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RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN NORTHEASTERN NIGERIA:

A CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Religious plurality in Nigeria in general is a fact to be reckoned with presently. Its negative effect is seen on our societies.

Religious syncretism is one of the major negative effects of religious pluralism on our societies. When a particular adherent of a religion is making use of a concept which has its origin in the life of another religion in solving his problem as if his own particular religion is not competent to give remedy to the problem, we say he is syncretizing religion.

Religious syncretism is not in God's plan for man hence, the first four of the ten commandments of Exodus 20. The wrath of God is always on those who syncretize their belief and faith. God has promised to provide, sustain and keep all who belong to him. Therefore Christians need not syncretize their religion.

Another problem posed by religious plurality is the issue of social evil. Each religion has its view of life. A way of life in one religion might be a taboo in another religion. For instance, Christianity is against polygamy while Islam and Traditional Religion embrace it. Furthermore, the role and participation of women in society is very different in Islam from Christian point of view, and we are living in the same society – mingling society. How shall we rectify the abnormal? What we are saying here is that, what a religion terms as evil may not be evil in another religion.

Imposition is yet another social evil that needs to be dealt with. For instance, in the North, you will find mosques in all government houses, secretariats, markets, institutions while chapels are not allowed. In fact, it was the Obasanjo regime that

rectified the abnormalities in the National Capital – Abuja, by building a chapel there for the first time since the Federal Capital was moved there. What an imposition

Economic problem is clearly visible. The oil producing areas are not benefiting from oil as much as the North is benefiting. Non-Muslims in the North were always bypassed by the power that be. Those old time prejudices and discriminations are still in force in the North. If you are not a Muslim, you may not be employed.

These and many more problems that stem from religious plurality are challenges that Christian missions must address in the Northeastern States of Nigeria. That can be achieved when light of the gospel is given to the people who are still in darkness. Give them light that they may see the way.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The pluralistic nature of religion in the Northeastern Nigeria is posing some serious challenges to Christian missions. The resurgence of Traditional Religion and the fast growing Islam coupled with religious syncretism had greatly added to the burden of Christian missions. Though the world is changing, yet people's need of salvation does not change. Changing times however call for changes in the means and methods by which the missions of the church is accomplished.

Christian missions need to take into consideration the pluralistic nature of Northeastern Nigerians in terms of cultures, languages and religions. Things are not what they used to be in those days. Education as brought a kind of awareness to the people, yet ministers of the gospel of the present generation need to revise the old methods and carve out new ones.

A. Recommendations

Paul used wisdom in dealing with different people. He was a Jew to the Jew, and became a Greek to win the Greeks. He became weak to win the weak and wise to win the wise. This shows that he applied wisdom in propagating the message of his aster.

Today, some ministers use confrontational methods. Others use argumentative method, while others still use seductive method. Yet others use social ministry method. These methods or approaches are no more effective as they used to be especially with the Muslims. One cannot win a Muslim through arguments or confrontation, but rather with wisdom.

Therefore, this writer is recommending Pauline approach as a means to reach the unreached people groups of the Northeastern Nigeria. The ministers of the Gospel need to apply wisdom as they apply the following approaches for effective evangelization of Northeastern Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general.

1. **Love.** Wisdom demands that we love even our enemies. How much more those we want to win into our fold? The world was won to Christ through love. God loved and so He gave. It was his love that attracts people into Himself.
2. **Patience.** God is so patient with us. So we see Paul as patient as he was with all his audiences. He never gave up easily.
3. **Endurance.** In spite of series of persecutions Paul faced, he endured. That helped him to gain more converts than he would have. The ministers of the gospel today need to endure persecution, abuse and even intimidation.
4. **Condemnation.** The ministers of God should always commend their audience's past – that does not mean we are in agreement with them. But when we commend and not condemn outright, they would listen and be convinced.
5. **Contemporary pastors need to begin from within the fold.** Paul often began with the synagogues before interacting with the unbelievers. When the lives of those already in the fold represent Christ, those without Him will find it easier to join them.
6. **Prayer.** Prayer should not be the last method. All though, from the beginning to the end, prayer should be used to bathe all methods and approaches. It is when the Holy Spirit will be able to work with the contemporary ministers even more than he had worked with those of the years.

1. Conclusion

In conclusion, evangelism is the first step in presenting Christ to the world. Therefore, it has to be one of our major priorities. The field is already wide for harvest, but the labourers are few. This writer is therefore calling on the Nigerian Baptist Convention to come over to Northeastern Nigeria and help us. The pioneer churches had tried their best. More hands are needed in order to recapture what had been snatched away from Christians.

Some Christian Churches of the Northerneastern Nigeria need commendation for the work of the expansion of the Kingdom of God they had embarked upon for many years and are not tried up till know. These churches are trying in reaching the unreached of their areas. May God crown their effort with success. Amen.