



Christianity in Northern Nigeria from 1841-2012: A Church under Persecution

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the causes and effects of Christian persecution in northern Nigeria. The persecution has caused many Christians in the north especially those Igbo settlers from the southeast to be widowers, widows, childless, orphans, loss of lives, property, family extinction and set backs for the growth of Christianity in the north. The method of approach is historical with the review of relevant literature.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of sharia in the recent past in some states in northern Nigeria and the emergence of Boko Haram along side religious extremists have made the existence of Christianity difficult in the north. This is because the introduction of sharia in these states and especially in the constitution of Nigeria has made Christianity a religio illicita (that is unlawful religion) in the northern Nigeria. The crisis has been there since the advent of Christianity in northern Nigeria. This paper aims at analysing the issues involved in the religious bigotry that made the Muslim fundamentalists to persist in persecuting the church of Christ. The strength of this paper is that it generates information on the genesis of the persecution that can serve as agenda for religious dialogue in Northern Nigeria for the harmony, tolerance and peaceful co-existence of different faiths in the north and beyond.

Definition of terms

The church is a community of saints, a “communion sanctorum” (Uka, 1995). It is the holy presence of Christ in the world, whose fundamental task is to build communities of holy character. The church is not a building, steeple,

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resting place, but a people. The church is the called-out-people of God who constitute the holy presence of Christ in the world. Nowhere is the church referred to as a building except as a metaphor, which denotes God's people.

In the African context, historical experience has incited a quest for the recovery of the Church as people-the people of God as Luke would say. The biblical roots are in two pairs of Hebrew and Greek words. *Edah* (Hebrew) and *Kuriakon* (Greek) refer to the institution as an assembly of people, any people. But *qahal* (Hebrew) and *ekklesia* (Greek) covenant terms move beyond to the people of God who have assembled. Indeed "ecclesia" (in theological parlance) refers to those who have been called out from among the people, out of miry clay, out of Egypt or out of the *kosmos* (world order) with her embellishments and allure (*kosmetikos*) into the kingdom of God (Uka, 1995). Those are chosen, called and redeemed people, in the process of sanctification; a pilgrim people moving to the great banquet in the eschaton. Their warmest relationship with Christ is ultimate and constitutes the *raison d'être* of their existence.

To most of us, the Church refers to our denomination or the congregation where we worship on Sundays. But the Church universal is the vast invisible cloud of witnesses passing across the ages. It is universal since God calls men and women from all races, colours, cultures and corners of the globe. For this reason Christians, from the earliest creed have confessed being part of one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. This is the body of Christ in the world, the body whose mission is to gather believers into confessing communities, to administer the sacraments, preach the word and make disciples (Mtt. 28:19-20). The Church is one foundation, one Lord, one faith and one baptism (Eph.5:23; A & M 255). Jesus described also the kingdom of God in the world- the church, as a dragnet (Mtt. 13:47-50). The idea that the church in the world is mixed bag tends to partly account for the tensions, rivalries, and the variety of expressions which the church has taken in its visible manifestation in the world. There is, however, some richness in diversity of expressions that strengthen the overall witness of the church and enables it to get to people who might not otherwise hear the gospel.

Different confessions, because of their peculiar emphasis often as a result of culture, make different aspects of the spiritual reality visible. The church is characterized by apostolic message (apostolic *keryma*, the proclamation of the resurrected Christ himself), the apostolic *didache*, the teaching (Jesus' *didache*, the New Torah, centered in mercy, forgiveness and kindness), the apostolic experience, worship, and life, and community life (Schmitt, 1987). The definition that stated that the church is called-out-people of God who constitute the holy presence of Christ in the world and its most fundamental task is to build communities of holy character will serve as our working definition.

Persecution, averred Macquarrie (1981), is a discrimination which amounts to a measure of persecution, inflicts disabilities upon those who differ from ideas or practices strongly held. Although the power to persecute exists in the general community, the act and the term are usually associated

with public authority which treats differences as public offences. Religious differences serve as objects of persecution and with religious beliefs, sentiments or pretexts, as motivating or justifying persecution, even though public authority is usually the force at work to compel. Intolerance is the attitude that impels towards persecution, a will to demand conformity either to an existing or to an ideal pattern of thought and behaviour.

The church is called to be conformed to its head and Lord, in particular in his suffering and rejection (Luke 14:25-33; John. 12:23 – 25; Rom. 8: 17; Rev. 1:9). Just as the cross was determinative of the life and mission of Jesus, so it is of the life and mission of his people (Milne, 1993). The church is the community of the cross (Mk. 8:3-38; Acts 14:22; 2Tm. 3:12). Suffering is therefore a fundamental hallmark of living Christian testimony according to the New Testament (NT). The Greek word for 'witness' is *martyrs*, from which we derive our English, *martyr*. God uses suffering corporately and individually for those witnessing for him (Job. 23:10; Ps. 119:67,71; Jn.15:2; Rom. 5:3; Heb.12:4-13; 1Pet. 1:6f.).

Persecution as encountered by Christians was nothing new, but it was part of their Jewish heritage (Douglas, 1980). The association of witness and suffering, punishment, cruelty, worry allow no peace to and the like began as early as the second part of Isaiah, was crystallized in the Seleucid struggle. In the time of Nero, there was fire out break and Nero used Christians as scapegoats for the fire of Rome In 64AD and condemning them also for the name of Christ (Livingstone, 1980).

In persecution literature, many of the NT writings reflect the tension and potential conflict between Christianity and the state. The author of Luke-Acts, for example, was in part motivated by a desire to defend the church against charges of disloyalty to Rome or of treasonable activity (Kee and Young, 1981). Mark, with its strong emphasis on Jesus' victory through suffering and death, may have been written in part to encourage Christians who had grown fearful under Nero's persecution. But three writings in particular reflect either actual conflict or a threat of conflict; these are Revelation, 1Peter, and Hebrews.

The advent of Christianity in northern Nigeria, 1841-1954

Many reasons have been given to explain why missionary bodies regarded northern Nigeria as the most potential promising area in Sudan for the spread of Christianity. One of the reasons is the account of the explorers. The missionaries readily accepted the impression portrayed by various explorers such as Claperton and Bell which averred that the people of Northern Nigeria were civilized, industrious and prosperous. They were said to be literate and superior to the coastal people and were also eager to accept or buy European manufactured goods. Following this account, the missionaries felt that it will be easier to convert the people of Northern Nigeria including Moslems. Further it was argued that because of this racial and cultural superiority that the Hausas will perceive the metaphysical truths of such a higher religion as

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Christianity. Perhaps more attractive was the belief held by many observers that the Hausas were the least bigoted of the moslem inhabitants of the Sudan; and that Islam sat lightly on them, and that its tenets had been forced upon them by the Fulani Jihadists. Common to all the missionary bodies was the desire of the white missionaries for healthy highlands, beyond the reach of fever and the pestilential climate of the coastal areas. Hence in 1879 John Milum, Chairman of the Wesleyan Mission in Nigeria recommended to the foreign mission board that all the white missionaries should withdraw into the highlands between Ilorin and Shonga on the Niger. Twelve years later a missionary of the southern American Baptist mission made similar recommendation to the foreign Board in Richmond, Virginia.

Missionary enterprise passed through three distinct phases in northern Nigeria in the period covered by this paper. The first phase, 1870-1888, was one of relative success for the missions. Their achievements, limited as it was, was owed to their tactics in winning the affection of the traditional rulers and in convincing the latter that they, the missions, were not torch bearers of imperialism. Then came the next phase, 1888-1900, when the missionary enterprise and British imperialism seemed to the northern Nigerian rulers as one and the same thing. In these years, for the potentates, missionaries were discredited. In the last phase, 1900-1954, the British administration dissociated itself from missionaries and, at times, went on to declare opposition to missionary enterprise, not only in the predominantly Moslem areas, but in the pagan districts as well.

The first phase from 1870-1888 showed a relative success. Although their achievement was not much. It was due to their tactics in winning the affection of the traditional rulers and in convincing them that they (the missionaries) were not torch bearers of imperialism. The key personality or figure in this mission was Samuel Ajayi Crowther, head of the Niger mission which had been founded in 1857 and in cause of time; he attempted to establish a mission station at Rabba, and Masaba. Later, Etsu, the ruler of Masaba, had become suspicious of missionaries and their propaganda. Moreso, some Yoruba elements and some Epes who have seen the close association of the Bible and the sword in the British occupation of Lagos, warned Masaba that the missionaries were pathfinders of British imperialism. Moreover the Etsu did not find it palatable the egalitarian teaching of the missionaries and their opposition to slavery and the slave trade.

Since Etsu needed white people for mutually beneficial commerce ammunition with which he hoped to consolidate his position in his kingdom, he asked Baikie and the missionaries to withdraw further down the river. This was the origin of the British consulate ultimately established at Lokoja. But by 1870 Bishop Crowther and his African companions or friends had succeeded in overcoming the suspicion of the traditional rulers that they were heralds of alien rule. These missionaries carried out their activity within customary laws and traditional politics. They recognized and respected the authority of the chiefs and so gain their favour and influence for the progress of the enterprise. Certain Christian values such as patience, amiableness,

sympathy and forbearance were the missionaries' watchwords. They had especially to profess interest in the political and economic welfare of their protectors. Crowther excelled all others in the display of these qualities and he made friendliness with the Etsu of Nupe an essential strand of his policy. Consequently he became perhaps, the most powerful external influence on the Moslem rulers of the Nupe country between 1869 and 1888.

In the second phase, 1888-1900, the prospects of missionary enterprise were associated with British imperialism. During this period under review, the missionaries were discredited. In 1888, Staudinger, a German explorer, reported to the Sultan of Sokoto that the main aim of Niger Company was not to trade but to Christianize northern Nigeria. The arrival of the missionary group known as the Sudan Party and the movement of the military headquarters of the company to Lokoja in 1890 seems to justify this allegation.

The Sudan Party sponsored by Church Missionary Society (CMS) was made up of eleven missionary graduates from Cambridge and Oxford under the leadership of Graham Wilmot Brooke. Brooke himself has become interested in Sudan Party through General Goldie. These missionaries were forbearers who believed that in a short time their medical skill and Arabic inscriptions, distributed among Caravans would turn Moslems into Christians.

They believed also that their method of evangelism, one of cultural surrender or assimilation would appeal to Moslems. When they began to don Moslem clothes including the Turban, the Emirs began to fear that they were political spies. Maliki was blamed by his chief for having signed a treaty with the Niger Company in 1885, Maliki asked the missionaries to withdraw from his country. On the instruction of the Sultan of Sokoko the Emir of Yola sent spies to survey the military capacity of the company. Over half the population of Lokoja left the town and early in 1892 the leader of the Sudan Party wrote that "the long gathering political troubles seemed coming to a head, I greatly fear that we may be on the verge of general Mohammedan rising." Contrary to general belief Goldie was not anti-missionary nor was he in principle opposed to the spread of Christianity in northern Nigeria. He wished that the Bible been translated into Hausa and distributed through out Hausaland, and he shared the anti- Fulani feelings of the CMS in Nupe Country. He was convinced that Fulani Emirs were likely to regard the company as Christian proselytizers and that the Mahdism might spread to northern Nigeria.

The belief among the administrative officers was that Christians were more loyal to the British administration than non-Christians, apart from the fact that missionaries produced clerks for government and commercial concerns. It is against this background that the trip made to Kano in the first half of 1900 by five CMS missionaries should be understood. In their progress towards kano they paraded themselves as Knight errands of British imperialism, believing that by coining the north for the British the Christianization of the territory would be hastened. Both Muhammed Bello and one of the sons of Usman Dan Fodio who succeeded his father as the

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Sultan of Sokoto and Shehu of Bornu had at the same time believed that the intrusion of white people into northern Nigeria should be discouraged. If the territory was not to be assimilated into British Empire as India has been. Records also show that Moslems have implacable contempt for the Kafiris as they termed unbelievers. Many Moslems at that time believed that Christians did not have the feature of human beings while others felt that infidels were cowards who could not fight successfully against the true believers (Moslems).

From 1891 to 1895, one Heiman Harris head of the central Sudan missionary training home trained 15 people for the evangelization of Hausaland. In 1895, Canon Robinson, "Professor of Hausa in Cambridge University who went to Kano for three months to study the language, gave the CMS the discorded picture of the extent of the intensity of Islam in Northern Nigeria. He declared that many Mallams had volunteered to translate the scripture which they said the people were grateful to buy. That only a third of the population were Moslems and that there was no Koranic school in northern Nigeria and Islamic literature was low except only in Kano where they have about forty books. The country, he went on, was only nominal "Muhammedans" and fear of religious bigotry of eastern Sudan was absent whereas there were few mosques in Kano and one in Sokoto. He was telling lies. He was also convinced that there will be no opposition to Christianity for at any rate for some years even the Mallam at Kano has no Koran copies. It is partly against this backdrop that the trip made to Kano in the first half of the 1900 by the Hausa Party should be understood.

The Hausa party was formed in 1891 in memorial of J.A. Robison, Brooke's companion who died in August 1891. J.A. Robison has started translating portion of the Bible before his death. The presidents of CMS and Wesleyan missionaries were among the officers of the association and its general executive was dominated by church dignitaries.

In the third phase, 1900-1918, the British administration dissociated itself from the missionaries and eventually declared opposition to missionary enterprise both to Islam and pagan areas. Lugard's attitudes to missionary work in northern Nigeria have been often been misunderstood. Such pessimistic have described him as anti-missionaries. Although he was not a regular church goer, he believes that Christianity produces a higher civilization than Islam. It was based on this that in 1899 in an official meeting which Tugwell had with him in London that Lugard approved of a protected missionary at Kano. If Lugard were anti-missionary he would not have approved a trip of the Hausa party to Kano.

Crampton (2004) has shown also how Christianity began in northern Nigeria and how it grew particularly among the non-Moslem groups in the central belt. He reasoned that Christianity could have made inroads into the Moslem enclaves of northern Nigeria were not for the colonial government policy of excluding missionary activities. When missionaries were finally allowed into those areas they were to provide social services without, "proselytizing." Missionaries of course, did not obey this, they could not

provide social service without preaching Christianity. When they were allowed, they did both.

As a result the missionaries had large number of converts among Hausa-Fulani in cities such as Zaira, Funtua, Kano and Gusau(Crampton, 2004). In 1840 the society for the extinction of slave trade and civilization of Africa was formed by Prince Albert as its President. It drew together those people in Great Britain who were interested in Africa and acted as a pressure group in the government. The result was that in the following year (1841) an expedition of three ships was sent to the Niger, whose mouth had only recently been established by Lander. Among the members of the expedition was the Rev. J.F. Schon, a German missionary of the CMS, and young African catechist, the freed slave, Samuel Ajayi Crowther (Crampton, 2004). The expedition introduced legitimate trade into the basin of Niger and Benue Rivers and established a Model Farm at their confluence. Farming and evangelism were not thought of as unconnected. One of the Buxton's slogans was the Bible and the plough must regenerate Africa. The first place in the north reached by the expedition was Idah. In one sense the 1841 Expedition was a disaster. The large number of casualties confirmed the belief that the West coast of Africa was the 'white man's grave! The model farm was a failure, and no mission stations were established.

In 1854 another expedition was set up for the Niger. It was a joint venture of the British Government and Macgregor Laird, the noted shipbuilder. Its objectives were exploration, to ascertain the whereabouts of Doctor Barth, the famous explorer, and to investigate the possibilities of introducing legitimate trade and the Christian religion into Niger-Benue area. A station was established at Rabba. In 1859 when Crowther visited the station, he discovered that a new Emir of Bida, Masaba, who was less favourable to Christian missions, had closed the station.

Up to 1864 all the Anglican work in Nigeria was under the Episcopal jurisdiction of the Bishop of Freetown (Crampton, 2004). Until the arrival of the mission vessel in 1878 the Niger Mission was staffed entirely by Africans. These were paid agents of the CMS rather than the products of self-supporting churches. Sudan Party, a new group of evangelical CMS missionaries, was interested to convert the north of Nigeria to Christianity (Ajayi, 1965). The Sudan Party missionaries were imbued with the puritanism and Holiness doctrine associated with such evangelical instruction in Britain as the Keswick Convention. According to Ajayi (1965), these missionaries such as Sudan Party, Sudan Interior Missionary Society (Sims) and the like had darkened the last years of Crowther basically because they were white and he was black. But contrary to this concept is Tasie(1978) who opined that Sudan Party had different emphasis from Crowther's Niger Mission and should therefore be judged in that context rather than on racist basis. Sudan Party made tremendous positive contributions to the evangelization of northern Nigeria. Early Christianity among the Nupe, Bassange, Kabba, Igala and Igbira dates back to this period. J.A. Robinson and his brother H.C. Robinson did a substantial work among the Hausa

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people and on the Hausa language; a project began by Dr. Schon in 1841. The Sudan Party tried to detach Christianization from Boxtunian idea of civilization mission. To practically demonstrate this, the Sudan party elected to live with ordinary 'natives' in an attempt to plant "primitive Christianity."

The second phase(1894-1954), a period that began with the coming of faith missions in northern Nigeria such as Association of Evangelical Churches of West Africa (now Evangelical churches of West Africa, ECWA), Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), Sudan United Mission (SUM) 1904; United Missionary Society (UMS) and the Africa Missionary Society founded by SIM, 1948 (now called Evangelical Missionary Society (EMS) of the ECWA has 554 couples working as missionaries in Nigeria and 31 families serving outside Nigeria. These groups are followed by the evolution of indigenous churches. The other missions relied much on the inter-denominational evangelistic body the New Life For All for their evangelistic outreaches which have taken them to different parts of Nigeria (Vingborg, 2001).

According to Falk (1997), Sudan Interior Mission made two unsuccessful attempts to establish a ministry in Kano. In its third attempt to establish a work in this region and was successful in entering the Nupe tribe and opening a station at patioi on the Niger. The Sudan United Mission was formed in Britain in order to bring the gospel to tribes in northern Nigeria. It commenced its evangelism at Wase in 1904 and from there advanced to Birom land. A second station started in 1906 and is been located at Wukari, south of the river. In 1909 the Wase work was transferred to Langtang and from there it was extended to the highland plateau among the Birom tribe. The British Branch of the Sudan United Mission enterprise could be located in three areas: the Langtang lowlands, the central plateau, and in Bornu and Sardauna provinces, reaching to the tribes around Lake Chad.

The South African (Methodist) branch of the Sudan United Mission chiefly sensed the Mada tribe, working in the Southwestern part of the plateau provinces and in the north central part of Benue province. The movement of Methodist Church into the northern part of Nigeria took also two directions. The Eastern district move along the railway line and established stations at Igumale, Utonkon, Otukpo and Makurdi. The Western Nigeria District missionary established stations at Kaduna, Jos, Zaria and Kano (MCN, 1994). In May, 1924, Rev. C. Finlay made a long journey to Otukpo as a result of which schools were promised and begun in the following places: Igumale, Otobi, Ikwonyi, Utonkon, Ijo, Otukpo, Icho and Agila. On September 16, 1924, Rev. William Norcross arrived in Igumale together with Rev. Robert Benham. They held service for the Igbo railway workers at Makurdi. Benham went to Uzuakoli while Norcross stayed on in Igumale.

For many years the majority of Christians in the north were not indigenous. They were expatriates of European or Lebanese origin, Africans from the more educationally advanced parts of West Africa and Nigerians from the south of Nigeria (Kalu, 1978). Active aladura type of Churches

might pose a greater challenge to Islam than orthodox Churches especially in marginal areas in that they are usually more indigenous and less concerned with monogamy. Igbirraland was visited by an aladura missionary in 1930. Objects of pagan worship were cast away as “bad medicine” along with copies of the Quran. Some Moslems became aladuras (Ibrahim, 1968 and Trimmingham, 1955). Those who are critical of the small part played by southern Nigerians in the evangelization of the north should remember that it was Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Yoruba, who started work in the north and it was the CMS which restricted the activities of his missionaries to the southern parts.

In 1907, the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) recommended work in the north at Lokoja. Father O’ Waller led a party to establish a new work among the Ankwe tribe at Shendam, not far from Wase As significant numbers of southern Nigerians moved northwards to Sabon garis and new towns where the Catholics among them began to hold services. These were followed by visits from Fathers and where the numbers justified it stations were built. In some ways the Roman Catholic Fathers resembled Crowther’s missionaries. Their schools were usually their chief means of evangelism.

Some of the first generation Christians were eager evangelists and responsible for taking the Gospel beyond the parts visited by expatriate missionaries or at any rate visited by them rarely. In 1939 CMS evangelism in Niger and Rabba Provinces had to be reduced when the grant was cut. This led to the dismissals of paid agents (Hewitt, 1971). According to Kalu (1978), RCM first established a Prefecture Apostolic of the Niger with its headquarters at Lokoja in 1884. In 1888 the headquarters was moved outside the north to Asaba. In 1907 the Shendam area was detached.

In 1929, all the areas north of the Rivers Niger and Benue were detached and called the Prefecture of northern Nigeria with Monsignor Francis O’ Bourke as its first Prefect Apostolic. In 1934 this was divided into two, one part being the Prefecture of Kaduna under Monsignor T. Hughes and the other the Prefecture of Jos under Monsignor W. Lumley. The work in these prefectures was done by Fathers of the society of African Missions (S.M.A). Augustinian Fathers began the work in the eastern part of Jos Prefecture in Adamawa and Bornu Provinces. In 1950 Yola and In 1953 Bornu were made separate prefectures. In the North West part of the Kaduna Prefecture, American Dominican Fathers were responsible for the work and in 1953 a separate prefecture of Sokoto was created for Sokoto and Kaduna Provinces. Mission work at South of the Kaduna and Jos Prefectures was carried out by Holy Ghost Fathers. Prefectures of Benue and Kabba were created in 1934 and 1955 with French Canadian Holy Ghost Fathers caring for them.

Causes of the persecution, 1841-2012

The genesis of Christian persecution in northern Nigeria started during the colonial era, as we observed above the introduction of Sharia in some

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northern states made Christianity a religio illicita (that is unlawful religion) in those states. Christianity was a powerful force in support of the majesty, prestige and authority of the Queen or British imperialism and as a result became irrelevant to the Moslems. Christianity, colonialist and trader made extensive use of explorers' reports to scramble for northern Nigeria. The imperial government of Lord Luggard was always careful not to offend important elements of Islam and therefore directly or indirectly helped the Moslems to persecute Christians and made it extremely difficult to evangelize most of the Moslem areas. The egalitarian society Christianity was propagating made it difficult for majority of the Moslem emirs and leaders to embrace Christianity. Christian attitude to polygamists and some cultural values that hold the northerners together caused a severe setback to Christianity. Many Moslems see Christians like Kafiris (unbelievers) since they are not Moslems. As a result, Christians are persecuted, not because of what they did, but of what they were. They were Christians bearing the name of Christ was sufficient cause for persecution a reminiscence of what happened during the time of Roman Empire or Emperor Augustus (in 27BC) or Emperor Nero (AD 64) (Boer, 2003).

The term "crusade" often use by the Christians in the north always cause Christian-phobia among some ordinary Moslems and Moslem scholars because it is a pointer to what the Moslem umma suffered in 1095 when Pope Urban II proclaimed the first crusade (that is Campaign under the cross) to stop the Moslems invading Europe as they did in Asia (Foster, 1974). In the words of this Pope to the crusaders,

Refrain your hands from killing your brothers.
As soldiers of the faith, turn your hands
against foreign nations, and under Jesus Christ
your leader, as a Christian army, as army invincible,
better than the Israelites of old, you shall do battle
for your Jerusalem, and attack and expel the
Turks there, who are worse than the Jebusite (P.73)

This statement shows the determination of the Church to contend for her faith before it will be exterminated. It involves sacrifice, martyrdom, and sword.

In the early years, spirited attempts resulted in the formation of the Christian Council of Nigeria in 1930 (Nmah & Nwadiolor, 2010). The council much latter changes its name to Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in 1982 to reflect the diverse currents within Christendom. Christian Association of Nigeria spirituality later metamorphosed into a modern crusade waging war on all fronts viz political, religious, cultural and socio-economic fronts when Nigeria was surreptitiously made a member of Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) now Organization for Islamic countries in 1986. This was, so to speak, when religion suddenly came to the front bumer in the affairs of the nation-Nigeria, especially in the face of globalization that has become a world- wide phenomenon.

Murtala Muhammed, Olusegun Obasanjo and Shehu Shagari resisted pressure to commit Nigeria to its membership. But Muhammadu Buhari's military administration decided to seek admission with obvious swiftness. It began by pressing ahead to institute dramatic changes in the country's religious equation. The first concerned an ever contentious issue: introduction of the Sharia into the nation's body of law, and secondly, the initiative made to amend the constitution and incorporate the Sharia as federal law. The then governors of the 10 northern states were reportedly instructed to prepare memoranda and be at the forefront for the institution of Islamic law. At this time, Christians had become aware of the moves. A protest delegation of Bishops then went to Buhari to register their objection. Buhari refused to listen. Then came the era of Babangida to conclude the initial arrangements thereafter continued. In 1985, an Arab diplomat was said to have visited Nigeria and complained to associates that there were fears to Arab circles that Babangida was not a good Moslem. While Bolaji Akinyemi, then minister of external affairs, was away to Europe and North America on January 6, 1986, an official delegation left for Morocco under diplomatic cover presented an application for Nigeria's membership and was immediately admitted as a member after being a spectator for 19 years. The trip and subsequent admission of Nigeria into the organization were cloaked in secrecy.

As to be expected, the reaction of the public was and has been very strong. The uproar started from the Christians and non-Christians. Moslems joined the affray, giving impassioned speeches resulting in Moslems and Christians threatening each other with serious consequences if their views were not adopted. The full impact of the OIC controversy was fully registered by the religious riots that swept through Kaduna, Kano, Plateau and other northern states in 1987 during which Christians and Moslems engaged themselves in full combat. Babangida called the riot which shook the regime to its foundation, a "civilian equivalent of an attempted civilian coup d'etat" (Nmah and Nwadiakor, 2010).

Another problem had to do with the political and socio-economic decisions which the Babangida administration has had to take. For instance, in 1987, controversy broke out over the status of Abuja, as regards the crescent Islamic sign placed at the entrance of the city. CAN protest vehemently on the Islamisation of the capital and the allocation of land and N10million donation by federal government to Moslems to erect a central Mosque there. They noted also that the federal capital territory since its inception has been under the tutelage of ministers from the north with Islamic bias. CAN alleged that there was a deliberate attempt by the federal government to frustrate the allocation of land to property-developers at Abuja, especially those of the Christian faith. This generated considerable heat across the country as the government denied the Islamisation of Abuja and its environs. The controversy was carried over to the constituent assembly in 1989 over the question of Sharia, where the 1978 experience was re-enacted by the acrimonious tension surrounding the debate.

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The post-independence period witnessed an intensification of the minority problem. The Northern people Congress government systematically started to undermine the middle belt and other minorities through conscious programmes of Islamisation of government policies and erosion of the culture of the people. This was most visible in the northernisation policy in which the search for “genuine northerners” was determined by proficiency in Hausa language as well as the Sarduana’s Islamisation tour between 1964 and 1965 during which the positions of the non-Moslem local communities’ leaders were threatened.

The Tiv riot of 1965 provided an insight into the deepening ethno-religious crisis that ravaged the north in the early ’60s. The 1966 military intervention blurred the issues being raised by the United Middle-Belt Congress, and thereby postponing the feud to a later date. Following the counter-coup in July, 1966, the configuration of previously opposed forces realigned in favour of a Middle- Belt- Hausa- Fulani alliance against the alleged Igbo domination of the federation. A new political equation was struck which character manifested in Yakubu Gowon’s seizure of state power in alliance with the Hausa- Fulani interest in the military, political, economic and religious. The federation was divided into 12 states with the minorities of Benue, Plateau, Bachama, Nupe and Tiv given separate territorial autonomy within the federation.

But the accompanying alliance did not re-define the rule of the minorities in the socio-economic institutions such as the northern Nigeria Development Company (NNDC), the Bank of the North, the Arewa Group of Companies and now the regularization of the Northern Governors’ meeting. The common enemy was the south especially south East in terms of its economic, technological, religious and educational advantage. These four issues were used as effective instruments of mobilizing the minorities in the North, in the belief that rapid economic transformation of the north could swiftly be achieved with the centralization of socio- political, economic and cultural powers around these institutions. The alliance was a fallacy and a grievous mistake the Christian indigenes of the north made because they thought that the strength of south east lies on these issues raised by them without knowing that it depends on God as they carry the cross. Those south east indigenes they killed and still killing are martyrs of the gospel. The survive of the northern Christian indigenes depends so much on the south east being part of Nigeria otherwise they would be exterminated by the Hausa-Fulani Moslems. The recent incessant Islamic insurgency or extremism, radicalism and sharia episode by some northern governors and Moslems have proved the alliance to be mundane and sacrilegious and have posed serious problems to the Christians in the Middle Belt. Their (Northern Christians) alliance with the Moslems to undo the Igbo people is a reminiscence of what King Zedekiah of Judah did when king Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon threatened Jerusalem, he requested the assistance of Pharaoh’s army to protect Jerusalem without seeking the face of God (Jer. 37:1-10). Instead of the indigenous northern Christians to look up

to God for the issues raised above, they decided to seek alliance with the Moslems to slaughter their fellow Christians from the south east like rams for Idu'l Adha. They are now paying the price of their misdeed. The persecution of Christians in the north started during the first republic when the late Ahmadu Bello, the Sarduna of Sokoto was the Premier of the region. Sir Ahmadu Bello adopted the policy of Islamizing the northern region by forming Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), an Islamic movement entrusted with a specific task of enforcing Islam on every northerner. At this time, the conversion to countries especially Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which are string members of the OIC. The conversion efforts were also advanced by basing promotion in the civil service on religious affiliation and using traditional chiefs as agents of conversion.

History, they said, has a way of repeating itself. In the recent past, some northern leaders met at Abuja on insurgency of the Islamic sect, Boko Haram, and observed as insecurity, political and socio-economic problems confronting the northern region that made the northern Christian indigenes and Moslems to form alliance against the southern Christians. The solution, according to Alhaji Maitama Sule (Alli and Omokhumu, 2012) is to tackle these challenges observed by the leaders. Baur (2005) observed that tension between the Islamic North and the Christian South is based on economic as well as religious, and the religious overtones have often hidden the basic economic issue.

Why Christian missionaries have little or no success in northern Nigeria in the period under review is that whilst the southern part of Nigeria was Christianized, Islam was proving a formidable obstacle to Christianity in Northern Nigeria. This situation was brought about by many factors. One of such factors was a peculiar nature of the region which made the co-operation between government and missions impossible. This peculiar nature was its big size, unifying effect of Islam, the literacy of the people and the absence of evil practices such as killing of twins, human sacrifice, and trial by ordeal, and inters tribal wars which were rampant in the south. Apart from the vastness of northern Nigeria which made it difficult for many ethnic groups to be touched at all by the missionaries, there was also hostility of the administration to Christian enterprise.

There was also the case of geographical location and Arabic civilization. The teachings of Islam appeared strongly to the people of the north. Islam encouraged also some existence of African tradition/customs and institutions such as polygamy, slavery, and the use of talisman. This made Islam more popular than Christianity that condemns these institutions. Another factor that contributed to the setback to the missionaries in northern Nigeria was their method of evangelism. Islam made use of Africans in its evangelization work whereas Christianity was propagated mostly by the European missionaries.

The traders and administrators were also hostile to the missionaries because of British military intervention in the north which disrupted trade

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and increased custom duties. The hostility of traders and administrators apart, there were few opportunities for Christianity to thrive and spread in the period covered by this study. British residents on their part explain to their anti-missionary attitude on the grounds of fear of a Mahdist uprising. According to El Mahdi (1965), Mahdism was both a religious and political movement which aimed at a return to orthodox Islamic constitution in government, culture, and religion and it was bound to conflict with any existing government not established on these principles. The teachings of Mahdi were primarily based on two principles namely a return to Islam by all his followers; and acceptance of the Quran and the traditions of the prophet (Hadith), as the guiding principles of the society.

Persecution by Emirs and residents began after 1906. Christian adherents were taken to work for the distance places under PWO. The emirs denied also Christians the right of inheritance of and possession of land. Christians were ordered to farm on Sunday. In Zaria the mission compound was boycotted. Boys and girls were forbidden to go there even for medical treatment. Lugard in his policy advised the missionaries about the futility in trying to convert a Moslem into Christian faith. He would have desired them to divert their resources in men and money to the “pagan” areas where they were likely to have greater success.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown that the persecution against Christians in the north started during the missionary era till date. For more than one hundred and fifty years after the birth of Christianity in northern Nigeria, the church has suffered much persecutions and has being in danger of it. According to Boer (1976), “The blood of the martyrs, it has been said, is the seed of the Church” (p.42). In the very act of suffering the church waxes and wanes indeed. It becomes disadvantageous, and sometimes dangerous, not to be a Christian in the north.

One of the most remarkable phenomena in the history of Moslem-Christian relations in the world is the crusades. Between 1096 and 1291 – nearly two hundred years- armies from Europe endeavoured to re-establish Christian power in the Holy Land (Boer, 1976). There is the need to plan for modern crusades in the north for self-defense before it will be too late for Christians to survive in such area. No religion should take precedence over other. The introduction of Sharia penal code in the Federal Constitution should be re-visited including that of some states in the north.

It has become imperative to seek for proper understanding between Christians and Moslems for tolerance, and peaceful co-existence before Nigeria will degenerate to Sudan experience. The northern native Christians by now are supposed to learnt their lessons for what they did to Igbo

Christians during the civil war by aligning with the Moslems in the north to slaughter Igbo people like rams for political and economic gain which was not feasible. For them to survive as Christians in the north, they have to align with the south especially south east. Religious extremism such as Boko Haram is a threat to the unity of Nigeria if not properly handled. The high rate of religious extremism in the north has caused severe catastrophe on the lives and property of Igbo Christians in the north since the time of Sir Ahmdu Bello and Civil war and needed to be addressed.

The recent resolution by the northern leaders to tackle insecurity in the north is a welcome development. It will complement the effort of the Federal government of Nigeria in combating religious extremism, economic, and political challenges in the country. The issues of insecurity, religious fundamentalism, political and economic problems should not be on the table of the presidency alone. It needs a concerted efforts of all and sundry. The northerners needed to promote religious tolerance or inter-faith and inter-ethnic relationships in the region. They should also search for better state-community relations. The region should evolve community vigilante groups and also involve communities in intelligence gathering and peace building. Their recent pronouncement should not have political undertone. The problems in the north is not been caused by any Christian in the south especially southeast and therefore there is no basis slaughtering the Igbo Christians in the north. The Igbo people believed in what they achieve out of their hard labour with or without federal government assistance.

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