

A Systematic Persecution of Christians and the Church in Northern Nigeria: The Church's Response

Williams Kaura Abba

Abstract

Christian persecution in Nigeria has taken a dangerous trend that warrants academic discourse. It is a serious challenge that has become a global threat. The Church has suffered persecution from people of opposing faith. Persecution of Christians has often resulted in the death of adherents of Christianity as well as the destruction of places of worship. It bears no repeating to state that persecution of Christians is one of the perennial challenges in the annals of the Church. Viewed as part of the naughty issue of the suffering of the innocent or the problem of evil, the topic remains on the front burner no thanks to the global escalation in secularism, aggressive evangelism and unprecedented radicalism. This paper attempts to examine how Christians have come under the onslaught of militant groups that have continued to unleash violence unrestrainedly. The paper concludes by proffering recommendations that will reduce to the barest minimum, the persecution of Christians in Nigeria.

Keywords: Persecution, Christians, Church, Response, Nigeria.

Introduction

The Wall Street Journal published an article in December 2019 wherein Bernard-Henri Levy, a French Philosopher, filmmaker, journalist, and public intellectual described a trip he made to Nigeria during which he privately investigated Fulani attacks on Christians. Levy recounts thus:

A slow-motion war is underway in Africa's most populous country. It's a massacre of Christians, massive in scale and horrific in brutality. And the world has hardly noticed.

In Levy's must-read account, he documents his visits to devastated communities and conversations both with victimized Christians and defiant Fulani Muslims. He concludes:

A postcard vendor joins the group and offers me portraits of Osama bin Laden and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He agrees, the Christians will eventually leave and Nigeria will be 'free'.

Will the West let history repeat itself in Nigeria? Will we wait, as usual, until the disaster is done before taking notice? Will we stand by as international Islamic extremism opens a new front across this vast land, where the children of Abraham have coexisted for so long?

The frustration and exasperation of Levy as captured by Wall Street journal paints a dire picture of the reality of persecution of Christians and the Church in Nigeria.

Next only to the recent COVID 19 pandemic and the question of climate change, the persecution of Christians is one of the most recurrent global issues. Although persecution is experienced by adherents of diverse religions of the world in one form or the other, the Church is today the most persecuted just as it was in the Roman days. The persistent rise in religious radicalism attempts toward global Islamization both bring the topic to the front burner. Thus, the heat of persecution becomes fiercer by the day due to the multiplication of organised terrorist groups.

Meaning of Persecution

To underscore the severity of what this paper seeks to achieve, let us attempt to put into proper perspective the meaning of religious persecution. Like many concepts, the word "persecution" is definitional. The etymological origin of the word persecution is the Latin equivalent *persequi*, meaning to "pursue". Put simply, religious persecution refers to any unjust action of any form and the level of hostility directed at individuals or groups regarded as the *religious other*, essentially for faith related reasons, resulting in any kind or level of harm to the victims. What distinguishes religious persecution is the primacy of religion as the leading factor for the persecution. Persecution may cause the victim psychological, social and/or physical harm. The psychological and social impacts of persecution, although not visible, are too grave to be ignored.

The *Bad Urach Statement* (Sauer & Howell, 2010) defines religious persecution as an unjust action against a believer or group of believers of a certain religion or worldview. This may be by systematic oppression, genocide, discrimination, annoyance, or other means. Religious persecution has religion (not ethnicity, gender, class, political persuasion etc) as its primary motivation, though other factors can be involved. Persecution of Christian is a form of religious persecution in which victims are targeted primarily because they are Christians.

Persecution in the Early Church

Originally, Christianity was considered as a synonym of Judaism and so it

enjoyed considerable sympathy and acceptance within the Roman Empire. As time went by, conflict ensued. When Christianity first came, it was considerably favoured by the policy of Pax Romana simply because of its correlation with Judaism (Fatokun, 1999). There were Christians in the imperial palace as Philippians 4:22 reveals. The Romans could probably not at first appreciate the disparity between the Jews who practised Judaism which was a *religio licita* in the empire and the Christian Jew (Acts 18:12-17). However, later, due to jealousy by the Jews of the rapid spread of Christianity, they made known to the Roman authorities the difference between the followers of the Mosaic Law and the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. The resultant effect of this was that persecution set in apparently because of certain factors which include the following among others was ignorance. Christianity was seen as an enigmatic religion and as a result would be a great threat to the peace of the Empire if allowed to spread its tentacles. It is probable that the Roman authorities could not draw a clear line of demarcation between religion and governance. They saw the growth and development of Christians as unduly fanatical as they tended to segregate themselves from the general public, abstaining from mundane things of life. Secondly, they maintained a very sound moral rectitude. The cumulative effects of these were that the Roman Empire branded Christianity as *religio illicita* as Christians were not desirous to participate in state religion. They scorned the Roman gods as mere handworks of men and helpless idols. They also refused to burn incense or offer sacrifice to the Emperor. In its stead, the professed faith in an invisible God and Christ His son whom they claimed died for their sins. Similarly, the refusal of Christians to join the Roman army infuriated the authorities. Rather than join the Roman army, they referred to themselves as 'soldiers of Christ'. They were thus seen as trying to equate themselves with the Roman authorities. Closely related to this is the issue of cannibalism. Christians spoke of drinking the blood and eating the flesh of Christ during Holy Communion. The Roman authorities did not know that it was only symbolic. Rather they misconstrued this to mean pragmatic involvement in cannibalism which invariably necessitated the seemingly unavoidable persecution of Christians. Akin to this was the issue of incest. Fatokun asserts that because the outsiders who usually heard them calling themselves brothers and sisters were often shocked each time, they saw them getting married to one another. They wondered how people of the same family could be getting married to each other instead of marrying from outside their ranks. As a result of this, they looked down on them as incestuous.

Also, the organization of the Church which was based on hierarchy attracted the suspicion of the State. The Church was becoming better organized with ordained Bishops, presbyters and deacons at the helm of affairs. The Christians strongly respected those officials even more than the Emperor. Also, the appointment of deacons and presbyters demanded swearing an oath of

allegiance to the Bishop and Church doctrine. The Christians preferred to obey the law of the Church even when such clashed with the law of the State. Besides, Christianity which was albeit budding was considered having the potential to be highly burgeoning. Again, Christianity was hated and persecuted because of the youthfulness of the faith itself in comparison with the ancient religions of the Empire. The above enumerated, some of which were considered as 'ineptitudes' or 'misdemeanour', inevitably compelled the Roman authorities to castigate and chastise Christians. The punitive measures taken on them include incarceration, banishment to lonely islands, confiscation of property, enslavement, crucifixion, decapitation, etc. However, open persecution was not always constant but sporadic, depending on the state of mind of the ruling Emperor and events during his reign. The persecution of Christians in the early Church was quite disturbing and intriguing. Christians were subjected to agonizing trauma and subsequently killed in ignoble ways. The best they could do was to run away to avoid annihilation.

Reality of Persecution in Northern Nigeria and Types of Persecution

One cannot deny the reality of persecution of Christians in Nigeria since the 1960 Independence. Events in our country, particularly in the North, have so much heightened the spate, such that the nation is today rated one of the most dangerous to be a Christian (ODUSA.org/wwl). Some of these events evoking Christian persecution in Northern Nigeria are a global rise in radical or fanatical Islam, the ravaging effects of deforestation that is pushing the Fulani herdsmen to the Southern part of the country; poor Islamic theological education; unbridled desire to assume Nigeria's political and economic control and aggressive evangelism (Sani, 2007; & Falako 2012). The quest by Islamic scholars and politicians to persecute Christians for the gains of domination is dividing the nation along ethnic and political affiliations. This development is dangerous and it can engender civil war, because 1967 to 1970 civil war led to regional or ethnic consciousness which is now exacerbated by the seed of religious acrimonies (Ushe, 2015). The dichotomy is more noticeable in Northern Nigeria where religious affiliation determines everything: recruitment into the armed forces, employment, promotion and even admission into schools (Turaki, 1993).

Since the dawn of the 21st century, and with horrifying acceleration in recent years, verified reports of murders, rapes, mutilations, and kidnapping of Christians in Nigeria have persistently increased. These attacks are frequently accompanied by the torching of homes, Churches, villages and farmlands. A July 15, 2020 headline reports that 1,202 Nigerian Christians were killed in the first six months of 2020 (Smith, 2020). This is in addition to the 11,000 Christians who have been killed since June 2015 (Emeka, 2020). Such violence has reached a point at which expert observers and analysts are warning of a progressive

genocide – a slow motion war specifically targeting Christians across Africa's largest and most economically powerful nation.

There are basically two (2) discernible types of persecution experienced by Christians in Northern Nigeria. Since there is no rule of thumb for such taxonomy, a simple approach is proposed.

- a) **Insidious persecution:** The type of persecution that Christians in Northern Nigeria face is insidious persecution. This type of persecution is prevalent and endemic in Northern states of the federation and typified by the daily experiences of many Christian minorities in the Northern region. Some examples of this type of persecution include: discrimination in employment. Every so often we see what happens in these states each time employment opportunities present themselves. Muslim applicants are often preferred over and above those of the Christian fold even when they possess by far superior qualifications and expertise. Qualifications and merit take the back stage while religion and ethnicity are preferred. Kaduna, Kano, Niger, Bauchi, Sokoto etc are notorious for these nepotistic practices. The other example is denial of Church building permits. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than to have C of O and building permits granted by many Northern states for the purposes of erecting Churches and worship centres. Other examples of insidious persecution include but not limited to stagnation in promotion in public service; suppression of ministries; preventing Christian pupils from receiving Christian Religious Education; denying Christians the opportunity to reach elective and appointive positions; imposing the veil on Christian female students; denying Christian students a place of worship on campuses (whereas mosques are built in virtually every block); discrimination in admission in tertiary institutions (professional courses are an exclusive preserve of Muslim students while those of other faiths are admitted for nonprofessional courses – where Christians are lucky, check out the ratio); forcing and abduction of young Christian girls into marriage against their parents' wishes (while forbidding their daughters from having any relationships with Christian boys). Such discrimination is very common in most of our Northern states and has become the new normal for Christians in Northern states. These common practices of persecution accentuate the domination-subordination relationship between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria. In a nutshell, insidious persecution in the North is made possible oftentimes through the deployment of instruments of state to target and marginalize Christians. This type of persecution impinges on the dignity, development and religious liberty of Christians.

- b) **Elevated persecution:** The second type of persecution that Christians in Northern Nigeria are subjected to is known as elevated persecution. This form of persecution was before now intermittent, but in recent times has become more entrenched and is evolving. Elevated persecution is a more lethal form of persecution. It is employed by extremists such as Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani herdsmen Terrorists against Christians in Northern Nigeria. Not satisfied with the outcomes of insidious persecution, Islamists began to adopt a more vicious strategy against Christians living in the region. At first, it took the form of sporadic violence involving attacks against Christians and Churches and homes. Recall the attacks of Christians in Maiduguri in 2006 in reaction to the Danish Cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed published in a Danish newspaper. Scores of Christians were killed while places of worship were either burnt or destroyed. Recall also the protest against Nigeria's hosting of Miss World beauty pageant in 2002. You will also remember the protest that erupted in Europe and cascaded into Northern states of Nigeria on account of Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg lecture in September 2006.

Nigerian Christians are subjected to such episodic attacks at the slightest rumour of blasphemy or provocation, whether committed in Nigeria or abroad. After such attacks occur, the usual reaction from state authorities and Islamic religious leaders is to dismiss the action as the activities of miscreants and hoodlums. The government hurries to carry out an investigation into the incident with a promise to bring the culprits to justice but soon afterwards, nothing is ever heard regarding that.

In the last ten years or more, elevated persecution has assumed a more lethal dimension in the North. Boko Haram is seeking to establish and entrench a strict version of Sharia and to establish Islamic or Theocratic state in Northern Nigeria. For this reason, they have engaged in terrorist attacks against Christians and other non-Muslims from other traditions.

Elevated persecution has taken another pattern in the last 3-4 years. This has taken the form of invasions of isolated, geographically dispersed Christian villages by armed terrorists of Fulani extraction. These attacks have become increasingly widespread and highly organised and sophisticated. Armed attackers take victims by surprise, usually arriving late at night or before dawn to wreak havoc on sleepy communities. States like Plateau, Benue, Taraba, Adamawa, Borno, Niger, Kaduna, etc. have all tasted the brutality of these assailants and persecutors. For us in Kaduna state, denizens have had a fair share of the brutality of these assailants who are usually of the Fulani stock but who are often referred to by government as bandits. In recent time, we had these sporadic attacks on our

communities in Southern Kaduna resulting in the death of many innocent Christians, and some churches either destroyed or touched. Today, the socio-cultural association known as Southern Kaduna People's Union (SOKAPU), the umbrella body of indigenous tribes of Southern Kaduna lays claim to the fact that some communities in Southern Kaduna have been overrun and are under the occupation of the Fulani terrorists. Increasingly, overt hostility to the presence of Christianity in Muslim hinterlands has manifested itself in frequent outbreaks of violence. As a consequence, there are many abandoned Church owned properties in neighbourhoods that Christians can no longer enter. Take a look at the way Kaduna metropolis is divided. Certain areas up north are no longer safe for Christians to practice their faith freely. The once flourishing areas for Christians have become dangerous and no-go areas. Thus, Christians have found solace and safety in the South.

An Overview of Religious Persecution in Northern Nigeria

Prior to 1980's, there were pockets of religious persecution that exacerbated tension in Nigeria. There was a dangerous re-awakening of persecution, which assumed a serious dimension. Religious conflicts and associated violence translated into inter-religious confrontation in some areas as well as assigned an ethnic and regional character. Akanni submits that "the rivalry between Christianity and Islam is known to all. This is occasioned, basically, by the attempts of each of the two religions to have the greater percentage of the people of the world" (Akanni, 2007). Perhaps the above statement is the key reason for persecution among the world religions. It could also be lack of tolerance for divergent religious views

Adebayo is of the view that in spite of the numerous security agencies put in place in Nigeria, there seems to be nothing to write home about in the nation's security situation. The rate at which religious organizations are being persecuted needs the attention of scholars. In most cases, Christians always bear the brunt and are at the receiving end. The persecution faced by Christians in the contemporary time all over the world cannot be overemphasised. In defense of the name of Christ, the Christians hold tenaciously unto it as the sole name by which human beings can be saved, Christians from all walks of life face sundry persecution challenges by fanatical Muslims and some adherents of other religious faiths and philosophical ideologies. (Adebayo, 2015).

Both print and electronic media are full of reports of gruesome murders of Christians, especially in Muslim dominated villages, towns, cities and nations of the world. Christianity as a religion and its adherents have grossly suffered persecution in the country. The generally acknowledged first religious crisis in

Nigeria was dated back to 1987 arising from a misunderstanding among Christians and Muslims at the College of Education Kafanchan which soon spread to other parts of the state leading to the burning of Churches with many lives and property worth millions of Naira lost. As a young boy at the verge of rounding up my secondary education at the Teachers' College Kafanchan, next to the College of Education, I was an eye witness to this crisis and till moment, I still have sad memories of the needless carnage that was visited on our people.

The most amazing in the first decade of the 21st century was Jos crisis, which started in 2001 leading to the loss of many lives and destruction of properties of many Christians. Clark opines that "whenever there is no legal protection in place to prevent it, the powerful are able to prey on the powerless". (Clark, 2013). But the above assertion isn't always true. The powerful sometimes, in some places, choose not to prey on the powerless even though there's nothing to stop them. Sometime the powerful are quite nice, allowing the powerless to enjoy a modicum of freedom and property while living relatively unmolested. But such benevolence is unreliable. Benevolence is never sufficient as the only constraint on the powerful. The only way to guarantee freedom and personal safety for the powerless is by enshrining that guarantee in a framework of law that protects the right of all, including the powerless. This is what all needed to know to understand any form of religious persecution or religious conflicts. The persecuting of religious minorities occurs whenever the rights and freedoms of minorities are not guaranteed by law but are contingent on which faction holds power.

The persecution of Christians has been ceaseless. It would be strange if the Christian community should have emerged without any record of persecution. In fact, we do find a number of references to persecutions and doubtless many others, buried in archival material or preserved in local tradition, will come to light in the course of time. What we do not have yet it seems, is any work specifically devoted to these persecutions (Mckenzie, 1977). This is a task academics and aspiring academics should take up. Ampitan agrees that in the contemporary days, the major persecutors of Christians are essentially Muslims, and this is predicated on the age-long enmity between them.

Many Christians have been hacked to death by Islamic fundamentalists. The fanatics are so mindless that they not only killed Christians in their scores, but callously burn down Churches. Fanaticism implies the behaviour, the character or the ideas of showing unreasonable keenness for some religious beliefs. Religious fanaticism could be violent, irrational and unreasonable in the display of religious community enthusiasm. Religious fanaticism which had triggered mindless blood-letting and wanton destruction of property and human lives, is becoming increasingly a negative factor in the Nigerian nation.

The unacceptable scenario of maiming has been on spasmodically with government doing little or absolutely nothing about the ugly incidences. And since the bigots are not sternly checked, they rather carry out their heinous acts with impunity. In fact, they have taken the massacre of Christians as something that should be carried out probably spontaneously, mindful of the very fact that it would be done without any repercussion. Buttressing this allusion, Opoola states that it is surprising offenders are not punished in any form. The government only compensates the affected group when necessary (Opoola, 2010). Since Christians are always having it at the back of their minds that they are not to avenge because vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19), their persecutors who have injunctions 'Holy fighting in Allah's cause is ordained for you' (Sura 11:216); 'so obey not the disbelievers, but strive against them' (Sura 25:52), have taken it as a license to perpetually humiliate and subdue them. The intent of the persecutors of Christians is to consistently put them under their hegemony, since they are not oblivious of the fact that Christians will never take-up arms against them in self-defence. What is often found is Christians running away for the avoidance of annihilation while their persecutors chase them ceaselessly.

In the contemporary days, according to Opoola, Christianity and Islam contend for recognition and dominance, with Islam struggling tooth and nail to exterminate Christianity. Consequently, it is quite evident that religious crises have become a regular phenomenon in Nigeria. These crises erupted because people do not want to acknowledge the right of individual to practice his or her religious beliefs and tenets. The problems have caused a breakdown in the religious, political and socio-economic stability of the country. Times without number, adherents of different religious groups engaged in conflicts which had resulted into loss of lives and properties. Thus, fanaticism has somewhat become the order of the day in a country that is secular in nature.

Attitude and Church's Response

Debates on what should be the ideal approach to persecution and the persecutors are being echoed in these days of fierce opposition (Sauer, 2013). The experience of Jesus Christ and events from the apostolic era till date show a myriad of responses; though persecution is a constant and nagging decimal in each age. Attempts to glean from the teachings and actions of Christ reveal a depth of reactions. Falako (2017) observed that a firm grasp of the socio-political scenario of the era: prayer, forgiveness, tact, security consciousness and non-violence characterised Christ's outlook. These reactions of Jesus displayed a profound understanding of the will of God for his life and mission. For example, he tactically withdrew to another region when told that John the Baptist was beheaded (Matt. 14:10-13).

Equally insightful is the stance of the early Church, particularly the approach of Apostle Paul. Once a persecutor himself, his letters tell so much about organised persecution and how to stand in the face of opposition. To the Church in Rome, he wrote: We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance (Rom. 5:3). Therefore, Paul admonished the Roman Christians not only to endure persecution but to rejoice therein as such tribulation is one of the blessings of salvation. According to Stamps (2011), tribulations refer to all kinds of trouble and difficulties that may afflict someone. Bowen (1996) identified three ways of suffering: complain; stoical endurance; and rejoicing in endurance; he also listed endurance (constancy); character (provedness); and hope (confidence) as fruits of suffering. This stand seems to be the general posture in the apostolic ear.

One persecution that has significance and relevance to the issue of attitude was that under Emperor Decius who led the first universal persecution of the Church (Oshitelu, 2002). In 250 AD, Decius issued an edict requiring all citizens to engage in Emperor-worship or obtain a certificate (libellous) proving they had done so. According to Frennd (1996), forty of these libelli survived. The reactions varied; those who defied the edict and refused to buy a certificate were arrested or executed. Then, one could obtain without actually sacrificing by bribing Roman officials. Among those arrested and killed were Cyprian of Carthage, the Bishops of Jerusalem, Antioch and Stephen and Sixtus II of Rome (Renwick & Harman, 1999). Some bought the certificate while others like the Bishop of Smyrna performed the sacrifice (Oshitelu, 2002). The diverse reactions created what has been termed a 'crisis of conscience' for many and caused a lot of tension in the Church (Falk, 1997). Hence, the persecution had lasting repercussions. There were two reactions: while some Churches welcomed those accused of apostasy back into the fold, others refused. There were strong arguments between St. Augustine and the Donatists over the issues of welcoming traitors (those who recanted Christianity, the lapsed or traitors) (Oshitelu, 2002). In his fierce dispute during the Donatist controversy, Augustine used the phrase *Extra ecclesium nulla salutis* (outside the Church, there is no salvation). This statement played a significant role in the history of the Church, particularly in the Middle Ages and the Reformation (Nichols, 2006). Unfortunately, the Donatists eventually seceded from the Catholic Church because they had embraced the apostasy or lapsed (Renwick & Harman, 1999).

Martyrdom and Apologetics are the two other Christian responses. That many extolled and glorified in martyrdom could be deciphered from statements credited to the early Church. Justin Martyr was quoted to have said that: "Though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession; but, the

more such things happen, the more do others in larger numbers become faithful (Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, 110). Other works included Origen's *Exhortatio Martyrium* (in praise of Martyrdom) written in 235AD; and Cyprian's *In praise or Exhortation of Martyrdom* (Oshitelu, 2002). These and the much-popularised epistle on the martyrdom of Polycarp of Symna gave insight into the attitude of persecution in the early Church. The prime idea then was that 'to be a true disciple of Christ, one must follow Christ to the point of death' (Nichols, 2006). Thus, Augustine talked of the "mania for self-destruction" in the early Church (Ide & Smith, 1985).

Many Christians chose death instead of recanting the faith; those who did so came to be called martyrs, which means 'witnesses'. This attitude is known as 'seeking or glorifying Martyrdom.' To Boer (1976), it brought much suffering upon the Church then as many misconceived it as a quick means of 'attaining to the presence of Christ.' For example, Ignatius of Antioch begged the Romans in his 'to do nothing that will prevent him from being thrown to the lions when he reached Rome' (Boer, 1976). To the consternation of the persecutors, the glorification of martyrdom had unexpected effects on the populace as many were drawn to Christianity based in part on his wonder at Christians' faithfulness in the face of martyrdom. He later declared that "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church" (Schaff, 1997), and that "Martyrdom is required by God" (Ide & Smith, 1985).

The third response of the early Church in the Roman Empire was to write apologies, or defences of the Christian faith. Those who put pen to paper were the Bishops and influential Christians; better known in Ecclesiastical Studies as the Apologists. Their purpose was to stop the persecution and defend Christianity against accusations and misconceptions. Thus, they addressed their works to the Roman Emperors, the Senate, Governors, notable individuals and the general public (Boer, 1976).

A comparative analysis of persecution in the early Church and present realities in Nigeria shows a lot of similarities and dissimilarities. On the question of attitude, a lot of debates are ongoing. First, others advocate endurance, patience, prayerfulness, watchfulness, perseverance, witnessing and expectancy of the parousia. Second, campaigns and demonstrations; Christians under the auspices of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) took to the streets to protest organised persecution which is a step further the prayer sessions; apologetic letters, visitations to government officials and the affected areas, and donation of relief materials. For the first time, CAN protested in April 2018 to draw government's attention to the violence meted out against Christians. Third, Relocation (retreat), Reaction (reply, retort) or retaliation (reprisal, vengeance) is the third standpoint. Perhaps most Nigerian Christians,

especially those in the middle Beltan States of Benue, Taraba, Plateau, Kogi and Nassarawa, are bothered on whether to retreat, defend themselves or simply retaliate. Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen Terrorists onslaught have led to the relocation of many southerners (mostly Christians) to the South. For the Northern Christians, the Internally Displaced Persons' Camps (IDP's) have become an eyesore. The camps stink due to mismanagement, maltreatment, rape, sporadic and coordinated attacks against the victims.

Calls for self-defence are signals of the apparent failure of government to secure lives and properties. Rhetoric after each attack or killings ends with the submission of reports by panels of inquiries and subsequently white paper by government. Nothing tangible is done to prevent future occurrences. Thus, the calls for self-defence is getting louder by the day, considering the cases of connivance by the security forces as alleged by Gen. T.Y. Danjuma. The call for self-defence makes the fourth of the attitudes. This standpoint was first echoed in 2009 by the then national chairman of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor called on Christians to defend themselves against their attackers (Falako, 2014).

Some Recommendations: Towards Curbing Religious Persecution

- 1. Visionary Leadership:** Nigeria will have to develop visionary leadership. A leadership that is detribalised and free from religious fanaticism. Such leaders should promote the ideal of common citizenship at the transcendent factor among all Nigerians, no matter the religion, tribe, and social status (Kofour, 2012). It is such leaders that will take necessary measures to see to the various religions and ethnic groups co-exist peacefully.
- 2. Elimination of Corruption and Entrenchment of Social Justice:** Corruption is one of the root causes of disaffection among Nigerians. If we emerge victorious in the war against corruption, we will enthrone an egalitarian society, where fairness, social justice and equal right for all will reign supreme; where there will be no preferential treatment based on tribe or religion; where there will be no discrimination or persecution of one group by the other. The principle of state neutrality must be strictly adhered to in Nigeria especially in respect to different religious traditions with their corresponding ways of life.
- 3. Advancement of a More Efficient Security to Counter Crimes:** Nigeria's security agencies seem to be dependent on a lot of politics and politicking. This mars their efficiency at various levels. To enhance the efficiency of Nigerian security system there is need to establish or develop security agencies or institutional infrastructures that are independent of corrupt

politicking. Also, Nigeria needs a more balanced security strategy to disarm the various terrorists and Islamic militant groups troubling the nation. We need a tremendous technological advancement and a computerized security system that can match and subdue these violent groups. A major strategy in this regard is to identify and map out black spots on physical insecurity. This requires vigilance on our environment on the part of security agencies, particularly attacks of the Boko Haram, ISWAP, and Fulani Terrorists.

4. **Religious Tolerance:** Major religious groups in Nigeria (especially Islam and Christianity) have a major role to play in ensuring security in the country. The teachings of religious groups are one of the bases of value development in the contemporary world. It is a known fact that values govern behaviour. Religious groups should emphasize the values that promote fraternal co-existence and values that respect the fundamental human rights. No religious group should instigate their members to be violent or to engage in activities that can affect the peace.
5. **Education:** It is through education that human beings are formed, nurtured and reformed. According to sources, there is a large and pervasive gap in educational attainment between Muslims and Christians in sub-Sahara Africa. By all attainment measures, Muslim adults in the region – both women and men – are far less educated than their Christian counterparts. For instance, Muslims are more than twice as likely as Christians in sub-Saharan Africa to have formal education.
6. **Inter-Religious Dialogue:** There is the need to continue to encourage inter religious dialogue amongst adherents of different religions. Nigeria is a religiously pluralistic state. The aim of dialogue is not to obliterate the identity of the participating religious group. Rather its objective should be to discuss the various aspects of the problem that pose as threat to the peaceful co-existence between different religious groups. Inter religious dialogue will contribute a great deal in averting religious violence.

Conclusion

There is no silver bullet when it comes to the question of persecution. Live and let's live is a famous African philosophy which designates a group of people committed to living in a tolerant society in peace and harmony. The Ujamaa philosophy of Julius Nyerere is another paradigm of what the world should be, a world with brotherly consciousness and interest especially in Africa where communalism is cherished above individualism. Religion is meant to better the lives of people and create the path of hope and understanding. Above all, the

Christian religion is a religion of peace, tolerance, understanding and co-existence yet it is still the most persecuted religion in the world as we have seen above. Notwithstanding the many persecutions the Church has encountered over the years, she still thrives in her quest for peace and harmony without physical retaliation or vengeance but with prayer and dialogue.

The persecutors of the Church may be ubiquitous in the North with the sole intention of instilling fear, Christians must never give in to their antics and wickedness. You have had first hand encounter of persecution that culminated in the death of one of you in this community. He was resolute and never gave in to fear. He bore witness even to the point of shedding his blood. Like Ignatius will say, his blood has become a seed for the Church. We hope that will encourage you all to brace up and be prepared to serve the Lord even to the point of laying down your lives. To the government we have just one sentence: "When you leave evil to have a foothold, you never can tell how that evil will mutate".

REFERENCES

- Bernard-Henri Levy, "The New War Against Africa's Christians," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 20, 2019, accessed July 10, 2020, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-new-war-against-africas-christians-11576880200>.
- Sauer, C. & Howell, R. (Eds). (2010). *Suffering, persecution and martyrdom: Theological reflections*. (Religious Freedom Series, Vol. 2). Johannesburg: AcadSA Pub. & Bonn: Verlag fur Kultur und Wissenschaft (Co-Publishers).
- Fatokun, S.A. (1999). *History and Doctrine of the Early Church*. Ibadan, Enicrownfit publishers.
- Sani, S. (2007). *The killing fields: Religious violence in northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Ushe, M.U. (2015). Religious conflicts and education in Nigeria: Implications for national security. *Journal of Education and Practice*. 6 (2) 117-130. Retrieved from www.iiste.org
- Turaki, Y. (1993). *The British colonial legacy in Northern Nigeria: A social politics in Nigeria*. Jos: ECWA.
- Samuel Smith, "1,202 Nigerian Christians killed in first 6 months of 2020: NGO report," *The Christian Post*, July 15, 2020, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/1202-nigerian-christians-killed-in-first-6-months-of-2020-ngo-report.html>.

- Emeka Umeagbalasi, "Nigeria Is A Killing Field Of Defenceless Christians," Genocide Watch, April 13, 2020, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/2020/04/13/Nigeria-Is-A-Killing-Field-Of-Defenseless-Christians>.
- Akanni, A.A. (2007). *From persecutors to propagators. A comparative study of the lives of Apostle Paul and Caliph Umar in the Ministries of Jesus and Muhammad (SAW)*. Insight: Journal of Religious studies (3) 1. Ilisan-Remo, Babcock University, Ayo-Abiodun Nigeria Ent.
- Adebayo, R.J, (2015). *A glimpse at Islamic concept of security: A lesson for Nigeria*. An article from Religions' and security issues. Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan.
- Clark, F. (2013). The Persecution of Christians: 4 ways to respond. www.pathess.com/blongs/slacktivist/2013/11/20/the-persecution-of-christians-4-ways-to-respond.
- Mukenzie, P. (1977). *The persecution of Early Nigerian Converts* in M. Goriawala (ed), Orita, Ibadan Journal Religious Studies XI/I. Ibadan, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan.
- Sauer, C. (2013). "To flee or not to flee": Responses to persecution and the issue of relocation. *Missioalia* 41:1 (April 2013) 53-65.
- Falako, F.O. (2017). "Reflections on Jesus' safety measures: Lessons for Nigerian preachers on mission security." *KIU Journal of Education*. Tanzania. 12 (1) 255-270.
- Stamps, D.C. (2011). *Fire Bible: King James Version*. Missouri: Life Publishers International.
- Frend, W.H.C. (1966). *The early Church*. London: Knowing Christianity series
- Oshietelu, G.A. (2002). *The African fathers of the early Church: The contributions of the African Church fathers to the development of Christian thought in the early Church*. Ibadan: Sefer.
- Falk, P. (1997). *The growth of the Church in Africa*. Bukuru: ACTS
- Boer, H.R. (1976). *A short history of the early Church*. Michigan: Eerdmans.
- Nichols, S.J. (2006). *Pages from Church history: A guided tour of Christian classics*. New Jersey: PPR Books.
- Renwick, A.M. & Harman, A.M. (1999). *The story of the Church*. 3rd Ed. England: IVP