

## Christianity in Nigeria *Part II*

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*and*  
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*This is the concluding part of the substantial study of Christianity in Nigeria. (See AJET 20.1 for Part I). In Part II Drs. Bulus Galadima and Yusufu Turaki discuss the "Mission Indigenous Policy" and "The Church Within the Nigerian State, 1960 - 1993."*

*One subscriber of AJET, Dr. Andy Wildsmith, a former missionary in Nigeria who is familiar with church history in Nigeria, observed that two factual errors were made in Part I which we desire to correct. One was a printing error on page 92. The Roman Catholic Mission entered Nigeria in 1861, not 1961. The second error was made in the list attributed to George Foxall. This mistake perpetuates an old error which states that the Qua Iboe Mission entered Nigeria in 1932. Instead, this mission entered Nigeria in 1887 (He refers to several sources, including Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891 by J.F.A. Ajayi. Essex, Longman, 1965, p. 234). In 1932 the construction of the first church sanctuary was completed.*

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### **MISSION INDIGENOUS POLICY**

This article, Part II of "Christianity in Nigeria," describes the indigenisation policy of some Christian missions which led to the founding of National Churches in the 1950s. This phenomenon was more of the experience of Christian missions in Northern Nigeria, such as, SIM, SUM, UMS, etc. However, mission agencies of the mainline denominations, such as the Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans (CMS) and the Catholics did not develop similar mission indigenous policies of the former group. The independent faith missions did two important things: (1) they developed new church structures and organisations; (2) they trained and developed nationals to take-over their mission work. Church missions, on the other hand, did only one major thing and that is, they trained nationals to take the places of missionaries.

This section discusses the indigenous policies of the independent and faith missions which operated mainly in Northern Nigeria.

#### **Classical Indigenous Principles**

Some of the classical indigenous principles which Christian missions used were:

**Ziegenbalg's and Plutschau's Principles:** In the early 1700s, Ziegenbalg and Plutschau, the first non-Catholic missionaries to reach India from Europe, established five basic principles of mission work. (Foxall)

- a. The Church and School are to go together so that Christians can read the Word of God;
- b. The Bible must be available in the vernacular;
- c. In order to communicate the Gospel, the missionary needs to have an understanding of the people;
- d. The objective of preaching is personal conversion;
- e. The indigenous church leadership must come into being.

These five principles can be summarised as: (1) Christian Education, (2) Translation, (3) Language and Cultural Studies, (4) Evangelism and (5) Training indigenous Church leaders.

**William Carey's Principles:** William Carey developed similar principles after his arrival in India in 1793. Carey's five basic principles of mission work were.

- a. Preach the Gospel as far widespread as possible and by every possible method;
- b. Make the Bible available in the vernacular;
- c. Establish a church as soon as possible;
- d. Study the cultural background of the people; and
- e. Train an indigenous ministry (Foxall).

These five principles can be summarised as (1) itineration, evangelism, and founding of mission stations, (2) translation, (3) church planting, (4) language and cultural studies, and (5) train indigenous church leaders.

**David Livingstone's Principles:** David Livingstone, who influenced the world and missions in the mid-1800s, developed the principle of the "Bible and the Plow," or "Commerce and Christianity." (Foxall) Livingstone stated, "We ought to encourage the Africans to cultivate for our markets as the most effectual means next to the Gospel for their elevation." Furthermore, he stated, "I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity." (Foxall)

Later, "education and medicine" were added to the concept of "the Bible and the Plow." "Commerce and Christianity" led to the founding of the John Holt Company and the United Trading Company (UTC) that are well known in Nigeria for their commercial activities with no missionary association today. (Foxall)

**Henry Venn's Principles:** Henry Venn was the Secretary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Nigeria, 1841-71. Henry Venn's principles were stated,

That the objective of mission is the calling into existence of self-overning, self-supporting and self-propagating churches, and that the "euthanasia" of a mission takes place when the missionary is able to resign all pastoral work into the hands of the indigenous ministry and congregation. (Foxall)

**Rufus Anderson's Principles:** Rufus Anderson of the American Congregational Church developed similar principles as Henry Venn's. He stated that "heathen nations must be rendered independent of Christendom for their religious teachers as soon as possible." (Foxall)

**Roland Allan's Principles:** Roland Allan's principle, which had greater influence in mission theory beyond Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, was "the dynamic function of the Holy Spirit in the national Church." (Foxall) He stated that,

Paul withheld no gift from them which might enable them to dispense with his presence, he gave as a right to the Spirit-bearing Body the powers which duly belong to a Spirit-bearing Body. (Foxall)

The above classical indigenisation principles had profound influence upon Christian missions. The only difficulty which Christian missions faced was the actual outworking of these principles in practical mission work in Africa. These policies defined in general terms the nature of the Church, its quality, structures, etc. The adequate or inadequate preparations of nationals to take over mission work depended very much upon what Christian missions understood by these indigenous policies and also what models they used in implementing them.

The influence of Rufus Anderson, Henry Venn, and Roland Allen upon the Evangelical missions was seen in their emphasis upon building churches that could stand on their own based upon the three selves formula, self-propagation, self-supporting and self-governing.

#### **Implementation of Classical Principles**

This section describes how Christian missions attempted to implement the classical indigenisation principles in the Mission Field.

**1. Evangelism and Church Planting:** Principles of evangelism were taught to early converts who became itinerant evangelists alongside the missionaries. Church planting resulted from various missionary activities, such as, evangelism, itineration, education, medical, literature work, etc. Organised evangelism and church planting based upon classical indigenisation principles were quite evident even during the pioneering stages of the mission work.

**2. Theological Training:** Christian missions founded many Vernacular Bible Training Schools with the primary purpose of developing indigenous Bible teachers, evangelists, and pastors who would later form a crop of indigenous church leadership.

**3. Teacher Training:** Teacher Training Centres were also built by Christian missions with the primary purpose of developing indigenous teachers. Similar Advanced Schools were established with the view of preparing indigenous leadership within the African Church.

**4. Pastoral Training:** Pastoral training was the least developed by Christian missions. Theological institutions were mainly centres of training evangelists and Bible teachers. Pastoral training and church administration were less emphasised. The missionaries felt that these two areas should not be introduced to the Africans too soon. In consequence, this simple preference became doctrinaire over the years. Licensing and ordination of Africans for pastoral duties and church leadership were most difficult to come by. Licensing and ordination of Africans were means of developing African Church leadership as those so licensed and ordained become the first national church leaders.

**5. Training of African Evangelists:** African evangelists were trained as an auxiliary work force to that of the missionaries in the Mission Field. However, indigenous missionary agencies similar to those of western societies were not formed, except for SIM which developed and indigenous one, African Missionary Society, in the late 1940s.

**6. Women's Fellowship:** The story of the founding of the Women's Fellowship is another means of implementing indigenisation policy. The Protestant missions in Northern Nigeria saw the value of developing both missionary ladies and national women and advised each mission agency to establish its women ministry.

**7. Conference of Missions in the Northern Provinces of Nigeria 1910-1948:** The series of Inter-Mission Conferences in the field (1910, 1913, 1926, 1929, 1932, 1935 and 1937) at Lokoja, Miango, and Jos mentioned in the previous section had been of great influence towards the development and implementation of indigenous principles. Similarly the Annual Meeting of the Representatives of Missions (AMRM) from 1935-1948 contributed a lot in this area.

It has been mentioned that the Colonial regulatory policies on Christian missions brought missionaries together in a united front. In addition to these, the conferences provided a common ground forum where Christian missions operating in Northern Nigeria addressed difficult issues which could not be handled by the individual mission

societies, issues such as, marriage, divorce and remarriage, standardisation of Christian worship, Scriptures translation, language studies, grants-in-aid and educational matters, etc. Most of the deliberations during these conferences affected the lives of the indigenous Christians. As such, general policies and resolutions were usually taken which, in consequence, affected the development of national Churches.

The idea of developing a national Church was fully discussed among these missions. At Miango in 1926 the Chairman of the conference introduced a resolution on a "Combined Native Church",

The Chairman felt that each Mission should not perpetuate its own denomination in the Mission Field. The Mission Field should be a place where Missions sink some of their differences and work towards founding of a common Church; some form of Federation. (Conference of Missions Minutes)

The Chairman, Bishop Smith of the CMS, proposed: "United Church of Africa in Northern Provinces." He also suggested the ordination of African ministers.

In these conferences, the missions discussed two types of federations. The first type was the Federation of all Christian Missions and the second, the Union of African Churches, which grew out of these missions. While the Federation of Missions was fully understood, the Union of Churches was not. Some favoured the organic union while others favoured the federation of fellowship of churches. The lack of a consensus on this matter led to the abandonment of the idea of the Union of Churches. The understanding was that each mission should develop its own national churches while continuing the inter-mission conferences. Christian missions cooperated together in various missionary ventures and enterprises, and this fact contributed immensely to the development and implementation of certain indigenous principles.

**8. International Missionary Council (IMC):** The IMC, based in London, Great Britain, contributed immensely in helping Christian missions to develop indigenous principles. The significance of the International Missionary Conference on Africa at Le Zoute, Belgium in 1926 and the subsequent ones need to be mentioned. The conference

emphasised the importance of understanding and respecting the social values of Africans.

The life of the African is essentially social and based on tribal conditions and traditional customs. The interests of the individual are subordinate to the interests of the group. The community rather than the individual is the unit of thought and practice to a far greater degree than it is among ourselves. (Smith)

One of the greatest issues which faced missionaries was the relation of the Church to African customs and culture. To underscore this point, the conference asserted,

The acceptance by Africans of Christianity does not mean—at least, it ought not to mean—that they cease to be Africans. Dr. Donald Fraser's words—"I fear the evangel which denationalizes"—expressed the general conviction of the Conference. (Smith).

A practical question was asked: "How am I to guide my people so that while becoming true disciples of Christ they may remain true Africans?" On how to deal with the importation of "animistic" beliefs in the Church, the attitude of missionaries should be: "Tolerance combined with thorough and consistent instruction." Dr. Richter called on modern missionaries to break away from their predecessors in the way they treated African customs.

Our missions have had an experience of over a century now, and more or less definite rules have been laid down and followed. On the other hand, I am more and more conscious that those decisions were taken by our predecessors in greater or less ignorance. They did not know what those customs meant; they did not know the Africans. We know the facts far better than they knew them, and cannot but ask ourselves, "Shall we continue to follow their rules?" (Smith)

The Conference took a resolution which was to guard against missionaries wounding the feelings of African Christians: That missionaries should not be overzealous in legislating for the African Church. "After all, Africans know the life of their people as no foreigner can know it; and it is Africans, not foreigners, who will

ultimately determine the course that the African Church will take in these matters." It also warned against the creation of artificial sins. "Europeans are apt to see evil in African doings where there is no evil."

The conference enunciated the principle that "everything that is good in the African's heritage should be conserved, enriched and ennobled by contact with the spirit of Christ." The conference divided customs into three categories:

- a. Customs which are evil – these the Church cannot sanction.
- b. Customs which are not incompatible with the Christian life – these should not be condemned.
- c. Customs whose accidents are evil but whose substance is valuable – these may be purified and used. (Smith)

The categorisation of customs along these lines was a matter to be decided locally.

The Conference raised the question of denominationalism. "Are other missionaries to act similarly, carrying to Africa all the denominational distinctions which are a shame of our European and American Christianity, with the result that the Africans also must learn to pray about "our unhappy divisions"? The lack of missionary understanding of African culture, values, and personality constituted a great obstacle towards missionary development and implementation of indigenous principles.

**9. Nationalist Movements:** Nationalist movements within the colonies, which became very strong in the mid-1940s, both challenged and rejected colonialism. In their attack on colonialism, Christian missions too, were not spared. The nationalist doctrine emphasised that colonialists should hand-over political power to the indigenes and put an end to all forms of colonialism.

Nationalists were not only interested in wresting power out of the hands of colonialists but also in the training and development of indigenes who would take over power from the colonialists. The demand here was not simply freedom, but consistent training and preparation of those who would run the government machinery when the colonial masters left. As a result of the nationalist movements, their demand for political independence and training of nationals who would take-over became a matter of necessity. This political movement exerted



a powerful influence on missionary development and the implementation of indigenous principles.

Some Africans became quite vocal and radical and thereby demanded advanced training and greater participation in the running of the missions. Such dissenting voices were beginning to be heard during the late 1940s. Many nationals felt that the process of indigenisation was too slow, either by not giving adequate training to the nationals, or not giving them a greater part to play in the running of the missions. This area too created a lot of tension, suspicion, and misunderstandings between the missionaries and nationals.

**10. Missions in search of an Indigenous Formula:** The nationalist movements of the 1940s taught Christian missions lessons. It became quite certain that Nigeria might become independent, perhaps by the mid-1950s. Questions and fears arose in the minds of Christian missions. If Nigeria should become independent, what would happen to the missionary enterprise? What would become of the nationals who had become Christians? Would Christian Missions be kicked out? Would mission institutions and churches be nationalised? Solutions to these issues were sought out by Christian missions.

**a. Forging a Common Front.** Christian missions were faced with two major problems: (1) the unfriendly attitude and the regulatory policies of the Colonial Administration; and (2) the radicalism of nationalists. Their response to these twin problems was in turn, and in itself, an indigenisation process.

Christian missions, operating within a colonial segregated and hierarchical structure of Northern Nigeria, were forced to form a common front in order to fight successfully against the obnoxious colonial regulatory policies. The common front of Christian missions was formed in the following ways as pointed out already:

- 1) From 1910s-1930s, Conference of Missions in Northern Nigeria, consisting of SIM, CMS, SUM, UMS, DRCM, and a few others;
- 2) From 1940s-1950s, Annual Meeting of the Representatives of Missions in Northern Nigeria (AMRM), consisting of SIM, CMS, SUM, UMS, DRCM, and a few others;
- 3) From the early 1950s to the late 1950s, Joint Meetings between AMRM (North), the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN, South), and SIM (since SIM refused to join CCN and AMRM).

Christian missions used these three forums for fellowship as common forums of deliberating and resolving their common problems, on the one hand, and addressing and confronting the Colonial Government and nationalist issues, on the other. Because of the fears of what might become of the missionary enterprise and the indigenous Christians, Christian missions worked tirelessly in the early 1950s to ensure that a clause guaranteeing religious freedom and human rights was enshrined in both the Regional and National Constitutions.

Protestant Christian missions in Southern Nigeria organised an ecumenical forum in the late 1930s which later became the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN). The primary function of CCN then was to develop a common ground approach and policies governing missionary activities in the area of education, medical and other causes, on the one hand, and also how to integrate mission policies with that of the Colonial Government. CCN became a senior partner to the AMRM in Northern Nigeria. The Protestant missions in both the South and the North worked very closely in helping to deal with the peculiar religious and political issues of Northern Nigeria. In the 1950s, the Protestant missions in Northern Nigeria (AMRM) and the Protestant missions in Southern Nigeria (CCN) held annual joint meetings and discussed matters of mutual interests. Later, AMRM of the North joined CCN. SIM was the only Mission in the North that refused to join CCN. Later, (SIM was instrumental in forming the Nigerian Evangelical Fellowship (NEF) in 1962). Thus, Christian missions of the North and those of the South came together to form one body in the CCN.

The Colonial Administration, both in the South and North, showed great interest in what Christian missions were doing. The Colonial Government had its representatives in both CCN and AMRM. In the North, when AMRM joined CCN in 1948, Northern Advisory Education Council (Protestant) (NEAC) was formed. This Body, just like CCN, became an intermediary between Christian missions in the North and the Colonial Administration. Its primary function was to co-ordinate missionary education, medical, literature work, etc. and to present the needs of missions to the Colonial Government. Government representatives usually attended NEAC meetings.

The Colonial Administration in a similar fashion, dealt separately with the Roman Catholic Secretariat. Catholics and Protestants were

treated separately through their ecumenical bodies. Through out the colonial era, Catholics and Protestants never had a common forum until in the mid-1970s when the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was formed).

Before the merger of the two blocks, AMRM and CCN, Protestant Christian missions in Northern Nigeria usually contacted the CCN based in Lagos to help them fight some causes for them. The issue of political independence and religious liberty and freedom of worship became paramount in the early 1950s. The Protestant missions in the North did request the CCN to keep up the pressure on the House of Representatives in Lagos on these religious and political matters until when they phased out AMRM and joined CCN.

On the 20th of April, 1955, the SIM and the CCN wrote a joint statement which was presented to the Civil Secretary of the Northern Region of Nigeria. The primary reason for such a joint statement was stated thus,

As a result of the written and sometimes verbal conditions which have recently been set upon missionaries by certain Residents of the Northern Region acceptance of which we have deferred, we desire to discuss the entire position of religious bodies working in the Northern Region. (SIM Archives, Toronto)

In this joint statement, Christian missions raised a number of issues, but prominent were the issues of religious freedom and human rights. They argued,

The position therefore is that it is the minority religions rather than Islam which require protection. In the predominantly Moslem areas the adherents of these minority religions are small and powerless in comparison with Islam; in the predominantly pagan areas the rulers are often Moslem. The need therefore is to ensure that such minorities are guaranteed the ordinary human rights. Lord Lugard's statement that "all were free to worship God as they please" should be made applicable to these minorities.

The Christian Council of Nigeria, therefore, and the Sudan Interior Mission, in association with this Council, request the British Administration, as representative of one of the signatories to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights to take the initiative in order to ensure that the proposed

Regional Constitution includes a clause guaranteeing religious freedom comparable to the above statement by Lord Lugard and to Article 18 of the United Nations Declaration. (SIM Archives, Toronto)

This is just one of many statements, memoranda, and letters which Christian Missions sent to both Lagos and Kaduna. While Christian missions were addressing the issues of religious freedom and human rights to the colonial masters and nationalists, the need to train and develop national church leadership became quite obvious; should they be kicked out at independence by the nationalists.

**b. Missions Strategies.** The prevailing socio-political situation of the late 1940s and the early 1950s left Christian missions with no choice but to train and develop national church leadership who would take-over the mission work. The missions addressed the situation at two fronts: the political approach and the ecclesiastical approach.

**1) Political Approach:** Politically, the missions advised nationals to develop strategies of ensuring the inclusion of religious freedom and human rights in the constitutions of both Lagos and Kaduna as stated already. Nationals were advised to do research on Christian members of the House of Representatives, Lagos and Christian members of the House of Assembly and House of Chiefs, Kaduna. These Christian members were to be acquainted and educated on Christian rights and the dangers of losing such rights in Independent Nigeria. In the following paragraphs, we present some strategies of both missionaries and nationals for solving this problem.

After SIM pulled out of the AMRM in 1948 as pointed out already, the remaining Christian missions in the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) and the SIM continued to hold consultations as usual on crucial issues affecting the operations of missions. 1955 was a significant year during which Christian missions in Northern Nigeria began to address seriously the political developments in Nigeria.

Religious freedom was just one aspect of politics. Christian missions played a significant role in giving guidance and direction to the national Church leaders, but did so in the background. The nature of Middle Belt politics was described in the following words of Mr. C.H.C. Edwards of the SIM,

From what the above members of the two Houses said I understand that the United Middle Belt Congress is making it one of the conditions of their alliance with the N.P.C. party that a clause on religious freedom is included in their policy. From a private confidential conversation I had with M. Dawuda of the Northern House it seems that the N.P.C. is not going to ask for self government for this Region in 1956. On this understanding the Middle Belt people will forego their demands for a separate zone at this stage provided that the N.P.C. will guarantee religious freedom to all classes throughout the region. It seems to me that if the N.P.C. really values an alliance with the Middle Belt people and want to keep them in the one region, this may probably be a very good line of approach and by this means we may get the religious freedom clause into the Constitution through the Africans themselves whether or not the European administration has any particular view on it from their end. (SIM Field Letter No. 2)

The idea of developing a common political forum by the Christians of Northern origin received much encouragement from Christian missions which were afraid to be seen participating in politics. The Colonial Administration and the Northern political elites were very suspicious of Christian missions, especially the SIM in Southern Zaria, and more so when the Non-Muslim League (later changed to Middle Zone League) was formed in Zaria and Plateau Provinces. They saw this new political movement in the late 1940s and early 1950s as mainly Christian. However, this loose political movement was seen as a threat to the corporate existence of Northern Nigeria. Those who played an active and leading role in this new political movement were mainly products of the SIM and SUM.

The political approach of the Christian missions to the prevailing political situations in Northern Nigeria in the late 1940s and the 1950s did influence the development, formulation, and implementation of missions indigenisation principles in general. The politics of independence did affect the processes of indigenisation within Christian missions and national churches.

**2) Ecclesiastical Approach:** The most important step towards indigenisation was not only the training of indigenous evangelists, catechists, and teachers, but the training, licensing, and ordination of some nationals to become pastors with authority to run the churches and carry out ministerial duties was also very important

Licensing and ordination were very important steps towards indigenisation and the formation of indigenous church leadership. As this fact was understood by nationals, it led to having great demands and putting much pressure on missions to liberalise licensing and ordination. This process was observed to be very crucial in giving nationals greater say and participation in Mission/Church leadership. Licensing and ordination were processes which granted recognition and conferment of leadership status on well-deserving nationals.

Early national church leadership took root in the processes of licensing and ordination. As more and more nationals were either licensed or ordained, African participation in Mission/Church matters and numbers grew. This also led to missions giving more responsibilities to the nationals, hence the development of indigenous Church leadership.

**3) Hand-Over of Mission Work to Nationals:** The philosophy of hand-over or the methodology of implementing the indigenous principles had to be worked out or developed by the Mission concerned. This philosophy simply meant that a Mission hand over its mission work, ministries, and operations in the Mission Field to the national Church which takes over the ministries and operations from the Mission. The hand-over or take-over became the historical incidence which both sides, the Mission and the Church anticipated, prepared, and accomplished as fulfilling the desired end of the Mission, the founding of a national Church.

The intended end of the missionary philosophy of the three selves was the establishment of the national Church, but this philosophy did not seem to have a methodology or the worked out process of handing over responsibilities to the nationals by the missionaries. It was somewhat related circumstantially to the colonial political philosophy of developing colonies towards independence in the 1940s and 1950s.

This concept of preparing the colonies for political independence by the colonial masters was also applied to Christian missions. It was also expected of Christian missions to prepare nationals to take over Church leadership and governance from the missionaries. The world political events of the 1940s and the 1950s in the colonies pressurised Christian Missions into preparing nationals to take over from the missionaries.

In Nigeria, the late 1940s and the early 1950s, witnessed a dramatic rise in nationalist activities and demands for political independence from Great Britain. During this period, Christian missions in Nigeria held a series of meetings on what to do if Nigeria should become independent by the 1950s. Constitutional questions on human rights and religious freedom were seriously raised by the Christian missions and national Christians.

It was feared that at independence missionaries and missionary work might cease to exist in Nigeria, especially in Northern Nigeria. This, however, led mission agencies to plan on founding national churches with government registration as a means of forestalling government take over of mission institutions at independence.

In the mission work, it was expected that nationals would replace missionaries. Nationalisation was measured by the number of nationals within the mission work. The goal here was to have more, if not all, nationals handling the mission work, while the expatriate missionaries should phase themselves out of mission work. In some extreme cases, moratorium was held as the norm or "missionary go home."

Looking at the performance of nationals, some were prone to ask: "Were the nationals who took over the mission work competent and skillful or were they adequately prepared to take over?" Some also argued, "It is one thing to take over, but it is another to know and fully implement the Goal and Objectives of mission ministries:" or "It is one thing to have a 'black face' on but it is another to know who calls the shots." These conflicting definitions of the philosophy of hand-over/take-over did not encourage a good mutual working relationship between missions and nationals.

Some aspects of Mission work have suffered terribly after the hand-over, and some have progressed well. Adequate preparation of competent and skilful nationals is quite essential, as well as their commitment to the concept of ministry and calling and full implementation of the goals and objectives of mission work. In general, nationals were not well prepared and groomed to take over from missionaries. Thus, the state of the Church and its relationship to the State and society reflect so much of the missionary legacy already outlined.

However, there are two crucial issues that need to be addressed: (1) the Church within the Nigerian State; and (2) the Church within the Nigerian contemporary society. These two important issues are taken up in the subsequent sections.

### **THE CHURCH WITHIN THE NIGERIAN STATE, 1960-1993**

The previous sections have discussed at length the formation of the Church through the work of Christian missions in Nigeria. The scope of this paper and our own personal experiences did not allow for examining the missionary experiences in Southern Nigeria and especially the contributions of the Roman Catholic Mission. From background studies of the previous sections, it is important to state the continuity and similarities between policies of the Colonial Administration and that of the Nigerian State towards the Church after independence, which were by and large pro-Islamic. This reflects the dominance of the Northern political and military ruling class in post-colonial Nigeria.

#### **From 1900s-1940s: Colonial Era**

From 1900s to 1940s, the period was characterised by colonial policies of (1) religious non-interference; (2) separate development; (3) regulatory policies and control of Christian missions; (4) pro-Islamic bias and protection; and (5) entrenchment of Islamic power and dominance in Northern Nigeria.

#### **The 1950s: Preparation for Independence**

The 1950s were preparatory years for Nigerian independence in 1960. The major issue at stake was "Religious Liberty" and its inclusion in the Constitution. Both Christian missions and national Christians became politically alert and active in ensuring religious liberty after independence. Both the Colonial Administration and Northern political leaders gave assurance of religious liberty to all Nigerians. Muslim leaders in the North preached religious tolerance and liberty to both Christian missions and national Christians in the North after independence.



**1960-1966: The First Republic and Fall of Nigeria**

The Government of the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) in the North, after silencing all opposition in the North, re-asserted the power and dominance of Islam in the Northern System. The Premier of Northern Nigeria, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, asserted himself as the Apostle of Islam and turned his efforts at converting the non-Muslims. This singular act drove fear into Christians in the North for fear of possible islamisation of the entire North.

Islam became the gate way to Northern political fortunes and the sole determinant of who is a "true Northerner". The gains of the 1950s in terms of religious liberty and tolerance was fast giving way to religious intolerance and fears of forceful Islamisation. A combination of ethno-regional, religious and cultural factors and corruption led to the downfall of the First Republic.

Nigerian Foreign policy of the period was dominated by pro-Arab and Islamic principles as these cultural and religious factors became the centre piece of Nigerian Foreign policy.

**1966-1979: The Military, Civil War and Religion**

The military coup led Major Chukwuma Nzeogu Kaduna on January 15, 1966, brought an end to the short-lived First Republic. Soon after that Nigeria was plunged into 30 months civil war of Biafra. The war was prosecuted by the Head of State General Yakubu Gowon.

Religion played an important role as both Islam and Christianity were used to mobilise resources for the prosecution of the war. The break-away East, Biafra, was predominantly Christian. Even though General Gowon was a Christian, but being a Northerner, Islam was quite dominant and exerted powerful influence in Nigerian State policy-making. In some quarters, the war was seen as Islam versus Christianity. The 30 months civil war, 1966-1970, tested the theology of "war and peace" of the Church in Nigeria. The split Church on both sides of the divide supported the cause of each opponent. The churches on both sides supported the war with prayers and material contributions and human resources.

Soon after the war, Christian missions were expelled from the East and that was soon followed by Government take over of missions

schools and hospitals. Islamic and cultural sensitivities influenced greatly these State policies.

The formation of Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in the early 1970s introduced in a big way religion into Nigeria's politics. This was also an opportunity for Arab countries to assert their Islamic and cultural dominance in international politics. In 1973, OPEC and Arab nations influenced the general African (OAU) boycott and severing of diplomatic relations with Israel.

Nigeria also took up an observer status with the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) during the same period and which in 1986, General Babangida signed Nigeria as a permanent member to date.

Generals Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo regime, 1975-79, introduced Islamic Sharia into Nigerian Constitution making and politics. Since then, the Islamic Sharia has remained an issue in Nigerian politics. The Constitution Drafting Committee of Rotimi Williams in the late 1970s had serious debates about the place of Islamic Sharia in the constitution.

This period also witnessed the response of the Church to the rising power of Islam in Nigeria. The Church at this time saw the need of forming an ecumenical forum and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was formed in the mid-1970s. This religious Body was predated by earlier missionary ecumenical bodies, such as, AMRM, CCN and NEF.

### **The Second Republic: 1979-1993**

During the Shagari's regime, religion became quite prominent, especially the Muslim Pilgrimage matters. The State became very partial in handling this religious issue, where Islam was the favoured Government religion to the neglect of Christianity. Even though Nigeria was defined as a secular State by the 1979 Constitution, the State, however, continued to be heavily involved in religious matters.

Alhaji Shehu Shagari created a Muslim Board to advise him on Islamic matters and which raised protests and rejections from Christian quarters. This fact also reveals Government discriminatory policy toward the non-Muslim and its preferential attitude toward Islam.

The Maitatsine riots at Kano in 1982 and the subsequent ones brought to light the increasing erosion of religious tolerance between

Islam and Christianity, especially in the Northern States of Nigeria. Government involvement in religious affairs increased the frequency of religious riots in the 1980s and the 1990s. The ambivalent attitude and approach of the State in religious matters gave opportunities to frequent religious riots in the Northern States in the 1980s and the 1990s.

**The Regimes of Generals Buhari and Babangida, 1984-1993**

General Buhari amended the "personal" definition of Sharia in the 1979 Constitution which aroused counter reactions from Christians.

In 1986, the General Babangida's Regime sought to redefine the secularity of the Nigerian state by enlisting Nigeria as a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). This political act almost brought the nation to ruin. The Muslim-Christian rivalry was inflamed and heightened. This incidence also almost ruined the Debates of the Constituent Assembly in 1989 on the Sharia issue. The Military had to intervene and stopped the Debates on Sharia since it was capable of destroying the existence of Nigeria as one indivisible political entity.

In 1992, General Babangida normalised relations with the State of Israel. This was a unique and unusual move by a Head of State who himself was a Muslim.

Religion and Sharia were dominant socio-political values and factors of the Colonial North while that of the South was religion and custom. The Northern political elites who dominated the Northern System had their socio-political values of religion and Sharia congruent with the Northern System. This politico-religious base was shifted to Lagos during the military regimes which were dominated by the northern military class. This later resulted in a powerful Islamic dominance of the State from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Islamic control of the military, politics and diplomacy in Nigeria has kept the Church on the sidelines and thereby weakened its position of influence in political matters. The battle ground between Christianity and Islam is in the Northern States. Almost all religious riots since the 1980s to the present have taken place in the North and only one took place at the University of Ibadan. Kaduna, Kano and Bauchi have been the hot-beds of religious riots.

As outlined above, the Church in Nigeria is gradually losing its influence, especially in political and social matters. The social and religious position of the Church are taken up in the next section.

### **THE CHURCH AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL ISSUES**

Contemporary social issues of Nigeria have compounded the problems of the Nigerian State and citizenship and therefore make the work of the Nigerian Church even more difficult and complex. For this reason, the Church in Nigeria must take up its social role and responsibilities seriously, given the state of Nigerian condition today. The Church cannot be an effective witness of the Good News of Jesus Christ if this fact is neglected. Effective witness of the Gospel must have to address the present Nigerian condition. What is the nature of contemporary Nigerian condition which the Nigerian Church must address?

In summary, the Nigerian condition can be described thus:

#### **Social and Cultural Issues**

1. Family disintegration and break down of family values
2. Ethnicity, tribalism and regionalism and sectionalism
3. Educational problems, and break down of the educational system, rising illiteracy and neglect of professional ethics
4. Problem of urbanisation and rural migration into cities
5. Abuse and misuse of drugs, etc.
6. Armed robbery, assassinations and violence
7. Communal and ethnic clashes and riots

#### **Political Issues**

1. Leadership problems in both the Church and State
2. Problems of Church-State relationship
3. Problems of multi-party political system
4. Problems of military dictatorship and militarism
5. Lack of a viable political system and peaceful co-existence between ethno-regional political centres
6. Problems of democratisation and elections
7. Problems of population control
8. Problems of foreign policy

#### **Economic Issues**

1. Prevailing poverty

2. Unemployment
3. Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), and external debt
4. Distress, corruption and collapse of the banking industry
5. Environmental issues
6. Industrialisation, creation and distribution of wealth and brain drain
7. Over dependence on oil revenues and underdevelopment of other economic sectors

**Judicial Issues**

1. Problems of human and civil rights and arbitrary detentions
2. Problems of public accountability and corruption
3. Bureaucratic bottlenecks and miscarriage of justice
4. Rise in crimes and "pen-robberies"
5. Prison congestion

**Religious Issues**

1. Rise of new religions and cults
2. Religious fundamentalism, intolerance, riots and violence
3. Religious persecution in some states
4. Problems of religious pluralism and secularism
5. Problems of religious politics
6. State's preferential and differential treatment of religions and religious groups
7. Proliferation of new theologies, preachers and churches

**Other Issues:** Aids, prostitution, abortion, pornography, cults and secret societies, polygamy, etc.

The above socio-political issues reflect generally the moral, spiritual and ethical social order in Nigeria and that the Church in Nigeria has to contend with this social order. It is important to note that the British Colonial Administration established the Nigerian State based upon certain principles of imperialism, racial or tribal inequality and differential and preferential treatment of ethnic groups or regions. The continuity of some negative values and unjust pre-colonial and colonial structures in Nigeria pose many problems for the Nigerian State and citizenship. The role of the Church is to address the decay of this moral, spiritual and ethical situation in Nigeria.

**The Search for a Viable Political System**

The search for legitimate and viable political system and structure in Nigeria where ethnic or class or religious conflicts can be managed, accommodated and moderated must address itself to the definition of

the State as a moral institution. The role and function of the State has always been assumed, especially in Nigeria. What is the legitimate basis for the existence of the State? What moral or ethical principles is the State founded upon? State laws, decrees, statutes, policies and pronouncements are founded upon what basis? The concept of the State used here refers to "a politically organised community with clearly defined territorial boundaries and government". From a Christian Traditional State is an institution divinely ordained by God. The Holy Bible states: "For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1b).

The State was ordained by God as an instrument of justice and judgement. The State as "government" is a representative of God's sovereignty, righteousness and justice on earth. It, therefore, means that the State in dealing with her citizens, she must do so under God's sovereignty, righteousness and justice. From this definition, what then is the difference between the Church and the State?

The divine origin and legitimacy of the State as an instrument of God's justice in human society makes it a moral and ethical institution. The State as a moral and ethical institution must then uphold the following ideals:

- a. The State is morally accountable to God and her citizens.
- b. The State must uphold its entire citizenry in a "a solidarity and equality of the human family" of all groups in the state
- c. The State must respect and honour the historical freedoms of all persons as a pre-condition for effective political and economic participation; and
- e. The State must acknowledge the reality of its limitations and sin in human society and, therefore, the need to control (limit) economic and political power (adapted).

A normative framework based upon the concept of social justice needs to be developed and which should form the basis of evaluating the legacies of protracted injustice, distorted human participation, continuity of unjust structures, and acts of social and moral indiscipline that are rampant in Nigeria today. Given the current state of the Nigerian State and the nature of citizenship, the following normative questions need to be raised: What solutions and suggestions can we offer for a just social order? What normative guidelines which

transcend ethnic, religious, cultural, class or personal proclivities can we use to order social relations and institutional practice? What values should form the basis of national integration or consensus, harmony, mutual understanding, co-operation among ethnic or religious groups? What values should be used to build a just participatory and sustainable social order? How can we correct the inherited unjust structures and social values of inequality, insecurity and incompatibility? Herein lies both the opportunity and the responsibility of the Church in developing a theology of the State, society and social action to address the ills of Nigeria. There is a Christian response to some of these contemporary issues which is quite important to our understanding of the role of the Church in the 21st Century. The contemporary Christian response is grossly inadequate and lacks a relevant theology that is biblical and contextual. This aspect is highlighted in the next and concluding section.

### **CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN RESPONSE**

There are numerous issues confronting the Nigerian Church as it approaches the 21st century. These issues can be classified as ecclesiological, social, and theological. The response to these issues reflect a general uncoordinated Christian approach by individuals, churches and quasi-organisations.

#### **Ecclesiological Issues**

There is an unprecedented number of new churches emerging everyday in the urban centres. For example, in Maiduguri the capital of Borno State, in an area outside town, there are over 50 different churches within a three hundred yard walk. The proliferation of independent and charismatic churches in urban centres across the country is indeed an alarming and rising phenomenon.

The belief in the priesthood of believers has given many Nigerian Christians the confidence to claim direct access to God and hear His calling over their lives. This belief coupled with the belief in the ability of the Holy Spirit to teach and empower a believer has led the emergence of many self-made Christian leaders. Such leaders find a

place of worship no matter how small, usually it is in a room. Then they gather people around themselves. As soon as possible, they buy a public address system. There is a new church which has less than ten members but it has a very loud public address system. Another church with less than a hundred members has musical instruments and a public address system worth hundreds of thousands of *naira*.

These spontaneous and self-expressive churches are springing up as a reaction against the traditional "docile" churches. People prefer the modern leadership and charismatic personality that attract people. This problem of spontaneity and charisma is a matter of concern for Roman Catholic and Protestant mainline and older churches. Even the Muslims are confronted with this modern phenomenon.

Many of the modern charismatic leaders started as a reaction against the established churches. These leaders were modest, wore informal clothes, abhorred titles, and resented being ostentatious. But today, the same leaders wear the latest designer clothes, expensive jewellery, and Rolex watches. The title Bishop is now acceptable to bear. They ride Mercedes Benz and even Jet planes. They seek media attention and wide publicity. One of these church leaders in Jos started about fifteen years ago and was homeless himself. He was squatting with someone and was the leader of an interdenominational couples' group. He converted some members of this group to form his core members. Today, he pastors a one thousand member congregation. Their place of worship is called a cathedral and he lives in the millionaires' quarters in Jos. He has a secondary school and was recently awarded an honorary doctorate degree which the media were invited to cover.

The Church needs to address the Youth Culture of today. Their mode of worship is the same regardless of the denomination one finds himself. Charismatic form of worship which encourages self-expression and loud music has become a part of the menu. They are highly artistic and visual oriented, thus their love for music to the neglect of Bible Study and theology. Many churches spend hundreds of thousands of *naira* in order to buy musical instruments. It is now a fad for each church to have its own band. Many of these same churches complained when they were asked to pay six thousand *naira* to buy a set of books worth over fifty thousand *naira* for their pastors. Pulpit and teaching ministries have been overshadowed by the music and media ministry.



Self expression in worship is highly welcome because it broadens the base of participation. However, the church needs to find a way of ensuring that these youths are grounded in the Word of God. This is essential if the Church of tomorrow is to have a solid foundation.

The efforts of Women Liberation movement, Feminist theology, and most recently the Beijing conference are being felt the world over. In the Nigerian Church, women form a majority of the believers. In ECWA, it is an open secret that a substantial part of the Church's income comes from the women. Gender issues are very rife in the society the church inclusive. They are no longer content to be observers in the church or the society. Attention needs to be given to clearly define the role of women within the church and larger society. Our women want more active roles. The egalitarian nature of the body of Christ, we believe, sheds light on this issue.

Contemporary ecclesiological issues are many and these require serious attention of the Church.

#### **Social Issues**

Across the world, there is a resurgence of ethnic and tribal identity. We have seen this in Europe and increasingly on the African continent. The church in Nigeria is not immune to this divisive ethnicity. Church elections are conducted along ethnic and tribal not along spiritual lines. This cankerworm needs to be addressed by the Church because it weakens the ability of the Church to mount any strong defensive or offensive strategies. If the Church is to address the problem of divisive ethnicity in the society, it must have resolved that problem for itself. Scripture's teaching on the unity of Christ's Body provides a way of overcoming this problem.

At the moment, Nigerian Government lacks credibility. There is a sharp decline in the state's ability to provide social services like education and health to its citizenry. There is no enabling environment for the private sector to grow. Government holds on to many parastatals and refuses to privatise them even though it is unable to run them efficiently. It is for this reason that power supply and communication, two basic necessities for development, are almost completely grounded in the nation. The government continues to consolidate its powers and seek to wield control over every area of the

lives of its citizenry despite the fact that it lacks the machinery to accomplish this. The Church needs to convince the Government that it is a major stake holder in the society and that the Government by not sharing power may engender frustration and anarchy within the society.

In part due to the depressed economic situation of Nigeria, there is the intrusion of materialism that has since escalated to the level of obsession. This concern cuts across denominations. God's blessings are measured in material and physical terms. Many modern preachers point to their 'condition as an indication of God's approval of their ministry. Their congregations are told to expect their own "miracle." But before they can experience this, they have to sow "seed money." A few years back, a popular preacher came to Jos for a crusade. He asked those who wanted to become millionaires to step forward and give ten thousand *naira* as "seed money." One ECWA pastor was among the potential millionaires. Today, four years later, he is not yet a millionaire. Partly due to the harsh economic situation in the country, many are looking for an easy way out of their discouragement and despair. They are looking for quick ways "miracle money" to alleviate their situation. This message which sounds very convincing and biblical is popular among many people because God appears to be behind it. The Church in Nigeria should respond to this kind of materialist conception of Christianity because it is a fad. After the passing away of these economically hard times the message would lose its relevance and the members would be left aloof.

Nigerian educational system has nearly broken down. The educational system from the primary to the tertiary level is suffering a great malaise. Graduates of most government primary schools can barely read. Those who graduate from the secondary schools hardly fare any better. The Church used to be a major participant until in the late 1960 and early 1970s when the Government took over Christian schools and introduced the Universal Primary Education. Concomitant with this today we have an educational system that is on the brink of collapsing. The return of the Church to educational training is laudable. In Jos, almost every denomination has a primary school or at least a nursery school. Many Christian secondary schools and at least one university in Benue State exist as a testimony to the way the Church

feels. The question is not how many schools there are but how well they are run and what its graduates can do.

The decay in morality and ethics is very depressing. Corruption has infiltrated all levels of the society. The disheartening thing is that there is not a place one could go to have the injustice corrected. Everyone appears to be doing what is right in his/her eyes.

What is the state of the body politic in Nigeria? It has been infected to the core by suspicion, political rancour, dominance by a minority or majority, intolerance, and unwillingness to compromise resulting in tension, fear, lack of trust within the national body politic. It is obvious that for any progress to be made, people must have an independent body that can be trusted to arbitrate between all of these various interest groups. The Church stands a very good chance of fulfilling this role. The Church in Nigeria needs to respond to this need immediately because this problem greatly threatens the ability to build a genuine democracy and the very existence of national unity.

The Church has been isolated from the society for too long. It has responded only to issues that affect it directly. It has departed from the missionary theory of the Bible and the Plough. This drift began before indigenization of the Church. The proliferation of NGOS (non-Governmental Organisations) is an indictment of the Church and the State. The return of the church to this philosophy is a welcome development but there is still more that can be done. This outlook needs to be maintained in the 21st century because the nation is in a seriously weakened state and it will take some time to get out of this lethargy and assume its full responsibility for its citizenry. The Church should develop a theology of development and physical needs and not leave the action in this arena exclusively to NGOs.

#### **Theological Issues**

The Nigerian Church is experiencing an unprecedented resurgence of cultic, occultic, witchcraft, and demonic activities. The Church appears to be a reflection of the current society. The Government is worried about the increase of cultic and occultic practices in the universities. In fact such activities threaten the safety of other students because ritual killings have been reported in the universities.

The Church reflects this reality of the society. About a decade ago, discussions on occultic and demonic activities were not part of the Church discourse. Everyone knew that these things existed but they were connected with traditional religion not Christianity. But today, there are allegations against and even accusations of Church members, even elders, and pastors of being involved in witchcraft. Stories about demonic activities abound. Recently, in one of our chapels somebody told the story of people getting married to demons or people being initiated into cults without their consent. Scary stories are told about how innocent school children are initiated in primary schools. One of our friends died recently and his seven years old son is being accused of being among those who caused his death. Now it is nearly impossible for any death to be natural. All deaths are now believed to be caused by someone. This is a complete reversal to the traditional worldview. What can the Church do to restore a balanced biblical worldview?

The indigenous Church ought to be self-governing, self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-propagating. The Nigerian Church is making great strides in sending missionaries. The theology of the priesthood of all believers and individual zeal and courage has contributed to the rise of many indigenous missionary organisations. This led to the formation of Nigeria Missionary Association (NEMA) which comprises missionary organisations. The stories of some of these missionaries tell of sincere personal love and commitment to Christ and the gospel. There is the story of a young man who heard the call to go to Sudan through reading about Sudan in the newspaper. His strategy was to get his masters degree and then go to Sudan to do his doctorate. He has since gone to Sudan and is having a fruitful ministry there as a student-missionary. Many at great personal risks have gone as professionals to many Muslim countries that otherwise closed to missionaries.

The Church needs to encourage and harness this personal spirit. The individual zeal is stronger than the traditional church commitment to missions. The established churches need to be more resolute in allocating substantial percentage of their resources to missions. In many churches the least paid Christian workers are the missionaries. They engage in their task at great risks to their lives and that of their families. Often they do not have good medical care and their children are without education. The church needs to address these issues.

A young man from an evangelical background like ECWA was in search of quick place where he can be trained for six months. He said that he had a ministry goal thus he wanted a place where this immediate need could be met. Just recently a church from Ghana asked us to assess the certificate of someone who got his BA in theology in 1992, got his MA in 1993 and his ThD (Doctor of Theology) in 1994. Many are turning to these schools to get immediate certification. How can the Church respond to such needs without capitulating to the pragmatism and shallowness that mark the contemporary mentality?

The dearth of theological reflection in the Church is alarming. But an abundance of popular theology or "sticker" theology, there is. Such theologies as "No weapon fashioned against me shall prosper" etc. can be found in cars, buses, offices, homes, and every imaginable place. They are meant to deter those with evil intentions and be some kind of quasi protection for the Christian.

However, such theologies are able to hold as long as the glue on them lasts. Under the hot Nigerian sun of trials and difficulties, the glue holding them are quick to lose their stickiness resulting in many Nigerian Christians returning to their traditional religions to find answers. There is probably the will to do theology but not the know how. Many lay people have made commendable attempts to do theological reflection--Non-Formal Theology (NFT). Through NFT, theologians can provide guidance for the laity by engaging in NFT. The Church needs to find a way of encouraging and stimulating rigorous academic theological reflection. This is inevitable if the African Church is to plant deep roots and offer leadership to the rest of the Church universal.

The Church in the 21st century must be genuinely committed to the development of theological education. The Church needs to develop graduate theological education. In spite of the strength Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, they do not have a reputable graduate theological institution. The Nigerian Church needs to meet these challenges in the 21st century. The Nigerian universities have been offering Master's and Doctorate for close to four decades. The Church needs to train its members to be able to minister and respond to the needs of the contemporary situation.

If Nigeria is to be a democratic society, the Church must address some of these problems squarely. The percentage of Christians within the Nigerian population clearly suggest that the Church cannot stand and watch these issues with apathy.

Success in dealing with divisive ethnicity and the moral decay rife in the society will help reduce the social conflict. There is a school of thought among social scientists that the solution is in finding the right theory. But the experiment of the world has not been as successful.

### CONCLUSION

The solution to this problem would need to begin with the Church developing a theological focus. Theological education is still lagging far behind the secular education. Nearly over three decades since Nigerian universities started awarding doctorate degrees in various fields, the Church does not have a reputable graduate school that offers even masters degree. The church in Nigeria suffers from the abdication of the intellectual arena that characterises evangelical Christianity in America. Whatever theological institutions that are developed must have commitment to serious scholarship as part of their concern. As we have noted earlier, the emphasis seems to be on practical training. Such a concern while commendable is not sufficient.

The ecumenical approach holds great promises for ways of resolving some of these issues. No single church in Nigeria can successfully address the issues on the Nigerian scene. CAN which embraces all the major Church Groupings in Nigeria, such as, (1) the Catholic Secretariat; (2) CCN; (3) Organised African Independent Churches; (4) TEKAN/ECWA; and (5) Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), is the beginning of something positive. It shows that Nigerian Christians can co-operate and accomplish certain goals. The lessons from the various mission organisations' effort during the colonial era point to the kinds of possibilities open to the Nigerian Church.

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