

ISLAM IN EKPERI LAND ETSAKO CENTRAL L.G.A. EDO STATE, PROBLEM AND SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Ekperi clan is one of the clans in Etsako in Edo State of Nigeria. Islam was first brought to the area by Muslim traders from Bida around the second half of the 19th century. Christianity came to the area later through Christian missionaries. Islam faces the problem of having frequent and constant apostates, especially in the Ekperi clan. The major causes of apostasy in Ekperi clan are: lack of basic Islamic knowledge, misconception of Islam as foreign culture, effects of traditional religion and culture and effects of Christianity. The seriousness of the case of apostasy in Ekperi clan is such that there is hardly a Muslim home without the case of apostasy in the clan! The viable solution is to educate the whole people of the clan, their children and adults, their males and females. This can effectively be achieved by giving the children of the area firm grass-root of Islamic education from nursery to primary to secondary school level of education. Basic Islamic knowledge should be the priority in these schools, and Comparative Religious courses should be included in the schools' curricula. The adults of the clan should be basically educated by establishing Islamic Adult Education classes. All these schools should be established and operated under the National Policy of Education and under the National Education System. Other methods to be adopted for educating the people of the clan should be public preaching at mosques and in open public places in accordance with laid down rules and regulations. Other methods include organizing public debates between Muslim scholars and Christian scholars with the aim of addressing misconceptions and establishing the truth publically and cordially, Also, Muslim Non-governmental Organizations should come to the aid of the people of the area by providing financial assistances for establishing and running such schools and programs.

Keywords: *Islam, Ekperi, land, Problem, Solutions*

INDRODUCTION

In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful. All praise is due to Allah. We praise Him and seek His assistance. We ask for His forgiveness and we take refuge in Him from the evil within ourselves and from the evil of our deeds. He whom Allah guides will never be diverted yet whomever He sends astray will never find his way. I bear witness that there is no God but Allah, Alone, He has no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger. May the blessings of Allah be upon him, his family, his companions, and upon those who followed his guidance.

All religions basically encourage mankind to be righteous and avoid evil. But Islam goes beyond that. It guides towards practical ways of achieving righteousness and eliminating evil individually and collectively. Islam takes into account human nature and the complexities of human society. Islam is guidance from the Creator Himself. Therefore, Islam is also called the *Deenul-Fitrah* (the natural religion of man).

Since Allah made all human beings swear to His Godhood when He created Adam, this oath is printed on the human soul even before it enters the foetus in the fifth month of pregnancy. So when a child is born, it has with it a natural belief in Allah. This natural belief is called in Arabic the "*fitrah*". (Bilal, 2005: 65)

If the child were left alone, it would grow up aware of Allah in His unity, but all children are affected by the pressures of their environment whether directly or indirectly.

The Prophet (PBUH) reported that Allah (SWT) said, "I created My servants in the right religion but the devils made them go astray." (Bilal, 2005: 65)

The Prophet (PBUH) also said, "Each child is born in a state of fitrah, but his parents make him a Jew or a Christian." (Muslim p. 1488)

Concerning the area in question that is the *Ekperi* clan, it is just a portion of a large group of people from Northern part of Edo State known as the *Afenmai* or Etsako land also called the *Kukurukus*, a name derived from the *Kukuruku* Hills.

Ekperi clan is distributed in fourteen villages and towns among which is *Osomiegbe* which is my own place of origin.

Islam in Ekperi Clan Problem and Solutions Ekperi People:-

Ekperi people are part of Etsako people, they are among the famous and popular group of people called the *Apemhai*. According to professor Omoh, "The name "Apemhai or Afenmai" means our kindred or our people of the same family" (Omoh 2014 : 1).

Etsako people, also called the *Kukurukus*, derived from the *Kukuruku* Hills, descended from Benin. It is made up of the *Akoko Edos*, the *Owans*, and the *Etsako* people, (Etsako Progressive Union, n.d).

In the 15th century AD, the *Etsako* people migrated out of the Benin Kingdom to avoid the tyrannical rule of the then Oba of Benin. They initially encamped at the *Obadan/Okphiaghamen* community, 30 miles from Benin and finally settled at *Avielle*, now in Etsako West Local Government, 13 years after the first encampment, (Etsako Progressive Union n.d).

According to the *Etsako* Progressive Union, twelve clans emerged from this *Etsako* People which further migrated to different locations thereby increasing the size of their land. The twelve clans are 1. *Ekperi* 2. *Aviele* 3. *Auchi* 4. *Aviamu* 5. South *Ibie* 6. *Uzairue* 7. *Okpella* 8. *Okpekpe* 9. Three *Ibie* 10. *Wepa wano* 11. *Anwain* 12. South *Uneme* (Etsako Progressive Union, n.d).

The Etsako Progressive Union briefly discussed the administrative changes that took place in Etsako land as follows:

The *Etsako* people in terms of local government administration and governance, used to be in one local District Administration which was known as *Etsako* Division. This division has however metamorphosed into three district local government administrative areas viz; *Etsako* East with headquarter at *Agenebode*, *Etsako* West with headquarter at *Auchi* and *Etsako* Central with headquarter at *Fugar*, (Etsako Progressive Union, n.d).

Out of the 12 clans in Etsako land, Ekperi clan is the main clan of discussion. *Ekperi* clan is one of the twelve clans in *Etsako* as listed above. It is situated in the South-Eastern part of *Etsako* Central Local Government Area of Edo state. They are among those who migrated from old *Binin* Kingdom many years ago to their present location.

Okhakha is said to be the founding father of *Ekperi* people. He had three sons namely *Uzea*, *Uromu* and *Ikphei*. *Ikphei* was the youngest among the three sons of *Okhakha*. It is the descendent of *Ikphei* that are now known to be *Ekphei* people which are wrongly called *Ekperi*, (Ilu, 2014).

Ekperi is a kingdom comprising of fourteen towns and villages with adult male population of 1,117 as of 1937. *Ekperi* clan subsequently grew to a population of 35,000 according to the figures obtained from Nigeria census of 1992, (Omoh, 2001). *Ekperi* is not a city or a town, *Ekperi* is a kingdom or clan made up of many towns and villages with a current population estimated to be about 45,000. The King of *Ekperi*, His Royal Highness, Chief (Alhj.) *Dekhe Y. Ikhanoba* (JP), the *Eghiegbai*, II is a First Class Chief among Traditional Rulers in Edo State of Nigeria, (Omoh, 2014).

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF EKPERI CLAN:-

The geographical location of *Ekperi* land, to the east of *Ekperi* land is River Niger. There are some islands such as *Onyedega*, *Ake*, *Ifeku*, *Iguji* and so on which are also in between river Niger and *Ekperi* land. They are called island because they become flooded during

rainy season. The inhabitants of these islands are fishermen. *Ishan* or *Uromi* and *Uzea* land are to the south. Located to the north of *Ekperi* land are *Wepa wano* and *Anviawu* clan. Islam first came into *Etsako* land through its western part. The three most popular towns that first embrace Islam in *Etsako* are *Agbede*, *Auchi* and *Uzairue*. These three towns are to the west of *Ekperi* land.

ANVIAWU CLAN

WEPPA WANO CLAN

SOUTHIBIE

AGBEDE

IWIOBA EWORHA IGHWAI IDEGU (ETSA, UROUMI AND URHOBO PEOPLE)

TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS IN EKPERI LAND.

Different African societies have distinctive version of traditional way of worship or religion. Despite the diversities, several common practices exist, (Newman et al, 2009).

Ekperi people are also traditionally religious people which they inherited from their ancestors in *Benin*. They spiritually worship natural bodies or animals to either serve as bringer of success, rainmaker, healer, protector etc. such natural bodies include certain rivers, snakes, trees, hills etc.

In a book written by Professor Ilu, he explained in detail how traditional religion takes place in *Ekperi* land. It states,

Like all other African countries, Ekperi people are also religious people. This explains the reason why even in their precipitate flight they took along with them objects of their family worship, namely Iyator; while Odighi is an example of communal worship in Ekperi land. As the people spread out in their new abode, several other objects of worship were discovered and acknowledged as such. These include deities, spirits and divinities, (Ilu, 2014).

In Ekperi land deities are understood to be objects of worship at family level. The origin of some of these family deities cannot be

established 'clearly'. The ancient ones are said to have been brought by the people along with them from Benin City. Examples of such are '**Emhaa**', '**Ikhuthe**', '**Iyator**' and '**Ode**'. Others are said to have mysterious appearance in the midst of the people and got to be known to be deities only after consulting the oracle. '**Inibizi**' and '**Okazi**' are in this category, (Ilu, 2014).

According to Professor Ilu, the Ekperi people believed in some natural bodies to possess spirits. These natural bodies could be fountain, lakes, and streams, (Ilu, 2014). Example: River Obe, River Oiyle, River Osimi (River Niger), River Ise, River Ikpeomi, River Atuno etc.

Divinities are acknowledged generally and considered at a higher level than deities and spirits. Examples include '**Akhu**', '**Odighi**', '**Okhapuokhai**', '**Oldal**', '**Onevbamabor**' and '**Utaki-Nabor**' (Ilu, 2014).

In spite of all these media of worship the Ekperi people still worship the Supreme Being directly. This is evidence in the special places dedicated for such worship in their various locations. In fact it is their religious belief that informed their respect for the leaders, (Ilu, 2014).

He further highlighted on aspects like priest and oracle. Under the priest it states as follows, "Priesthood among the people of Ekperi is a perfect example of a selfless leader. He is the visible presence of their objects of worship. He is not only a divine messenger; he represents the people before their objects of worship. His importance is both personal and communal. At the individual level he is consulted by those who have personal and family problems. At the communal level, he is consulted at varied degrees. There he acts and exercises both royal and spiritual powers as the mouth piece of the gods, (Ilu, 2014).

Concerning the oracle he mentioned it as "A medium of communication between the divine and community of worshipers and/or believers. As the people consult the priests in order to know the minds of the gods and/or ancestors the latter communicate their wishes to the people in a non verbal manner. In Ekperi traditional religion, the oracle's leadership role is indispensable as a pleasant experience. Accordingly, the oracle gives direction; it leads the

people to greener pasture in their relationship with their objects of worship and in their rapport with another. (Ilu, 2014).

ADVENT OF ISLAM IN EKPERI LAND.

In the entire *Etsako* land, Islam first came to *Agbede*, the headquarter of *Aviele* clan. It was brought by Muslim traders from *Bida* around the second half of the 19th century. It came in at the reign of a great and powerful king, the *Oba* of *Agbede*, *Oba Momodu I*. Before the advent of Islam, he occasionally put his head on the ground as a sign of prostration. He took this act as the only suitable mode of worship. On arrival of the Muslim traders from *Bida*, he was interested in their way of worship and quickly accepted Islam as the only true religion, (Abdul- Qadir, 2005).

Being a great and powerful king as well as a man of good public relations, his people and some of his contemporary kings accepted Islam through hiro. *Agbede* became the first place to accept Islam and from there it spread to other parts of *Etsako* land. Some parts accepted Islam collectively as a result of their kings, for instance, *Auchi* and *Uzairue*, while some parts accepted Islam individually, example *Ekperi* clan.

During his reign, *Oba Momodu I* delegated some Islamic scholars from *Agbede* to propagate Islam to other parts of *Etsako* land. (Abdul- Qadir, 2005).

But Islam entered *Ekperi* in a different way. According to a book written by *Alhaji M. Auto Islam in Edo State*:

Malam Ani Ezomah, a native of Odigie whose father was living at Agbede was the Malam sent to Ekperi to teach Islam. The claim that Islam came to Ekperi through Idah has no authentic historical basis because Ofukpo which is said to have been converted to Islam by the Nupes was sent an Agbede Malam to teach them the Qur'an. Late Alhaji Momoh (Onaute) the man who fasted all days of the year except the two Eid days, stayed in Ofukpo for sometime but later left Ofukpo because the basic diet (sweet potatoes) in Ofukpo did not suit his health. Alhaji Momoh, however, settled at Idato in Uzairue clan where he paid regular visits to Ofukpo. Ofukpo, it must be noted, remained 100% Muslim and had its school changed to Ansarud-deen school to meet with the yearning of the natives, (Auto, 2009).

The *Hausas* or the northerners also used to come for preaching as well as for trading purposes, like selling the type of *Hausa* dressing, example *Babban Riga*, cap, shoes etc. The *Malam* that taught me while I was very small is a *Hausa* man popularly known as

Malam Ahmadu Katsina. He came to preach in my village *Osomiegbe*. When he was about to leave, my father asked him to take me along, and he agreed. That is how I started my Islamic education. There are other similar people that were also the students of *Malam Katsina*.

Islam came to *Ekperi* around the beginning of 20th century. This can be evidenced in a book written by Professor Ilu, *Leadership among Ekperi People In the 21st Century*, where he mentioned the kings that ruled *Ekperi* clan. From his book it is understood that Islam came to *Ekperi* land during the reign of *Ikhanoba I* (1897-1918).

ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN EKPERI CLAN.

Professor *Oseni*, in an article in which he discussed briefly how Christianity came into *Etsako* including *Ekperi* land, said:

The Nupe warriors were primarily interested in collecting tributes from their subjects. Such tributes included slaves and foodstuff. They were not interested in Islamic propagation in the area as that would have defeated their goal of economic exploitation. Nonetheless, their presence in large numbers in Auchi, Ayuele and other towns sparked off an Islamic revolution with the passage of time. It is interesting to note that towards the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, when the British dislodged the Nupe from Afenmai that was the time interest in Islam on-the part of the benevolent 'dictators' in the area took roots. This was the case at Agbede, Auchi, Okpella, South Ibie and Uzairue for instance (Oseni, n.d).

Also in an article written by Professor *Omoh*, can be seen to further give us an insight on how Christianity came into *Etsako* land. It states,

The colonizing British reconstituted *Etsako* Division in 1919 after the *Nupe* invasion of the areas ended in 1897. Its Headquarter then was *Avhianwu*" (*Omoh*, 2014).

Christianity came to *Ekperi* by the British missionaries. On their arrival, they found Islam was already in existence. They built their own schools, churches and hospitals.

PROBLEMS OF ISLAM IN EKPERI LAND (APOSTASY)

Apostasy in Islam (Arabic: ردة *riddah*) literally means: "relapse" or "regress" but is commonly defined in Islam as the rejection in word or deed of one's former religion by a person who was previously a follower of Islam. (Abdelhadi, 2006)

Apostasy is a type of disbelief that comes after belief. This is the case of whoever declares disbelief and acts upon it, or takes pleasure in it wilfully, even though he may be

acting against his own heart. The *Ulama* ' have discussed this at length and have said that an apostate is the one who disbelieves after having previously submitted himself to Islam, whether by word, by deed, or by belief. They have established that whoever declares his disbelief is a disbeliever even if he has spoken without conviction, and does not act upon it. The only exception to this is someone who has been compelled against his will. (Al-Qahtani, 65,)

The only exception to this is someone who has been compelled against his will. This exception has been made by a verse of the Glorious Qur'an 16: 106-109 which say:

مَنْ كَفَرَ بِإِلَهِهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِهِ إِلَّا مَنْ أُكْرِهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ وَلَكِنْ مَنْ شَرَحَ
بِالْكُفْرِ صَدْرًا فَعَلَيْنَاهُمْ عَذَابًا مِنْ اللَّهِ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ - ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ اسْتَحْبَبُوا الْحَيَاةَ
الدُّنْيَا عَلَى الْآخِرَةِ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ - أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ طَبَعَ اللَّهُ عَلَى
قُلُوبِهِمْ وَسَمِعَتْهُمْ وَأَبْصَرَهُمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْغَافِلُونَ - لَا جِزْمَ أَنَّهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ هُمْ
الْحَاسِرُونَ) سورة النحل الآية 106-109

Whoever disbelieves in Allah after his belief - except one who was forced while his heart is at peace with the faith - but whoever opens their breasts to disbelief, on them is wrath from Allah, and theirs will be a terrible torment.

That is because they preferred the life of this world over that of the Hereafter. And Allah does not guide the people who disbelieve. They are those upon whose hearts, hearing (ears) and sight (eyes) Allah has set a seal over. And they are the heedless! No doubt, in the Hereafter they will be the losers.

Allah tells us that He is angry with them who willingly disbelieve in Him after clearly believing in Him, who open their hearts to disbelief finding peace in that, because they understood the faith yet they still turned away from it. They will suffer severe punishment in the Hereafter, because they preferred this life to the Hereafter, and they left the faith for the sake of this world and Allah did not guide their hearts and help them to stand firm in the true religion. He put a seal on their hearts so that they would not be able to understand what is beneficial for them, and He sealed their ears and eyes so that they would not benefit from them. Their faculties did not help them at all, so they are unaware of what is going to happen to them, (Ibn Katheer).

﴿إِلَّا مَنْ أُكْرِهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ﴾ (Except one who was forced while his heart is at peace with the faith).

This is an exception in the case of one who utters statements of disbelief and verbally agrees with the *Mushrikin* because he is forced to do so by the beatings and abuse to which he is subjected, but his heart refuses to accept what he is saying, and he is, in reality, at peace with his faith in Allah and His Messenger. The scholars agreed that if a person is forced into disbelief, it is permissible for him to either go along with them in the interests of self-preservation, or to refuse, as Bilal did when they were inflicting all sorts of torture on him, even placing a huge rock on his chest in the intense heat and telling him to admit others as partners with Allah. He refused. (Ibn Katheer).

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَصَدُّوا عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَشَاقُّوا الرَّسُولَ مِن بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ لَن يَضُرُّوا اللَّهَ شَيْئًا وَسَيُحِطُّ أَعْمَلُهُمْ - يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَلَا تُبْطِلُوا أَعْمَالَكُمْ - إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَصَدُّوا عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ مَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارًا فَلَن يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ - فَلَا تَهِنُوا وَتَدْعُوا إِلَى السَّلَامِ وَأَنْتُمْ الْأَعْلَوْنَ وَاللَّهُ مَعَكُمْ وَلَن يَتَرَكَكُمْ (أَعْمَلَكُمْ). سورة محمد الآية (32-35)

Verily, those who disbelieve, and hinder from the path of Allah, and oppose the Messenger, after the guidance has been clearly shown to them, they will not harm Allah in the least, but He will make their deeds fruitless. O you who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger and invalidate not your deeds. Verily, those who disbelieved and obstructed others from the path of Allah and then died as disbelievers -- never will Allah forgive them. So do not lose heart and beg for peace while you are superior. Allah is with you and He will never deprive you of (the reward of) your deeds.

Allah then informs about those who disbelieve, obstruct others from the path of Allah, oppose the Messenger and contend with him, and revert from the faith after guidance has become clear to them. He indicates that those people can never harm Allah in the least, and rather they only harm themselves and become losers on the Day of Resurrection. He will nullify their deeds. Allah will not reward them even the weight of a mosquito (i.e., the smallest thing) for any good that they did before their apostasy, but would instead totally invalidate and destroy it. Their apostasy wipes away their good deeds entirely, just as the good deeds would normally wipe away the evil deeds. Imam Ahmad *Ibn Nasr al-Marwazi* reported in *Kitab as-Salah* (the Book of Prayer) that *Abu al-Aliyah* said, "The Prophet's Companions used to think that no sin would harm a person who says '*La ilaha illallah*,' just as no good deed would benefit a person who joins partners with Allah. So Allah revealed,

أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَلَا تُبْطِلُوا أَعْمَالَكُمْ

Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and do not invalidate your deeds.

This made them fear that some sins could nullify their deeds." It has also been reported from *Ibn `Umar*, May Allah be pleased with him, that he said, "We, the Companions of Allah's Messenger, used to think that good deeds would all be accepted, until Allah revealed,

أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَلَا تُبْطِلُوا أَعْمَالَكُمْ

Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and do not invalidate your deeds.

So we asked each other: 'What is it that can nullify our deeds' So we said, 'The major sins, great offenses that require admission into the Fire and immoral sins.' But then Allah revealed,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ

(Verily, Allah does not forgive joining partners with Him in worship, but He forgives except that to whom He wills.) (4:48). After this was revealed, we ceased saying that. We thereafter continued to fear for those who committed great sins and immoral sins and to have hope for those who did not." Then, Allah commands His believing servants to obey Him and His Messenger, which would result in their happiness in this worldly life and the Hereafter. He also prohibits them from apostasy, because that would result in the nullification of their deeds. Thus He says,

وَلَا تُبْطِلُوا أَعْمَالَكُمْ

(and do not invalidate your deeds.) meaning, by apostasy.

Allah then says,

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ارْتَدُّوا عَلَىٰ أَدْبَارِهِمْ

(Verily, those who have turned back) meaning, they departed from the faith and returned to disbelief.

مِمَّن بَعْدَ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ الشَّيْطَانُ سَوَّلَ لَهُمْ

(... after guidance had become clear to them -- *Shaytan* has enticed them) meaning he adorned and beautified that (apostasy) for them.

يُوَأْمِلِي لَهُمْ

(and filled them with false hopes). Meaning, he tempted them, and deceived them, (Ibn Katheer).

CAUSES OF APOSTASY

There are different causes of apostasy in *Ekperi* clan. The major causes are: lack of Islamic knowledge, misconception of Islam as foreign culture, effects of traditional religion and culture and effects of Christianity.

According to Dr Hanı, apostasy can be due to the following (1) conspiracy of the unbelievers (*kuffar*) against the Muslims (2) weak faith (3) showing interest in the worldly possessions and the life styles of the unbelievers (*kuffar*) (4) joint effect of the Jews and the Christians in fighting against Islam. All these can be related in one way or the other to the causes of apostasy in *Ekperi* clan.

The explanation Dr Hanı made under the first point is how in ancient times the unbelievers (*kuffar*) embraced Islam claiming that they were Muslims but they only did that to spy. Similar thing do happen occasionally whereby some well-to-do or learned Christians deceptively embrace Islam only to know more about it. Later on, they regress together with the weaker Muslims, while the poor Christians who had sincerely wanted to convert to Islam are discouraged. The following verse backed his point.

وَقَالَتْ طَآئِفَةٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ ءَامَنُوا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ عَلَيَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَجِهَةٌ النّهَارِ وَكَفَرُوا ءَاخِرَهُ لَعَلَّهُمْ
يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿سورة آل عمران الآية 72 - 74﴾

And a party of the People of the Scripture say: "Believe in the morning in that which is revealed to the believers, and reject it at the end of the day, so that they may turn back.

Concerning the weak faith, many have converted to Christianity or left Islam to traditional religion. Whenever an *Ekperi* man is tempted with any calamity he became worried, the next thing that will come to his mind is to either go to a pastor, a priest or soothsayers etc, backed it with a verse in surah al ankabut

الم, أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ ﴿سورة العنكبوت الآية 1-7﴾

(Do people think that they will be left alone because they say: "We believe," and will not be tested.) This is a rebuke in the form of a question, meaning that Allah will inevitably test His believing servants according to their level of faith.

The third point he mentioned is also common in the clan, Some of the Muslims are attracted by the way the Christian women or ladies dress, this also made them to marry them and from there they become Christians. For instance the present Governor of Edo State, Adams *Oshiomole* became Christian because of his late wife Clara. This information was retrieved from internet. It states as follows: "Adams Aliyu *Oshiomole* was born on 4th April 1953 at *Iyanmoh*, near Auchı in Edo State. He was born Muslim but was led to Christianity by his late wife Clara" (Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia).

In an interview I made with the chief imam of *Uzairue*, he told me how he married a Christian girl and that the marriage was blessed with two children male and female. But now they are all Christian including the mother. He is even advising that Christian women should not be married because he now understand that the Christian are just tempting the Muslims.

So also a brother of mine called Muhammad Ibrahim *Anaweokha* was a Muslim but he married a Christian and had three children with her. After his death, she wanted to

convert the children to Christianity, but his brothers denied and it resulted to a great struggle and even led to a court case but in favour of the brothers that is the uncles of the children. The children were taken to my place in *Misau* so that they will not be going to the mother. *Alhamdu lillah* the first child called *Faruk* Muhammad Ibrahim and the second one called *Fa'iza* Muhammad Ibrahim have memorized the Holy Qur'an. *Fa'iza* used to represent Edo State in National Qur'anic recitation competition.

The brother of Muhammad Ibrahim called Basher Muhammad Ibrahim *Anaweokha* also married a Christian woman. All his children became Christians. There are many examples like that; in short there is no house or Muslim family that you will not find an apostate in my village, *Osomiegbe*.

CONSEQUENCES OF APOSTASY IN *EKPERI* LAND IN PARTICULAR AND *ETSAKO* IN GENERAL

The rate of apostasy has drastically reduced the population of Muslims in the clan. Also, the power of Islam has become weak due to increasing rate of apostasy. The little Muslims are always discouraged to carry out their daily Islamic activities such as prayers, fasting and the like. They are made jest of or mocked. You hardly differentiate between a Muslim and a Christian in term of dressing especially women.

Those who are supposed to support Islam with all their effort, financially, physically, politically, intellectually and so on, are now the enemies of Islam in *Etsako* and the entire Edo State. People like Tony *Momoh*, one of the sons of the founding fathers of Islam in *Auchi* that is *Otaru Momoh* is now a Christian. He held many political positions in Nigeria and was one time Minister of Information. There is nothing he did for Islam in his own town, talk less of other Islamic towns in his State. Likewise the present governor Adams *Oshiomole*, in his position, a lot should be expected if he was a Muslim. But all his religious activities are for the Christians and Christianity. So also is Pastor Johnson Suleman of Omega Fire Ministries. He was born in Islam but later converted to Christianity and even converted his parents to Christianity. With the talent Allah has given him for preaching he should be someone to preach for Islam, but now the reverse is the case. *Hasbunallahu wanimal wakil*.

SOLUTION: DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM IN *EKPERI* LAND AND ITS ENVIRONS

It was observed that the greatest problem causing apostasy in this clan is general by lack of proper Islamic education. Therefore, the provision of proper basic Islamic education would surely go a long way in solving this great problem in the clan in particular and the

area (Etsako) in general. And this would pave the clear way of developing Islam and firmly establishing it in the whole area.

For this purpose, Islamic primary and secondary schools should be established for the children and youth of the area, and Comparative Religion courses should be introduced in these formal schools. As for the adults, Adult Islamic Education Classes should be established and extensive and intensive formal preaching should be launched at mosques and other public areas to educate all. Amicable and healthy public debates between Islamic scholars and Christian scholars should be regularly carried out in the area. And, finally, Muslim Organizations, both national and international should be appropriately informed and invited to come to the aid of the religion in the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research paper, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Muslim scholars and leaders of *Ekperi* clan should come and work together to confront the problem of rampant apostasy from Islam in *Ekperi* clan.
2. Islamic Nursery, Primary and Secondary Schools should be established in the area to help educate the children and youth of the clan about Islam.
3. Islamic Adult Education Classes should be established in the area to help educate the adults of the area.
4. Public preaching, including frequent preaching at mosques, should be carried out as another measure for educating the general populace of the clan.
5. Healthy, cordial debates between Muslim scholars and Christian scholars should be regularly organized under laid down rules and regulations with the aim of addressing misconceptions, misinterpretations and misrepresentations.
6. Muslim Organizations from within and outside the country should be informed of the problem and invited to help in kind and financially to help up-root the problem.
7. The Muslim youth of the area should be taught to engage in trades and commercial activities to stand by their own so as to solve the problem of the Muslim youth having interest in the worldly possession of the Christians of the area.

CONCLUSION

After all that has been discussed in this paper, we understand that Ekperi clan is one of the clans in Etsako in Edo State of Nigeria. Islam was first brought to the area by Muslim traders from Bida around the second half of the 19th century. Christianity came to the area later through Christian missionaries.

Islam faces the problem of having frequent and constant apostates, especially in the Ekperi clan. The major causes of apostasy in Ekperi clan are: lack of basic Islamic knowledge, misconception of Islam as foreign culture, effects of traditional religion and culture and effects of Christianity. The seriousness of the case of apostasy in Ekperi clan is such that there is hardly a Muslim home without the case of apostasy in the clan!

The viable solution is to educate the whole people of the clan, their children and adults, their males and females. This can effectively be achieved by giving the children of the area firm grass-root of Islamic education from nursery to primary to secondary school level of education. Basic Islamic knowledge should be the priority in these schools, and Comparative Religious courses should be included in the schools' curricula. The adults of the clan could be basically educated by establishing Islamic Adult Education classes. All these schools should be established and operated under the National Policy of Education and under the National Education System.

Other methods to be adopted for educating the people of the clan should be public preaching at mosques and in open public places in accordance with laid down rules and regulations and organizing public debates between Muslim scholars and Christian scholars with the aim of addressing misconceptions and establishing the truth publically and cordially, Also, Muslim Non-governmental Organizations should come to the aid of the people of the area by proving financial assistances for establishing and running such schools and programs.

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