


**A MISSIOLOGICAL PANACEA TO THE
BOKO HARAM ISLAMIC INSURGENCE AGAINST
CHRISTIANS IN NORTH-EASTERN NIGERIA**



By

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Abstract

Religio-ethnic violence is a 'monster' which continues to traumatize the nation, Nigeria. The Northern part of this country where this writer was born; which is predominantly Muslim, has continued to be the hot-bed of violence which is shrouded in the garments of religious and ethnic rivalry. Within the last decade, no other major development has commanded the attention of the media both locally and internationally about Nigeria like the news of the repeated violence unleashed by the Boko Haram (a Hausa phrase meaning Western Education is forbidden or sacrilege) Islamic sect, particularly in Northeastern Nigeria. While using a combination of research methods (historical analyses, literature, biblical exposition and participant observations), the study analyzed the precarious situation and recommended to Christians in the affected areas a missiological panacea. Thus, owing to the missionary and pilgrim natures of the church, the paper while alluding to the Bible in Mt.10:22-23 and other references, recommends Jesus' admonition to "flee from place to place" during faith related persecutions. It

is obvious that opinions will differ among Nigerian Christians on an appropriate response. However, if persecuted Christians will be alive to clamor for justice in order for peace to reign in Nigeria, this study argues that the first missiological response of Christians in keeping with the missionary and pilgrim natures of the Church is to flee from places of life threatening persecution to places where their lives are not threatened due to their faith inclinations.

INTRODUCTION

Other than the menace of corruption which appears to defy the purging 'hammer' of successive administrations in Nigeria; religio-ethnic violence is a 'monster' which continues to traumatize the nation. The Northern part of Nigeria where this writer was born; which is predominantly Muslim, has continued to be the hot-bed of violence which is shrouded in the garments of religious and ethnic rivalry. Within the last decade, no other major development has commanded the attention of the media both locally and internationally about Nigeria like the news on the repeated violence unleashed by the *Boko Haram* (a Hausa phrase meaning Western Education is forbidden or sacrilege) Islamic sect.¹

While growing up in the Northern Nigeria, particularly in the Hausa cities of Katsina, Zaria and Kaduna, issues of religion had not taken the excessive path of violence which has dominated the scene in that part of the country in contemporary times. Largely beginning in the early 80s, based on perceived 'divine' injunctions, external influences, religion, politics and cultural differences; a form of radicalized Islam emanated in Northern Nigeria. This development has made several parts of the North to be dreaded today by

1. See: Al-Jazeera News August 2, 2009; Nigerian Tribune January 30, 2012; Voice of America May 22, 2013; Washington Post May 31, 2013; Yahoo News, Associated Press, February 28, 2014 and so on.

many people. Caught in the web of these series of religious menace in the North-Eastern parts of Nigeria are the Christians. On March 11th 1987, my sister and I narrowly escaped death from the hands of one of the groups of irate militant Muslims during a religious riot in Zaria, Kaduna State. I have a firsthand near-death experience of these violent Islamic attacks.

In some instances, the *Boko Haram* sect had let loose its mayhem on constituted authorities in the North-East; the police and army and indeed anyone who expresses sympathy with the plights of the Christians who are the primary targets of the group. Over the years, the question which many Christians continue to pose is "What do we prescribe for the Christians to do?" "What shall the Church do?" Or better still, "How shall the Church respond to all of these?" There is no doubt that there would be diverse opinions, perhaps, as many opinions as the number of persons responding to the issue. In this brief study, as a Missiologist, I would like to approach the question from the perspective of Christian missions or better still, the mission of the Church. Therefore my intent in this presentation is to propose or prescribe a missiological response to this ongoing evil.

However, before doing so, I will first discuss 'religion, politics and violence in Nigeria.' Second, I will provide the reader an opportunity to have a better understanding of the *Boko Haram* sect as I analyze its formation, agitations and violent activities. Third, I will discuss the mission of the Church in terms of its missionary and pilgrim natures. Fourth, I will allude to Mt.10:22-23 (with the support of other scriptural texts) in proposing a missiological response. In all of these, I hope to argue that at the face of life threatening faith related persecutions against Christians by nefarious groups such as the *Boko Haram*; the missionary and pilgrim natures of the Church behooves believers to relocate from the place of life threatening persecution to a place of 'safety'

in order to continue the Great Commission of the Church and be alive to seek justice and peace.

ANALYSES OF RELIGION, POLITICS AND VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

We noted earlier that violence in Nigeria is not divorced from religion and politics. It is clear that religion affects social and political order as it defines appropriate conduct and morality. The State is not value-free; most of its prevailing values are drawn from religion. Toyin Falola is on point as he notes that an aspect of religion which has dominated the literature is that of fundamentalism. The term can refer to three interrelated tendencies in religion: (i) a commitment to seek answers in religion to the crises that affect the world and its peoples; (ii) religious revivalism in a variety of forms such as aggressive proselytization and (iii) militancy, that is using religion aggressively as a movement to reorder society or fight opposition in order to accomplish other goals.² There is no doubt that the type of fundamentalism which Nigeria is experiencing with Islam in the North-East, is the militancy type. But how do we explain the cause for fundamentalism in religion? It can be attributed to many causes. Majorly, fundamentalism arises due to individual or group insecurity in a changing world, economic crises, global spread of religious doctrines, failure of State, etc. Indeed, the presence of fundamentalism heightens the political relevance of religion. The phenomenon is associated more with radicalism than conservatism, particularly among Muslims.³

Violence in Nigeria is caused by a myriad of factors. Some of these have been noted by Toyin Falola.⁴ First is political instability. Indeed, Nigeria is

2. Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press) p.11

politically fragmented. There is a wide divide within many parts of the country on political terms. Since 2012, there have been massive defections from one party to another. At present in 2018, these party defections have been on the increase. Owing to some colonial legacies and long period of military rule; often, the North believes that she has the legitimacy for the right for power in Nigeria. Religious violence can and has indeed occurred in Nigeria within this context of political fragmentation and instability. Second is ethnic diversity. Ethnicity and intergroup relations are complicated in Nigeria. As the cases of violence in Zangon-Kataf (1987) have clearly demonstrated; religious and communal interests can combine to produce violent crises. The matter of identity becomes stronger when ethnicity combines with religion and this makes conflicts to deepen and linger.⁵

Third is poverty. Many Nigerian youths are frustrated due to poverty. The situation is worse in some parts of the country than others. More often than not, this frustration is expressed in religious, political and communal violence. Jobless youths and adults soon become 'ready employees' of religious fundamentalists who reward them with meagre financial gratification.

Next is modernization. As Nigeria seeks to have a modernized society, the country is not clear on the role of religion in a modern society. The State is deeply involved in religious spheres, such as organizing pilgrimages, issuance of preaching permits, governing religious institutions, etc. In the course of these activities, religion encroaches upon the State by challenging many of its legislative powers. Fifth is foreign affair. In this era of globalization, news and ideas travel not just through the print media, but

through the Internet, the endless stream of traffic across the borders and indeed by other means. Through these means, the radicalization of religion also crosses boundaries to exert its influence on religionists. The last in the list by Falola is militancy. Indeed, the politicized version of religions tends to be militant and radical. This is observable in the repeated religious crises in Nigeria. It is these factors of radicalism and militancy which make religious fundamentalists to be willing to die for religious beliefs.

In ending our discussions in this part, it is instructive to note that Islam, more than Christianity has been characterized by violence in Nigeria. This negative reputation as we noted earlier is both local and international. In addition, Muslim fundamentalists groups such as *Boko Haram*, continue to use violence or *jihad* to seek Islamic reforms. In all of these, foreign influences or sponsorship cannot be ruled out. The leaders of these violent religious groups profit from the practice as they use religion to build their power base by inciting their followers against the State.⁶

SITUATING THE INSURGENCE WITHIN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is significant to note that *Boko Haram* is not the first Muslim movement in Northern Nigeria which has advocated *jihad* (in the sense of an armed struggle) as a strategy to implement its programme of Islamic reform. The movement of *jihad* which was started by Usman Dan Fodio (1754- 1817) in the early nineteenth century led to the removal of the pre-Islamic rulers in Hausa land and to the establishment of the rule of religious scholars (Arabic: '*ulama*'), who consequently strove to legitimate their rule through theological argumentation. Since then, recourse to theological argumentation has become a precondition for political action among

6. Falola.

Muslims in northern Nigeria. A sound education in Islamic law and theology has consequently become a *sine qua non* for participation in public/political debates. In the advent of colonialism, Western education was brought to Northern Nigeria.⁷ The introduction of Western education, as symbolized by the books (Hausa: *boko*) of British colonial schools, has seriously challenged the hegemonic position of Islamic education and has consequently been seen as both a threat and a symbol of the increasing impact of an alien, colonial, Christian, materialist and corrupt process of Westernization.⁸ Since the Sokoto caliphate which ruled parts of what is now northern Nigeria; Niger and southern Cameroon fell under British control in 1903, there has been resistance among the Muslims in those areas to Western education.⁹

British Colonization, British education, British law and the economic dynamics of the colonial and postcolonial period have indeed led to a deep crisis in Northern Nigerian Muslim society. Roman Loimeir describes this by the umbrella term “modernization shock”. In contrast, Muslim reformers such as Ahmadu Bello, the premier of Northern Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s, Aminu Kano, the leader of the influential oppositional Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) from the 1950s to the 1970s, and Abubakar Gumi, a Muslim religious scholar who inspired the foundation of the Yan Izala (Hausa: “sons of Izala”) movement, tried to develop programmes of reform that sought to Islamize modernity. In the 80s, Gumi held daily Television programs during the Ramadan fasts. This and other mediums were used by him for the propaganda of his Islamizing modernity

7. Some could argue that it was Christian missions that first began formal education in Northern Nigeria, consequently, the Colonialists were also involved in providing formal education to the Northerners

8. Roman, Loimeier. “Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria” *Africa Spectrum* 2-3/2012: 13

9. Farouk Chothia, Who are Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamists? BBC News Africa, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13809501> (Accessed on 27/08/2018)

agenda.¹⁰ Gumi and others like him believed that other established *Sufi* orders such as the *Qadiriyya* and *Tijaniya* were incapable of tackling modernity.

The attempted reforms of these leaders were contested by representatives of the religious and political establishment and by small but outspoken and radical groups that maintained that any reform which was not radical enough is un-Islamic and equivalent to another form of Westernization. A classic example of such a radical anti-modern movement was *Maitatsine*, a group that surfaced in a number of violent clashes with the Nigerian army between 1980 and 1987. The religious sect was founded by late Malam Muhammadu Marwa, alias *Allah Ta-Tsine* or *Maitatsine*. With an ideology that was opposed to most aspects of modernization and to all Western influence; the group unleashed acts of terrorism against the state. The sect also decried such technological commonplace as radios, wrist watches, automobiles, motorcycles, and even bicycles. Those who use these things or who read books other than the Qur'an were viewed as hell-bound. The first *Maitatsine* violence in Kano shocked many Nigerians to their marrows. In that crisis, 4,177 lives were lost. The Kano incident stands out for being the first religious crisis that took a huge toll on human lives and property.¹¹ Indeed, one cannot agree less with Charles Kumolu as he posits that the mayhem unleashed by the *maitatsine* sect in the early 80s raised the curtains for the repeated Islamic militancy in the North.¹²

ANALYSIS OF THE INSURGENCE OF THE *BOKO HARAM* ISLAMIC SECT

Following the *maitatsine* sect, many other radical groups were formed in the

10. Loimeier, p.13. For more discussions on the *Yan Izala*, see Ousmane Kane. *Muslim Modernity in Post-Colonial Nigeria: A Study of the society for the Removal of Innovation and the Reinstatement of Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2003)

11. Charles, Kumolu. "How Maitatsine raised curtains for Militancy" *The Vanguard Newspaper*- Friday February 28, 2014. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/06/how-maitatsine-raised-curtians-for-militancy/> (Accessed 02/08/2018)

12. Kumolu.

North. One of such groups which has become particularly notorious in recent years is the organization formed by Muhammad Yusuf (1970-2009). In the early 90s, the group was known as *Ahlus sunna wa-l-jama'a wal hijra* (a Sunni Islamic sect). The media gave to this group a variety of nick names such as *Yussufiya*, *Taliban* and finally, *Boko Haram*.¹³ In pursuance of his radicalization agenda, Yusuf rejected the modern Islamic schools of the 'Yan Izala as well as Nigeria's secular system of education. He summarized his position on education as *book haram* (Hausa: Western Education is forbidden). He vehemently opposed legally constituted Nigerian institutions; in particular, the Nigerian police and other government security outfits. He refused to recognize the Sultan of Sokoto as the head of all Muslims in Nigeria. He referred to the Sultan as "Sarkin Sokoto" (Hausa: "King of Sokoto"). A core in Muhammad Yusuf's argumentation was a text written by a Saudi Arabian Wahhabi-oriented scholar, Abubakar B. 'Abdallah Abu Zayd, titled *al-madaris al-'alamiyya al-ajnabiyya al-isti'mariyya: ta'rikhuha wa-makhatiruha* (*The Secular, Foreign and Colonialist Schools: Their History and Dangers*). This text specifically served as the theological basis for his rejection of a natural science-based (Western and secular) view of the world.¹⁴

In 2003, a clash erupted between the followers of Muhammad Yusuf and the security forces in *Kanamma*, *Yobe* State. Later in 2004, about 200 followers of Yusuf attacked a police station. This incident made the Nigerian media to begin to initially refer to the group as "Nigerian Taliban." In the same year, other attacks on the police soon followed in *Borno* State. The Nigerian Army stepped in, killing at least 27 *Boko Haram* members. The group dispersed

13. Ben Amara Ramzi, *The Izala Movement in Nigeria: Its Split, Relationship to Sufis and Perception of Sharia Re-Implementation*, Ph.D. Thesis, 2011, Bayreuth University, p.55ff.

14. Mohammad Sani Umar, "The Popular Discourses of Salafi Radicalism and Salafi Counter-Radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of *Boko Haram*." In *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 42, 2, (2012): 123.

with some fleeing to the neighbouring Cameroonian towns.¹⁵ According to *The Guardian*, Dar es Salaam, Muhammad Yusuf escaped to Sudan and subsequently to Saudi Arabia, where he met with the deputy governor of Borno State, Adamu Dibal, who eventually organized his return to Nigeria.¹⁶

It is significant to note that on the issue of use of modern technology, Muhammad Yusuf and his *Boko Haram* movement do not view modern technology, as forbidden. The group rather claimed that modern technology (by contrast to Western education), such as mobile phones, television, motorbikes and even modern medicine (as well as AK-47 machine guns), was completely acceptable in Islamic terms. In this respect, the *Boko Haram* movement has clearly taken a different position than that of the *Maitatsine* movement of the 1980s.¹⁷

The months of June and July 2009, witnessed the eruption of violent clashes between *Boko Haram* followers and the Nigerian security forces in five Northern States in Nigeria. In the course of these clashes, at least 900, or possibly even more than 1,100 people, were killed in Maiduguri alone. It was at this time that Muhammad Yusuf was killed in a police station after he had been taken into custody.¹⁸ The news of his death became so widespread. Initially, the populace did not believe it; however, with the YouTube video which was in circulation on the Internet soon confirmed the obvious. Many Northern Nigerian residents breathed a sigh of relief for a moment thinking that the siege on the Northern cities by the sect was over. However, the events which unfolded between the time of the demise of Muhammad Yusuf in 2009

15. Paden John N., *Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution: The Challenge of Democratic Federalism in Nigeria* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 170; 187-188.

16. *The Guardian*, Dar es Salaam, 5 August 2009; <http://www.zoomtanzania.com/TheGuardianNewspape> (Accessed 27/08/2018).

17. Loimeier, "Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria" p. 150.

18. Loimeier

and the ongoing violence by the sect, continue to be an unfortunate development in the history of the nation. In 2010, the Boko Haram operations continued. In September of that year, the group attacked a prison where she released 150 of her members that had been detained by the government.

Beginning in 2011, two very sad chapters were opened in the activities of the group. First, it was in this year that the insurgency began to intentionally unleash violence against individual Christians and the Church in many parts of Northern Nigeria. The attacks against Christians thus acquired an integrative function in political contexts characterized by disputes among Muslims. Second, the Boko Haram started to attack targets beyond its home base, Bornu and Yobe, and expanded its activities to Kano, Bauchi, Jos and Yobe States, and even to the Federal Capital Territory.¹⁹ Indeed, with these developments, the violence has taken new dimensions; the group has become more organized and sophisticated.

Following the death of Muhammad Yusuf its incumbent leader in 2009, the group re-organized and chose a 20-man council (Arabic- *Shura*) to lead the affairs of the group.²⁰ The group also adopted a new name: *Jama'at ahl al-sunna li-l-da'wa wa-l-jihad 'ala minhaj al-salaf*. (Simply the Sunnah society for the propagation of Islam through Jihad). Loimeier is right on point as he notes that this change of name again reflects internal dynamics. The former name, *ahl al-sunna wa-l-jama'a wa-l-hijra*, may be translated literally as “the people of the Sunna (of the prophet) and the community (of Muslims) as well as (those who accept the obligation) to emigrate (from the land of unbelievers, i.e. the Nigerian state)”. By choosing this new name, *Boko Haram* clearly positions itself to be the supreme authority on the concept of

19. Loimeier.

20. Mohammed Aly Sergie and Tony Johnson, “Boko Haram” *Council on Foreign Relations*, <http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/boko-haram> (Accessed on August 28, 2018).

Sunna as well as the question of who could be regarded as a member of the community of Muslims.²¹ It is important to note that it is not all Muslims in Northern Nigeria that agree with the ideologies or pursuits of this militant Muslim sect. At present, the leader of the group is Abubakar Shekau. He is noted for posting on the Internet YouTube videos in which he is dressed in a military camouflage with Cashmere rifles flanked behind him as he speaks to defend the series of attacks of the group.

Agitations of the *Boko Haram* Sect

It is important to clearly delineate the major agitations of the sect which continue to make the group terrorize Christians, Church buildings, government establishments and several other individuals and groups of people in the country. First is the fact that the group is anti-West. It is believed that the civilization brought by the West is "Christian", hence it must be disallowed. The group has an ideology which is opposed to most aspects of modernization and to all Western influence. Second, the group has the quest for the imposition of *sharia* law. These laws are viewed as the divine dictates for human society. Third is the political goal of creating an Islamic State. In Islam, the 'house of the infidels or unbelievers' must not rule over the 'house of the believers' (the Muslims). For this to happen, there must be an Islamic State, and this is the desire of the group. Other minor agitations include the quest for the release of their imprisoned members and revenge or the killing of the incumbent leader of the sect in 2009.

²¹ Loimeier. "Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria" p. 152.

A SYNOPSIS OF THE MAJOR VIOLENCE BY THE *BOKO HARAM* SINCE 2009²²

| S/No. | Date | Violence / Location | Casualties/Destructions |
|-------|-------------------|--|--|
| 1. | July 2009 | Attack on a police station in Bauchi | Over 900 killed |
| 2. | January 2010 | Attack in Borno | 4 killed |
| 3. | September 7, 2010 | Attack on Bauchi Prison freeing over 700 prisoners | Destruction of prison |
| 4. | December 2010 | Bombing of market in Jos | 80 killed |
| 5. | December 2010 | Attack on Abuja Barracks | Many injured |
| 6. | 2010-2011 | Maiduguri sporadic shooting | Dozens killed many injured |
| 7. | May 2011 | Bombing of part of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa after President's inauguration | |
| 8. | June 2011 | Police Headquarters Abuja bombed | Several properties were destroyed |
| 9. | August 2011 | United Nations Headquarters Abuja bombed | Properties destroyed / many injured |
| 10. | December 2011 | Outskirts of Abuja | Many killed and properties destroyed |
| 11. | 2012 | Series of bombings in Borno, Yobe, Adamawa. Bayero University Kano was also attacked | Hundreds killed and several properties destroyed |
| 12. | February 19, 2013 | Kidnap of French family in Cameroon | |
| 13. | May 7, 2013 | Attack on Soldiers in Bama, Bornu State | Dozens of people killed including 2 military men |
| 14. | June 2013 | Attack on a school in Yobe | 7 students and 2 teachers skilled |
| 15. | June 6, 2013 | Attack on school in Yobe | 20 students and 1 teacher killed |
| 16. | August 11, 2013 | Attack on a Mosque in Konduga, Bornu | 44 people killed |

22. Many sources were compared to put together these dates. See CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/27/world/africa/nigeria-year-of-attacks/>; BBC News Africa, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13809501>; and other Local Nigerian National dailies, Radio and Television News broadcasts (Accessed 26/08/2018).

| | | | |
|-----|----------------------|---|--|
| 17. | September 29, 2013 | Attack on College of Agriculture, Yobe State | 40 students killed |
| 18. | October 20, 2013 | Attack in Bornu | 4 killed |
| 19. | November 13, 2013 | Borno / Cameroon boarders | French Priest kidnapped |
| 20. | December 2, 2013 | Attack on Air Force Base Maiduguri | Many killed / several injured |
| 21. | January 26, 2014 | Attack on Kawuri village in Bornu | 45 people killed |
| 22. | February 11, 2014 | Attack on Konduga village in Bornu | 23 killed and several houses were burnt |
| 23. | February 15, 2014 | Attack on Doron Baga Christian village in Bornu | 106 killed and the village burned down / looting of fish |
| 24. | February 26, 2014 | Attack on Federal College Buni-Yadi, Yobe | 29 students killed |
| 25. | April 14, 2014 | Abuja Bombing | Over 88 People killed |
| 26. | April 15, 2014 | Kidnapping of the Chibok Girls | 276 Female Girls are kidnapped |
| 27. | January 3 -7, 2015 | Baga Massacre | Over 2,000 people killed |
| 28. | January 27 -28, 2016 | Attack on Dalori Village, Maiduguri | Over 65 People Killed |
| 28. | February 19, 2018 | Attack on Dapchi village | Abduction of 110 DAPCHI Girls |

According to the Human Rights Watch report of 2013, since 2009, the *Boko Haram* sect has claimed over 3,000 lives in Nigeria.²³ As at 2018, the Human Rights Watch informs that Nigeria's prolonged conflict with Boko Haram has

23. Human Rights Watch. World Report 2013: Nigeria, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/nigeria> (Accessed on August 28, 2018).

resulted in the deaths of over 20,000 civilians and a large-scale humanitarian crisis. At present, approximately 2.1 million people have been displaced by the conflict while 7 million need humanitarian assistance.²⁴ It is clear from the synopsis above that the sect would stop at nothing in destroying lives and properties. The synopsis also reveals that the group has four primary targets in all of her attacks; the police, Christians, government establishments and Muslims who cooperate with the government to oppose the group. From this list, it is clear that Muslims are not the core target of the group; it is only the Muslims who support the government against the sect, such as the vigilante groups that were formed to repress the sect. I would like to submit that the fact of the killing of Mohammad Yusuf, the incumbent leader of the group in 2009 is the principal reason that continues to make the sect to attack the police. I believe that within the list itemized above, Christians form a core of the target in the *jihadist* (struggles) attacks of the group. The question now is how should Christians respond to the series of attacks by the *Boko Haram* sect?

AMISSIOLOGICAL PANACEA

The insurgence of the *Boko Haram* sect and its nefarious activities of violence and repeated attacks on innocent citizens, particularly Christians, can be viewed from the perspective of persecution against the Christian faith. Indeed, every good student of Church history knows that from the very beginning of the faith, down through the centuries, Christians continue to be persecuted for their faith claims. It is fair to note however, that in the history of Christianity, Christians have also persecuted other religious groups. For example, through the crusades, Christians persecuted Muslims. Also, within Christianity itself, there have been persecutions; the Donatists persecuted the Anabaptists and the Roman Catholics persecuted the Protestants and so on.²⁵

24. Human Rights Watch 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/nigeria> (Accessed August 25, 2018).

25. Scott Moreau, "Persecution" In *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, Scott Moreau (ed.) (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, 2000), p.746-745.

By and large, it is accurate to note that Christians have been the most recipients of persecutions worldwide. Indeed, more Christians have lost their lives to persecution in this century than every other century combined.²⁶ These persecutions take different forms; subtle hatred, discriminations, prejudice, victimization, humiliation, torture and sometimes, death. Hence, persecution is no longer strange to the Church. What remains however, is how to respond to persecution. In this section, as a prescription, I intend to show that, Christians and indeed, the Church has a mission to the world; that by her very nature, she must be missionary and must be God's pilgrim people. We must note that Satan does everything possible through persecutions such as that by the *Boko Haram* and others to try to dissuade the Church from her God-given mission.

The Missionary Nature of the Church

The Church is essentially missionary by nature. The biblical model which has informed this position is based on I Peter 2:9 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." The Church is not the sender, but the one sent. Here Karl Barth rightly notes that the mission of the Church is not secondary to its being; the Church exists in being sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission.²⁷ Since God is a missionary God, then, God's people are a missionary people. Indeed, the Church is both "missional" and "missionizing." Here the missionary dimension involves intentional and direct involvement in the society; in the lives of people through such activities as evangelism, justice and peace.²⁸

26. Moreau, p.745.

27. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/1* (Edinburgh: T. & T Clark, 1956), 725.

28. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2012). 381-382.

her evangelism, the Church has the task of sharing the gospel. The gospel known in Greek as *euangelion* which is translated as the "good news" which has been entrusted to the Church by Christ to be proclaimed to all people.²⁹ The gospel or good news which the Church is to proclaim is that, Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the world and was crucified and buried and that He rose from the dead on the third day according to scriptures. That anyone who believes in Him and confesses his sins will be forgiven, but anyone who does not believe and is not forgiven will perish (see Jn.3:16-17; 4:6; Rom.8:23, etc.). The gospel affirms the centrality of Christ for salvation and the requirement of faith in Christ for salvation. However, if the Christians are extinguished through persecution, how shall the gospel be preached to the world? Indeed, as the bible declares, "...And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Rom.10:14c). Next is the pilgrim concept.

The Church as God's Pilgrim People

The Church as the people of God is a 'pilgrim' community. In contemporary Protestantism, this idea first surfaced clearly in the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.³⁰ The biblical picture is that of a wandering people of God which is conspicuous in the book of Hebrews. The Church is a pilgrim not simply for the practical reason of finding itself everywhere in a diaspora situation, rather to be a pilgrim in the world belongs intrinsically to the church's ex-centric position. The Church is "ek-klesia" (called out of the world) and sent back into the world. Essentially, this means that the Church has no fixed abode here; wherever it is located, it is only temporary. Indeed, the Church pilgrimages towards God's future.³¹ Again as we had noted earlier, if the

29. Arthur Glaser, Mission in the 1990s. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 13: 20

30. Jan M. Lochma, Church and World in the Light of the Kingdom. In Gennadios, Limouris (ed.). *The Church as Mystery and Prophetic Sign* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 58.

31. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 382-383.

Church must be God's pilgrim people on a mission to the world, she needs to be alive to do so.

A Proposed Missiological Prescription: Mt.10:22-23 "Flee from one place to another"

You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

The context of this text was the occasion in which Jesus chose his twelve disciples and then sent them out to preach about the kingdom of God. The sending of the twelve symbolized the continuity of salvation-history in God's program to the world. In Mt.10:16, Jesus warned them of the reality of being like "sheep among wolves." In other words, they were vulnerable in the world due to their association with Jesus. Later in verse 22, Jesus did not mince words in asserting that "All men will hate you because of me." Here, Michael J. Wilkins clearly notes that, Jesus disciples will have the privilege of carrying his name with them, however, this will bring along with it suffering and persecutions. In other words, the same antagonism and hatred which Jesus faced would also be directed to his followers.³² However, in the face of all of these, Jesus gave a strong directive on how to handle persecution. He said, "When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another" (Mt.10:23a). Indeed, the response of Jesus for some sounds like the response of a weakling! And certainly, for many others, it is the response of a fearful person.

32. Michael J. Wilkins, "Matthew." Clinton E. Arnold (ed.) *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, Volume I (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 69.

I believe Jesus' response comes not only from divine wisdom, but also from God's will. The reason is obvious. For Jesus, the importance of the preaching about the kingdom necessitated that the disciples be alive to do so. His admonition to them to flee from a place of persecution to a place of "safety", largely relates to the purpose of God; that all men would be saved. I strongly believe that this admonition also holds for contemporary Christians facing life-threatening persecutions like that of *Boko Haram* in North-Eastern part of Nigeria.

Other Biblical Examples

Jesus admonition in Mt. 10:23 is not an isolated case. We have other examples in the bible which buttress or support this argument which I am putting forward. First, Joseph and Mary were told to flee or escape with baby Jesus from the hatred and killings (persecutions) by Herod; "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him" (Mt.2:13). In this text, we can view Bethlehem of Judea where Jesus was born as the 'persecution zone' and Egypt as the 'no persecution zone.'

Our second example is Jesus. During his disputation with the Jews, they became furious with his words and picked up stones to stone him, however, the bible informs that, "but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds" (Jn.8:58). It is clear that Jesus in this text fled persecution! Why? He knew that He was on a mission to the world and staying around there could mortgage His divine destiny. And so, he fled away from the place of persecution (the temple grounds) to a place of safety. The third example is Paul. On a number of occasions, Paul had to flee from places like Damascus (in a basket), Thessalonica, etc., for his life (see Acts 9:15-25; Acts 17:5-14; the other disciples insisting and

assisting Paul to flee those life-threatening persecutions? The answer is simple, "the field is white and the harvest is plenty." Definitely, there were several other persons in other places who needed the gospel message and hence, Paul was assisted to leave a place of resistance to the gospel to a place of reception of the gospel.

Thus, we have seen from the above that the principle laid by Jesus became a model for the apostles at the time of persecution. Hence, as Northern Nigerian Christians face persecutions from the *Boko Haram* sect, they should pray for divine grace to be able to tactfully flee from the areas of persecution to other safer places. As they do this, they must bear in mind the missionary and pilgrim nature of the Church. Fleeing from persecution as I have shown from the New Testament is not a sign of weakness. Rather, it is a sign of strength and purpose. The purpose is to be alive to continue to serve as the witnesses of God wherever He gives the grace to escape to. Secondly, being alive would enable them to fight for justice and equity.

The Challenges of this Response

The idea of fleeing from a point of persecution to a point of safety has several challenges.

First, for many, the argument may sound like living as 'fugitive' in one's own fatherland. On this mindset, we must bear in mind that Christians are actually 'foreigners and strangers' on earth (Heb.11:13). Heaven is a Christian's ultimate home. A second challenge of my position is that it appears to excuse and support the incompetence of the government in tackling the *Boko Haram's* repeated violence. This however, is not the case. The fact that there are places to flee to simply shows that the government has control in some places and lacks control in others. This calls for vehement calls on the government to be up to its duties and also prayers for the Nigerian

However, to be able to call on the government to do this, we must be alive first by fleeing from the place of life threatening persecution to a place of no persecution. Other challenges include the challenges of relocation, adjustment, health, mobility, etc. While these challenges are real, they are all surmountable. The first essential thing is the possession of life. As the popular maxim states, "once there is life, there is hope." Moreover for believers in Jesus who are on a mission (God's mission), God is able and willing to help in all re-adjustments. Fleeing from persecution itself is a grace of self-defense which God is able to give to His children during life threatening persecutions as they pray and depend on Him for safety.

CONCLUSION

This paper analyzed the *Boko Haram* insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria and made missiological prescriptions to the church. Among other things, the paper discussed 'Religion, Politics and Violence in Nigeria', 'situating the insurgency within historical context'; 'the insurgency of the *Boko Haram* sect', 'a synopsis of major violence by the group from 2009 to 2018' and 'a missiological response by the Church.' It is obvious that opinions will differ among Nigerian Christians on an appropriate response. However, if persecuted Christians will clamor for justice in order for peace to reign in Nigeria, I have argued that the first missiological response of Christians in keeping with the missionary and pilgrim nature of the Church is to flee from places of life threatening persecution to places where their lives are not threatened due to their faith inclinations. The purpose of this is to be able to sustain the Great Commission of the Church. I am aware that this position may be contestable and hence, I will welcome diverse opinions and their supporting arguments. I have simply offered a missiological prescription. In this prescription, violence by the church is not an option. Further researches can be conducted on what the government can do to curb the situation.

However, as it appears now, the Nigerian government has not been able to completely curtail this violent Islamic sect, hence, Northern Christians and indeed all Nigerian Christians would do well to heed the words of Christ, "When you are persecuted, flee from place to place..."