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The Faith of Christians in a Muslim Society: A Case Study of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the intricate dynamics of faith in a Muslim-majority society, with a focus on the Nigerian context. The research systematically explores the experiences of Christian witnessing and its repercussions, highlighting the challenges posed by ethno-religious conflicts. Additionally, it delves into the pervasive issue of persecution as a defining element of Christian witnessing, and investigates the factors contributing to religious violence in Nigeria. The central argument posits that, on the whole, Muslims have been more detrimental than beneficial to the coexistence with Christians, who, in contrast, have struggled to foster peaceful relations. The discourse surrounding the fate of Christians in a Muslim society is characterized by a singular perspective on Islam's perceived 'bloody corridors' and the escalating violence, leading some to view Christianity skeptically. The experiences of many Christians in Nigeria have created an environment where rhetoric tends to lean towards calls for revenge, often devoid of logical justification. The study reveals that the faith of Christians in Nigeria is seemingly in jeopardy. In light of these findings, the study advocates for religious tolerance and enlightenment as the primary solutions to safeguard the faith of Christians in Nigeria. It underscores the importance of fostering an environment where diverse religious beliefs can coexist harmoniously. The recommendations offered aim to promote understanding, tolerance, and dialogue between Christian and Muslim communities, with the ultimate goal of preserving the fabric of religious diversity in the nation.

Keywords: Faith, Christianity, Islam, Society and Moslem Society

INTRODUCTION

There are two major religions in Nigeria: Christianity and Islam. While religion has served us with a number of fortunes which we continue to enjoy till date, it is also a fact that can by no means be disputed that undignified rivalry between these two major religious in our country, Nigeria has often left our society tethering at the brink of untold disaster and collapse. This rivalry, we must note, did not begin in our time, and it is not even peculiar to our clime. More often than not, this rivalry escalates to full blown violent conflicts as is often the case in some states in Northern Nigeria like Plateau, Maiduguri, Kano, Kaduna and Sokoto. Painful among all is the killing of Deborah Samuel in the name of Blasphemy in Sokoto by irate mob on May, 12, 2022. A Deaconess at the Divine Touch Parish of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Eunice Elisha, was murdered by irate mob just because she was preaching. Some Priests and parishioners was kidnapped and murdered by the herders in Benue in 2020 etc. Over 11,500 Christians have been murdered in Nigeria since June 2015, Genocide Watch reported in April. The perpetrators of the killings are Islamist terrorists from Boko Haram (also known as the Islamic State in West Africa), who seek to create a state like the so-called caliphate that took hold in parts of Iraq and Syria between 2014 and 2015. Increasingly, the attackers have included another group, militant nomadic Fulani herdsmen who raid villages and kill Christian men, women, children, and babies with AK-47s and machetes. These horrific massacres of Christians in the northern and middle parts of Nigeria at the hands of Muslim militants and terrorists have been a daily occurrence in recent years [1]. Nigeria, a nation of close to 200 million, is made up about evenly of Christians and Muslims. Christians live predominantly in the South; Muslims are the majority in the North. The most painful aspect of these anomalies is that most of these problems/crime are committed in the name of religion mostly by our moslem brothers. Our moslem brothers are engulfed with the problem of superiority of Islam over other religion. These seems to be motivating the adherents of Moslem. They seem to have one agenda. For some they want to

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Islamize the whole nations. In these case the faith of Christians seem threatening. In some other cases the perceived rivalry of Christians and Moslems skyrockets to the level of insurgency like the case of Bokoharam and banditry, presently threatening to wreck the ship of our peaceful co-existence. Our society has been condemned to remain a total stranger to peace and tranquility. It is more difficult to reckon moments of peace than periods conflicts have threatened to sear the very heart of our peaceful and happy living. This compels one to wonder why things have to be so, especially when we remember that at the very heart of the beliefs and teachings of these two religions is not only peace, but more importantly, the golden rule: "Always treat others as you would like them to treat you, that is the meaning of the law and the prophets (Matthew 7:12). In the case of Islam, we have the traditions of A-Nawai that; "none of you is a believer until he loves for his brother that which he loved for himself"

To be fair, critical reasoning must compel us to believe the unadulterated truth that it is not the nature of religion or faith per se that pushes the adherents into rivalry, it is rather human deviation from their faith and their lust for power that lead people to hate and exploit those who do not share the same beliefs and views as them [2]. Although there is evidence of conflicts that have arisen without any religious ties, but most often those colored by religion as a means of exploiting others especially socially, economically and politically looms large over other causes off crisis. The combination of these vested interests backed with fundamentalist's desire to stamp their religious superiority only foster rivalry and violent remonstrations. Consequently, exploring the socio-economic and political dimensions of religious rivalry with a particular attention on how these factors affects Christians makes them to begin to wonder about the Faith/fate of Christians in a Moslem Society .It is against this background that the study sought to critically examine the faith of Christians in a Moslem Society with a particular reference to Nigeria.. But before we delve into the subject matter squarely, it is good we have a brief bang on the door of conceptual clarifications

Conceptual Clarifications

Faith

Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed. As personal adherence to God and assent to his truth, Christian faith differs from our faith in any human person. Faith is also a theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. By faith "man freely commits his entire self to God. For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God's will. But a definition does not do us any good if we cannot understand it. So let's look at this definition closely.

So understanding the concept faith is born when we receive the immense love of God which transforms us inwardly and enable us to see reality with new eyes (Lumen fidei, 26). By revealing the love of God the Creator, faith enables us to respect nature all the more, and to discern in it a grammar written by the hand of God and a dwelling place entrusted to our protection and care (Lumen fidei, 55) With faith comes the restoration of the primacy of God in the heart of men. [3]. For without God man neither knows which way to go, nor understand who he is. This faith in God makes explicit the value of human life created in Gods image and likeness as well as the entire creation our common home. [3]. As Cardinal Sarah would say, history would prove the Church right, for the defense of human life is the defense of humanity (Robert, 2015, p.157). So once God is established as the fundamental value, the value of human life immediately comes to the fore

Religion

Religion can be described as the most powerful and pervasive force on earth. African people according to Mbiti do not know how to exist without religion. Bolaji Idowu in confirmation of the above remarked that Nigerians are incurably religious. This is an indication that most Nigerians exhibit religious extremism. Based on this, we can say that religion eludes a universal definition, which is because religion means different things to different people meaning that people define religion. Based on their perception and temperaments. For Max Muller, religion is a mental faculty which independent of sense and reason enables man to apprehend the infinite, under different names and under varying guises, For Immanuel Kant, it is the recognition of all duties as divine command. For Schleiermacher it is the feeling of absolute dependence. For Allan Menzies it is the worship of higher powers from the sense of need. Edward Amrs, it is the consciousness of the highest social values. For William James, it is the feeling, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude thereby basing everything on the divine. For the Indigenous Africans, there are various ways of reaching out to the Supreme Being. From experience, it seems the adherents of Traditional Religion are more tolerant towards other religions. Conflicts often ensue when such other religious speak ill of African Traditional Religion or due to intolerance from adherents of Christianity and Islam

Christianity

Christianity is a religion founded by Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus is the basis for Christianity [4]. When placed within the ambience of human civilization, Christianity can be regarded as still youthful, for it appeared late in the religious development of mankind [5]. It may be something of this kind which was meant by Paul when he declared that "in the fullness of time God sent forth His son."(Gal. 4:4) Christianity is next to the youngest of the

great religious systems in our day which has undergone wide interpretations among mankind. In a span of about two thousand years, it has become world-wide, with a more extensive geographic spread and a greater influence upon mankind than any other religion. The history of Christianity in Nigeria can be traced back to the 15th century, when the Portuguese arrived at the shores of the region via the Atlantic. The Portuguese brought unable Christianity with them but were to successfully plant Christianity because of their involvement in slave trade. After the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire 1833, Slaves captured by European masters were freed and sent to Freetown in Sierra Leone. Freed slaves from Nigeria sailed from Sierra Leone to Lagos and Badagry and other cities in western Nigeria. They also had opportunities to acquire education offered by the Church Missionary Society (CMS). They practiced Christianity and preached the gospel to their family and kinsmen. At the start of the 1950s, Pentecostalism came to Nigeria. Its rapid growth and expansion in the years that followed was unprecedented. Christianity in Nigeria has had significant impact on culture, education and politics and many other facets of social life. Christianity also provided a platform for the establishment of western education in Nigeria. Western ideas of individualism and rationalism began to replace traditional value of communal living. In schools, people were introduced to new ideologies which spanned across different areas of human existence. Many of these ideologies portrayed African Traditions as backwards and uncivilized. It can be argued that a couple of traditional practices may have been barbaric; however, the introduction of Christianity and subsequently western education did set biased standards that overshadowed some rich cultural practices

Islam

Islam is the second largest religion in the world after Christianity. According to secular history, the origin of Islam can be traced back to 7th century Saudi Arabia. Islam is thus the youngest of the great world religions. The Prophet Muhammad (circa 570-632 A.D.) introduced Islam in 610 A.D, after experiencing what he claimed to be an angelic visitation. Muhammad dictated the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, which Muslims believe to be the pre-existent, perfect words of Allah. According to Islam, the origin of Islam is generally credited to the Prophet Muhammad but to the devout Muslim, Islam began long before Muhammad ever walked the earth. The Qur'an, was dictated by Muhammad but according to the Qur'an, it did not originate with Muhammad. Followers of Islam aim to live a life of complete submission to Allah. Muslims believe several prophets were sent to teach Allah's law. They respect some of the same prophets as Jews and Christians, including Abraham, Moses, Noah and Jesus. Moslems contend that Muhammad was the final prophet. The Qur'an is the major holy text of Islam. The Hadith is another important book. Followers worship Allah by praying and reciting the Qur'an. They believe there will be a Day of Judgment, and life after death. A central idea in Islam is Jihad which means struggle. While the term has been used negatively in mainstream culture, moslems believe it refers to internal and external efforts to defend their faith. Although rare, this can include military Jihad if a just war is needed. Islam came to northern Nigeria as early as the 11th century and was well established in the state capitals of the region by the 16th century, spreading into the countryside's and towards the middle belt uplands. There, Islam's advance was stopped by the resistance of local peoples to incorporation into the emirate states. The Fulani led Jihad in the 19th century pushed Islam into Nupe and across the Niger River into northern Yoruba-speaking areas. The colonial conquest established a rule that active Christian proselytizing could not occur in the northern Moslem region, although the two religions continued to compete for converts in the middle belt where ethnic groups and even families had adherents of each persuasion. Two features of Islam are essential to understanding its place in the Nigerian society. They are the degree which Islam permeates other institutions in the society, and its contribution to Nigeria pluralism. In the contest of these paper a Christian is a witness

Witnessing

The term witnessing is derived from the Greek word *Martus*” which is translated in English as Martyr meaning, unflinching loyalty no matter the cost. A witness is he who having seen or understood, makes a report of the event. This implies an active participation not only of words but of acts and in extreme cases, in the sacrifice of a life. A witness is capable of suffering and dying for that he believes. When the test of conviction becomes the prize of life, the witness changes his name, the witness is called a martyr. A witness is one who is correlated with the course of justice and right, one who has a deep and constant conviction of what he believes in and is ready to pay the ultimate price for such deep conviction. In the case of Christian witnessing, it is the conviction and love of Christ that motivates the Christian to sacrifice his time, talent, treasure and even his life.

The fate of Christian in a Moslem Society: A case Study of Nigeria

This section shall expose the genesis of the fate Christians in a Moslem society. In exposing this subject, Nigeria as a nation was used as a case study. This shall be done by systematically analyzing the ill treatment meted to the Christians to the point of killing them. The Moslem will even kill a Christian in the name of blasphemy and nothing happens. To put, the study in the right perspective, we exposed Nigerian Experience of Christian Witnessing and its untold Consequences. Sequel to the above, the challenges posed by ethno-religious Conflicts to Christian

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Witnessing was ascertained. This was followed by assessing persecution as a character of Christian Witnessing, a retrospect of the origin of the Church

Nigerian Experience of Christian Witnessing and its untold Consequences

It goes without saying that every age is confronted with its peculiar crisis. Whereas the early missionaries that evangelized Africa in general and Nigeria in particular battled with slave trade, illiteracy, killing of twins, unfavorable climates conditions and so on; today, witnesses are plagued by a barrage of untold consequences ranging from terrorism, ethnic violence, and gruesome persecution of Christians among others. Instances of these abound. On the 25th of December, 2011 being Christmas day, St Theresa's Catholic Church madalla, Niger State was bombed by the Boko Haram sect of Islamic religion leaving more than 30 persons dead. On the night of April 14th 2014, a group of Boko Haram militants attacked a school in Chibok, a primarily Christian village and kidnapped school girls who had returned to school to sit for their final physics exams. These girls numbering about 329 were taken to Boko Haram strongholds in order to convert them to Islam. February, 19, 2017 was a black day for members of a parish of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) located at Kubwa, Abuja as the Church was invaded and set ablaze by people believed to be religious extremists. On 4th February, 2018, a Christian student by name Eric McBen Kyari was killed, and others injured in an attack by Muslim students at the Modibbo Adama University of Technology (MAUTECH), Yola, Adamawa State. The assailants also destroyed 9 out of 11 stores where Christian students keep their musical instruments. Worthy of note is also the issue of the now famous Leah Sharibu who was among the 110 Dapchi schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in the month of February 2018 but was denied release because of her vehement refusal to renounce the Christian faith and be converted to Islam irrespective of the severe torture she underwent in their custody. More so, in the early hours of April 25th 2018, 2 priests and 17 others were murdered in cold blood by suspected herdsmen while celebrating the morning Mass at St. Ignatius Catholic Church, Ukpok-Mbalom Benue State. On October 2018, 55 people were killed as a result of religious violence in North Central Kaduna State when a clash erupted between young Christians and Muslims. We are witnessing a Nigeria here religious intolerance is coated with ethnic chauvinism resulting in an endless record of bloodshed and death. There are countless heart rending stories of religious clashes resulting to untold consequences. We can go on and on in enumerating unfavorable consequences meted out to Christian on account of their witnessing to Christ.

Challenges posed by ethno-religious Conflicts to Christian Witnessing

It is not an over statement to say that present-day Christians are facing challenges which militate against their efforts to witness to the Gospel in different parts of the world. One of the greatest challenges they encounter is persecution. A good number of Christians have lost their lives some are tortured, detained and maimed by anti-Christian groups. The difficulty is prominent in Asia, Middle East and Islamic dominated parts of Africa. More so, in the Northern part of Nigeria Christian encounter persecution from the Boko Haram sect of the Islam religion. The most resent is the enormous scores of killing been perpetuated by the Fulani herdsmen on account of ethno-centralism. Wars, violence and insurgency that characterize the present day society pose a great challenge to Christian witnessing. As a result of these crises, people live in fear. They keep on running for their lives every moment. As such, Christians are at the cross-road of losing their lives and consequently, they may not have audience or attention necessary for the reception of the Gospel message. This typifies the crises faced by Christian in areas like Mali, Iraq, and Sudan etc. These conflicts become worse in areas where Moslems are in the majority. In such areas, the official position is that only religions of the book might be allowed to exist, others with strong restrictions on non-Islamic religion of the book. On the contrary, most countries with predominant Christian populations allow free reign to the exercise of the Muslim faith. There are of course some exceptions as some West African countries as Senegal, Mali, and Burkina Faso, where people practice their faith without serious problems of discrimination. In these places, the relationship between Christians and Moslems does not have the same acrimony that it has in a country like Nigeria, Sudan, and India and especially in the Middle East. While there is an increasing attempt to obliterate all manifestations of Christianity in public places in these countries; Moslems keep on gaining adherents in traditionally Christian societies. At times, this disagreement culminates in religious conflicts. As a result, Christians find it difficult to witness to Christ in such unfavorable conditions and at extreme cases, they are often caught in the web of denouncing their faith. The most difficulty damage in this situation is the breach of trust in the community as a Christians now prefer to live in segregated communities where they feel that their lives and property could be safe. This can be exemplified in the case of Jos crisis. Frequent Ethnic and religious crisis have caused damage to the peaceful cohabitation that hitherto existed in Jos. Consequently, Christians no longer find it comfortable to build houses where Moslems are predominant. For instance, Rikkos area was before the 2001 crises a rapid developing area where both Moslems and Christians owned houses and plots, but the 2001 ethno-religious conflicts in Jos adversely affected this settlement pattern. In Jos today, Christians do not just take accommodation of their fancy in any part of the town. They have to do extensive research to find out whether the area is safe. For a

Christian, only an area that is inhabited by Christians is considered safe. For a Christian, only an area that is inhabited by Christians is considered safe. Today, one can hardly find Christians in areas like Angwan Rimi, Angwan Rogo, Gangare, Line Zama and Ali Kazaure. As such, Christians can no longer visit a predominantly Moslem enclave late in the night. In this situation whereby Christians are denied of their freedom of association and worship as well as the right to free movement, it becomes difficult for effective witnessing since their lives are at stake when they tend to go contrary.

Persecution as a character of Christian Witnessing: A retrospect of the origin of the Church

In retrospect, we have to note that Christianity from the outset never had a glorious beginning. Its beginning was dotted with persecution and suppression. It began in a holistic environment and as such saw to the death of many who refused to sacrifice their faith and are today celebrated as martyrs. No wonder, the blood martyrs became the seed of Christianity "*Sanguis Martyrium Semen Christianuorum*" This prosecution laden origin of Christianity is also manifest in today's Christianity in various guises. And as such pose great challenge to authentic witnessing. Nonetheless, Avery Dulles opined: The present situation creates special difficulties for the transmission of a highly structured, traditional and cosmopolitan faith such as Catholic Christianity. For purposes of illustration, three impediments may be mentioned here: historical consciousness, pluralism and the free market mentality [6]. Notwithstanding all these, Christians are called to bear witness to the Gospel message in all circumstances. The early history of the Church recounts the stories of a great number of men and women who stood their ground at the face of conflicts and persecution. Their faith should encourage us on this journey of faith that is marked with hurdles, hardships and crises. As they have demonstrated the rare virtue of courage, Christians of today are called to exhibit such rare courage bearing in mind that authentic witnessing demands perseverance and firmness in the defense of faith at all cost. Following Pope Paul VI who in his Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World "Evangelii, Nuntiandi" highlighted the importance of "witness to Life" (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 1975, n.17). Christians are called to witness to Christ not only by words of mouth but more so by actions. This is prominently manifested in the act of solidarity with those who are disadvantaged as a result of religious violence. Sequel to this, [7] analyzed Ad Gentes Divinitus no 12: thus; by uniting themselves with men in their life and work, Christ's disciples hope to render to other true witness of Christ and to work for their salvation, even when they are unable to proclaim Christ fully. For they are not seeking in mere material progress and prosperity for men, but are promoting their dignity and brotherly union, teaching these religious and moral truths which Christ illumined with His light. Their work is both human development and authentic evangelization at the same time [7].

The use of violence and persecution: [8] in his book titled Christians: seed of another Humanity singles out violence and persecution as the tools used by Moslems to annihilate Christianity in the Northern part of Nigeria. Persecution according to him, takes different shapes and forms, ranging from the less violent persecution such as wealth and the use of worldly enticements and goods, which eventually graduates to institutionalized discrimination and marginalization, paving way to more radical form of persecution such as forced migration, martyrdom, mass murder, slashing of throats, and suicide bombing. Christians are being driven out from their villages and towns while their places of worship are destroyed and the symbols of their Christian affiliation are destroyed or removed from public view. They are sometimes kidnapped, subjected to forced marriages, sold for ransom, imprisoned, tortured and murdered only because they are Christians. The way Nigeria government go about things in Nigeria seem to portray that they adopted Islamic religion as a state religion. There are some instances in Nigeria where a Christian and moslem committed one crime, a moslem was set free whereas the Christian was sentenced (the case of Evans the notorious kidnapper from Nnewi). Despite the provision of 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended and Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states thus: Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his or her religion or belief. And that: 'the Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State religion. Many states in the Northern part of Nigeria adopt and give preference to a particular religion as state religion in a bid to dominate minority religions. Worst still is the abduction and forceful conversion of under aged Christian girls to Islam. In like manner, Moslem use politics and education as tools to induce non-moslem into Islam, this they do by denying Christians their political right to be voted into any political position. Sequel to this is the discrimination and unequal opportunities in the areas of employment, recruitment or admissions in public educational facilities and the refusal to allow the teaching of Christian Religious Knowledge in government schools. While Northern Christians are molested by some moslem fanatics, it is pertinent to note that there are countries where Moslems are molested too by some Christian fanatics. In 2014, Amnesty International reported several massacres committed by the Anti-balaka (CAR) against Moslem civilians, forcing thousands of Moslems being cannibalized. While anti-balaka groups have been frequently described as Christian militias in the media, this has been denied by Church leaders. The story is not different today, observation has shown that Christianity is the most persecuted religious group in the world nay in Nigeria. Guided by the principle of love of neighbor and tolerance of people who hold divergent views, as

expounded in the scriptures and other documents issued by Church Magisterium and councils of Christian associations, Christians have learnt how to courageously profess their faith amidst the seeming climate of religious domination perpetrated by the promoters of Islamic hegemonic agenda in Nigeria.

Factors responsible for religious violence in Nigeria

Many factors are responsible for religious violence in Nigeria

Lack of Knowledge (Ignorance)

Religious extremists are all misled about the real teachings of their own religions. This can be traced to an inappropriate understanding of the basic tenets of their Religion. Many at times, these people read into various instructions as contained in the religion, and begin to carry out acts they think are in favor with such instructions. Worst still are those who have half knowledge. As the saying goes that half knowledge is more dangerous. Those with half knowledge about the teachings of a particular religion, eventually become extreme fundamentalists even if they are in error. This ignorance is seen in the acceptance of the promise of a blissful afterlife. Extremists encourage people by this promise. Those who make this promise themselves do not offer themselves, but capitalize on the ignorance of others. According to Eric Hoffer, Extremists implant in the other a depreciating value towards this present life, turning attention to the afterlife, to things that are not yet [9].

Reactions to Sexuality and gender equality

Many extremists believe highly in restrictive sexuality. As Kressel notes that many of the worst extremists share a hatred of sexual liberality and a strong preference for "keeping women in traditional subordinate roles. Psychoanalysts have detected a connection between religious extremism and feelings about sex. The hostility of most militants toward homosexuals, the exaggerated concern about the sexual activities of other people, the angry reaction to permissive mainstream media broadcast, the preference for Women in non-revealing garb, and the insistence upon a male-dominated power structure can all be seen as suggestive of difficulties in the management of sexual impulses. Perhaps militants fear their own sexual impulses [10].

Intolerance

Intolerance is one of the major reasons for religious extremism in Nigeria. Each religion sees itself as the best and the only one doing the will of the Supreme Being. Each sees its own way as the only way to salvation. This is seen in the way they carry out their proselytizing. Some do it by running other religions down; some do it by manipulation of the psyche of people, others by the means of violence. These various religions are intolerant of the other forgetting so quickly that we are in a multi religious state, where everyone is allowed freedom of religion. While seeking for membership drive is good, the means of carrying this out should be free of threat or violence. Persuasion and witness of life is the key to effective proselytizing, instead of those who want to use threats to win membership or others who use violence to bring people to the Supreme Being. Of the three major forms of religion in Nigeria, the African Indigenous Religious is the most tolerant of the three. Christianity and Islam which are not indigenous religions are less tolerant towards themselves and towards African Religion.

Superiority Complex

As evident in Nigeria today, acts of religious extremism can be traced basically to the rivalry between Christian and Islam. It is this desire to be superior to the other that has often led to various conflicts that have led to the death of thousands of people. Even within these two religious (Christians and Moslems), there are various divisions which are even hostile to themselves. For example you have Christians who are anti-Catholic running down Catholics and their doctrines. Also you find divisions amongst Moslems up to the extent of inflicting violence. Also found here are Christian and Moslem extremists who do not see anything good in other religions. It suffices to say that the tenets of every religion are open to misinterpretation by their adherents. These misinterpretations should not be taken as a true representation of a religion.

Cultural Superiority

Some extremists tend to favor their cultures over others. Thus they believe that in the judgment system which their cultures provide should be a basis by which other cultures should be judged. Since Nigeria was colonized by the British, they brought Western education and Christianity to us. For some extremist, these two are alien to us, and must be done away with. But as we know, no one culture is superior to others. Today in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam are predominantly split into Southern and Northern residency respectively. However, there are Northerners who are Christians. Most times these persons are judged to be traitors to their respective cultures. Such persons are often victims of extremists' violence that hangs the faith of Christians in a Moslem world.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Evaluation

With the above instances of all the ill treatment meted to the Christians, Christians continued to struggle in order to sustain their faith. The killings of the Christians by our Moslem brothers without doing anything by the President calls for a serious attention. The non-challant of our leaders to challenge the Moslem leaders in the court to bring

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to book of those murderers seem invisible. In such situation, one sees the Christian victims being persecuted. In returns, the victims questioning God whom he thinks abandoned them in misery without response. In this situation, it is vital to note that Job equally questioned God and even the psalmist at different occasions questioned why God stayed far off while his faithful suffer (Psalm 13:1). Since the book of Job forms part of the canon of the Scripture despite the fact that he questioned God, it therefore means that we can as well questioned God while still holding unto Him. The questioning is not an expression of hopelessness. It is a humble question of a pilgrim trying to understand God. In this regards, the atheist may have the view that God does not exist by applying his rationality. The truth is that God is the cause of the causality of the efficient cause. Contrary to the above, when the Christian in the midst of pain, suffering and persecution question God, such a person seeks the face of God that has seemingly let one down. It is quite inevitable not to ask why God allows bad things happen to us. The questions are expressions of our bitterness to our Father whom we believe can rescue us. Most times people are made to feel bad for questioning God in their grief. These acts of denial or silence as a show of maturity in faith could be disastrous to victims. The Christian wrestling with the God-question in the face of persecution is faced with a double tragedy. The first is that that the believer is suffering affliction. The second is that this God on whose account one suffering seem not to offer immediate consolation. Undeniable is the fact that the victimization and suffering which Christians in Nigeria pass through on account of their faith, affects them also could have a devastating effect on their lives (Zehr 138). When beset with all these evils, pains and suffering for the sake of God who appears distant, one is left with two possibilities. The first will be to simply walk away by giving up on God that has let one down, or abandon the faith. The second will still be to still hold on to God whom one has received at baptism. Though one cannot fully grasp what has happened. The later could make one to become apologetic, offering excuses for God which was the response of the Early Church Fathers. In a discussion with one of the survivors of the attacks in the religious crisis in Maiduguri in February 2006 which claimed many lives including the servant of God, Fr. Michael Gajere, a Christian expressed how heartbroken and disappointed she was with God who allowed this evil to take place, that also claimed the life of his humble priest. According to her, the more disappointed she felt with God and asking Him questions, the more her heart was inclined to God. At that point, she realized how much he needed God even in the midst of her pain, suffering, misery and disappointment. Sometimes we need to dare and ask God why he has abandoned us. Probably in it we might take steps towards wholeness. The uneasiness that suffering and persecution creates in us either builds us, to respond positively by accepting to hold-on to God, or deforms us by making us deserters of the faith. Christians who are suffering and are at this threshold point of holding on or letting go, need to be helped in every way possible. This is the point when we begin to ask about the where about of humanity [10]. There is no doubt that the silence of God in the indiscriminate bombing of Churches and the killings of innocent lives especially in Nigeria is heartbreaking. Since, we are co-creators with God. We need to step in and rescue humanity from the evil shackles that seem to hold us down

The fate/faith of Christians in a moslem world appears to be an invitation martyrdom. How can God abandon us Christians to be suffering and most times killed in the hands of our Moslem brothers? Theologically, already the Christian who question God is in some way already aware of Gods total control of the universe. But the challenges is making sense out of such basic faith conviction for the fact that God, whom one can only conceive in the superlatives acts as though the situation was beyond Him. Sometimes, just like the prophet Jeremiah, the depth of our grief lead us to ask why he was born or conceived in the first place (Jeremiah 20:18). Such struggle with faith and courage, hope and despair is part of the experiences of most Christians in Nigeria [11]. Suffering in whatever form it may come to us affect us and takes something out of us leaving us wondering about God and our faith [11]. In truth, suffering abounds in the world and we must admit it. But it is this fate or lot of those who trust in God. O make a head-way, we must first of all begin by asking ourselves ho we are? Knowing whom we are, that is our identity, might be a first step towards understanding God. Principally, the one who suffers carries a distinctive mark and that is, the Christian identity? Is being a Christian synonymous with suffering? A Christian is a baptized person who believes in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through his or her belonging to the body of Christ the Church [12]., modeling oneself on the life and teachings of Christ by truly living and following in His steps. Scripture tells us that Jesus when reviled, did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23), thus giving us an example to follow. This presents a great challenge to our faith, thus making Christian discipleship a swimming against the tide. The life of Jesus was one of contradictions. His commands were pay back evil with good, to be my follower, you must take up your cross and follow me daily. What a difficult teaching this is. How can one be a child of joy giver and be lacking in joy, peace or comfort? Fr. Mike Boni Bazza, a Pastor and survivor of the October 28th, 2012 bomb blast at St. Rita's parish in Kaduna captures the reality of our calling as Christians. He said, "God does not desire to break our spirits. He allows us go through certain trials so that e we also will learn and be compassionate towards others from what we ourselves have suffered [13].

As we question God seeking to know why he abandons, we must remember the words of Jesus that narrow is the way that leads to eternal life (Matthew 7: 13). What this means is that there is pain discomfort and suffering in his path but we must nevertheless, trust him, A humbling trust in the sovereignty of God. Meaning that although the way may be narrow but he will never abandon or forsake us. Pastorally, the Church is a mother and just as mothers have the responsibility of caring, providing and ensuring the general well-being of their children, the Church also has such responsibility towards her Children. Her motherhood extends to humanity in general and not just those who profess the Christian faith, that is why what affects humanity, affects the Church because she is also part of the society. In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the Church declared that “ the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our times especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well (Gaudium et Spes 1). The Church on her part has the responsibility of showing Christ who is the light of humanity to the world through her pastoral interventions (Lumen Gentium 1). Through her voice, we can build a just and human society. As is the case of most countries in Africa particularly in Nigeria, we must not shy away from saying that most governments have failed and that is why a fundamental response from the perspective of the Church will be to speak to leaders who have the responsibility of promoting equal rights and dignity of her people. [14]. In doing this, the Church must be courageous and relentless. In a country like Nigeria that is highly pluralistic, the Church needs to encourage government to put in place, measures that will curtail the excesses of radical fundamentalists whose actions cause violence and infringe on the freedom of other. The Church must realize that the task of protecting and enforcing these rights, cannot be left in the hands of the State alone because from our past, we are aware of instances where the state violated the rights of individuals. Thus, the Church through her prophetic voice and actions, must work in close collaboration with other organs of the society such as the Civil Society Organizations, and other advocacy group to regulate and monitor happenings in the society. The Christians who are murdered on daily basis and those suffering in the hands of our muslim brothers needs to be alleviated. The Church must not just end at giving humanitarian assistance thinking that it will solve the pains of Christians. The desires of Christians go beyond the material things, even though these are necessary for survival. The Church, must recognize the deepest desires and yearnings of God in the hearts of these individuals who are broken and are in need of the consolation of God. This act of consolation towards the broken-hearted, can be made visible especially through the witness of presence of its shepherds and the entire people that make up the body of Christ. Above all, the Church's actions should help people come to the realization of the presence of God in the situation of their lives.

CONCLUSION

The challenges faced by Christians in a Muslim society like Nigeria are multifaceted and deeply entrenched in historical, socio-political, and religious factors. From the persecution endured by individuals to the systemic discrimination and violence perpetrated against Christian communities, the plight of Christians highlights the urgent need for greater tolerance, understanding, and respect for religious diversity. Despite the adversity, the resilience and steadfastness of Christians in bearing witness to their faith amidst persecution serve as a testament to the enduring power of conviction and the unwavering commitment to principles of peace and coexistence. Moving forward, addressing the root causes of religious violence and fostering dialogue and mutual respect between religious communities are essential steps towards building a more harmonious and inclusive society where all individuals can practice their faith freely and without fear of persecution or discrimination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Dialogue, peace and conflict resolution should be encouraged between Christians and Muslims. The best tool for a peaceful and mutual co-existence is love and not the sword.
- Government should enlighten her citizens so that unhealthy religious rivalry and crisis in Nigeria can be put to an end through curbing religious indoctrination, fundamentalism and lack of enlightenment

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