

## INCESSANT KILLINGS OF CHRISTIANS BY ISLAMIC SECTS: A THREAT TO PEACE IN NIGERIA

**Christian Maduabuchi Umeanwe, PhD**  
Department of Religion and Human Relations,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,  
Anambra State, Nigeria.  
[drchrismadu777@gmail.com](mailto:drchrismadu777@gmail.com); 0803 294 3999  
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### **Abstract**

*It is no longer in doubts whether there is a hidden agenda of extermination of Christianity in Nigeria by the Islamic sects. The recent incessant public killings of Christians and posting of the videos of secretly beheaded Christians in different social media is clear-cut evidence that these Islamic sects are gradually fermenting trouble in Nigeria. In the recent times, Nigeria's Boko Haram extremist sect has continued to demonstrate the ability to execute attacks. The security forces and political leaders of Muslim-majority Northern Nigeria are either complicit with Boko Haram's operations, or they are taking a rather complacent view of its success. A video released by Islamic State on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2019 which claims to show the killing of 11 Christian hostages in Northern Nigeria threatens to spark religious tensions in the country. The Islamic State sub-group called Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) said the "beheading" of the hostages was part of its campaign to "avenge" the killing of ISWAP leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a US military raid in Syria. The findings of this paper have shown that there is declaration of religious attack by Islamic religion on Christianity. Again, the deliberate effort to give religious colouration to the farmers-herders clashes and the Boko Haram insurgency, in particular, has undoubtedly helped to conclude that the government is doing little or nothing to guarantee religious freedom in the country. Therefore, the purpose of this study, is to foretell to Nigerians, especially the government the impending dangers by these needless incessant killings of Christians, it is also an avenue to appeal to the Islamic religious leaders to cease fire on these constant killings in order to arrest impending revenge by those that hate what ISWAP and Boko Haram are doing in Nigeria. Data collection method for this research is mostly secondary data collection. The research concludes with proffering the theory of peace by Johan Galtung and its proper application in Nigeria situation as solution, especially on this incessant killing of Christians in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Incessant Killings, Christians, Islamic Sects, Threat, Peace, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

Boko Haram, more than before, contemporary Nigerian society has been beset with religious conflicts that have threatened to tear the fabric of the country's unity and peace. To a large extent, one can say that Nigeria of the past before independence boasted of religious flexibility and tolerance for many years. However, recently, it seems to have been shelved as gruesome stories relating to religion rear their ugly heads frequently, causing loss of lives of Christians. One can say that a curious feature of today Nigerian society is religious intolerance, most especially in the Northern and the Middle Belt regions of the country. Religious fanaticism in the northern part of Nigeria has been hidebound and its spread is unbridled. Religious violence has been unleashed on many innocent Christian citizens of this country, that one wonders if Nigeria is truly a country which gives room for religious freedom.

There is palpable apprehension among the citizens due to the Boko Haram insurgencies in different parts of the North. For over ten years, cities like Maiduguri, Bauchi, Damaturu and Gombe have been bedeviled with fear due to the Boko Haram insurgencies. Religious intolerance prevails in the country and this is an abuse of human rights. The high rate of killings of Christians due to religious intolerance in many parts of the country is worrisome. A great concern at this alarming phenomenon is informed by the slaughter of Rev. Lawani Andimi who was attacked by Boko Haram at Michika in Adamawa State; though he was declared missing, later he appeared in a video released by Boko Haram on January 5, in which he pleaded with authorities to secure his release. The terrorists had demanded a ransom of two million Euros and were offered N50 million, which they rejected before beheading the cleric. Indeed, the insurgents had the effrontery to call the wife of the slain Pastor that they will kill her husband on Saturday, but they delayed until Monday. The governments need to inhibit the superfluous of this religious intolerance and chauvinism among the people of this country.

There is also another story of an evangelist, Mr. Akinyemi Oladapo, a known soul winner in the South West who was brutally attacked for his role in converting many Muslims to Christianity. It was reported that Oladapo was killed after he became the spiritual father for one Mr. Mobolaji Akingbade, the son of a popular Islamic scholar. He ran away to Abeokuta where he was attacked by some unknown assailants reminding him that he has no hiding place in the country. Since then, he has never been seen again. We should not forget in

jiffy the extrajudicial murder of a 75-year-old woman, Mrs. Bridget Agbaheme, a Christian and trader at Kofar Wambai market, in Kano, who was beaten to death by irate youths after accusing her of blasphemy against Islam, or Mrs. Eunice Elisha of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Kubwa, Abuja, who was killed recently for preaching. Before Nigerians could comprehend the motive behind such barbarity, another Christian and carpenter at Kakuri area of Kaduna metropolis, Mr. Emmanuel Francis, was mobbed and stabbed severally by some Muslim youths for failing to observe the Ramadan fast.

Are we running out of options or will? On January 20, 2020, the Islamic State West Africa Province, ISWAP, an offshoot of the Boko Haram terrorists group, released a video showing the execution of Ropvil Daciya Dalep, a 22-year-old Christian student from Plateau State. Rapvil Daciya was from Jing village in Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau who was studying Biology at the University of Maiduguri. He was kidnapped on January 9 in Borno State along with other two students one of whom was a 20-year-old Zoology student from Plateau, Lilian Daniel Gyang, while they were returning to the university after the Christmas. The video shows Dalep calmly kneeling down while a masked child stands behind him wielding a pistol. Before shooting Ropvil, the under-aged child, obviously acting on instruction, chanted in Arabic, and then spoke in Hausa. Right to religious freedom is based on the inherent dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27). Even in the Qur'an 2:256, it is stated that "there is no compulsion in religion". Recent report of forcing Leah Sharibu to Islam and marriage too is unislamic, barbaric and therefore stands condemned. In the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, it is explicitly affirmed that the recognition of the dignity and the rights of the human person is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace, and that disregard and contempt for them are acts of barbarousness that offend the conscience of humankind. The right of the individual and of communities to social and civil freedom in religious matters carries with it the right to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. The insecurity of lives and property in recent times was the main reason behind the formation of the security outfits in different corners of the country. We must restate that religious belief is fundamental to many human identities. It is part of the ways in which human beings experience the world around them. Hence, all have the right to enjoy freedom to choose which religion

that one is convenient with. Belonging to a particular religion must not be by compulsion.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

Concept clarification is centrally important to theory development. While often understood as a formula-driven task, concept clarification is really a process that engages critical thinking. The central challenge in concept clarification is to understand how words create things. In this literary work I define and discuss concepts pertinent to the subject of this study. These include: Incessant Killings, Christians, Islamic Sects, Threat, Peace, Nigeria. This will give the readers insight into researcher's intention for the choice of the topic.

### **Incessant Killings**

Incessant killings can say to be uninterrupted in time and indefinitely long continuing of killings. According to Tauna (2020), following what the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), in Adamawa State described as rampant killing of Christians in the state. From Tauna's opinion the word incessant is synonymous or can be used interchangeably with the word rampant. Dami Mamza buttressing that there are incessant killings going on against Christians recalled that three Christians, including two prominent Christian leaders as well as a journalist, were killed around the state within the last one week. The three were a pastor and politician, Rev Denis Magauri, killed by unknown persons at his residence in Mayo Belwa; a broadcaster with Radio Nigeria's Fombina FM, Mr Maxwell Nashion, killed also by strange elements; and the Michika LGA Chairman of CAN, Lawan Adimi killed by Boko Haram insurgents. Incessant killings are a situation where there is constant gruesome murder of people unduly, against the law. Adibe (2014) in explaining the emergence of Boko Haram said, Under a radical Islamic agenda, these militants have perpetuated violence across Northern Nigeria since roughly 2009, aiming to rid the country of any Western influence. This means that since 2009 the Islamic sects have deployed many ways in killing Nigerians, especially the Christians without substantial interventions by the government. Cook (2012) said, Boko Haram's new phase of attacks on Christians can be divided into several target categories which are:

- i. Attacks against local Christians in Boko Haram's core operating area of Borno and Yobe states, and the adjacent state of Bauchi.

- ii. Major suicide operations or bombing attacks of high-profile churches in Jos in Plateau State and the capital of Abuja
- iii. Minor operations against church or parachurch personnels throughout the north and middle belt regions of Nigeria. These operations represent a fairly major shift in the goals of Boko Haram, which are still squarely Nigeria-focused, and represent the opposition of certain elements of the Muslim north to the spread of Christianity in the region.

### **Islamic Sects**

A sect is a subgroup of a religious, political, or philosophical belief system, usually an offshoot of a larger group. Although the term was originally a classification for religious separated groups, it can now refer to any organization that breaks away from a larger one to follow a different set of rules and principles. The word *sect* comes from the Latin noun *secta* (a feminine form of a variant past participle of the verb *sequi*, to follow), meaning "a way, road", and figuratively a (prescribed) way, mode, or manner, and hence eponymously, a discipline or school of thought as defined by a set of methods and doctrines.

### **Sociological Definitions and Descriptions of the Term Sect**

There are several different sociological definitions and descriptions for the term sects. Among the first to define them were Max Weber and Ernest Troeltsch (1912). In the church-sect typology they are described as newly formed religious groups that form to protest elements of their parent religion (generally a denomination). Their motivation tends to be situated in accusations of apostasy or heresy in the parent denomination; they are often decrying liberal trends in denominational development and advocating a return to true religion. The American sociologists Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge assert that "sects claim to be authentic purged, refurbished version of the faith from which they split". They further assert that sects have, in contrast to churches, a high degree of tension with the surrounding society. Other sociologists of religion such as Fred Kniss have asserted that sectarianism is best described with regard to what a sect is in tension with. The English sociologist Roy Wallis argues that a sect is characterized by "epistemological authoritarianism": sects possess some authoritative locus for the legitimate attribution of heresy. According to Wallis, "sects lay a claim to possess unique and privileged access to the truth or salvation" and "their committed adherents typically regard all those outside the confines of the collectivity as 'in error'". He contrasts this with a cult that he

described as characterized by epistemological individualism" by which he means that "the cult has no clear locus of final authority beyond the individual member.

### **Christians**

According to the demographic presentation of Brian J. G., Todd M. J., Vegard S. and Gina A. Z. (2017) about the population of Christians in Nigeria, "46.3% of Nigerians identify themselves as a Christian" (p.1). Though the percentage of Christians differ in my consultations, but the percentage of the population Christians in Nigeria ranges between 45% to 49%. The answer can be found by looking at how the word Christian is commonly defined, then examining how does the Bible define a Christian. Knowing the difference will make defining a real Christian meaning so much more than just a definition.

According to New Pew Research Centre (2017) demographic analysis, Christians remain world's largest religious group. Christianity is the number one world religion by number of adherents. Members of the Christians religion are called Christians. Christians generally believe Jesus to be son of God, the second person of the Trinity. What is a Christian? The Perception or the answer to the question will vary greatly depending on whom you ask. To some, it means you were born in a "Christian" nation or you come from a Christian family. To others, it means you believe in Jesus or the religion that is based on Jesus' teachings. Yet others use the word Christian to speak of a deep personal relationship between Jesus Christ and an individual. Many in the very early Christian movement, a Christian was defined as a person who was baptized and proclaimed Jesus is Lord. Their definition was true to them because it agreed with their understanding of their religious belief. A dictionary definition of a Christian would be something similar to a person professing belief in Jesus as the Christ or in the religion based on the teachings of Jesus." While this is a good starting point, like many dictionary definitions, it falls somewhat short of really communicating the biblical truth of what it means to be a Christian. Followers of Jesus Christ were first called "Christians" in Antioch (Acts 11:26) because their behavior, activity, and speech were like Christ. The word "Christian" literally means, belonging to the party of Christ or a follower of Christ, or Christlike.

### **Who is a Christian? The Biblical Definition**

Since the Bible is the authority for the Christian faith; let's see what it says about the word "Christian." The word is only used three times in the New Testament and each instance is referring to the first Christians of the early church.

- i. "...So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (Acts 11:26).
- ii. Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?'" (Acts 26:28).
- iii. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (1 Peter 4:16).

They were called "Christians" because their behavior, activity, and speech were like Christ Jesus. The word Christian means, "follower of Christ" or "belonging to the party of Christ." So, what made them part of this group called "Christians." The word Christian was given to the early followers of Jesus, and the name has 'stuck' to this day. A Christian is someone who looks to Jesus Christ for salvation and eternal life, someone who acknowledges his need for a Savior and who tries to emulate Christ in his daily life. A Christian is a person who is trusting Jesus Christ for their eternal salvation, and is seeking to follow Him in their daily life. To put it another way, a Christian is committed to Jesus as both their Savior and their Lord (or master).

Let me explain what this means. It means first of all that Jesus Christ was more than an extraordinary man; He was the unique Son of God, fully God and fully man. As Jesus Himself said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). It means also that Jesus Christ was sent into the world for a purpose and that purpose was to save us from our sins. Sin separates us from God; it also makes us subject to God's judgment. But God loves us, and on the cross all our sins were placed on Christ, and He took upon Himself the judgment and Hell we deserve. When we commit our lives to Christ, God forgives us and now our desire is to live for Him instead of ourselves.

### **Threat**

Threats are negative, and external. This means that threats do not benefit your company, but there is nothing you can do to stop them from coming about. A statement of an intention to inflict pain, injury, damage, or other hostile action on someone in retribution for something done or not done. A person or thing likely to cause damage or danger. In nut shell threat is an expression of an intention to inflict pain, harm, or punishment. Other concepts include;

- i. An indication of impending danger or harm:
- ii. One that is regarded as a possible source of harm or danger.

iii. The condition of being in danger or at risk.

### **Threat to Peace**

The European Union identified act of terrorism, particularly in Nigeria, as one of the major threats to peace and security in West Africa. Since 2002, it has gradually acknowledged that different manifestations of continuous killing of Christians constitutes a threat to peace of Nigeria as a country and therefore justify the use of enforcement measures. In order to understand the threat to peace, it is also important to reflect on the meaning of the word 'peace'. The latter can be defined either negatively or positively. In the negative sense, the word refers to the absence of organized use of armed force; therefore, in order to constitute a threat to peace, the situation in question must have the potential of provoking armed conflict between states or groups in the short or medium turn. Still, an actual outbreak of armed conflict is not necessary. The term 'threat to peace' is sufficiently flexible and dynamic to include all major forms of serious misconduct. However, in every case, a threat to peace is a situation that objectively can be characterized as destabilizing and potentially explosive. The positive concept of peace is wider and includes also friendly relations between states, as well as other political, economic, social, religious and environmental conditions that are needed for a conflict-free community or society. There are some textual supports for the positive notion of peace in the United Nations Charter; for example, Article 1 sections 2 and 3 speak about the strengthening of universal peace through the development of friendly relations and co-operation among nations. Absence of war and military conflicts amongst States does not in itself ensure peace and security. Religious crisis, instability and use of force to convert people from one religion to another have become threats to peace and security in Nigeria.

Today, 60 years of independence, and over hundred years after existence, the Giant of Africa is plagued by numerous that are threatening her unity as a nation. *In a time of national crisis, no reasonable person should stand aloof and wish that the crisis resolves itself.* Global insecurity orchestrated by manmade disaster such as: terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery and armed banditry is gradually becoming a national embarrassment to the Nigerian people. The upsurge in criminal activities seems to have taken a new dimension to the extent that Nigerians are becoming worried, as it portents a great danger to the unity of the country. Peace and harmony seem to be eluding our people. A lot of things seem to have fallen apart and the Centre can no longer hold. Our existence as a nation



is threatened, and our existence as people is equally being threatened. The peace and unity of Nigeria as a country is threatened by many things which among them is the incessant killing of Christians by deadly and dastardly group called Boko Haram.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theories are formulated to explain, predict, and understand phenomena and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge, within the limits of the critical bounding assumptions. The theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study. The theoretical framework introduces and describes the theory which explains why the research problem under study exists. Therefore in this paper the writer has chosen to use the theory of peace as propounded by Johan Galtung which explains the writers idea for the choice of the topic.

### **Johan Galtung a Mini Theory of Peace**

The basic point is that peace is a relation, between two or more parties. The parties may be inside a person, a state or nation, a region, religion or civilization, pulling in different directions. Peace is not a property of one party alone, but a property of the relation between parties. According Galtung (1964) there are three kinds of relations we can have, which include;

- i. Negative disharmonious: what is bad for one is good for the other.
- ii. Indifferent: a non-relation, they do not care about the other.
- iii. Positive harmonious: what is bad-good for one is bad-good for other.

In the real world, relations may be mixes of all three. When the negative relation is brought about with intent, the party is an actor, we talk about direct violence, or harm, and about war if the actor is collective. If the violence to a party is not intended (but watch out for acts of commission, more or less intended) it may be referred to as indirect, often caused by inequitable structures producing harm - structural violence; and then the role of culture legitimizing either or both types of violence: cultural violence. From these follow two concepts of peace, which are as below:

- i. Negative peace
- ii. Positive peace

**Negative Peace:** This can be better explained as the absence of violence, like a cease-fire, like keeping them apart, not negative but indifferent relations. At this point, not that peace have been achieved, but a compulsory separation is applied

to the conflicting party in order to achieve peace. Sometimes, in order to achieve this negative peace certain instructions are given to the both conflicting parties of which either of the parties violates, a certain punishment must follow.

**Positive Peace:** The presence of harmony, intended. It is the integration of human society. Peace seems to be an "umbrella concept", a general expression of human desires, of that which is good, that which is ultimately to be pursued. This is peace as a synonym for all other good things in the world community, particularly cooperation and integration between human groups, with less emphasis on the absence of violence. The concept would exclude major violence, but tolerate occasional violence. It is a concept that seems to be particularly widespread in underprivileged groups, groups that are less in status quo oriented.

One approach to negative peace studies opens for peace and conflict studies, seeing violence-war as the smoke signals from the underlying fire of a conflict. And that leads to a major approach to negative peace: remove the conflict, by solving it or, more modestly, by transforming it so that the parties can handle it in a non-violent way, with empathy for each other, and with creativity. This is applicable in Nigeria situation. It is high time Nigeria government should apply some noticeable violence on this groups that are killing Christians and innocent souls in Nigeria. For years now, these killers have been handled like the untouchable and first class citizens in the country. Nigeria government has not been decisive in her approach to calm menace of insurgence in Nigeria. A military dictator who was one of the military heads of Nigeria government-General Sani Abacha, said that when insurgence lasts more than 24 hours government has hand in it.

The root of a conflict is always a contradiction, an incompatibility or clash of goals which then easily translates into a class of parties and violent behavior. At any stage in this process negative attitudes may enter and attitudes, behavior and contradictions then feed into each other in vicious cycles. In the wake of those processes are traumatized parties and actors with festering wounds on body, mind and spirit.

These two aspects of the search for peace are not unrelated since most peace promoters probably would agree that the most promising way to reduce negative relations to a minimum is via an increase of positive relations, but

empirical correlation does not imply logical dependence, for which reason the two concepts should be kept separate. What are these positive relations? Just to mention some examples:

1. Presence of cooperation
2. Freedom from fear
3. Freedom from want
4. Economic growth and development
5. Absence of exploitation
6. Equality
7. Justice
8. Freedom of action
9. Freedom of religious affiliation

Some comments of this set of these values:

**Presence of cooperation:** we mean a pattern of interaction between two parties, whether religious or secular so that there is an exchange of values between them, of commodities, services, knowledge, people etc. This is the opposite of isolation, it is interdependence between nations.

**Freedom from fear:** we mean a state of affairs such that individuals, and nations, predict with relatively high probability a major negative event in the future, an event with relatively high negative utility, and this expectation dominates their life and existence, whether they live in the shadow of floods, earth-quakes, hunger, war (internal or external) or other calamities.

**Freedom from want;** we mean that neither in the life of the individuals should major, primary needs remain unsatisfied or unsatisfiable. Thus, we mainly refer to such needs as hunger, thirst, shelter, sex, basic security.

**Economic growth:** and development we mean an organization of the structure of groups and the relations between groups so that 1. Resources per capita increase and 2. These resources are better distributed. This is not only a question of technological development but also of social and religious organizations within the country.

**Absence of Exploitation:** we mean that all value exchanges between individuals as well as between ethnic and religious groups take place at, roughly, equal

terms. Thus, no individual shall be able to receive very much more from another individual than he gives back to that individual.

**Equality:** we mean that all individuals irrespective of religious affiliation are regarded as having the same essential value, none is implicitly worth more and entitled to basically different types of life or existence than others. Extreme "gaps" in opportunities and resources at the disposal of individuals or of groups should not be tolerated.

**Justice** one may mean roughly the same as by equality, but there is also the dimension of basic, fundamental rights, not only individual or national worth or value.

**Freedom of action:** we mean that all individuals should have a wide range of possible actions open to them - both that they have been stimulated to have the imagination to conceive of such action and that they have the means to carry them out.

**Freedom of religious affiliation:** we mean that every citizen should be give freedom of choice to choose religious affiliation of his/her choice devoid of use of force or compulsion of any kind. It should also extend to when decides to leave his former religion to another for reasons best known to him. For example when one leaving Islam for Christianity he/she should not by any means threatened. Most of the killings in Nigeria is traceable to religious crisis and masterminded by Islamic religious sects.

### **Boko Haram as a Sect of Islamic Religion in Nigeria**

Boko Haram as a sect of Islamic religion is also part of Islamic religion in Nigeria. Islamic religion is not different from Boko Haram and Boko Haram is not different from Islamic religion in Nigeria; both exist towards achieving the same goal. Agbiboa (2013) buttressed the idea that both Boko Haram and Islamic religion interrelates in the following words, Radical Islam is not a new phenomenon in northern Nigeria. Following independence in October 1960, the rise of the radical Maitatsine movement in the 1970s led to clashes with the Nigerian Police Force in Kano in December 1980, and in Maiduguri in October 1982, leaving many hundreds dead. (p.8). Ekot, (2009) opined that Alhaji Muhammadu Marwa, known as the Maitatsine ("One who curses"), championed these intra-religious riots (p.56).

Hickey(1984) The uprisings had its roots in the “deeply conservative practice of Islam,” dominant in the region that had its origins in the highly successful jihad (holy war) of Sheik Usman dan Fodio of Sokoto (1754–1817) in the first decade of the nineteenth century. (p.251). Crowder (1978) said that what began as a search for religious purification soon became a search for a political kingdom (p.71). Udoidem (1997) shares the same opinion when he said; with the outcome that “Islam has remained the focal veneer for the legitimacy of the northern ruling class, and consequently, its politicians have always prided themselves as soldiers for the defense of the faith” (p.156).

Forest (2012) said, since 2009, however, Boko Haram, yet another religious terrorist group from North Eastern Nigeria, has been responsible for more violence than any other armed group in Nigeria. The nomenclature, “Boko Haram,” is derived from a combination of the Hausa word, boko (book), and the Arabic word, haram (forbidden). Put together, Boko Haram means “Western education is forbidden,” as it is important here to clarify that the Hausa word, “boko,” originally had implications of “falseness” and “duplicity.” This certainly has increasingly become the case in recent times, but only with regard to books of Western provenance, as they were deemed to contain material antithetical to Islam and, therefore, “boko.” Onuoha, (2012) agreed that Boko Haram is working in defence of Islamic religion:

In any case, Boko Haram has even rejected the designation, “Western education is forbidden,” and instead, the group now prefers the slogan, “Western culture is forbidden.” The difference, as one of the senior members of Boko Haram noted, is that “while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the Westm, which is not true, the second affirms our belief in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not education), for culture is broader, it includes education but not determined by Western education” (pp.1-2).

According to Agbiboa (2014) who said, “Do not think jihad is over. Rather jihad has just begun” (p.1). this he said with regard to formation and activities of Boko Haram Islamic sect in Nigeria. He furthered to to opine that:

The lethal and growing threat posed by the Nigeria-based Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram or People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad. Specifically, the

group's emergence and grievances, as well as its increasing links to the global jihad as spearheaded by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and its affiliates like the Somalia-based al-Shabaab. (p.1).

Udounwa (2013), Boko Haram officially calls itself Jama'atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda'wati wal Jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad).

Nigeria is currently faced with internal security challenges posed by the group "Jama'atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda'wati Wal Jihad," also known as Boko Haram. Boko Haram's objective is to establish Islamic rule in Nigeria through imposition of Sharia law throughout the country. Boko Haram's insurgency is fueled by Nigeria's history, geopolitical structure, ethno-religious composition and socio-economic disparities. (P.1).

Across northern Nigeria, Western education continues to be linked to attempts by evangelical Christians to convert Muslims who fear the southern economic and political domination. As Isa (2010) contended, the term, Boko Haram, implied a sense of rejection and "resistance to imposition of Western education and its system of colonial social organization, which replaced and degraded the earlier Islamic order of the jihadist state. (p.322).

The Boko Haram insurgency is not unrelated to the fact that a Christian from the largely Christian-dominated south is in power. As one of their pre-conditions for peace, Boko Haram called on President Jonathan to embrace Islam or resign from office (Nigerian Tribune, 6 August 2012).

The comingling of religion with politics in Nigeria is portentous for the stability of the country and the emergence of a true national identity. Unfortunately, government complicity in religious matters has often fanned the flames of religious tensions. Kenny, (1996) and Ekot, (2009) informed that Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB), during his tenure as president (1985-1993), for example, unilaterally registered Nigeria as a full-fledged member of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). This is anchored on the core values and goals of the OIC, membership of the organization is underpinned by a commitment to the advancement of Islam. Toeing a similar line, President Sani Abacha, who succeeded the Interim National Government set up when Babangida was forced out of office, again unilaterally registered Nigeria as a

member of the D-8 (Developing-8), an organization for development cooperation among major Muslim developing nations, including Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey.

These decisions caused much consternation and anxiety among Nigerian Christians who saw the government moves as an attempt toward the Islamization of Nigeria. Following a chorus of disapproval by Christians, the issue of Nigerian membership in the OIC was put on hold. Udoidem (1997) said:

This decision, however, precipitated a series of religious disturbances in the north, beginning with the March 1986 clash in Ilorin between Muslims and Christians and the May 1986 clash between Christian and Muslim students at Uthman Dan Fodio University in Sokoto. (p.172).

The politics of religion in Nigeria is evident in the Sharia law debate, which has always pitted the Muslim-dominated north against the Christian-dominated south. Ekot,(2009) said, the issue engulfed Nigeria shortly after her return to democracy in 1999. Zamfara State was the first northern state to introduce Sharia as the supreme law of the land. The then Zamfara governor, Ahmed Sani, was quoted as saying: "Whoever administers or governs any society not based on Sharia is an unbeliever" (The Post Express, 15 July 2000). Following his example, many northern governors also soon introduced Sharia law, but in the case of Kaduna State with half of its population being Christians, there was a strong resistance. This led to violent religious confrontations in February 2000 between Christians and Muslims as attempts were made to implement the Sharia law. In this conflict, hundreds of people were killed, property worth billions of Naira was destroyed and thousands of people were rendered homeless. From the onset wrote Ekot (2009), "The Muslims had never given up their quest for Nigeria to be an Islamic state ..." (p.54).

The Islamic State in West Africa or Islamic State's West Africa Province (abbreviated as ISWA or ISWAP), formerly known as Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād "Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad") and commonly known as Boko Haram is a jihadist terrorist organization based in northeastern Nigeria, also active in Chad, Niger and northern Cameroon. Founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002, the group has been led by Abubakar Shekau since 2009. When Boko Haram first formed, their actions were

nonviolent. Their main goal was to *purify Islam in northern Nigeria*. Since March 2015, the group has been aligned with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Since the current insurgency started in 2009, Boko Haram has killed tens of thousands and displaced 2.3 million from their home and was at one time the world's deadliest terror group according to the Global Terrorism Index. Global Terrorism Index (2019) report said: The most recent escalation in violence follows increased militia attacks and implementation of new anti-grazing legislation. In Nigeria, terrorist activity is dominated by Fulani extremists and Boko Haram. Together, they account for 78 percent of terror-related incidents and 86 percent of deaths from terrorism.

### **Boko Haram Mission is on Nigeria Christians**

Yusuf's successor, Abubakar Shekau, vowed to exact revenge on the Nigerian government. A violent campaign against the state was launched. A year later in 2010, Shekau sought to make it a Jihad against Christians.

According to Adibe (2019), this is evident in a message reportedly broadcast over the Internet in July 2010, Shekau was reported as saying: This is a message to President Goodluck Jonathan and all who represent the Christians. We are declaring a holy war! We will fight the Christians, because everyone knows what they have done to the Muslims! It is obvious that from the preceded assertion Boko Haram was created as a veritable instrument to fight Christians and governments headed by Christians.

Today, Boko Haram is believed to be made up of at least two main factions, one led by Shekau and the other, known as the Islamic State West Africa Province, led by Abu Abdullah Ibn Umar al-Barnawi who is said to be one of the sons of Boko Haram founder Mohamed Yusuf. However, there appears to be two people with the same name or aliases, one of whom is not linked to Yusuf.

It is now estimated that by 2018 Boko Haram had been linked to the deaths of over 37,000 people. The United Nations Children's Fund has reported that the group has kidnapped more than 1,000 children in northeastern Nigeria since 2013 to spread fear and show power. Similarly, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre believes that over two million people have been displaced in the North East as a result of Boko Haram's terror activities.



### **Brutal Killing of Christians by Boko Haram and Other Islamic Sects**

In the recent times, there are trending records of Muslim groups killing Christian apart from that of 1980s and 1990s massacre of Christians and bombing of churches. The following is a list of massacres that have occurred in over the past number of years in Nigeria. In 1991, the late German Evangelist Reinhard Bonnke attempted a crusade in Kano, causing a religious riot leading to the deaths of about a dozen people.

In 1991, during Bonnke's visit to Kano in Nigeria, there were riots in the city as Muslims protested over remarks he had reportedly made about Islam in the city of Kaduna on his way to Kano. A rumor was spread that Bonnke was planning to "lead an invasion" into Kano. Muslim youths gathered at the Kofar Mata Eide-ground where they were addressed by several clerics who claimed that Bonnke was going to blaspheme Islam. About 8,000 youths gathered at the Emir's palace and after noon prayers the riots ensued, during which many Christians sustained various injuries and several churches were burned. This riot was as a result of deliberate misinformation from both religious and political leaders of the state about the Bonnke's evangelical mission to Kano State.

There is public and callous display of video in the social media which shows the Islamic sect-Boko Haram ruthlessly beheading Christians. British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC) released news about the activities of Boko Haram. The Islamic State group has released a video claiming to show the killing of 11 Christians in Nigeria. The footage was filmed in an unidentified outdoor area. One captive in the middle is shot dead while the other 10 are pushed to the ground and beheaded. According to the speech released by Abubakar Shekau the kingpin of Boko Haram "we killed them as revenge for the killing of our leaders, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Klett (2017) reported the series of killing of Christians as follow;

- i. Muslim Fulani herdsmen killed 16 Christians in separate attacks in Plateau state this month amid a spate of violence carried out by various groups against believers in Nigeria.
- ii. Herdsmen invaded Torok village in Riyom County on January 20th, killing Reuben Bulus, a 25-year-old member of the Church of Christ in Nations, said Dalyop Solomon Mwantiri, a human rights activist with

- the Emancipation Centre for Crisis Victims in Nigeria, to Morning Star News.
- iii. Just two days earlier, 13 COCIN members were slain in Plateau state's Kulben village, Mangu County, in an attack carried out by about 20 herdsmen who also wounded three others. In Gako village, near Rim in Riyom County, another COCIN member, Ngam Stephen Dachung, was shot and killed by herdsmen on Jan. 1, Mwantiri said.
  - iv. In December, herdsmen killed a Christian woman, Mary Machief, and her baby daughter in Plateau state's Bokkos County. A relative told the outlet Machief was not killed instantly but died later from her wounds.

Christians in the northern region and in the Middle Belt have experienced an uptick in violence at the hands of radical Islamic groups, such as Boko Haram, ISWAP, and Muslim Fulani herdsmen in recent years. Curry said, the great tragedy of Nigeria's ineffectual response to Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen is now parts of Cameroon and those other areas like Burkina Faso are greatly affected. Nigeria still represents the most violent country in the world for Christians as far as Open Doors USA's data can track. The persecution watchdog ranks Nigeria at No. 12 on its 2020 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. It observed with great dismay that, the messages in the videos are clear: whether it is the continuous attacks of Boko Haram or ISWAP or even Fulani militia, the fact remains that a full scale jihad has been launched against Christians in Nigeria. Vanguard News of 31 January, 2020 opined the following, it is of grave danger to pretend not to see it, keep quiet over it or try to be nice about it and water it down. Many evidences point to it that Christians are hunted down in Northern Nigeria. The biggest symbols of this sad truth are the remaining over 100 Chibok schoolgirls, Dapchi schoolgirl, Leah Sharibu and others in the den of the Boko Haram terrorists.

Killings and abductions are on the rise. On January 8, 2020, an armed gang dressed in military uniforms forced its way into the Catholic Good Shepherd Seminary located off Abuja-Kaduna-Zaria Express Way, home to some 268 seminarians, and abducted four first-year philosophy students: Pius Kanwai, 19; Peter Umenukor, 23; Stephen Amos, 23; and Michael Nnadi, 18. One of the abducted students was later dumped along Kaduna-Abuja highway because the abductors felt he would not survive given the type of injuries they inflicted on him.

Then on January 9, 2020, Dachiya Dalep, a student of the University of Maiduguri, was abducted on his way to school from Jos. Twelve days later the gory video of his gruesome execution surfaced by Boko Haram. Another gory incident was the beheading of the abducted Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, in Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Rev. Lawan Andimi. The terrorists had demanded two million Euros ransom but were offered N50 million, which they rejected before beheading Rev. Andimi and sending the gory picture of his killing to the President of the EYN Church, Reverend Daniel Mbaya. Just the Sunday before Rev. Andimi's beheading, another clergyman, Rev. Denis Bagauri, was murdered by gunmen in his residence at Mayo Belwa of Adamawa. The list will keep growing if continued to be mentioned.

In 2017, the United States House of Representatives had cited Nigeria as the most dangerous place for Christians in the world. In December last year, the U.S. authorities reacted again by placing Nigeria on a Special Watch List for tolerating severe violations of religious freedom, saying sectarian violence increased in 2018.

Before that, former President, Olusegun Obasanjo, in January 2019, alleged that Boko Haram was being 'empowered' by the Federal Government. And CAN, along with other Christian groups, have accused the Federal Government of not doing enough to stop these evil acts. The Federal Government should arise to protect Nigerians irrespective of their faith. There is no way that Christianity or any other faith can be uprooted from Northern Nigeria. Those who have made it their agenda must be ruthlessly pursued and uprooted instead.

### **Impending Dangers in Nigeria for This Incessant Killing of Christians**

Nigeria as a country is no longer safe as there are many things militating against the peace of Nigeria. There are agitations going on already within the country and no one can be pellucid in his/her prediction of what these ongoing agitations will lead to, but it may look presumptuous if one says that it will lead to war that will eventually disintegrate Nigeria.

Christianity lies in achieving greatness in the face of the world's hatred. Fifteen-year old Leah Sharibu's refusal to deny Christ and convert to Islam, which cost her freedom, exemplifies what Christians are going through in Nigeria. The threat to make her a slave for life in captivity, by the Islamic Jihad in West Africa

(ISWAP), a Boko Haram faction, says it all. Her case and those of thousands being killed because of their Christian faith reveal that Christians are under severe persecution. However, the Nigerian authorities have always downplayed or denied this reality.

The persecution occurs in systemic, institutionalized and direct forms. According to Gideon Para-Mallam Persecution can take many different forms. There is of course the obvious and painful one of physical harm. Persecution can also be subtler. This occurs when the instruments of the State, particularly in Northern Nigeria, are variously used to target and marginalize Christians.

This takes different forms across states, but the pattern is almost predictable:

- i. Christian students are denied places to meet for prayer, Bible study, and worship.
- ii. Christians are denied Certificate of Occupancy (C of O) for lands where church buildings are already in place.
- iii. Abductions and forced marriages of young and under-aged Christian girls are common and increasing in the northern states. This is especially prevalent among the Maguzawa unreached people groups and Hausas who convert to Christianity.

### **Survival through Self-Defense: Nehemiah 4 & 6: 15-16**

The oppressed may sometimes be moved to be weird in his actions. Nehemiah effectively mobilized his people to defend themselves against attacks. He never asked his people to attack but he charged them to defend the work and by implication the land. Defending our ancestral lands need not be confused with defending the church. Only God can defend his church (Matt 16:18). Defending our ancestral lands is imperative; we should not be driven off our God-given land under any guise. There is no biblical mandate for reprisal or retaliatory attacks. However, grassroots mobilization to defend and police our communities through vigilantes is necessary.

The strongest confidence in the protection and favour of God does not preclude the use of all or any of the means of self-preservation and defense which his providence has put in our power. While God works in us to will and to do, we should proceed to willing, through the power he has given us to will; and we should proceed to action, through the power he has given us to act. We cannot

will, but through God's power; we cannot act, but through God's strength. The power, and the use of it, is two distinct things. We may have the power to will, and not will; and we may have the power to do, and not act: therefore, says the apostle, seeing God has wrought in you these powers, see that you work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling. Prayer to God, and a diligent use of all appropriate means, will defend his people from the rage of their enemies, and carry them forward in their appropriate work till it is accomplished.

Nigeria situation especially the recent uncontrollable incessant killing is forcing many non Muslim Nigerians including Christians to start adopting some systems of security and defense whereas the security operatives of the government have shown high and noticeable failure in protecting the citizens and their property. A typical example of this, is the launching of Operation Amotekun, a security outfit based in all the six states of the South Western, Nigeria, responsible for curbing insecurity in the region. It was founded on 9 January 2020 in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria as the first regional security outfit initiated by a geopolitical zone in Nigeria. According to Okonkwo (2019):

As a result of continuing insecurity in Nigeria's northeast, conservative Christian groups including Washington DC-based Save the Persecuted Christians (STPC) have seized on the killings to urge the Trump administration to appoint a US special envoy to Nigeria and the Lake Chad region to monitor what it called "heightened violence against Christians." In conservative media across America, there are barrage of stories emerging about the persecution of Christians in Nigeria. The Christian Post reported Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen have killed over 1,000 Christians in Nigeria in 2019 alone. (p.5).

More of these should be expected from other tribes in Nigeria both from within and outside the country because Nigeria security system has proven utter failure in protecting Nigeria citizens and their property.

### **Conclusion**

The Nigerian government has over the last few months indicated its disposition to resolving the Boko Haram insurgency through what may be described as a carrot and stick approach. The former involves political dialogue with all stakeholders. Onuoha, (2012) reviewed that the Nigerian state established a committee of inquiry led by Ambassador Usman Galtimari to "identify the grievances of the

sect and make possible recommendations on how to improve security in the northeast region” This carrot approach also included programs by the government to address deep-seated problems in northern Nigeria such as poverty, unemployment, social injustice and public corruption conditions that continue to galvanize extremist tendencies among northerners. President Jonathan offered to grant amnesty to Boko Haram members. However, Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram, responded to the president’s amnesty entreaties by saying that his group had done no wrong, and that an amnesty would not be applicable to them. According to Shekau, it was the Nigerian government committing atrocities against Muslims. In his words: “Surprisingly, the Nigerian government is talking about granting us amnesty. What wrong have we done? On the contrary, it is we that should grant you pardon (Atlanta Blackstar, 23 April 2013). Onuoha (2012) said:

Despite the above attempts by the Nigerian government to negotiate in a non-violent way with the northern extremist group, the stick response to the Boko Haram uprising has received greater attention, involving the use of state security forces to “mount aggressive pursuit and crackdown of Boko Haram members. (p.5).

To this end, the Nigerian government established a special Joint Task Force (JTF), known as “Operation Restore Order (JTORO)” to eliminate the threat posed by Boko Haram. The JTF had had modest successes, including the September 2011 arrest of a top Boko Haram commander, Ali Saleh, and five accomplices in Maiduguri. However, JTF have been accused of killing innocent people in the name of counter-terrorism.

In the recent time, Nigeria government has returned to carrot approach to solving Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. On 28th February, 2020 I read the following news headline “Repentant Boko Haram members will get free foreign education” That may sound to be tactical approach to Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria, but in the real sense that is the worst approach the Nigeria government had ever given to Boko Haram problem which indirectly will exonerate them from the judgment they deserve and increased membership of Boko Haram seeing that when a member repents he will go abroad for free foreign education. Nigeria government is planning to send the notorious killers (the Boko Haram members) abroad perhaps to America in order to go and under study America as Osama Bin Laden did to facilitate the future of Islamic world attack against

America. Hitherto, Nigeria government has not unfolded their plans on how government has compensated the families of the parents Boko Haram members killed, especially the soldiers that died fighting Boko Haram insurgency. When majority is grieved by these incessant killings of Christians going on Nigeria, people may be forced to pick arms for defensive purposes.

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