, because of their insensitive disposition to the religious and ethnic composition of the country.

The incumbent vice-president, Yemi Osinbajo, a Christian from the South-West has been an object of constant attacks by some Christians in the South-Western region in order to justify the emergence of Tinubu. According to this argument, for the past seven years in office, Osinbajo has not done 'anything' for the zone and Christians in general. He has helplessly watched while Christians are being massacred across the country. He only goes on condolence visits and

preaches calmness in the face of provocation. The argument goes further that, as a Christian, he should have resigned in protest to demonstrate his love for Christians or confront the president or act differently. Osinbajo's failure to choose any of these options is tantamount to non-representation (Discussion/NACS/WhatsApp/Platform2022)⁵. When confronted that Osinbajo is not the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and that this position cannot be constitutionally exercised by the vice-president as long as the president is alive and, given the fact that Osinbajo does not attend security meetings of the heads of security agencies with the president, the counterargument is that these reasons were strong enough for his immediate resignation.

In addition, Osinbajo is accused of being incapable of effectively running the economy – a portfolio under his direct supervision. Truly, Nigeria has undergone two official recessions since 2015 when Buhari came to power. The scrunching inflation, dwindled electricity supply and other inclement business conditions have resulted in many industries and companies relocating from Nigeria to Ghana and elsewhere. Added to these are the inscrutable security challenges which have continuously threatened individuals and corporate bodies. For instance, all the heads of the security agencies, except one, are Muslims from the North; yet the North is the most volatile and insecure part of the country. In July 2022, bandits attacked the Presidential Brigade Guard near Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, and the president's advance convoy in the president's home state of Katsina. The sustained, but unenviable, mindless political corruption in the Buhari government that has led the country into humongous debt, both locally and internationally, has not helped has not helped the economy to grow (Igboin 2022). The fall of the Naira, the national currency has worsened the already grubby economic situation. Consequently, Nigeria has been witnessing an unstable economic environment. However, all these interlocking reasons cannot be solely and rationally docked in the footsteps of the vice-president alone.

Osinbajo is touted as 'a Judas who betrayed his master'. According to this position, it was Tinubu who brought Osinbajo into the political limelight. For Osinbajo, the incumbent vice-president who has contested with his 'political godfather is a complete betrayal beyond redemption. It is treasonable to say the least. In fact, this is the end of the political journey of this man [Osinbajo]' (D. Olayiwola, pers. comm., 16 July 2022). Olayiwola argues that Osinbajo should have known that in politics there should be respect for godfathers, irrespective of religious subscription. He defends Tinubu by arguing that he is not a fanatical Muslim such as Buhari. Olayiwola further defends Tinubu's role in hugely supporting Buhari based on a political rather than a same-faith project. Buhari has contested and failed three times in 2003, 2007 and 2011 before winning in 2015. In the years he lost, he had won

5.A discussion in the Nigerian Association of Christian Studies WhatsApp platform NACS on 12 July, 2022 contributed to by Olusola Niyi, Samuel Okanlawon among others. Phone no.: +2348160220622

elections in Muslim-dominated states. In 2003, Tinubu had described Buhari as an unrepented Muslim fanatic and autocrat that should not be allowed to come into power again after his draconian regime as a military head of state in 1983–1985. He projected Buhari as a fanatic that would unseat the relative unity of the country and plunge it into religious war. In the build-up to the 2015 elections, Buhari started flocking around Catholic bishops and other Christian leaders to change the image of a fanatic he had earned over the years. Buhari had publicly spoken in Hausa to his supporters that Muslims should not vote for Christians. Nevertheless, Olayiwola argues that Tinubu will ensure that there is religious balance in the polity despite choosing a Muslim as his running mate.

O. Abiodun (pers. comm., 16 July 2022), a pastor in one of the leading Pentecostal churches in Nigeria argues that religion does not really matter in Nigerian politics. He states that Tinubu's wife is a pastor in a Pentecostal church and some of his children are Christians. 'Such a family as this [Tinubu's] should be emulated as a solution to the religious crises in the nation.' Abiodun (pers. comm., 16 July 2022) further states that what is crucial is competence:

I think Nigerians ought to be more concerned about competence than religion. Tinubu has shown over the years that he has the requisite competence. Come to Lagos and see what Tinubu did when he was our governor.

Abiodun (pers. comm., 16 July 2022) adds that all Nigerian politicians are corrupt, including a particular presidential candidate who claims to have saved huge sums of money as governor.

A governor who has ideas on development will spend state money to develop his state. For a governor to claim to have saved that kind of money and left it behind, it show [sic] that he is not competent.

Abiodun believes that the claim of spending less state funds on more projects is a bad excuse because, 'in this Nigeria, every politician is a thief'. Even though Abiodun's defence of Tinubu explicitly indicts him as corrupt, he believes that the democratisation of corruption, that is, illegally enriching one's cronies, is better than saving state money.

E. Adewale (pers. comm., 16 July) caustically criticised the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) for acting as a political arm of the opposition party, the PDP. Adewale argues that CAN was fanning the embers of religious crisis by its rejection of a Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket. He posits that CAN's stringent position on the issue may lead to its disintegration if the churches in the South-Western region withdraw their membership. Even O. Abiodun (pers. comm., 16 July 2022) who is a pastor thinks:

[I]t is possible that the leadership of CAN has been compromised. I know that the President of CAN is from the South-West, but that does not mean he is right on this. What has CAN been doing since 2015 when Christians are being killed right, left and centre?

Is it now that it can get its voice? There is politics in CAN. CAN should know that it is not a political party.

Although CAN is not a partisan body, it was established to defend the rights of Christians in Nigeria politically and legally.

A. Ajayi (pers. comm., 24 July 2022) also supports Tinubu's presidential ambition on the grounds that 'he is our baba [father]. How can you leave your own and vote for somebody else? If he will die there, let him die there, *awa l'okan*.' Ajayi (pers. comm., 24 July 2022) argues that Tinubu did not create the numerous problems Buhari's administration is now widely known for, and therefore he (Tinubu) should not be judged on that basis.

If you assist someone to get a job, will you also help the person to do the job? That's the case of Tinubu and Buhari even though they are in the same party.

Ajayi also vehemently disagrees with the Christian position in the North that they will not support Tinubu's Muslim-Muslim ticket. According to her, the Christians from the North should understand that 'they cannot stop him [Tinubu] from reaching his goal. By the grace of God, we will vote for him and he will win in 2023.'

However, there are also many Yoruba Christians that have openly argued against Tinubu's ambition. These Christians argue that Tinubu's ambition ought not to divide the Christian body. According to F. Femi (pers. comm., 16 July 2022):

I actually do not see why Christians should be divided in this matter. The Bible is extant about it. Our experience in the hands of Muslim leaders in the nation should guide us in making our choices. I believe that religion matters in politics in Nigeria. I also believe that genuine Christians should know that the blood of Jesus is thicker than the blood of ethnicity, particularly when it comes to the matters of the rights of persecuted Christians. Look at Nigeria today: how many Christians have they killed in cold blood? What has the government done to stop it? Recently, Miss Deborah Samuel was immolated in broad daylight. Nothing happened after that. During Obasanjo, did they dare to treat us this way? My brother, Muslims are Muslims everywhere. Christians must be wise at this moment.

In Northern Nigeria, there appears to be a stronger and more unified voice against the Muslim-Muslim ticket by the Christians than in the South-Western region. Most Christian bodies and leaders in the North have unequivocally rejected the same-faith ticket. They argue that it does not only compromise the multi-religious composition of the country, but also confines them to second class citizens. The argument that there are no competent Christians in the North, unambiguously suggests that Christians are inconsequential in national polity and development. Dogara (2022), the immediate past Speaker of the House of Representatives and a Christian from the North, submits:

But when it comes to choosing between the love and admiration I have for an individual and what is right and what I believe

represents my vision for Nigeria, my choice will clearly be for the latter ... It is a rude awakening and I am happy it happened sooner than later. The very fact that they said we should not worry about Muslim-Muslim ticket while a Muslim-Christian ticket gave them sleepless nights should make me worry the more. To worry about a Muslim-Christian ticket while counselling others not to worry about a Muslim-Muslim ticket is the very textbook definition of cognitive dissonance and an attempt at gaslighting gullible Christians.

Dogara (2022) further argues that the badge of incompetence tipped on millions of Christians from the North and inconsequential demographic strength in deciding electoral victory are baseless as evidence suggests to the contrary:

I do not want to speak to the argument that there is no Christian competent enough to be Vice-President because as we all know, that is hogwash. It only speaks to the need to deliberately exclude – whereas the need now is for inclusion.

Dogara articulates how religious, racial or ethnic and gender balancing is shaping global politics, especially in the United States, United Kingdom and other major democracies. If Nigeria refuses to embrace such progressive political dynamism of inclusion, ‘the only alternative is the road to Yugoslavia’, but:

[A]s long as God remains the God of justice, may we continue to resist injustice to our sinews, no matter who is for or against it because it is the requirement of the just God. (Dogara 2022)

For Christians from the North, he posits that strength is not always reckoned in terms of number alone, but in formidable unity that even a minority can garner.

In the same vein, Lawal (2022), the former Secretary to the Federal Government and a Christian from the Northern region who is also a leading member of the ruling APC, argues that the Muslim-Muslim ticket is a strategic agenda of the party to systematically wipe out Christians in the northern region. Lawal statistically projects how tertiary institutions in the Northern region have been taken over by Muslims even though Christians are more educated. Lawal posits that the competency argument is unfounded, as there is no empirical evidence to prove that Muslims from the North are more competent than Christians. He (Lawal 2022) heckles:

Why are they instead hiring fake bishops and fake church groups to further embarrass the Church? Why are they embarking on a vicious media war against CAN and the Church? ... Spare us these sanctimonious lectures on ‘competence’ and the cliché ‘religion of the candidates do [sic] not matter.’ The truth is that the 2023 presidential election will be all about religion ... Clearly, there is an agenda to politically, religiously, and economically suppress and oppress the Northern Christians. But we are up to the task ... The PVC and our prayers will be our weapons of choice and we will massively deploy them in 2023.

The APC Christians from the North resolved to be bonded together by their common faith in Christ. They also resolved to engage in inter-faith consultation to ensure that their

existential survival in the face of oppressive measures against them is guaranteed.

Conclusion

We can ascertain from the foregoing that the Christian community is not speaking with one voice about the political issue that concerns them. The Muslim-Muslim ticket apparently affects the Christians in the South-Western region differently from those in the Northern part of the country, for the former, ethnic solidarity is imperative and more sagacious, but in the North, existential survival is critical, given their experience of inter-religious violence. The prevalent existential threat to Christianity in the face of Islamisation has been made to appear non-threatening at this moment in the South-Western region, while it is heightened in the North. The Christians in the Northern region are bound together by relations through becoming part of the body of Christ by the death of Jesus Christ. In the South-Western region, it, however, appears that ‘ethnic blood’ suffices to bind and bond them together. Beyond ethnicity, Christian ethics demands that fairness and equity should guide Christians in making a critical decision that affects the body of Christ rather than resort to the politics of *Emi l’ókàn*, which depicts selfishness and injustice.

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