

CHURCH PLANTING IN A HOSTILE REGION:

CASE STUDY OF KWARA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This paper was motivated by the observed violent activities of Muslims in Nigeria, leading to religious riots resulting in the destruction of lives and properties. Economic and material losses were incurred, not only by individual families, but also the government of the land.

If one may ask, why did the writer pick on Kwara State since it is not one of the most notoriously violent core-Islamic North of Nigeria like Kano, Zaria and Kaduna? Kwara State is a border State between the North and the South of Nigeria. In fact, the capital of Kwara State, Ilorin comprises Yoruba tribe in the majority. The writer did note, however, that contrary to expectations, Kwara State has such a degree of Islamic violence that ranks with that in any of the core-Islamic North. For instance, converted sons and daughters of Ilorin Muslims were either threatened with death or thrown out of the family homes, as testified to by the experiences of a number of churches.

Religious upheavals had adversely affected the growth of churches. Some ministries have been wholly terminated when the structures accommodating hundreds of people were suddenly demolished. Getting another place had been difficult resulting in the loss of members. The

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research intends to sensitize the church with the menace of hostilities against the church, the effective response and strategies to church planting in the hostile region.

The paper consists of six chapters. Chapter one is a background study to show the readers, the urgency of the problem at hand. Chapter two looks at hostilities against the gospel in the historical perspective. Chapter three deals with the strategies of church planting in a hostile region. Chapter four investigates the history of hostilities against the church in Northern Nigeria. Chapter five is on the challenges of Islam in Kwara State. Chapter six gives the conclusion with recommendations.

A. CONCLUSION

Hostility against the church is as old as the church. The Lord Jesus faced stiff oppositions from the Jewish leaders. The early church suffered cruel persecutions from the Roman Governments, and the public. The contemporary church suffered attacks from a number of sources including paganism, environmental, political, cultural, and religious hostilities of which Islam is a major protagonist.

Christian response to hostilities was diverse. Some responded with pacifism like the Early Church, some believed the Old Testament principle of fighting just wars, like Luther did believe. Some, in the contemporary church believed in an outright revenge, meeting the militancy of other religions with Christian militancy.

Church planting is seen by a number of Christians as the most effective method of evangelism. In planting churches in a hostile region, prayer is the first indispensable requirement. A number of informal church planting methodologies have been executed by churches in hostile

regions. These are in addition to social services embarked upon to alleviate people's sufferings and thus attract them to Christ.

Kwara State, being one of the Northern states of Nigeria, has a common history of religious hostilities and violence with the Northern Nigeria. The seeds of religious violence were planted through some historic events that occurred in the country namely, the Islamic Jihad, the British colonization, the Hausa/Fulani hegemony among others.

Church planting in Kwara State has been a dangerous undertaking particularly in the Islamic strongholds identified as being located mainly on the East and Western parts of the State. In order to fulfill the Great Commission in the State in the face of hostilities, the response of the church in Kwara State had been mainly prayers and self defense. A few (16%) wanted revenge. Only a little more than half of the churches have targeted evangelism to the Muslims. This can still be improved upon. The church needs more of friendship evangelism and dialogue to relate in love to the Muslims so as to carry out its mandate with ease.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

Response to hostilities: Hostilities against the gospel in Kwara State, like some of the hostile States in the Northern Nigeria, have led to the loss of many lives, properties and whole church ministries. Painful losses may have been responsible for some Christians clamoring for revenge. Nevertheless, it must be realized that the responsibility for the conversion

of the world, no matter how wild it is, has been committed to the Church.

Jesus responded to the Jewish hostilities by laying down his own life.

Contemporary Christians cannot do less. While self defense may be legally permissible, it must not lead to aggression or Christian militarism.

Impregnable Communities: Churches in Kwara State have succeeded in penetrating some of the hostile regions by the provision of some needed basic social facilities. Nevertheless, a number of towns like Osin Merindinlogun and other Islamic strongholds in Ilorin were still impregnable. The suggested solutions are as follows:

Osin Mrindinlogun : To penetrate this region comprising 16 communities, it is suggested that some Christians be planted among them to embark on the "Tent Making" ministry. While doing their secular jobs, they would learn about the people. Within a given time, they would be required to come up with suggestions on the best ways to penetrate the people.

Hostile Regions in Ilorin: Places like Oja Oba and Akerebiata are still very volatile. The suggested approach is to embark on Friendship Evangelism. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Pentecostal fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) would be required to take the lead by moving closer to the Muslim communities in dialogue and peace meetings. The churches would then follow in the spirit of love and friendship.