

MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND EGYPTIAN POLITICS (1954-2010)

(A Lesson for Nigeria in her quest for a true Democracy)

ISIDORE U. NWANAJU

Department of Philosophy and Religion, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria

Abstract: Religion and Politics play very important roles in the life of every individual and society, directly or indirectly, willingly or unwillingly. This is an indication that both are inevitable aspects of human existence. In the course of human history, however, there have been exaggerations of their influence in the polity. Sometimes, these roles have been translated into fundamentalism, violence, and fanaticism. Examples abound, and I like to use two countries to buttress my argument in this paper: the wrong interpretation and application of religion and politics in Egypt (where I lived and studied for two years, 2006-2008) and Nigeria where I am born and bred. It is a glaring fact that in Africa and in Nigeria particularly, Christianity and Islam have shown various faces of the above-mentioned 'translations' associated with religion and politics. Sometimes, they have allowed themselves to produce religious and political disorders – a complete opposite of what they are supposed to achieve in human society. It is my intention in this paper to consider the role of a particular group called the 'Muslim Brotherhood' in shaping the religious and political history of an African country called Egypt, and to use the development and possible misuse of the same and similar group in Nigeria to remind the citizenry of the dangers of religious extremism in the practice of democracy in a secular state. In the light of this, one cannot but mention the most recent ugly incident perpetrated by the *Boko Haram* sect in Northern Nigeria since 2009. It would therefore not be an exaggeration to maintain that if *Boko Haram* was a Brotherhood, it was simply an anomaly. At best, one can refer to it as a secret cult, detrimental to both religion and society. The world has witnessed its havoc in the last six years. Thus, it is my candid opinion that honest and genuine co-existence rooted in love and mutual acceptance of one another would enhance progress and development in Nigeria, and in the world as a whole. The globalized world cannot but co-operate to eradicate religious violence and fanaticism.

Keywords: Muslim Brotherhood, religion, *Boko Haram*, fundamentalism, violence, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

The reality of the religious association of Muslims called 'the Muslim Brotherhood', *Al Ikhwan al Muslimun*, cannot be denied without serious consequences, especially in the history of religious and political development in Egypt, which I wish to explore in this paper from the time of President 'Abd al-Nasser in 1954 to Hosni Mubarak since 1981¹. To understand the role of this body in Egypt, I will trace its historical development, explain its involvement in Egyptian politics and religion, as well as presenting some of the criticisms leveled against its mode of operation. However, it would be unfair to overlook some of the positive attributes of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially as it tries to defend itself against the accusation of, fanaticism, violence, terrorism and fundamentalism. It is also important to note from the onset that no single paper or individual can explain the entire 'mystery' of the Muslim Brotherhood as it keeps unfolding and expanding its horizons, even beyond the frontiers of Egypt, claiming to fight and regain sovereignty to 'Allah'² through the strictest application of the Shari'ah³ in all Islamic states, and those supposed (like Nigeria) to belong to the league of

¹ The three major periods in the history of this organization in Egypt are: 1928-1938; 1939-1954; 1954 to the present day. This paper will concentrate itself with the last phase of its development.

² In Islam, Allah means 'The One and Only God'

³ It means Islamic law derived from the Quran and Muhammad's teaching and example.

Islamic States. This is a call to return to the classical Islamic understanding of the juridical theory of the State in which case, political authority was understood within the framework of a jurisprudence as the instrument through which the application of the main tenets of the divine message is overseen. In other words, Sovereignty is not for the ruler or for the clergy, but for the Word of God as embodied in Shari`ah. This is why the ideal Islamic state is not an autocracy or a theocracy, but rather a monarchy⁴. By extension, the paper will consider the activities of the Boko Haram, which considered itself a Muslim Brotherhood aimed at eradicating every trace of western influence especially education in Nigeria. The excesses of this group caused a lot of havoc in some Northern States of Nigeria last year leading to people asking about the religious rationale behind their violent and destructive tendencies. Even some others associated them with occultism and dubiousity.

2. THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN EGYPT: INCEPTION AND PRINCIPLE

There was a new dawn in the history of Egypt when in March 1928, a man called Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Ismailia. He was an Egyptian teacher who had received both a traditionally religious and modern education⁵. He achieved this feat with some other six workers (Hafez ‘Abd al-Hamid, Ahmad al-Husari, Fu’ad Ibrahim, ‘Abd ar-Rahman Hassab Allah, Isma’il ‘Iz, and Zaki al-Maghribi) of the Suez Canal Company, arguing that contemporary Islam had lost its social relevance and dominance. They made it clear from its inception that it had religious, political, and social orientations, based on the principle, “Allah is our objective; the Quran is our constitution, the Prophet is our leader; Jihad is our way; and death for the sake of Allah is the highest of our aspirations”⁶. The implication of these chosen and well-stipulated principles was a call for a return to an original Islam, which al-Banna claimed had been corrupted by Western influences⁷, especially the British colonialism strongly felt at the period in question⁸. By so doing, Hassan al-Banna followed the footsteps of earlier reformers like Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, who insisted on the implementation of the Sharia Law based on the Qur’an and the Sunnah - believed to be passed down by Allah, and should be applied to all parts of life, including the organization of the government and daily life/activities.

As I mentioned already, the Muslim Brotherhood was meant to go beyond religious frontiers to influence life in politics and society. As a result of this, al-Banna has been described as a populist, or rather strived to win popular acclamation through the Muslim Brotherhood. For instance, the Brotherhood endeavoured to convince workers of its effort to ensure their protection against the tyranny of foreign and monopolist companies, by founding and building social institutions such as hospitals, pharmacies, schools, etc.

Rapid growth and political activism:

Though the first eight years of the inception of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt experienced a slow growth in membership (ca. 800 members in 1936), there was a rapid growth in its membership in the next few years, such that by the year 1938, there were more than 200,000 members and by the early 50’s the membership had swollen to two million people, even crossing the frontiers of Egypt to other Arab countries such as Lebanon (1936), Syria (1937), and Transjordan (1946). With the increase in number and political involvement, the members began to lose the favour of the government. In November 1948, for instance, the police seized some supposed “secret apparatus” belonging to the association, found to be containing prohibitable information and activities capable of undermining the peace of the state. On the basis of this development, about 32 leading members were arrested, while in the subsequent month, the Egyptian Prime Minister, Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi, dissolved the Muslim Brotherhood and it seized to be a legitimate association. The measure taken by the government did not please the members of the organization, who in a supposed retaliatory move organized and aided the assassination of the Prime Minister through the instrumentality of one of the radical students, a veterinary medicine student called Abdel Meguid Ahmed Hassan, on December 28, 1948. Indeed, this gory

⁴ Cf. Ayubi, N.N., “Islamic State”, in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, vol. 2, ed. by John L. Esposito, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 320 (pp. 318-325).

⁵ See Esposito, J.L. (ed), *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983. pp.9-10.

⁶ *Muslim Brotherhood Movement Homepage* (<http://www.ummah.net/ikhwan/>).

⁷ Cf. Ramadan, T., *Aux sources du renouveau musulman*, ed. by Dennis Gira, Paris: Bayard Editions/Centurion, 1998, p. 199 (pp.194-201).

⁸ There have been speculations that the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was also aided by the British in order to keep Egyptian nationalism and anti-nationalism at bay, though the present reality in Egyptian politics seems to surpass this particular ideological orientation.

event opened a Pandora box of assassinations and unfriendly relationships between subsequent Egyptian governments and the Muslim Brotherhood. In less than two months after the death of Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi, Al-Banna the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood was also killed in Cairo by supposedly government agents and ardent supporters of the assassinated premier.

Gamal 'Abd al Nasser (1954-1970) and the Muslim Brotherhood:

President Gamal 'Abd al Nasser could be said to have experienced the Muslim Brotherhood at its most complicated stage in the history of its existence in Egyptian religious and political activism. This is because he took over the reins of power when the group was beginning to be associated with a series of assassinations, especially of heads of state in Egypt, beginning with Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi. In fact, after the Second World War, the Muslim Brotherhood acquired a notorious reputation as a radical group ever-ready to use violence and violent means to achieve its goals - religious and political. The group had contacts with the Free Officers before the 1952 Revolution and supported most of their initial policies. But the Muslim Brotherhood soon came into conflict with 'Abd al Nasser whose government accused the Brotherhood of complicity in alleged 1954 plot to assassinate the president. Thus, there was enough reason to imprison many of its leaders.

It is still on record that throughout his period of governance in Egypt many of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood were held in various prisons, if not concentration camps. So many of them died as result of torture while the others who survived the torments of prisons were executed. For instance, not less than 21 Muslim Brothers were killed in their cells in June 1957. One could say without contradiction that life was not easy for the Muslim Brothers throughout the period of Nasser because those who succeeded in evading arrest either lived in hiding for the whole period or ran away from Egypt to avoid the fate.

Prominent among those arrested and tortured during this period was a member called Sayyid Qutb. He was famous as the editor of the Society's Newspaper, as well as well-known for writing fiction, literary criticism, and other articles on political and social issues⁹. He is also still known for his famous bestseller, "Social Justice in Islam", which dwelt on principles of Islamic Socialism. He was not only a writer but also the Brotherhood's most influential thinker, such that in 1959, he got the responsibility from the Brotherhood's General Guide, Hassan Isma'il al-Hudaybi, to look after members detained in various prisons. Sayyid Qutb went further to interpret the situation in the camps in Islamic terms. Thus, one could argue that his writings provided the framework for the re-organisation and re-activation of the Brotherhood in 1956 when some of the members who were not yet officially sentenced were released. A famous woman-leader in the Brotherhood, Zaynab al-Ghazali, head of the Association of Muslim Women helped to organise charitable work to meet the basic needs of the nearly-devastated Muslim Brothers. Their 'ugly experience' led to a gradual but strong orientation towards vengeance.

Since this paper is not particularly concentrating on the life of Sayyid Qutb, we shall mention his roles in providing the analytical framework for assessing Nasser's regime and possible dethronement only in passing, especially when deemed necessary, as already done in the last few lines. It suffices to say that Qutb regarded Nasser's regime as totalitarian and a state of Jahiliyyah (way of life characterised by ignorant hostility towards God's will, especially by imposing individuals' own value systems, instead of accepting God's sovereignty). For him, therefore, the way out of such jahiliyyah is "declaration of the total sovereignty and rulership of God (al-hakimiyah)"¹⁰. These ideas contained in his book, "Milestones", published in 1964 provided a turning point in the history of the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and Nasser's government. According to Sayyid Qutb, "Islam is not merely a belief, so that it is enough merely to preach it. Islam, which is a way of life, takes practical steps to organise a movement for freeing man"¹¹.

The radical views of Sayyid Qutb led to two major opposing groups in the Muslim Brotherhood - those who opted for immediate revolutionary change in Egypt with the possible elimination of Nasser and those who advocated reforms based on educational pursuit. Whereas the former were mainly promoted by young Muslim radicals, the later was supported by some elderly members of the Brotherhood like Zaynab al-Ghazali. In August 1965, the government made a swoop on the

⁹ See Musallam, A.A., "Prelude to Islamic Commitment: Sayyid Qutb's Literary and Spiritual Orientation, 1932-1938", in *The Muslim World*, Vol. LXXXI, No.1, 1991, p.182 (pp.177-189).

¹⁰ Ayubi, N.N., "Muslim Brotherhood: An Overview", in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, vol.3, ed. by John L. Esposito, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.185 (pp.183-187).

¹¹ Qutb, S., *Milestones*, Lebanon: The Holy Koran Publishing House, 1980, p. 137.

members leading to the destruction of the village of Kardasa. So many of the members were arrested, tortured, and killed. In August 1966, Sayyid Qutb, himself, was hanged. Describing the atmosphere at the period in question in Egypt, R. P. Mitchell wrote,

Having begun to emerge from incarceration and from the shadows of Egypt's political life by 1964, members of the organization became involved in some kind of conspiracy against the regime of President Gamal Abd-al-Nasir. Arrests were made beginning in the summer of 1965 and for the remainder of the year and through the first half of 1966; more arrests and trials culminated on 21 August 1966 in the sentencing of the Supreme State Security Court of seven Brothers to death by hanging and a hundred or so more to prison terms of varying lengths¹².

After Sayyid Qutb's death, the polarisation between the revolutionary block and the reformist group became very much pronounced. But one could say that it was the latter that held sway, insisting on the need for educational advancement for an eventual reform of the Egyptian society. In fact, it is this option that has prevailed on the organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, though earning it the aversion of revolutionary militant groups, who see themselves betrayed and weakened in their struggle to win the whole Egyptian society to Islam and Allah.

Anwar Sadat and the Muslim Brotherhood (1970-1981):

After 16 years of hard and seemingly harsh relationship between Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Anwar Sadat tried to show a different kind of policy of economic liberalisation aimed at softening living conditions for the people. It was called the "Infitah" or "Open door"¹³. In an effort to ameliorate the political measures of the previous regime in favour of the Brothers, Sadat closed the concentration camps in 1971 and released some of the imprisoned members of the Brotherhood. According to Yvonne Y. Haddad, "Qutb's writings have also had a special impact on Islamic groups in Egypt, especially after 1971 when Sadat allowed them to resume their activities in an effort to combat his socialist opposition. His writings had the special poignancy for those who shared the torture of Egyptian prisons under Nasser regime. Sadat's assassins came from one of the many groups who quote Qutb for justification of their revolutionary fervor"¹⁴. Yvonne's viewpoint seems to justify some critics of Sadat's reforms regarding whether they were to serve his regime right or not. The answer is imbedded in the experiences he had with the Muslim Brothers and other Islamists during his nine-year regime and the eventual supreme prize paid with his life. For Raymond Baker, "the death of the defeated Nasser and the succession of Anwar el-Sadat in 1971 paved the way for yet another return of the Muslim Brothers. As Sadat moved his regime to the right on all levels, he turned to the Islamist current to contain the old Nasserists and other elements of the left. Less than five years after Sayyid Qutb's martyrdom, the Muslim Brothers reemerged to play their most important role in Egyptian public life since the 1940s"¹⁵. The success of the resurgent radicalism could be proved by the fact that though the Muslim Brotherhood remained banned and illegal, all those imprisoned by Nasser were granted general amnesty in 1975.

During Anwar Sadat's regime, there was nothing again like 'General Guide' for the Muslim Brotherhood, such a title ending with the death of Hudaybi in 1973. In his place, there was a prominent spokesperson called Umar Talmasani. Generally speaking, the Brotherhood refused to accord its total allegiance to the regime of Sadat despite the amnesty granted its imprisoned members.

During the time of Sadat, the Brotherhood went further to demand for the complete adoption and application of the Shari'ah law, and in 1980 the government succumbed to pressure, amending the constitution to state that the Shari'ah "is the main source of all legislation". However, the Brotherhood did not succeed in all its requests. For instance, the government refused to recognise it as a legal political party, though in 1976 it allowed the group to publish its monthly newspaper, "Al-Da'wa" (The Invitation to Islam), as well as allowing it to operate and publish until its closure in 1981.

¹² Mitchell, R. P., *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966, xxiii.

¹³ Reid, D.M., *Cairo University and the making of Modern Egypt*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1990, p.215.

¹⁴ Haddad, Y.Y., "Sayyid Qutb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival" in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. by John L. Esposito, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 68 (pp. 67-98).

¹⁵ Baker, R., "Egypt" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. by John L. Esposito, vol. 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.434. (pp.428-436).

It is important to mention again that Sadat's economic liberalisation policy led to a serious misunderstanding with the Brotherhood, especially with severe price increases for basic necessities. With the drastic fall in the provision of public services, as well, opposition started mounting, such that there was a riot in January 1977. Since students were the worst hit by these degrading living conditions, some Islamic activist groups capitalized on the situation to ferment trouble and misunderstanding. The famous monthly newspaper, Al-Da'wa used the opportunity as well to support the student Islamic movement, thus inviting members of the Muslim Brotherhood to speak at special gatherings organized by student groups on Islamic holidays. The trap paid out because when the government started using riot police to check student protests, the Muslim Brotherhood saw an opening to register their dissatisfaction with the government and gained popularity among the people.

The Muslim Brotherhood cannot be said to be completely against the regime of Sadat. For instance, they made consistent effort to reject and obstruct the revolutionary and terrorist violence of the militant Islamic groups trying to ferment trouble throughout the period of Anwar Sadat. But their effort was not enough to prevent one of the groups, the Al-Jihad, from assassinating him in October 1981. The Brotherhood accused police brutality as the reason for the militant assassination of Sadat and the upsurge in Islamic radicalisation and extremism - an appeal they claimed fell on insensitive ears. But a more generally accepted notion for his assassination was his role in the peace process with Israel. His Camp David agreement with Israel saw the eventual expulsion of Egypt from the Arab League until 1989. It is interesting to know that arrested Muslim Brothers accused of Sadat's assassination were released some months after Hosni Mubarak took over power in 1982, thus ushering in another regime and new battle for supremacy in the Egyptian political and religious society.

Hosni Mubarak (1981- present) and the Muslim Brotherhood:

Hosni Mubarak succeeded Anwar Sadat in 1981, and in the last 29 years one could say that the relationship between the government and the Muslim Brotherhood has not recorded a huge change. Mubarak is known as a moderate. At best, the relationship between the Muslim Brothers and the government is still at the level it was when Sadat left the stage of governance - a certain degree of tolerance from the government with the Brotherhood still considered officially illegal. The illegality is driven to the level that it is not allowed to distribute literature and assemble in public. There are also periodic arrests of the members when the government deemed them security problems, such as after attacks on tourists and resort areas a few years ago. Generally, it is observable that the society has remained non-violent in its reformatory measures hoping for the day Egypt would become an ideal Islamic state. But campaigners for political reform have become more vocal in recent times and have taken to the streets in defiance of an emergency law, in force since 1981, arguing that the law restricts political expression.

The Muslim Brotherhood has also published two newspapers (Liwa' al-Islam, "The Banner of Islam", and al-l'tisam, "Adherence"). There are also regional and national offices belonging to the Brotherhood. They make public statement from time to time and sell books by prominent members of the Brotherhood to the public through their bookshops.

The Brotherhood has continued to influence the lives of so many people, especially the youth. For instance, its membership and influence increase steadily, despite emergency rules and political restrictions. There are visible and growing number of charitable Islamic Organisations as well as private mosques. But some of them have been seen as breeding centres of dissent with the government. For instance, "in 1975, an internal survey conducted by the Ministry of Awqaf calculated that the nation's mosques then totaled 28,738. Of this number, 5,163 belonged to the government system and the rest, 23,575, were classified as private"¹⁶. It is not presently ruled out that their members have also penetrated state bureaucracies and hold positions of authority. The Brotherhood and its revivalist activities have given many people, especially the young educated and jobless some degree of solace, not really in the area of material good, but largely through growth in piety and Islamic learning. Most young people have learnt to live simple lives of religious piety and dedication to Allah, though no wonderful alternatives could be easily imagined in their present circumstance. This stance of life enables their optimism that the future would be better than their present suffering and hardship. The solidarity exhibited by the Brotherhood has often given them an edge in elections into government offices, professional and administrative bodies, such as those of doctors, teachers, pharmacists, engineers, etc. For aiding the Brotherhood to attain certain goals, the young members are in turn provided with moderate programme of health insurance, low-interest loans and training to fill in some inadequacies experienced in the course of their education in the university.

¹⁶ Gaffney, P.D., "The Changing Voices of Islam: The Emergence of Professional Preachers in Contemporary Egypt" in *The Muslim World*, vol. LXXXI, No. 1, 1991, p.40 (pp.27-47).

The Muslim Brotherhood has recorded some successes when given the opportunity to contest as opposition parties in parliamentary elections because it has mass appeal¹⁷. For instance in the 1984 elections where they ran candidates for the Wafd party and in 1987 when it was permitted to contest again. In 2007, the Brotherhood contested in the name of the Labour Party, receiving more votes than other opposition parties. But the Brotherhood still sees these measures as not being enough for their intended goal of making Egypt a complete Islamic state.

This is not to say that the Muslim Brotherhood has had it very rosy because after the two experiments of 1984 and 1987, there dawned again an era of suspicion such that in 1992, 1995, and 1996, the government applied further restrictions, sometimes combined with arrests and imprisonments. They have been accused of, and charged to be terrorist groups, and occasionally do not win popular support, especially from the upper middle class.

There has been a development in the political orientation of the Muslim Brotherhood, whereby a group of prominent middle-generation leaders left the Brotherhood and joined with several Copts to form a new political party, called WASAT (Centre). "Centre" aims at representing a civic platform based on the Islamic faith, which believes in pluralism and the alternation of power. This political party is secular oriented and has the support of secular intellectuals, although all the efforts it has made to be recognized as a legal political party has not yielded much fruit. The Muslim Brotherhood has also made frantic efforts to show that it is open-minded, distancing itself from the religious intolerance and anti-Semitism manifested in its official newspaper in the 1970s. Even Copts are welcomed with open hands, citing Hassan al-Banna as having two Copts as his assistants. They confess publicly that Banna himself was not prejudiced against Copts and Christians in general. However, some of these declarations have failed to convince the government and other people who see it as a cloak to win legality and unleash mischief. If he is to be taken seriously, one can say that the statement of Mohammad Mahdi Akef - elected the General Guide of the Brotherhood in 2004 - still has some relevance in portraying the goodwill of the Brotherhood. He said: "Islam dignifies Christians and Jews and we hope they treat us the same way. The ignorance of people is what is causing a grudge among them and their religion"¹⁸.

Presently, there could be said to be an uneasy tension between the Muslim Brotherhood and the ruling government of President Hosni Mubarak under the political banner called National Democratic Party. Whereas the former is doing everything possible to take over the political arena, the latter is working very hard to consolidate its power and maintain its authority. It is not really known how the era of Mubarak would end, though there is a strong speculation that his son Gamal Mubarak is being groomed to take over the reins of political leadership - a move speculated to have strong Western support.

Politics, Religion And Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt:

Although I have mentioned some political roles played by the Muslim Brotherhood in the historical development of the relationship between her and various governments in Egyptian history, particularly since its inception in 1928, I would like to highlight them again in this section. First, it is important to mention that Islamic political activism has a very long history in the Egyptian society. This is traceable particularly to the end of the First World War when Hassan al Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. It became a radical group, however, after the Second World War when it was observed that the group was ready to be violent in the achievement of its goals, especially religious ones. As already mentioned, the Muslim Brotherhood was deeply connected with the assassination of a Prime Minister, Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi. It was also associated with the failed plot to assassinate Nasser in 1954, a few years after the Egyptian revolution. It was this incident that heightened the tension between the government of Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the political era of the former. Many members of the group were imprisoned and tortured.

The era of Anwar Sadat saw a very militant Brotherhood, already functioning in three factions. Though he granted many of the imprisoned members of the Muslim Brotherhood amnesty, an extremely militant group of the three factions was vehemently committed to a policy of political opposition to the government and were ready to pay the price. The second faction was, however, concerned with a peaceful withdrawal from the society and the creation or formation of a parallel society based on strict Islamic values and laws. There was a third faction, which was very moderate and showed deep interest in cooperating with the government to achieve a better Egyptian society.

¹⁷ Sullivan, D. J., "Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, vol.3, ed. by John L. Esposito, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 190 (pp.187-191).

¹⁸ See Mohammad Mahdi Akef, <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/52642AOD-2FCO-4616-8308-19972B99E70F.htm> 2005. He was elected General Guide on 20 April 2004) at the age of 75.

It is generally believed that the great war of June 1967 during which Egypt lost her territory to Israel affected the growth of religiously inspired political activism. It was for Muslims a humiliating experience, reminding them of the almost 150 years of foreign domination by “infidels” and a corruption of what a true Islamic community and tradition stood for - rejection of the idea of non-Muslims dominating Muslim society. It became a discrediting phase for all Muslim leaders who allowed such a domination to take place. True believers saw it a point of duty to fight against such an incursion and win back Islamic land for Muslims. Even radical activists supported and adopted the option of Jihad or holy war¹⁹. It was also believed that this conviction led to the eventual assassination of Anwar Sadat in October 1981. It is to be noted that the reclamation of the Sinai by Egypt in 1973 is still celebrated as a step towards true Islamic State and liberation from external domination.

Actually, the era of Sadat witnessed a rise in Islamic activism, probably because of his tolerance for political activities, especially in the Universities and other institutions of higher learning. Some critics have argued that it was a tolerance too much to be associated with a President who inherited a lot of radical Islamic indications from Nasser. Sadat had probably thought that the growth of Islamic groups and associations (Jamaat al Islamiyah) would help him to check the leftist influence among students. But it was not to be the case because sooner than later, he discovered that he could not control the disruptive activities of all these associations in the society he was the leader. The Jamaat al Islamiyah won student union elections, thus providing them with the platform to canvass for very strict Islamic principles of dressing, veiling of women, segregation of classes by gender, etc. Although secular university administrators opposed this trend, they could not withstand the opposition from the radical student groups. In an effort to check the unhealthy situation, Sadat tried to diminish the influence of the associations and transfer the authority of the student unions to University professors and administrators. But it was almost too late as at 1979 when he intensified this effort for reform. The Islamists were not only interested in socio-economic reforms but also in the religio-spiritual growth of the populace. They even argued that the socio-economic problems in the Egyptian society were deeply associated with religious and spiritual failures on the part of the people. They condemned laxity, secularism, and corruption, proffering a return to life of simplicity, hardwork, and self-reliance as solution to the problems.

They vehemently rejected any type of western or communist influence - Marxism or Capitalism. As expected, Jewish Zionism and Christianity were proclaimed arch-enemies of Islam and Muslims. They particularly described the last two as crusader-minded and constituted the major avenues for foreign domination in Islamic lands, especially Egypt. Zionist defeat became a major slogan and goal to be achieved at all costs. They did not spare the orthodox Ulama, like the Al-Azhar scholars in their extremist religious criticism and interpretations. Above all, their common focus was the enthronement of the Shari’ah as the country’s legal code. In fact, in 1980, as already mentioned, Shari’ah became the sole legal code in Egypt. Although the Islamist influence waned to a great extent after the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981, the election of nine members of the Muslim Brotherhood to the People’s Assembly in 1984 revived Islamists’ prospects of making in-road to the Egyptian politics.

A major political landmark was also recorded in 2005 when the Muslim Brotherhood said that it won at least 33 seats in the first round of national assembly elections in Egypt. According to a BBC News Report, ‘A Brotherhood spokesman said the group’s performance, apparently winning a fifth of seats, “confirms in an unquestionable way that the Egyptian people stand behind the Brotherhood and that the Brotherhood really do represent the strongest social and political group in Egypt”²⁰. However, I do strongly doubt the possibility of the government of Mubarak accepting this kind of strong recommendation from the Brotherhood for itself to be the popular opinion.

3. CRITIQUE OF MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN EGYPT

Actions and Beliefs:

The Muslim Brotherhood has been strongly criticized to be insincere in the expression of its actions and beliefs. Its purported non-violent position regarding issues is often seen as being deceptive and only a means of achieving complete Islamization of society. Although it opposes terror, especially against civilians, and condemned the September 11, 2001 attack on the Twin Tower in New York, some critics doubt their sincerity of purpose. Within the Brotherhood itself, such moderate position on issues of vital importance has caused some ripples, with the more radical, violent members breaking away in protest to form other groups like the Al-Gama’a al-Islamiyah (The Islamic Group) and Al Takfir Wal Hijra

¹⁹ The Jihad or holy war is known as the Shia sixth pillar of faith.

²⁰ Cf. Story from BBC NEWS: http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/ft/-/2/hi/middle_east/4442204.stm/2005/11/16 12:27:33GMT

(Excommunication and Migration). In fact, the Muslim Brotherhood has been accused to be a springboard for all kinds of religious terrorism witnessed in modern times - an accusation which holds some water when historically and statistically investigated, and as also proved in the course of its relationship with various Egyptian governments since inception in 1928.

Connections with violence:

The Muslim Brotherhood would find it very difficult to dissociate itself from accusations of linkage to violence. Thus, it is still being accused of the assassination of Egypt's prime minister in 1948, while its strong hatred for Zionism ties it to accusations of fuelling suicide bombing attacks on civilians in Israel. A concrete example is the fact that its counterpart in Palestine - Hamas²¹ - kills civilians and attacks military installations in Israel. The Muslim Brotherhood is also accused of being connected with Al-Qaeda apparatus.

Promotion of inequality for non-Muslims:

There is a strong indication of discrimination against non-Muslims. For instance, there are still speculations that Egypt Coptic Christians are expected to pay the long-abandoned jizya poll tax, levied on non-Muslims alone. Not long ago, in 1997, the Muslim Brotherhood's Supreme Guide Mustafa Mashur argued that top army officials who are Christians should become Muslims since they could be bad omens in the event of war with enemy-countries.

Holocaust denial:

To show their deep-rooted anti-Semitism, the Muslim Brotherhood has even denied the accusation of holocaust against the Nazi Germany during the time of Hitler as mere speculation, as argued by the Egyptian brotherhood leader, Mohammed Mahdi Akef. He refers to it simply as "the myth of the Holocaust", thus defending the position of the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who held that the holocaust was not a reality, and that six million Jews were never exterminated.

4. APPRECIATION OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

Defense against terrorism - Western or Islamic:

The Muslim Brotherhood has won a lot of admiration from many people because of its emphasis on ethical values of society based on Islam and rejection of terrorism, though practice does not always tally with theory. With its rejection of Marxism, atheistic communism and western capitalism, it has won a lot of followers. However, the inherent danger in its teaching is the extremist and fundamentalist tendency of excluding all who are not within the Brotherhood, including Muslims themselves. Sayyid Qutb was a glaring example of the Brotherhood's promotion of Islamic value systems that criticized the Western world's concept of democracy, which he argued was based on an individualistic ideology leading to vast social injustice, colonialism and capitalism. In fact, he saw Islam and its values as the basic solution to the whole of humanity's predicament when he accused the whole world, including Egypt as living in a world of Jahiliyya. For him, the world had derailed and became hostile to the will of God. God's sovereignty must be re-established and it is the major task of the Muslim Brotherhood to do so.

Defense against fundamentalism and political Islam:

The Brotherhood has also made a lot of impact - internally and externally - by aiding the so-called Palestinian Liberation in their fight against what they call the unjust Occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel. It has attracted world attention and discussions of immense values. Although, a Palestinian State is not yet declared by Israel, it is important to note that the Palestinian cause has gained and attracted international attention. Its monthly newspaper, Al-Da'wa (The Invitation to Islam) has often focused on the problem of Palestine. The editors of this newspaper have gone extra mile to

²¹ The Hamas is an Islamic entity which is both political party and a radical Islamic group, often embracing terrorism as a means of attaining its goals of recovering Palestinian occupied territories. It is closely allied with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, of which it is an offshoot in Palestine. It has also links with Iran, ruled by a radical Shi'ite Islamic regime. They emphasise the rule of Islam and eventual victory over infidels. They presently control the Gaza Strip and are referred to by the supporters of Palestinian Authority ruled by Abu Mazen, and who represents the national-secular Fatah action as "Islamic emirate" (illegitimate and lacking any Islamic foundations). But Hamas has rejected its designation as "Islamic emirate". An emirate in the sense it is used is mainly notorious in the history of Islam for the internal rivalries between rulers.

disapprove of the well-celebrated Camp David accords of 1978 and the peace treaty signed by Egypt and Israel in 1979, holding strongly to the viewpoint that Israel would never be faithful to any peaceful resolution of the conflict. This is, however, where it has gone wrong and fuelled the incessant suicide attacks on Israelis with the ugly repercussion of making life very difficult for the already impoverished Palestinian populace.

A source of hope and sustenance for the under-privileged:

As already mentioned the series of charitable organisations and private mosques opened by the Muslim Brotherhood have acted as sources of hope and sustenance for the highly disadvantaged in the Egyptian society, though they often portray the closed mindset of the Brotherhood in certain issues of importance in Egypt. For instance, the Muslim Brothers have used these media to recruit unemployed graduates and fermented social unrest through them. On the other hand, the seminars they have organized have also helped in inculcating moral values in the lives of these young people. Again, it is a well-known fact that under the Brotherhood leadership, several professional associations set up programmes to help remedy practical difficulties encountered by young graduates, offering health insurance, low-interest loans and training to fill in the gaps left by inadequate university courses. However, the same programmes are faced by their own inadequacies ranging from poor financial support to limited resources.

5. MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN NIGERIA: THE EXCESSES OF THE BOKO HARAM AND LESSON FOR NIGERIA²²

As already indicated at the beginning of this paper, I wish to use the historical development of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to drive home some vital lessons for our country Nigeria. First and foremost, it is pertinent to note and realize that Egypt and Nigeria are two strategic countries in Africa – a continent that has been impoverished from different angles: economically, politically, educationally, geographically (considering the harsh weather condition), and unfortunately the self-inflicted religious antagonisms, which the topic under discussion ‘brotherhood’ tries to cover in disguise.

Having lived in a Muslim environment, Cairo precisely, for a long time, I stand a vantage point to defend the use of the word ‘disguise’ to designate the anomaly of the religious misrepresentation of ‘brotherhood’. Islam as religion does not support violence and compulsion (cf Surah 2:256; 24:33). The crude use of force and violence to enforce piety, conversion, and respect for religion is condemned by the Quran. We have noticed that all the effort made by the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt in the last 80 years to impose religious belief on the political terrain has only yielded fear, abhorrence, and disorder. It is true that Egypt has adopted the tag of ‘Islamic State’ in order to appease the pressure of the Islamist groups, the fact remains that so many people confess that they accept it because they cannot do otherwise.

But it is of paramount importance to note that the Egyptian society is not as myopic as some Muslim brothers in Nigeria speculate. This is why it is amazing to observe how much the Egyptian economy benefits from the international community. There are a lot of investment in schools and industry. There are about 200 international private schools in the city of Cairo alone. One cannot imagine the level of tolerance that is operative in an Islamic state like Egypt, especially in its capital city of Cairo. During the years I lived in that city of more than 14 million people, there was no single riot. Christians, Buddhists, Hinduists, and even Atheists were living together, and sometimes sharing flats. Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt can be said to have been reduced to an ideology, pressurising the government non-violently to improve the lot of the people.

This brings us to the reality of Islamist groups and brotherhoods in Nigeria, especially in Northern Nigeria: the Tariqa (Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya), Izala, Maitatsine, Nigerian Muslim Brothers, Muslim Students’ Society of Nigeria, Jama’atu Nasril Islam, Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, State Islam²³, etc. With the latest addition of the Boko Haram to this list, it becomes clear that our story has remained one of continuous violence and destruction of lives and property, especially since the political independence of the country in 1960. I would not consider a historical development of this ugly story in this paper. Suffice it to pick the latest of its kind, the Boko Haram, which rocked the whole nation in July 2009. At a time when Muslim countries like Egypt are doing everything possible to open up to the outside world through investment in education and industry, a group in Nigeria is running amok destroying lives and property in order

²² Boko Haram is literally translated as “Opposition to Western Education” and its civilizing influence on Africa regarded by the members of this sect as the proper and sole domain of Islam.

²³ Cf. Nwanaju, I., *Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria*, Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2008, pp.238-251.

to show her disdain for western education and civilization. But could this group had gone too far in societal destruction had we had a responsible government and governance which a true democracy demands? Good governance puts the human person into consideration, and by implication, inculcates the same into its citizens. The individual is respected and has a place in the daily governance of the state. It is not to be unexpected that any group of persons arises in any society where there is no law and order, and starts menacing the entire populace under various umbrellas including religion. According to John I. Okoye, “it may be that part of the problem of governance in Africa is that the individual is not put seriously enough into consideration”²⁴.

We observe a huge world of difference between the ideological disposition of the first leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) and Mohammed Yusuf (1970-2009), the acclaimed proprietor of the Boko Haram nightmare who wasted a whole lot of human life and property in order to prove his opposition to western education and learning in Nigeria. Again, contrary to the Al-Jihad declared by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which pressed the successive governments for reform and good governance, the Boko Haram proclaimed a jihad of harassment and wanton destruction of innocent lives. This paper would be far from supporting the type of insurrections and assassinations carried out by the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt on their heads of state in Nigeria because bloodshed is universally wrong. On the other hand, a focused and organised Muslim brotherhood in Nigeria aimed at improving the lot of the masses by pressing for good governance without disrupting the society could be a welcome development. Nigeria as a secular state can only succeed and progress if pluralism and obvious differences in the polity are recognised and upheld. Peace and harmony become imperative for Nigeria because according to Peace Pilgrim “...when societies get out of harmony, problems develop within the society”²⁵, and I think that the various incidents of violence and disorder in Nigeria, especially in the name of religion and ethnicity is a very clear example that harmony in the society has long been dealt a deadly blow.

Could Boko Haram have qualified to be religious, not to talk of its being a genuine Muslim group in the strict sense of the word? Or is it not better to categorise it as a secret society shrouded in manipulation of the mind of the less-privileged of the society, as well as capitalising on their quest to satisfy ordinary human needs of food, clothing, and shelter. Boko Haram is more or less regarded as a secret society because like The Free Masons, The Rosicrucians, The Amorc, The reformed Ogboni Fraternity, The Odd Fellows, The Gray, etc exhibited that its membership, transactions, cult, and even its ultimate aim *cum* mode of operation were secret. It was not just normal and ordinary secrecy but one “protected by terrible oaths”²⁶, and aimed at the detriment of non-members and the rest of the society as a whole. This was exactly what happened when the Boko Haram broke lose and ravaged the masses. But such religious, or even politically-minded outbursts by misguided groups cannot help Nigeria to advance and progress. Even the untamed killing of members of such groups by the security agents cannot help matters either. The country needs a better system of governance for the realisation of mutual co-existence in the polity.

The plurality of religions and religious affiliations has become a reality in Nigeria with its diverse population and ethnic groups. The government should do everything legitimate to conscientize and educate the people to accept and respect one another. This should not be era of “jihads” and crusades” in the derogatory sense they were used by Muslims and Christians many centuries ago. Religions and peoples must interact to ensure democratic growth. There is no doubt that at arrival and settlement, both Christian and Muslim groups confronted themselves in search for supremacy and authority. But today, it is not uncommon “to find both co-existing in the same families”²⁷, a trend one may not reverse without unbearable consequences and implications for religion, society, and politics.

6. CONCLUSION

Egypt is an important political player in the history of the Middle East, especially in its peace process. Nigeria cannot be overlooked in the maintenance of peace in the sub-Saharan Africa. That is why both countries should be at the vanguard of religious, political, and social harmony and order. We cannot deny the fact that the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in its history shifted Egypt’s fame from the pyramids and ancient civilization to a world player in religious

²⁴ John I. Okoye, “Governance and the question of virtue”, in *Philosophy, Democracy and Responsible Governance in Africa*, ed by J. Obi Oguejiofor, *Studies in African Philosophy*, Enugu: Delta (Nigeria) Limited, 2004, vol. 1, p. 14 (pp.12-21).

²⁵ Friends of Peace Pilgrim, *Peace Pilgrim*, USA: Hemet California, 1994, p.59

²⁶ Cf. Okere, T., *Church, Theology and Society in Africa*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 2005, p.129.

²⁷ Gbadomosi, T.G.O. & Ajayi, J.F. Ade., “Islam and Christianity in Nigeria”, in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, ed by Obaro Ikime, Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Plc., 1999, p.352 (pp347-366).

politics. And we cannot forget that the constant effort to impose the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood on Nigeria and its citizenry has only succeeded in causing pain and disorder. The time has come for a re-evaluation of our religious ideals, whether Christian or Muslim.

We have seen that religious aspirations have caused both Egypt and Nigeria a lot of resources – human, material, and spiritual. However, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has maintained a serious opposition to every Egyptian government since its inception in 1928, that of Nigeria has destroyed a lot of human life without any proper ideological orientation.

Perhaps, both countries might help the issue of democracy and its growth by allowing some reasonable opposition to ruling governments. However, opposition parties should not be embedded in fanaticism, fundamentalism, religious bigotry and violence. This is where both countries can learn from the Western world without condemning it *in toto*. Religion and Politics should have their proper domain in the lives of the citizens. Whereas politics should be strictly geared towards the material development of the human person and society, religion should be reasonably applied to uplift human spirit, rooted in love. This should be the new lesson for Nigeria – one rooted in Christ's new commandment of love (Jn. 13: 34).

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