

ISLAMIZATION OF NORTH AFRICA: LESSONS FOR THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH IN NIGERIA

Stephen A. Akpoigbe*

Abstract: *This paper examines the factors that led to the eclipse of Christianity in North Africa in the early centuries in light of the postmodern Nigerian situation. The current situation of religious persecution in Nigeria is of great concern. The current situation of religious persecution in Nigeria is of great concern. The methodologies for the research are basically historical, comparative, and evaluative. Findings show that the factors that led to the decline and eventual eclipse of Christianity in North Africa, such as Egypt's fertile valley, secularization of bishops and followership, failure to indigenize and evangelize native Africans, failure to translate the Bible into the native language(s), theological controversies, and the Arab invasion, are similar to the current Nigeria experience, which includes the British failure to evangelize Northern Nigeria. It concludes that Nigerian clergy and Christians should avoid needless theological distinctions, and actively, aggressively, and strategically evangelize the northern region of the nation.*

*** Lecturer, Baptist Theological Seminary,
Eku, Delta State, Nigeria.**

Keywords: *Islamization, North Africa, Contemporary, Church, Nigeria.*

Introduction

It is a known fact, as revealed in Josephus' testimony, that North Africa (Egypt), which was the cradle of civilization, was also the cradle of Christianity (Falk, 1997; Whiston, 1999). But as of today, the most civilized and developed continents of the world are not associated with Africa, nor does the fast spread of Christianity in some parts of Africa today have anything to do with North Africa. It is also common knowledge that North Africa had the most notable and outstanding theologians, such as Tertullian, Saint Augustine, and Cyprian, whose contributions helped to sharpen the course of Christianity in their time. But today, the story has become different.

This paper, therefore, reappraises the factors that led to the fall of Christianity in North Africa vis-à-vis the present situation of Christianity in Nigeria. If its outcome corresponds with the North African sagged. It is the task of the paper to suggest solutions that will assist Nigerian Christians in preventing a repeat of the unfortunate eclipse of the Christian faith in the early centuries in North Africa.

Factors Responsible for the Decline of Christianity in North Africa

Numerous factors accounted for the speedy decline of Christianity in North Africa. Some of these reasons are identified and discussed below.

1. The fertile valley of Egypt

Prior to the invasion of North Africa by Islamic Jihadists, history reveals that the land of Egypt was very fertile in all its ramifications. The jealousy about the fertile land was irresistible to the Muslims' cattle herders, and it was one of several reasons why North Africa was invaded in the early centuries (Whiston, 1999). Second, as a major route connecting other parts of Africa, Egypt was an easily accessible kingdom for Muslims. In consonance with the above; Coombs (2012) submitted that the fertile valley presented a strong temptation to people who were attempting to find their substance in the desert region of Africa. The Arab merchants travelled through Egypt to other parts of North Africa and understood the region and the resources available there.

2. Secularization of bishops and followership

Deducing from Saint Augustine's sermons quoted in Robin Daniel's works that during the reign of Constantine the Church received special benefits from the state and that these enabled the Church to amass wealth during the fourth and fifth centuries (Schaff, 1980). The Church had become a major landowner by

employing thousands of laborers. Saint Augustine warned the clergy against the spiritual distraction of church enrichment and criticized its materialism, saying that "the church is not a trading company". Similarly, Schaff (1980) asserts that while the spiritual benefits of the state brought numerical growth and enrichment to the Church, they also promoted the loss of missionary minds by increasing corruption and spiritual decadence. It was assumed that the loss of missionary-mindedness was responsible for the secularization of Christianity in the early church.

Tertullian's (cited in Monsignor, 2015) works on idolatry paint the secular nature of the North African church that seems to have been filled with Christians, yet they were never real Christians but rather were in attendance in order to get their personal gains. And this, it is likely, brought into the churches a changing understanding of both Christian and faith, which had nothing to do with God's call and Christ's moral standards, but rather were related to the needs of the world. Consequently, a spiritual drought set in, and the Church could no longer protect herself from powerful oppositions such as the invasion of the Vandals and the spread of Islam.

To buttress the above situation, Cyprian further narrated the worldliness of some bishops in his *De Lapsis*, written in 250 AD, when he said that:

The bishops desired religious zeal, the ministers total faith; there was no mercy in works, no discipline in manners...Numerous bishops, who ought

to be an encouragement and example to others, despised their sacred ministry, engaged themselves in secular vocations, relinquished their chair, deserted their people, strayed among foreign provinces, hunted the markets for mercantile profits, tried to amass large sums of money, while they had Brethren starving within the Church, took possession of estates by fraudulent proceedings, and multiplied their gains by accumulated usuries (p. 331).

Judging from the above, one can infer that the North African church was an unhealthy church from the beginning with respect to both spirituality and morality. With the passing of time, there was a lack of clear doctrinal preaching, and the Christian gospel was gradually overpowered under a growing sacramental system (Latourette, 1973). As a result, the church leaders lost their missionary commitments, spirituality, and morality. Notably, they could not concentrate on their inherent ministry, while the congregations, on the other hand, could also not get adequate spiritual nourishment, which made them very weak.

3. *Failure to indigenize and evangelize native Africans*

Boer (2003) revealed that the message of Christ was not communicated in the languages of the Berbers and Punic. Christianity in North Africa was a Latinized religion and nothing else. Also, in the days of Saint Augustine and the Byzantine Empire, evangelization of

the Berbers was hindered by the use of Latin liturgy in public services. While the use of the Latin liturgy sounds sacred and mysterious to the learned class, the native Africans were not able to comprehend its meaning because it was foreign to them. That was why Latourette (1973) concluded that the absence of a church suitable for the Berbers was the problem that the early North African Church had.

Furthermore, because the language of the gospel was Latin, only the few who could understand it responded to it, while the majority of natives remained unconverted because of the language barrier. Chadwick, Henry, Northcott, and Cecil (cited in Coombs, 2012) pointed out that evangelization was essentially identified with those who were educated, the upper class of citizens, and those living in metropolitan cities. On the contrary, the majority of North Africans who were indigenous Berbers were faced with negligence as a result of language superiority. This is why, according to Coombs (2012), the North African Church was a Romanized colony that failed to reach the Berber culture.

Groves (1958) concluded that the church in North Africa embraced much of Latin culture to the detriment of the majority of native Berbers, Punic culture, and languages. As a result, during the Islamic invasion, the Romanized Christians, in collaboration with the educated upper classes, fled to Europe. The native majority, who were not grounded in Christianity, became victims of conversion into the Islamic religion without resistance (Groves, 1958). This led to the conclusion by modern church historians that the failure of the church to evangelize the native people eventually

led to the decline of the church. The church would have grown if she had increased her efforts to contextualize Christianity by evangelizing the Berber and Punic hinterlands.

4. ***Failure to translate the Bible into one or more native languages***

Sanneh (cited in Schaff, 1980), Boer (2003), and Latourette (1973) submitted that in the early days, the majority of the churchmen were strangers from Syria, Jews in diaspora, and Greco-Roman citizens who spoke other languages, including Latin. Because the African converts did not understand Latin, they became victims of several religious heresies. Because Latin was regarded as spiritually mysterious by the educated class and was the only adopted means of communicating the gospel, the translation of the Bible into Berber or Punic languages was never completed.

Failure to translate the Bible into native languages was seen as one of the most significant reasons that brought the North African Church into extinction. However, Sanneh (cited in Schaff, 1980) describes the rule that guided the early church fathers on how to meaningfully communicate the gospel as follows:

Firstly, a native congregation has the right to understand what is being taught in the church because God is interested in the language of gospel communication, which should be made simple for the common man. Secondly, for the common worshipper to understand the truth about religion, the

veil that covers religious rituals such as incantations and theological vocabularies must be removed. Thirdly, this is the only way the understanding of religion can be compatible with ordinary humankind (p. 185).

A closer observation of the contributions of the trio of North African Christian apologists (Tertullian, Cyprian, and Saint Augustine) revealed that Christianity was promoted mostly among the elites by the use of Latin as a means to conduct services, the celebration of the Eucharist, and teachings in the Catechetical School in Alexandria without consideration of the majority natives. This was the bane that worked against the survival of a viable indigenous church in North Africa.

In summarizing, Falk (1997) specifically hinted at the point when he said:

The Latin language was the vehicle for preaching, and the Scriptures were not translated into the language of the people. Consequently, the Punic and Berber populations became Christians only to the degree that they became Latinized. The fact that Christianity did not become thoroughly rooted in the indigenous population may in part be the reason why Christianity suffered a greater loss in North Africa (p. 119).

5. *Theological controversies*

There is no doubt that the theological controversies that affected the decline of Christianity in North Africa were gradual. It started as a series. It began with the Apostles and the philosophies of Epicureanism and Stoicism (Acts 17:18), followed by the Gnostics, Nestorians, Arianism, and Donatist movement on the subject of the lapsed celibacy controversy between the West and Eastern Christians, coupled with a great schism over Christological debates on whether Christ was fully God, fully human, or both (Latourette, 1973). Gonzalez (1985) threw light on the fact that while the Western church settled for the dual nature of Christ (docetism), the Eastern church was comfortable with Christ's divine nature alone (anti-docetism/monophysitism). The above scenarios finally led to the separation of the Western and Eastern churches. Consequently, when Islamic invaders came in the seventh century, the latter could not resist them.

Gonzalez (1985), Isichei (1995), Cragg (2003), Frend (1952), and Schaff (1980) were scholars who regretted the devastation doctrinal disputes caused in the North African Church. Even though African clergy stressed the purity of church members, she was still divided and lost her doctrinal purity. Worse still, theological arguments could not resolve the separation. As the schisms continued, the Church in North Africa was unable to focus her attention on evangelism, but rather directed her vigour toward defending the purity of the gospel's message. In accordance with the above, Gonzalez (1985) pointed out that the internal crisis was what the church spent her lifeblood on. To put it another way, Schaff

claims that churches were declining due to theological and religious issues. For others, it was Trinitarian and Christological debates that kept the church napping when Islam eventually invaded. However, the church would have lasted if she concentrated on her primary calling (evangelization) rather than theological debates.

6. *The Arab invasion*

The final straw that broke Carmel's back was the Arab-Islamic invasion. At this time, the Egyptians did not like the Byzantine rule (Coombs, 2012). Since Cyrus did not apply a repressive policy toward the Coptic Church, the latter did not resist the Arab invasion. They believed that Arabs would drive the Greeks out of the country. So, the Arab army led by Amr ibn al-Ac invaded Egypt in 640 AD without encountering any strong resistance (Coombs, 2012). Thereafter, they took Alexandria and rapidly conquered Egypt. However, the Egyptians were disappointed because the Arab occupation became permanent. By A.D. 710, all of North Africa had been covered (Coombs, 2012). The Arabs were very tolerant of the Christians at first. The Christians were not physically persecuted before becoming Muslims.

The Christians were soon treated as second-class citizens, lacking equal privileges with the Muslims (Akpoigbe, 1994). They were not permitted to erect new churches or monasteries. By the end of the first century of Muslim occupation, a poll tax and various requisitions for the army and for other purposes were imposed on the Christians, whereas there was no evidence of a tax imposed on Muslims. Also, converts to Islam were

automatically exempted from poll tax. In order to escape this financial pressure, so many people claimed to have accepted Islam. In 744 A.D., the governor of Egypt again offered tax exemption for Islamic converts (Kalu, 1980). In response, about 24,000 Christians converted to Islam (Kalu, 1980). The high level of persecution inflicted on Christians by Muslims put an end to Christian clergy training. There were not enough priests to continue the ministry of the church. Therefore, some of the priests retired to monastic life. There was a drastic reduction in the number of Christians. Only a few genuine Christians remained true to their faith through the centuries of persecution.

Factors Favouring Nigeria's Islamization

General observation has shown that Christians in Nigeria are currently facing unabated religious persecution. The persecution, according to Adegun (2017), is a result of the quest for Islamic political and economic dominance and control over the oil industries in Nigeria. Some of the strategies that are designed to achieve the above plans include religious intermarriages, initiation of Nigeria into the membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Boko Haram resurgence, exploitation of the disunity among Christians in Nigeria, and national grazing reserve bills coupled with disrespect for the provision of the Constitution that portrays Nigeria as a secular state (Kalu, 1980). On the part of Christians, the lack of evangelization of northern Nigeria by the British missionaries and the amalgamation of a country with two distinct rival religions are the major obstacles that

threaten the existence of Christianity in Nigeria today. These factors are discussed in detail below.

1. ***The quest for politico-economic dominance***

It is Islamic law for Muslims to always dominate the politics and economy of the countries in which they live. They believed that they were born to rule. Any other professed Muslim who is not a Hausa cum Fulani Muslim and wishes to hold a higher political office may be denied (Kalu, 1980). This was true of the politico-religious tussle during Abiola's controversial presidential election. And truly, he was denied because he was a Yoruba-Muslim. If one is not Hausa or an Arab Fulani Muslim in Nigeria, he or she is treated as a second-class citizen as well as a second-class Muslim.

Since Nigeria's independence, the Islamic Northern political class has dominated the military and civil leadership. As Reese (2015) rightly observed, Nigerian politics have always been tumultuous. Prior to 1999, Nigeria had been ruled by military generals from the north. Out of the eight generals, five were Muslims. When they are not in leadership, they cause problems and make the country ungovernable for other religious adherents that are in leadership (Reese, 2015). This was evident during President Jonathan Ebele Goodluck's administration. The major reason they desire to control nations politically is to Islamize such nations to the detriment of other existing religions. That was why religious rivalry in Nigeria always had a political agenda behind it.

Because they control politics, they automatically control the nation's economy. Therefore, they use the economy to enforce the Islamic religion on weak Christians. It may be repeated that the fertile Nile Valley was one reason for the motivation of Islam in North Africa (Kalu, 1980). Gold mining in Ghana also played a role in Islam's arrival in West Africa in the eighth century. In the same way, the rich petroleum production of the south-south region of Nigeria is one of the reasons why Nigeria is a target of Islamic "invasion." Towards the end of the last century, precisely before the 1999 civilian regime, there was an exodus movement of the Igbo Roman Catholics into the Islamic religion (Kalu, 1980). Also, some adults from the west and east of Nigeria were bearing the names of the three major ethnic groupings in Nigeria just for political convenience. This method of naming has also been extended to the children of prominent Nigerian politicians.

2. The oil wealth of southern Nigeria

One of the major reasons the Muslim north desires to Islamize Nigeria in its entirety is because of the rich oil wells in the south-south of Nigeria (Kalu, 1980). The petroleum-producing states contribute over seventy percent of the national wealth. For this reason, the northern part of Nigeria will not want the country to break up. Adegun (2017), who edited a recent keynote address delivered by the Emir of Kano (Muhammadu Sanusi II), during the opening ceremony of Kaduna state's investment programme entitled "Promoting Investment Amidst Economic Challenges," reported, among other things, that northern Nigeria will be the

poorest if the country is broken into components. This is because according to him, while the oil-rich Niger Delta, commercially viable Lagos, and business-oriented South-East mirror the livelihood of northern Nigeria, the latter can never be a match.

There is also a general opinion that if it were the north that had oil wells in Nigeria, the latter would have been divided long ago. Besides, the Islamization of Nigeria is tied to the control of Nigeria's wealth by Muslims, especially the Niger Delta's oil-rich resources. Just as the fertile soil of Egypt was a major attraction for Islamic invaders, so also is it in Nigeria's current situation. Her oil-rich south is the hidden agenda for Islamic incursions, and her cattle have recently fueled insurgencies in the south and core east.

2. Colonial religious policy

During the British colonization of Nigeria, an attempt was made by the missionaries to evangelize northern Nigeria, but they were faced with greater resistance by the northern Muslims (Kalu, 1980). Some of the missionaries were arrested and held hostage by the emirs for days and months. As a result, the then-British government in Nigeria implemented a religious restriction policy (Kalu, 1980). That is to say, the propagation of the Christian faith should be restricted to the West, South, and core Eastern regions alone. This religious restriction policy hindered Christianity from penetrating the North in the 1800s and parts of the 1900s in Nigeria. At the time Nigeria gained its independence, Islam had consolidated in the north and also begun to penetrate other regions of Nigeria.

According to Kalu (1980), any attempt to extend the system to the north was hunted down by Goldie in 1809 because he was unwilling to provide protection to Roman Catholics if they went beyond Lokoja.

Clarke (1984) agreed with Kalu that the British did not interfere in religious matters on a general basis. Moreover, the colonial authority promised not to interfere with the Islamic faith and gave the emirs the authority to decide whether or not Christian missionaries should be allowed to operate in their territory. Consequently, missionary activities, with a few notable exceptions, were confined to non-Muslim areas until after the Second World War. Similarly, Buah (1967) capped it when he said:

Islam gained influence in northern Nigeria several centuries before the arrival of Europeans in Nigeria. One condition on which the northern Emirs allowed their territories to become British protectorates was that the British would not interfere with their own Islamic religion. Thus, the early Christian missionaries had to confine their work in the north to the Middle Belt, where Islam had not yet taken root (p. 36). The religious policy of the British colonial masters towards Islam in northern Nigeria was a serious setback to the Christianization of Nigeria. Unfortunately, the latter Ghanaian counterpart also followed the same

pattern of tolerance, sympathy, and even protectionist ideology.

3. Colonial political policy of amalgamation

The amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 by the British colonial masters created religious problems for the country. While the amalgamation favoured political unity and economic buoyancy, it left the country with the religious rivalry that Nigeria and Nigerians are still suffering from today. Adjarhore (2016) and Akpoigbe (2017) argued that it was a grave mistake to have amalgamated the North and the South into one country in 1914 without taking their religious differences into consideration. This is because Christians are more concentrated in the South West, South-South, and core east, whereas Muslims are concentrated in the north.

The differences have manifested themselves greatly on the part of Islamic adherents who lack religious tolerance and accommodation of others' religious views. Isichei (1995) had earlier observed in one of her scholarly works that the British government gravely contributed to the religious differences: "Christian access to the North was rigidly restricted by the British officials, who often seemed more hostile to Western influences than the Emirs themselves" (p. 67). This latter observation was sufficient to have stopped the unholy amalgamation and political policy arrangement that had recently sent millions of Nigerians to their early graves unabated.

4. *Sharia law in opposition to the Nigeria constitution*

According to Ottuh (2012), the Islamic sharia is a threat to the Nigeria constitution and the nationhood of Nigeria being a multi-religious state. Although the constitution has provisions for religious matters, but it clearly portrays the nation as a secular state. By implication, she has no recognition or preference for a particular religion, but rather, it is a multi-religious state. While Christians recognize this and have respect for the constitutional provision on religious freedom, Muslims want to impose their Islamic Sharia laws on the constitution. This has resulted in conflicts between the two religions in diverse ways in relation to the operation of Sharia laws in Islamic states where Christians are also domiciled.

The Sharia laws are considered to be anti-Christian and make life and the Christian religion unbearable for Christians who are living in Islamic states in Nigeria. According to this stance, Islam's Sharia laws are more respected than the national constitution. No country that practices two separate constitutions can be said to be one. It is a contradiction. If this continues, either the country may eventually become divided or completely Islamized. This is a great challenge for Christian legislators in Nigeria.

5. *Islamic Conference Organization*

Nigeria became an official member of the Organization of Islamic Conference in the early 1990s, during the reign of the first military president (Major

General Ibrahim Babangida). This was in the midst of protest by Nigerian Christians and civil rights activists, yet the military president went ahead to register Nigeria with the above organization. Right from that time, Nigeria has always been regarded as an Islamic nation by other Islamic countries. Nigerian Muslims have always resisted attempts to portray Nigeria in a negative light. In consonance with the above, Akpoigbe (1994) asserted that the implication of this ideological manipulation of religion to embrace all life endeavors, despite the fact that the country is multi-religious, has led to major confrontations. This is because Nigeria's membership in the OIC presupposes that she has become an Islamic state, thus making people of other faiths in danger of being Islamized and relegated to the background.

6. *Boko Haram's resurgence*

It is a known fact that the 1904 Islamic Jihad of Uthman Dan-Fodio promised to take Islamic religion to the southern regions of Nigeria (Kalu, 1980). Uthman Dan-Fodio had submitted that "the sword of Islam will be thrown into the Atlantic Ocean." Ottuh and Erhabor (2022) collaborated on the above statement, stating that different Islamic extremists have tried to achieve the above goal, and the recent Boko Haram resurgence in Nigeria is not excluded from such a plot. The philosophy behind the latter movement is that anything Western should be erased from every country that is not affiliated with the Organization of Islamic Conference.

Secondly, the English language should not be used as a means of communication in a formal academic setting

in Nigeria, especially in northern Nigeria. Thirdly, the Arabic language should be an official language to be used in all institutions of learning in Nigeria. Fourthly, that Christianity should be erased from Nigeria because, according to them, Nigeria is an Islamic state. Fifthly, no other politician should rule Nigeria except a Northern Muslim because other non-Northern Muslims are inferior and second-class citizens (Ottuh, 2008). The above five philosophies are the reason behind the Boko Haram Renaissance.

7. *National grazing reserve bill*

Monye (2017) revealed that the proposed bill on the national grazing reserve by the Nigerian government is an attempt to fulfill Uthman Dan Fodio's mandate of 1904. Secondly, the Federal Government has the right to take any landed property within the country from its rightful owners and, in return, compensate them. Thirdly, the owners of such landed properties have the right to seek redress in a court of law, but only with the permission of the Attorney-General of the country. Monye (2017) further noted that the bill is a deliberate attempt to take over people's lands and hand them over to the Fulani cattlemen since it is only the Fulani that rear cattle in Nigeria. Taking a critical look at the above-proposed bill, if it is eventually passed into law, it may likely disintegrate the country. Purchasing landed properties by cattle owners for their cows is a common practice in other countries. There is no country where the lands of the citizens are compulsorily acquired and given to others. There are calls from various quarters of the nation that, in order to save Nigeria and her unborn

generations from Islamization, the passage of such a bill should be resisted by the Christians.

Lessons for Contemporary Churches in Nigeria

Religious intermarriage: According to Fola (2017), the major agenda to Islamize Nigeria is through intermarriage between female Christians and Muslim males. Because of their political advantages and influences, Nigerian politicians currently marry from the three major ethnic groups. This has also made it difficult to identify Nigerians within their own ethnic groups. This has also made it difficult to know who is a Christian, African traditional adherent, or Muslim. While individuals bearing three major Nigerian ethnic names are commendable for the purpose of national unity, it is disadvantageous to Nigeria's multi-religious status. Secondly, it is not the best idea to ascertain the correct assessment of Nigeria's census in relation to religious classification and population distribution. This is due to the fact that someone may have an Islamic name but be a Christian or a Christian name but be a Muslim or adherent of a traditional religion. The general belief is that there are more Islamic adherents in Nigeria than Christians. This is not completely true. It is likely a projection of the names of Nigerians who bear Muslim names, which may not necessarily correspond with their actual religious affiliations. The *Guardian* news paper of September 1, 1997, reported a scenario about Diana, who was a princess. Diana of Wales, popularly known as the "People's Princess," and a divorce from Prince Charles of the British Monarch, was killed in a fatal accident in Paris alongside her lover Dodi Al-Fayed, an Egyptian

multi-millionaire, on the 30th of August 1997. Among other reasons that were advanced as to what led to her death, it was masterminded by British intelligence to stop Dodi, a Muslim, from marrying Diana. According to the newspapers, Dodi would have become a stepfather to Prince William and Harry, Diana's two sons, which would have been an affront to the British monarchy. This assertion presupposes that Diana and Dodi's deaths had both political and religious undertones. And that the British want to keep their monarchical dynasty pure of mixed blood, as well as their state religion (the Church of England) free of Arab religious influence. If there is any lesson to be learned, Nigerian Christians should learn from the British approach by denying the marriage between Diana and Dodi. Second, the political strategy of marrying from other ethnic groups, coupled with mixed naming, for political reasons without regard for religion, may be a dangerous setback to Christianity and the promotion of the Islamic project in Nigeria. Nigerian Christians should learn from the Samaritan Jews, whose identity with the Judean Jews has gone into extinction and at best metamorphosed into the Arab nations that have continued to remain rivals to the Israelis till date.

Disunity among Christian denominations in Nigeria: Christians in Nigeria are divided because of divergent views on their denominational practices. Within the Christian Association of Nigeria, known as CAN, and the Christian Council of Nigeria, also known as CCN, there are blocs and camps of different ideologies. Denominational differences, coupled with a schism in the ecumenical councils, have opened a big gate for Islam to flourish in Nigeria. While Christian leaders are using the mass media and cable to criticize

one another's weaknesses by tearing themselves down, the Islamic leaders, on the other hand, are exploiting the above weaknesses to their advantage by advancing Islam in the country. On the part of Christians in the South, they have not shown enough solidarity to Christians in the North who are passing through persecution under Boko Haram's resurgence. This cold attitude of Christians in the West, South, and core Eastern regions of Nigeria towards their Christian brethren in the North is unhealthy for the continued existence of the Christian faith in Nigeria. According to Akanji (2015), security training, capacity building, budgeting, political involvement, good ecumenical relations, interreligious harmony, regulations, statistics, prayer and fasting, word preaching, repackaging of church activities, and rehabilitation, as well as the Nehemiah approach to security coupled with brotherly affection and standing on God's promises, can serve as solutions to avoiding the extinction of Christianity in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The research makes it evidently clear that the factors that led Christianity in North Africa into oblivion are currently present in Nigeria. Among them are the amalgamation of Nigeria with two distinct rival religions, the non-evangelization of northern Nigeria by the British missionaries, the socio-politico-economic dominance of the northern political class, the attraction of oil wealth in the South-South region, religious intermarriage, initiation of Nigeria into the Organization of Islamic Conference, the Boko Haram resurgence, the lack of unity among Christians in Nigeria, and disrespect for the national constitution, which sees Nigeria as a

secular state. With the above flaws notwithstanding, if Christians in Nigeria, especially Christian politicians, will genuinely uphold their professed faith in Christ in the corridors of power and fight against anti-Christian bills without betraying their electorates, it will serve as a check for Islamic incursion. Second, Christians in Nigeria, particularly the clergy, should shed their denominational veil and see themselves as one, avoiding unnecessary doctrinal differences and putting a premium on and engaging in a deliberate, aggressive, and strategic evangelization of the north. This can serve as an antidote to the eclipse of Christianity in Nigeria.

References

- Adegun, A. (2017). Emir Sanusi, blasts northern leaders, says region is poorest in Nigeria. <https://www.naij.com>
- Adjerhore, R. (2016). The development, growth and decline of Christianity in North Africa: Lessons for the contemporary church in Nigeria. Unpublished Thesis of Master of Divinity, BTS, Eku, Delta State, Nigeria.
- Akanji, I. (2015). Respond proactively to insecurity. *The Nigerian Baptist*, 94 (05), 22.
- Akpoigbe, S.A. (2015). The Samaritans' problem in its historical perspectives: The politico-religious implications for Nigerian' Christian. *Niger-Delta Journal of Religious Studies*, 2(1), 73-82.
- Akpoigbe, S.A. (1994). The Controversy of the Organization of Islamic Conference: The Socio-Religious Implications in Nigeria Politics. Paper on Religious Dialogue presented at NBTS, Ogbomoso.
- Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, re-stated in Philip Schaff, *History of Christian Church*, vol. III, 235
- Boer, H.R. (2003). *A short history of the early church*. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

- Buah, F.K. (1967). *West Africa and Europe*. Macmillan Education.
- Coombs, R.J. (2012). The decline in the North African church with reference to the state of the church from 100 AD to 640 AD. A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Theology at the South African Theological Seminary.
- Cragg, K. (2000). *A history in the Middle East*. Kregel Publications.
- Daniel, R. (1993). *This holy seed*. Harpenden: Tamarisk Publications.
- Der-Meer, F.V. (1961). *Augustine the bishop*. Harper and Row.
- Der-Meer, F. V. (September 1, 1992). Diana people's princess: Died at 36. *The Guardian*, 1-2.
- Falk, P. (1921). *The growth of the church in Africa*. Zondervan Publishing House.
- Frend, W.H.C. (1952). *The Donatist church*. OUP.
- Gonzalez, J.L. (1985). *The history of Christianity* Vol. 11. Harper and Row, Publishers.
- Isichei, E. (1995). *A history of Christianity in Africa*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Kalu, O.U. (Ed.). (1980). *The history of Christianity in Africa*. Longman, Group

- Lateju, F. (2017). Inter-Religious dialogue: A panacea for peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Being a Lecture Delivered at the Post Graduate School in Faculty of Humanities in Bowen University, Iwo.
- Latourette, K.S. (1970). *The great century: North Africa and Asia*. Vol.6. Zondervan.
- Latourette, K.S. (2018). *A history of the expansion of Christianity*. Vol. 1: 93. OUP.
- Latourette, K.S. (1973). *Advance through storm*. Harper and Row.
- Monsignor, L.D. (2003). *Early history of the Christian church*. Macmillan Education.
- Monye, A. (2015). *Grazing reserve council bill*. Whatsapp message
- Ottuh, P.O.O. (2008). Human Rights Abuses and Violations: The Sharia Experience (1999-2005). *Iroro: Faculty Journal of Arts*, 13(1), 63-71.
- Ottuh, P.O.O. (2012). Sharia, secularism and secularization: an appraisal of the Nigerian experience. *SAU Journal of Humanities*, 1 (1), 216-228
- Ottuh, P.O.O. & Erhabor, F.O. (2022). Radical Islamism: Trajectories of Human Rights Violations and

Abuses in Africa. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, 8 (1), 243.

Reese, T. (2015). Religious tensions in Nigeria.
<http://www.ncroline.org/authors/thomas-reese>.

Schaff, P. (1980). *History of the Christian church*.
Eerdmans.

Whiston, W. (1999). *The new complete works of Josephus*. Kregel Publications.