

Curing or Converting Them? A Critical Study of Christian Mission Leprosarium in the Muslim Emirates of Sokoto and Katsina

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ABSTRACT

Christian missionary activities started late in the Muslim emirates of Sokoto and Katsina. This was as a result of many factors that impeded the establishment and growth of proselytization in the region. For Sokoto, it was the center of the defunct Sokoto Caliphate, seat of the Sultan, the spiritual overlord of the Muslim in Nigeria. Establishment of evangelical stations therefore would have been tantamount to a direct challenge to the spiritual nerve center of Islam which may have been resisted. Katsina on the other hand is among the major emirates under the Sokoto Caliphate. Therefore, the missionary instead of direct evangelism resorted to the use of medical and humanitarian options, which strongly assisted the Missionary organizations in making the few converts that they were able to make in the stronghold of Islam in Nigeria.

Keywords: Cure, Conversion, Christian Missions, Nigeria, Muslims Emirates

INTRODUCTION

In the mid 1930s however, with the backing and support of the colonial Government literary classes and dispensaries/ clinics were opened in mission stations in various places in Sokoto and Katsina emirates. Schools and hospitals, rather than the church, became the strongest means of sending out Christian messages to the Muslim populace. Later, these dispensaries turned into leper settlements because most of the patients attending were affected with leprosy disease.

Due to people's suspicion of missionary education, not many achievements were recorded through the school. Ever Government, schools were avoided for fear of conversion to Christianity. The leprosarium therefore, remained the only hope of the missions in Sokoto and Katsina and other Muslim emirates, because those inmates or outpatients had no alternative. The only hope for a cure from leprosy was the Mission stations. The people had the strong conviction that the Missions had the capability of handling leprosy cases. And in

fairness to them, the missionaries took care of leprosarium for the treatment of victims. Also, the patients were stigmatized and rendered as outcast in the society due to the dreadful nature of the disease.

The Mission houses took care of patients, provided drugs and rehabilitated them after their stay in the settlements. Occasional gifts, charity and medical care coupled with constant evangelization made all patients in the leper settlements potential converts. In northern Nigeria, about seven leprosarium centers were established under SIM, and this paper intends to discuss those of Sokoto and Katsina. Leprosy as (Macdonald, 1946:12) pointed out was a complex disease, which is difficult to cure. Moreover, it causes an instant incapacitation of an individual. He observed further that

Leprosy is a chronic disease and insidious in its origin. For years the bacillus may lie latent in the tissues so that after the symptoms appear the disease may be of such long duration that its treatment presents many problems. The whole

man's physical, mental and spiritual capabilities are involved, and sanitarium treatment is required. The patients' day has to be planned for him and he needs to be under supervision all the times (Ibid). In the traditional setting according to (Shankar, 2007:2), Hausa society view leprosy as a spiritual and supernatural disease. The missionaries exploited this opportunity very seriously, and they offered drugs effective to cure the stubborn disease which the traditional therapies could hardly cure. In addition, a more hygienic and sanitary environment and segregation caps assuaged the patients' difficulties.

In the Muslim emirates in northern Nigeria medical centers were synonymous with Christianity. Two major leper settlements known as 'AMANAWA' were established in Sokoto province. One near Dange, a few kilometers from Sokoto and another at Kalgo near Birnin Kebbi in the defunct Gwandu Division. In Katsina Province a leper's camp was established in a small village called BabbarRuga, about five Kilometers away from the city by the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association (BELRA) in 1934 (Shankar, 2007:10). By 1937 the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) officially took over the settlement after concluding agreements with the Katsina Native Authority (NNAK/Katprof, 2217/Vol. 1:2-6).

In Kano, the missionary eye hospital was popular due its effective services and won them a great number of converts. Likewise, Wusasa in Zaria and Tungar Magajiya in Niger provinces respectively were very important to the mission's evangelical programs. This paper therefore intends to explore the role of a leper settlement in Sokoto and Katsina in converting Muslims to Christianity. This follows a preliminary examination of the colonial government's Native Authorities agreement with the missions in establishing the settlements and a brief study of other means of proselytisation in the Provinces with a view to giving a clear assessment of the settlements' role in making converts in contradistinction with other methods.

Missionary Strategies for Conversion in Sokoto and Katsina Emirates To convert a Muslim to any other religion has been identified as one of the most difficult and expensive tasks in the missionary enterprise (Lugard, 1922:593). In this regard therefore the Sokoto and Katsina Provinces received a variety of methods through

which message of the Gospel could be sent to the unwilling people. These include; Establishment of Schools As early as 1935 when missionary activities started in the provinces schools were opened, though Government schools existed as early as 1905 in Sokoto and Katsina in 1922. Schools were considered as viable instruments for indoctrination and orientation by the Missions and the government. The missions targeted the youth who were promised free land, shelter and clothing for those that enrolled into the primary schools (Kofar-Bai, 1998:45). Lesson classes were spread throughout day and night in order to enable people attend in batches at their convenience. In the schools and lessons classes, Bible stories were the main subjects followed by skills of reading, writing and trade.

Through this process the missionaries believed that fresh minds would be won for Christ. Father Gately of the SIM said establishment of village schools was inclined to gloss over the missionary side of such works the main aim of those schools was of course proselytization (NNAK/Sokprof, 1934:12). According to (Turaki, 1982:206) Classes for religious instructions started around the mission stations and out stations. The emphasis of (missionary) education at that time was a religious instruction, reading and writing. The main objective of education was proselytization and evangelization.

Schools contributed in several ways in giving impetus to the missionary activities. Evangelists and preachers particularly Hausa speaking Christians from southern Kaduna were employed as teachers and also embarked on preaching tours after their school hours. People like Mr. Halidu Mamman, Mr. Yero, Mr. Bidan and Mr. Gowon father of the former Nigerian head of state) were among the early staff in Tsafe and the surrounding Mission schools (Aliyu, 1988:40-41). The same story could be found in all mission schools since European staff was inadequate and Hausa speaking instructors preferred. Furthermore, the converts were first introduced to learning the Gospel- to read and understanding the message-through the schools medium. According to (Mamman Barkeji, 1998) going through the school orientation after conversion to Christianity made him to establish Christian families in spite of his Muslim background. Mission schools were established in places like Gusau, Tsafe, Moriki, Gatawa, Sokoto, Ambursa, Kalgo, Andarai,

Kamba, Argungu and Kangiwa between mid 1930s- 1940s. In Katsina Province, the schools were established in areas like Kadanya, Malumfashi, Wagini and Kafur among others (Rabe, 2010:132-139).

Though most of the converts were not made from the schools however, it served as a means of consolidating their Christian faith. By and large, the educated both from the converts and the Muslims had the opportunity of getting employed. That also made the education more attractive and few educated Christians used the opportunity to advance the course of Christianity in the two Provinces. In this regard, (Lugard, 1922:78) observed that Christianity has proved so powerful on influence for the creation of political and social organization though in recent years combined with western education, we have seen remarkable results in many places. The SIM also introduced industrial and technical classes for the cured who could still make use of their fingers. There were classes and workshops under the supervision of instructors (Kofar-Bai, 1998:46).

Preaching Tours

Missionary individuals and organizations entered into Sokoto and Katsina Provinces with high enthusiasm and vigor to evangelize. This is due to the fact that the Missions were eager to establish Christianity in what was presumed to be a mono-religious area. An area which (Oshotoba, 1985:39) described as 'forbidden area 'against the Gospel of Lord Jesus Christ, opened forcefully for them by the power of the Holy Spirit. Public preaching tours were therefore carried out with an extraordinary zeal without any area spared. In Sokoto the most targeted zones were the pockets of pagan settlements in Kotorkoshi and Kangiwa areas, while in Katsina the southern emirate was mostly affected. The missionary organizations which championed this course were the church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM).

The preaching was mostly conducted in an open place especially markets in those pagan areas, but not among the Muslim populace. However, some strong evangelists like the SIM Field Director, Mr. Play fair used to preach mostly among the Muslims. At Dundaye for instance he

was reported to have preached to people using public address system in July 1940. This act was seriously objected by the people. The Sultan thus, had to report the issue to Resident for intervention to avert civil strife (NNAK/Sokprof, 1940:23). Conventions were in addition to public preaching aimed at consolidating the unity and prowess of the converts and strengthening their morale. Through this medium the mother of Pastor Yusuf Garga Argungu was converted to Christianity in 1959 at Kalgo. This made him to be brought up as Christian though with a Muslim father (Oral Interview, Garba: 1997).

Health Care Services

Provision of medical assistance to those in need has been considered as an integral aspect of advancing the Christian faith to non-Christians. Jesus Christ was identified to have offered cures and healing to lepers and those born blind and resuscitated the dead to life (John 11:14-42). Christian missionaries enjoy a sense of pride as they follow the same action of their masters. According to (Zvobgo, 1996:202) an excellent objective lesson in Christianity (was medical mission) if by skilful treatment a sick native is relieved of pain or cured of his disease, he must wonder why it has been done, and is far more prepared to receive and respond to the Gospel message than if this is presented to him with his pain unrelieved'. It is further observed that:

Not only does a right use of mission's medical skill convince them (patients) of our kindly regard, but the triumph of modern medical sciences often has the impression of miracle to them. And why they not legitimately serve a similar purpose to these poor heathens that the miracle of Christ and his apostles did to those whom they taught and do to us? (Ibid).In a traditional African sense medication and healing of any kind is considered possible only with the help of the supernatural. It is therefore a belief that a strong and efficacious medication could only be attained through divine interventions. (Ugwu, 1998:07) also maintained the same view and stressed that Nigerians like the rest of Africans never look on medicine as something purely material.

They strongly believe that the tangible medicine prepared from plants, charcoal, pepper, salt and so on has a long need of some invocations to be made over it before it can heal effectively. The mission therefore, presented their medical

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services not only as a new form of medical invention but as a demonstration of the power of their religion over the religions of their patients. The patients therefore succumbed to the 'superior' religion through the 'superior' medicine.

(Bunza, 1995 :) argued that in Sokoto and Katsina like most African communities, the missions used medical centers very seriously in creating Christian strong holds. In Zimbabwe, for instance among the Shona the medicine chest, stethoscope and scalpel accompanied the Gospel and were often invaluable in winning the confidence of the people who were reluctant to permit the missionary to enter their area. According to (Zvogbo, 1996:204) through medical services most of Zimbabwe areas came under the Cross. The work of (Silla, 1998:40-43) on role of leprosy settlements in Christian evangelization in Mali is another good example. He concluded that dispensing medicine enabled missionaries to approach local people and initiate their religious discussion in a less obtrusive manner.....healing of the body look second place to winning of the soul. Chief Obasi of Igbol and amazingly exclaimed over the power Missions 'medicine that:

White man I Salute you. God is with you, man from Oyibo country, providence brought you to this country to render us assistance. I salute you white man. For disease you have given us a box of medicine which we know nothing of (Nwobjko, 1985:236).

Due to the stubborn nature of leprosy disease in resisting local medication and the stigma attached to its patients were left with no alternative other than coming to missions at the expense of their Islamic faith. Realizing this fact made the Missionsto intensify their control of the Leper settlements.

Establishment of Leper Settlements in Sokoto and Katsina

As the importance of curing the leper patients came to be recognized beyond doubt the missions in collaboration with the Colonial Administration under the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association (BELRA), leprosarium was established throughout the Muslim Emirates including Sokoto and Katsina. According to (Oshotoba, 1985:41), the Government of Nigeria in 1937 invited the Sudan Interior Mission to share in the leprosy work. At that time Government had three

Provincial Leper Homes: one located fifty-two miles out of Kano, another four miles from the city of Katsina and the third one established near Sokoto. This collaborative effort between Governments and the Missions in running the affairs of these settlements was not free of disagreements and knotty issues surrounding it. Though the Government wanted the assistance of the Missions in this direction it didn't want to see as deliberately promoting Christianity against Islam. The missions on the other hand were not ready to accept any agreement in leprosy work which would jeopardize their evangelical interest. A resolution in one of their meetings to review the situation stated that (Boer, 1979:283) has argued that it is necessary to ensure in our hospitals and dispensaries freedom of action as Christian missions, and that co-operation shall not degenerate into undue interference. To this end we consider a Board of Medical Services (members)..... Should be appointed in which missions should have adequate representation. The Sultan of Sokoto and Muslim Emirs in northern Nigeria were not comfortable with this development. Their complaints were directed to the office of the Secretary Northern provinces, that the Missions should not be left unchecked so as not to make the settlements a conversion ground. To that effect on 31st October 1939 a letter from the Secretary's office informed the missions that:

"I am directed by the Chief Commissioner to inform you that the Sultan of Sokoto and the Muslim Emirs have expressed their considered opinion on the extent to which effort may be made to convert to the Christian faith inmates of Provincial Leper Settlements who profess the faith of Islam" (Arewa House, 1939). The missions were reminded by the Government that 'the objective of the creation of these leper settlements and the co-operation between the Native Authority and the Missions was, and is, the cure of leprosy and nothing else'. Other regulations were therefore more categorical as follows:

- No religious teaching whatever may be given to any children whose parents are Muslims, except such teaching in Islamic religion as the Native Authority may not prescribe nor may they attend Christian services.
- No house visiting for any purpose of suggesting to or persuading any Muslim to apply for the teaching in the Christian religion shall be permitted and this includes

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the delivery of tracts, pamphlets or any other publication designed to such purpose.

- No Christian religious services shall be held in any public place within the settlement to which lepers' resort for treatment, recreation, education or social purposes: but this does not prevent the holding of such services in a suitable building approved for the purpose.....
- The Native Authority will provide a building for use as a mosque and for Islamic religious teaching for Muslims in the settlements and appoint Liman or other person to be in charge.
- On the administrative responsibilities of the settlement, it was agreed that:
- The mission shall carry on, manage, control and maintain the said leper settlements as agents of the Native Authority.
- The Native Authority shall erect and supply with furniture and equipments of reasonable standard a dispensary of permanent construction.
- The Native Authority shall during such time as the work of the mission and the maintenance of the settlements is being carried on to the satisfaction of the chief commissioner, Northern Provinces. The Native Authority also among other things shall contribute to responsible for their shelter, sanitary facilities and other things as may be required for children under the age of five years not affected by leprosy (Arewa House SNP. NO. 26516/4/S.4/105, 31/1939).

The Missions however could not accept these regulations governing religious activities in the settlements as anything practicable. Thus; in December 1939 they wrote their reactions to Secretary Northern Provinces. They stated that as far they were concerned their reason for participating in the leprosy program was serve Christ, so therefore, any attempt to slow down conversion to Christianity in whatever way would never be acceptable. The SIM Field Director wrote to the Resident Sokoto Province that: Since everything (church services and others) is on voluntary basis, we cannot prohibit anyone old young from attending any services or religious instruction (NNAK/SNP 4/39).

The Director further confirmed that, it is only natural where Christian doctors and nurses are carrying on their works of charity day after day

that a definitely Christian atmosphere and influence is created. The missions therefore went ahead proselytizing freely in the settlements in total disregard of all regulations. To confirm this, Christian materials were distributed before the Sultan at the Amanawa Leper Settlement. In addition a banner with Hausa Biblical inscription was pasted on the entrance of the settlement:

Nine Hanyar, Nine Gaskiyar Kuma Nine Rayuwar, meaning, 'I am the way, the Truth and the Life' (NNAK / Sokprof, 1940). It is important to note that neither the Sultan emirs nor colonial officers could take any decisive measure to check the missions' excesses. The Muslim leaders perhaps had no alternative other than to condone the evangelization of the missions or lose medical treatment for their subjects. It seems the former was preferred. But, the colonial Government's inaction could be explained in trying to please the missions due to their earlier laws, which were considered as anti-missionary and pro-Islam. More so, colonial rule consequence of this exercise was creating Christian communities of Islamic background in Sokoto.

Leprosarium and the Emergence of Christian Communities in Sokoto and Katsina

In this section a study of the practical effect of Missions' administration of the leper settlement will be made. The profile of some of those converts with Muslim background whose families are today speaking and protecting the interest of the Christian religion in Muslim dominated areas of Sokoto and Katsina will be given attention.

This is part of a field work report and wide scale interviews with the converts or their children in case they are dead. Valuable information was also received from the employees of the missions who assisted them in running the settlements or Government Health Workers who manned or are manning the affairs of the settlements after the Government took over the control of the hospitals. Similarly, only such converts that were of significance in the church and with a family of reasonable influence in community are selected.

Reverend Mammanbarkeji

Mamman Barkeji was born around 1925. He is a Fulani by tribe and a Muslim by family background. His parents Mamman Umaru and Hassanatu were nomadic Fulani Muslims who

settled at Barkeji, a few kilometers from Sokoto in Gumbi District Wammako Local Government, Sokoto state. Mamman started learning reading and writing of the Holy Qur'an at about the age of five. This is a common practice in Hausaland for Muslim children. The occupation of his parents was rearing cattle, which he started enjoying and participating at an early age. As a teenager Mamman used to participate in the Fulani festivities like sharo and others. At the age of seventeen the leprosy disease attack on him became unbearable.

After the efforts of his parents failed to improve his situation, the only remaining alternative was the mission hospital. On admission into the hospital Barkeji was warmly received by the Missions. He narrated that the hospital was very kind and hospitable to him. Apart from the Missions' kindness, what led Mamman to Christianity was the vigorous prayer session conducted daily before and after given them treatment. Similarly, tracts in Hausa containing religious sermons as well as translated parts of holy Bible in Hausa Language were distributed to them. Constantly there was Christian preaching by Doctors and Nurses to their patients. Occasionally too, a larger congregation of preaching by and prayers were led by the SIM Director from Jos. the patients called him Baturemimagani.

These coupled with the successful treatment of their maladies made them to convert to Christianity. Around 1945 Barkeji accepted Christianity and enrolled in the mission's primary school in the settlement. He was selected in 1949 to further his education at Tofa Bible School after graduation due his brilliance, and was later commissioned a preacher. He continued to preach in Hausa and Fulfulde particularly in leper settlements and other mission stations in Sokoto province. In 1951 Mamman Barkeji was sent to Babbar Ruga in Katsina for higher Bible studies.

He completed the course in 1952 and took up pastoral duty at the SIM church in Sokoto town as its second indigene pastor. Barkeji was married to a Fulani convert called Hajo (Khadija) nicknamed Gatere in Fulfulde. They had six children all Christians. The eldest is a medical Doctor and others are studying in various institutions in Nigeria. Mamman Barkeji is one of the respected indigenous church elders who mediates in case of crises defends the interest of Christianity in Sokoto

Assistant Reverend Ibrahim Aliyu

Ibrahim Aliyu is the son of Liman Aliyu Tsamaye, a naibi of central Jumu'at; mosque in Tsamaye town of Sabon Birni Local Government, Sokoto State. He was born in the year 1940. Going by the tradition of his family, Ibrahim started learning the Quran from his father and later from various scholars as far as Zaria. After the completion of the studying of the holy Qur'an at an early age, Aliyu returned back home to his father. He then joined Adult Education classes at Tsamaye conducted by one Malam Nabo Kurawa from Sabon Birni in 1959. At about the age of twenty, in 1960, young Aliyu became a leprosy patient. The same year he went to Amanawa leprosarium for treatment where he was converted to Christianity. That was as a result of the intensive preaching and persuasions by the missions on the patients to accept Christianity. And most of the patients believed that without accepting the religion of the mission one would not be cured from leprosy.

Due to his interest in education in 1963 Aliyu joined primary school in the settlement. As a result of his outstanding performance, he was awarded a scholarship by the Mission to study in America, the offer which due to some personal reasons he refused to accept. However, he went to Tofa Bible School in 1965 and completed in 1968. After graduation Aliyu held different posts in ECWA church. For instance, he was Secretary SIM Medical Organization, Sokoto District, Pastor in charge of Tsafe ECWA church in 1973, Chairman Zamfara State Indigenes Christian Association, Chairman Tarayyar Masihiyawan Nijeriya (TAMANI), Zamfara State branch. (The association of Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri Christians in Nigeria). He was appointed member Northern Christian Elders in 1989, and in 1998 elected Chairman, Christian Association of Nigeria, (CAN) Tsafe local Government Branch. He is currently a school teacher with Zamfara State Primary Education Board. Mrs Jummai Ibrahim Aliyu Jummai was born around 1945 in Goronyo town Sokoto State. Both her parents were devoted Muslims. She was brought up under the tradition of Islamic education and culture. Like the tradition of Muslim girls, she acquired the basic religious education for her rituals in her matrimonial home. At the age of fifteen Jummai fell a victim of the dreadful leprosy disease, and in 1960 she sought the

assistance of the Missions at the Amanawa Leprosarium near Sokoto.

Within a very short time she recovered while she was already a Christian. Jummai attended primary school in the Leper Settlement from 1961-1965 and was extremely intelligent. Thus, recommended for further education at Tofa to be sponsored by the Mission. A former patient in the leper Settlement, Ibrahim Aliyu Tsamaye sought her hand in marriage, which was formalized while they were both at Tofa. Their marriage was blessed with nine children. Among them is Yusuf Ibrahim, a history graduate (a school mate of one of the authors of this paper), teaching at Bukkuyum secondary school, and they remained loyal churchgoers.

In Katsina Province Muslim patients like Mamman Bugaje, Ado Bakori and Chima joined the Christian Faith at Babar Ruga Leprosarium centre. Bakori first served as a Pastor at Babbar Ruga, before he was appointed as an instructor where he taught in quite a number of Mission Schools in the southern part of the Emirate where there was the large concentration of Christian community. He was succeeded by another convert, Ibrahim Farfaru as the Pastor of Babbar Ruga. Bugaje became a preacher at Wagini in present Batsari Local Government Area (Oral Interview, Mudi, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The discussion above tried to show the role played by leper settlements of Amanawa and Babbar Rugain Sokoto and Katsina Emirates respectively in converting the Muslims to the Christian faith. It has been observed that the settlements achieved the aim mainly through the establishment of schools, provision of health care services and organizing preaching tours. The paper also identified that one of the major impacts of the activities of the leper settlements was the conversion of the people to Christianity not so much the leprosy work. Through the use of the settlements most leper patients were seen becoming Christians before they were cured. In spite of the fact that the SIM had succeeded in improving the quality of health care services as well as fostered western education to quite a number of lepers, nevertheless, the leper settlements largely became centers of proselytization and recorded a degree of success in the growth and development of Christianity in the Provinces.

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