

Religious Proselytism and the Illusion World Peace: The Disservice of World Religions

Chika J. B. Gabriel Okpalike

<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jrhr.v13i1.10>

Abstract

This work is constructed on the hypothesis that religious proselytism is the tool in the hands of the three major monotheistic religions with which they canvass/campaign for membership recruitment. It identifies and explores different modes which proselytism has taken among the practitioners of the religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and understands proselytism as the source and cause of a world divided along religious lines and which may not be healed if that practice persists. The work adopts the methods of analysis of written data and focus on groups.

Keywords: Proselytism, Proselytization, World Peace, Religion of Humanity, Religious Domination

Introduction

It was Judaism which birthed the idea of a God who chose some people over above others. Yet affrighted by the possibility of a non-fulfilment or confronted by the vagaries and vicissitudes of the fulfilment of the promises that such conviction held in a material history which has so disappointed them, the religion sought that fulfilment in an after-life as reward. Thus was born, the idea of heaven or Aeon. Set apart by the faith of Abraham¹, established in the promise of Isaac² and chosen in the preference of Jacob³, the Jews

¹Gen. 12:2

² Gen. 18:1-15

always understood themselves as a special race, distinguished, chosen and consecrated by God⁴. The definitive emergence and inauguration of this people both as a nation and a religious movement was accomplished by Moses who gave it its most potent document – the Torah.⁵ From then on, the Jews neither failed to remind themselves of that proud history nor did they slack in defending both faith in it and evidences of that promise with whatever it takes including their blood. From generation to generation that sense of superiority for which they stood out, in a sense, taller than all other people of the world was passed on among the Jews and it drove their survival instincts wherever they were found in the world. Most importantly it shaped their resilience to adversity, persistence in challenges and dominance in world affairs. By the 1930's, their success and relevance especially in the Soviet Union drew the attention of Adolf Hitler who reasoned that to bring down the Soviet regime, it has to be freed from Jewish influence. Part of the reasons of the Holocaust was to weaken the Soviet state and replicate a repressive regime like Stalin's in Germany, by exterminating the Jewish population.⁶ However, for the same reasons, they were good targets for rivals in the socio-economic, political and military domain. In 2019, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported that 60.2% of all hate crimes in United States of America were religious-based

³ Rom. 9:13

⁴ ArielaPelaia. "What Does It Mean For Jews to Be the Chosen People?" *Learn Religions*, Aug. 26, 2020, learnreligions.com/jews-as-the-chosen-people-2076776.

⁵ [Menachem Posner](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/73398/jewish/Moses.htm#Moses). "Moses: The Israelite Prophet and Lawgiver Known as Moshe in the Bible" Chabad.org (no date), https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/73398/jewish/Moses.htm#Moses, Ex. 20:1-17

⁶ Timothy Snyder (2012). "The Causes of the Holocaust," *Contemporary European History*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2012, pp. 149–168., doi:10.1017/S0960777312000094.

hate crimes, while 56.9% of religious-based hate crimes were anti-Jewish crimes.⁷ Yet, demographically, the Jewish nation was so insignificant in comparison to the more powerful and dominant civilizations like Babylon, Assyria, Greece, Egypt or Rome in ancient times. This “Chosen-ness” was so taken for granted that for Jewish scholars like Adam Kirsch, the question was rather why God chose the Jews not whether he chose them.⁸ While being chosen was taken for granted and it made sense to the Jews that the rest of the world were not chosen or were rejected or at least second fiddles to Yahweh, they held tightly to that privilege; keeping the rest of the world as permanent dejects. Interestingly, non-Jews (by biological birth) could be initiated into Jewry.⁹ Although most places in the Jewish scripture suggest conversion to Jewry to be by coercion or captivity, there is also the possibility of becoming by free choice through proselytization.

Christianity emerged directly from the religious mysticism of Jesus who himself was a Jew. It was the gospel of Luke (17:21) which bears the fundamental evidence of that mysticism. Christianity becomes fundamentally the gathering of those whose consciousness has been raised to grasp that what was earlier sought in the external observances of religion lies in the internal disposition to the truth of the “Kingdom of God within”. Whether or not he had intended a new religion has become either a subject of debate among his later followers and converts or faith as believed in contemporary

⁷ Jennie Taer (2020). “FBI Report: Jews were the targets of over 60% of religious-based hate crimes in 2019,” *The Sara Carter Show*, retrieved January 28, 2021, from <https://saraacarter.com/fbi-report-jews-were-the-targets-of-over-60-of-religious-based-hate-crimes-in-2019/>

⁸ Kirsch, A. (2014). *Why did God choose the Jewish People to receive the Torah?* *Tablet*, retrieved October 8, 2018, from <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/170728/daf-yomi-79>

⁹ Lev. 19:34, Deut 21:10-14, Esther 8:17

Christianity, Jesus clearly initiated a religious consciousness which was drifting away from Judaism.. Nevertheless, the frustration of the Jews through invasions, wars and exile, could have inspired the revival brought by Jesus of Nazareth, which advanced into a fiery movement in the 1st century CE. This movement was championed by his immediate followers but especially furthered by a certain Paul from Tarsus who brought the element of proselytism into the nascent faith. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, his immediate followers were preaching only among the Jews and in the Synagogues; careful not to move the new religious consciousness beyond Jewish boundaries until Paul dared it after meeting a stiff opposition from fellow Jews at Antioch in Pisidia.¹⁰ When the attack was too much for Paul (and Barnabas) to contain, he declared his plan for proselytizing the religious consciousness among non-Jews.¹¹ The furtherance of this singular movement by Paul; endorsed and backed by the “Council of Jerusalem”,¹² Christianity zeroed in on the words of Jesus,¹³ which will later be referred to as the “Missionary mandate”, to embark on converting the whole world to Christianity. That singular move, sustained by the collaboration and guardianship of the Roman state, afforded Christianity the opportunity of monopolizing the world and civilization for close to a millennium and dominated it for more than two millennia¹⁴.

Meanwhile, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70CE and the consequent dispersion of the Jews in ca100CE contributed immensely

¹⁰Acts 13:14-45

¹¹Acts. 13:46

¹²Acts 15

¹³Matt. 18:19-20

¹⁴Shaye I. D. Cohen (1998). “Legitimization Under Constantine,” *Frontline*, retrieved January, 30, 2021, from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/why/legitimization.html>

to the founding of the Islamic religion.¹⁵ Mohammed has had interesting and testing times with Diaspora Jews who settled around the Arabian Peninsula. Characteristic of them, they displayed their pride in their history and their hope for domination, which captured the fancy of young Mohammed. He learnt from the Jews about Ishmael whom they think could have been the progenitor of the Arabs; capturing him in their story as the bastard and rejected son of Abraham, he also learnt about the prophets especially Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and the *Promised Land*. Notably, his own prophetic calling aped that of Isaiah in a more dramatic way. The backlash and consequences of this Jewish purported and perceived domination saw the rise of Islam which, inspired by Judaism and Christianity, understood that the only way to survive the domination of the former is to make Islam a political reality.¹⁶ Meanwhile its gaze was turned on the Promised Land (the mortal inheritance of Abraham) with a counter domination as its singular drive. In the same vein, he also understood the effectiveness of Jewish proselytism; he merged it with more ruthlessness to evolve its peculiar Islamic version. Max Rodenbeck ascribed forced conversion to Islam, but allotted overwhelming proportions to Christianity:

There are indeed numerous instances of forced conversion to Islam, and not only east of the Indus. Muslims have often behaved no better than adherents of other aggressively proselytizing faiths, although it is hard to find examples quite as egregious as the brutal eradication of paganism by the Christian kings of Europe beginning with Charlemagne in the eighth century and ending with the forced mass baptisms of Vladimir the Great in the tenth, or the repeated expulsion and slaughter of

¹⁵Charles Cutler Torrey (1933).*The Jewish Foundation of Islam*. New York: Jewish Institute Of Religion Press . Bloch Publishing Co.

¹⁶Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (1993), New York: Ballatine, is of the opinion that it was the ingenuity of Mohammed to make Islam a political reality

European Jews, or the Spanish edict of 1513 that gave Native Americans a stark choice between slavery, death, or submission to the church of Saint Peter.¹⁷

Many scholars of Islam debunk the theory that conversion to Islam is by coercion. Commenting on Surah al-Baqara, 2:256, Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi wrote:

There can be no force in accepting Islam; Islam wants sincere believers, not hypocrites. By forced conversion, you only increase the numbers of hypocrites, not the number of true believers. The Prophet of Islam has also been mentioned as a reminder, not as a person who forces Islam upon others.¹⁸

However, it is important to note that membership of Islam or not defines, determines and categorizes the person, communities, human life and the world. Remarkably, the Jews before them had divide humanity in two – Jews (Jehudah) and gentiles (goyim). In between, Christianity, in the language of St. Augustine of Hippo did the same – the City of God, *Civitas Dei* (made up of citizens of heaven) and the City of the World, *Civitas Mundi* (made up of mundane creature). In the same manner, Islam reconstructed the world into *Dar Al-Islam*, the House of peace (peopled by members of Islam) and *Dar Al-Harb*, the House of war (peopled by infidels). However, there is not much difference that can be found in the provisions of Judaism and Islam as to the place of converts in the religion.¹⁹ Christianity, as

¹⁷ Todd Caldecott (2016), “Forced Conversion to Islam?” In *The New York Review*, retrieved November 12, 2020, from

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/03/24/forced-conversion-to-islam/>

¹⁸ Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi (2006), *How did Islam Spread? By Sword or By Conversion?* America: NAMSICO, <https://www.al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/38142>, p. 1

¹⁹ Mustapha Umar (2011), *Does Islam Force Itself On Others?* Retrieved October 9, 2018, from <http://www.virtualmosque.com/islam-studies/hot->

fundamentally the religion of the converted, makes conversion a priced religious experience. The difference is that whereas the fulfilment of the hope of Christianity is strictly in an afterlife, for Judaism and Islam, an afterlife is determined by the extent to which this present life is possessed – conquering the earth is a precondition for an afterlife of bliss and enjoyment.

These three world religions reviewed above show abundant evidences that their practices are not restricted to any nation or people, membership of them is by faith and that each of them is designed to propagate the faith and initiate new converts. Each of these religions teaches ways that will assure the reward of a good after-life; earthly life is often de-emphasized. Nevertheless membership to the religions is pre-eminent in lieu of that reward. Proselytism and propaganda became the mechanism for these religions to recruit members whose earthly existence is merely a preparation for a worthwhile after-life. Following various dimensions and categories of religious contentions and contests, there were created the dichotomy of “Us and Them” in which the “Them” (depending on the camp from which reality is viewed) were disparaged and denigrated. The world has been polarized according to faith in/affiliation to these religions. Every day, the chasm created by the differences in religious world views and the accepted ways of gaining the coveted after-life keep drawing regions of the world apart from the rest, creating tensions and unrest. These religious sentiments are further complicated by political and economic interests; quest for socio-cultural, ideological and military domination.

We are in accord with Asoka Bandarage whose opinion is: “Proselytism is commonly understood as attempts by religious

topics/does-islam-force-itself-on-others/ had argued along the lines of Sura 2:256, 39:41, 10:99, 88:21-22 to insist that conversion to Islam is not by coercion and that Islam encourages members to treat those of other beliefs with kindness.

organizations or religious individuals to convert people to their own religious beliefs.”²⁰ In as much as Jeff Mirus, on the other hand, brought in the element of persuasion in his definition of proselytism, the present researcher is of the opinion that proselytism is either coercive or persuasive. According to Jeff Mirus, proselytism is “any effort to persuade a person to give up one point of view in favor of another”²¹. Clearly his objective was to do an *Apologia* in defence of his faith. Webster Dictionary brings in the element of inducement in the definition of ‘Proselytize’ thus: “1) To induce someone to convert to one’s faith; 2) To recruit someone to join someone’s party, institution or cause.”²² “To induce” contains in it element of coercion and manipulation. However, we are not interested in the correct definitions, but to bring out all possible nuances in the definitions of proselytism. Nevertheless, behind the attempt to woo another into a belief system is the conviction that something is wrong with that other’s religious space and convictions. Either way, it has been argued that proselytism can only be practiced in violation to the fundamental right of worship and association. This is because, in as much as those who embark on the task of converting others may claim that their victims did so by free choice, their choice was informed by the initial deliberate exploitation of their ignorance, manipulation of their gullible minds or taking advantage of their life situations and conditions. Sa De Freitas, in as much as he understood that the issue of religious freedom in public schools is controversial contemporary

²⁰ Asoka Bandarage (2015). “Proselytism or a Global Ethic?” In *Huffpost*, retrieved October 18, 2018, from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/asoka-bandarage/proselytism-or-a-global-e_b_6779640.html

²¹ Jeff Mirus (2008). “Understanding Proselytism”. In *Catholic Culture*, retrieved October 18, 2018, from <https://www.catholicculture.org/commentary/articles.cfm?id=240>

²² Merriam-Webster Dictionary, sub verbo —”proselytize”, online: <http://www.merriam-webster.com>

concern, yet was inclined to believing that proselytism could at least be improper and manipulative; capable to induce improper influence on the pupil.²³

José Casanova²⁴ injected another dimension when he acknowledged the difficulties associated with the incoherence of Jesus being a Jew and his religion being universal; identifying the inevitability of pluralism there from. At the same time he is at difficulty giving up on proselytism which could be legitimized as an expression of fundamental right to worship in as much as it is a moral or practical demand on the practitioners of any religion. In other words, while JoséCassanova opines that religion by nature is nationalistic, he allows for proselytism in as much as it is an acceptable practice of any religion and believers in that religion practice the act out of free choice; an argument which seemed not to have considered the plight of the proselyte-victim of that act. However, the present work gleans from participant observation that there are two forms of proselytism, Coercive and Persuasive.

In this work, however, we are mostly interested in the religious demographics from their origins, patterns and places of domination, which constitute enough worry. Members of these three religious groups believe with the same intensity and conviction that membership of their own (any of the three) religion assures them of a space in the territorial boundaries of ‘God’s’ reign. Consequently, faith to the religious demands of the three, keep members on a combat stance in wait to devour/crush non-members always perceived as agents and subjects of God’s adversary often referred to as “Devil”. In

²³Sa De Freitas (2014). “Proselytism and the Right to Freedom from Improper Irreligious Influence: The Example of Public School Education,” *Per*, 17(3), 868 - 887

²⁴José Casanova (2010). “For and Against Proselytism”, In *TheImmanent Frame*, retrieved October 19, 2018, from <https://tif.ssrc.org/2010/04/26/proselytism/>

other words, members of one are, by default, mortal enemies of non-members. The work adopts the dual methods of focus on groups and analysis of written data, both official documents and other scholarly contributions in the development of these religious cultures. At the conclusion, this work advocated for the rediscovery of a common humanity which should supersede membership of any religious institution; a common humanity translating to a singular religion in which the sentiment towards a divisive God can be harmonized in the unity of a specie commonality. It postulates that the unity, peace and harmony in God are not just an isolated nature but a comprehensive nature with the world and human beings as the domain of its manifestation.

Forms of Religious Proselytism

Gleaning from participant observation and studied analysis of the above submissions, the present researcher derives that there are two forms of proselytism, Coercive and Persuasive. However, they are interwoven and interconnected that care must be taken to distinguish one from another.

Coercive Proselytism

Coercive Proselytism is the use of force, intimidation, aggression or false propaganda to achieve the conversion of one, from one religion, sect or denomination to another. Two distinctions could be made of Coercive Proselytism: Mild Coercive Proselytism and Aggressive Coercive Proselytism.

On the one hand, Mild Coercive Proselytism is the use of aids, grants, education, employment or administration to coerce conversion from one religion, sect or denomination to another, whereby the donor, benefactor, educationist, employer or administrator makes conversion a precondition for donee, beneficiary, student, employee or worker to benefit, gain knowledge, work or collaborate with the

former. For instance, Micah Network is a Christian aid organization which is dedicated to what it referred to as ‘integral mission’ and denounces in no uncertain terms what it called ‘coercive or manipulative proselytism’. By so doing, Micah Network²⁵ acknowledges the existence of coercive proselytism which a sister network, Shelter Now, has been accused of on August 2001 in Afghanistan. About eight aid workers of Shelter Now were arrested in Kabul on August 3, 2001, amidst international outrage. They were accused of being in possession of Christian literatures, Bibles and thousands of videos and of exposing the local Muslim workers to such materials. Meanwhile Christianity is banned in Afghanistan, the only Christian space officially allowed, is the Catholic Chapel in the Italian Embassy in Kabul. These alleged actions amount to proselytism. Though the aid workers were later rescued in a US-led operation, but the content of this accusation amounts to Mild Coercive Proselytism especially when workers are treated according to their adherence to the Christian materials they were handed on. Therefore, the proselytizing style of Micah Network and Shelter now can be categorized as Mild Coercive Proselytism. There are evidences that Christianity still uphold and practice Mild Coercive Proselytism. Their style of Mild Coercive Proselytism is tied to humanitarian services and aids among non-Christians with the ultimate purpose being to convert beneficiaries to Christianity. In that exercise, food and clothing items; medications and shelter materials could be labeled with incisive Christian messages with the aim of exploiting the gullibility of the hungry and helpless. Christianity and Judaism still employ political, economic and educational means to achieve. Mild Coercive Proselytism and conversions from such are most times

²⁵“Proselytism”, in *Policy Statement of Micah Network*, retrieved on October 19, 2018, from http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/library/proselytism_policy_statement.pdf

presented as resulting from free choice. Clearly, Mild Coercive Proselytism threads the fringes of Persuasive Proselytism and that is why victims are always thought to have converted freely, whereas in truth they were compelled by prevailing circumstances that leaves them with no option. It was Mild Coercive Proselytism that was deployed to Africa by the early missionaries. In as much as it was through religion that they offered western style education, it was also true that the education cannot go without conversion to Christianity. That education also, both in content and objective, was limited to the place designed for the beneficiaries in the new scheme of things which included colonial administration and new work opportunities in the mines, farms and forests. Christian proselytism in Africa often referred to as 'Missionary activities' was clearly the religious counterpart of colonialism. Various contemporary African scholars have tied missionary activities to colonial exploitation. Lamin Sanneh accused missionaries of collusion with colonialists.²⁶ Emmanuel Ayandele affirmed the inability of the African to differentiate between the colonialist and the missionary in which case both were often adjudged as same with same agenda.²⁷ Walter Rodney opines that from West Indies to Africa, missionaries operated in the understanding that they may never incite the slaves or natives with the gospel of equality so as to hold them in perpetual servitude.²⁸ Rodney's position did not just highlight Mild Coercive Proselytism, but also underlined the deceit and manipulation of such mission whose agenda can only be manipulation and exploitation. However, whether or not his judgment is correct is not within the

²⁶Lamin Sanneh (1990). *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. Maryknoll, New York.

²⁷Emmanuel Ayandele et al. (1969). "Traditional Rulers and Missionaries in Pre-Colonial West Africa", *Tarikh*, III, 1.

²⁸Walter Rodney (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, London: L'ouverture.

scope of this work. To come to the understanding of the affinity between missionary activities and colonialism in Africa, it is important to recapture the meaning of colonialism itself:

Colonialism is the imposition of foreign rule by an external power, which culminates in the control and exploitation of the conquered people. Foreign rule can be imposed through political deception and propaganda.²⁹

Evidently, while colonialism sought to impose administration of the locals from a foreign land of overlords, religious proselytism ensured potent means of remaking the minds of the locals with ideologies that will keep them shut of compliant within the colonial schemata. Within this framework, religious proselytism or missionary activities are understood as the religious arm of colonization. Contrary to its own local world view, the proselytizing religions extol human suffering, advocate subjugation and discourage mental emancipation with the promise of an afterlife of compensation for all those privations. Either way, proselytism targets the very essence of human pride, namely faith in the authentic existence of the locals outside the colonizing schemata and within the given in their environment, pride in their ancestry and heritage, hope in the fulfillment of the promises handed down through tradition and the sacred preservation of their history. These are usually replaced with foreign alternatives without let and most often the victims of the process keep living in limbo from which they may never be free; they are neither themselves nor do they become who they hoped to become. Scarier is the fact that those victims have been pitched against themselves and against whoever that teaches anything on the contrary, in an eternal battle which often demands the shedding of their own blood to maintain.

²⁹Okon, E. Etim (2014). Christian Missions and Colonial Rule In Africa: Objective and Contemporary Analysis, *European Scientific Journal*, 10, 17, p. 193

On the other hand, Aggressive Coercive Proselytism is the use of force, through military conquest and cultural intimidation/invasion, mostly with ostracisms, persecutions and death threats, to convert people from one religion to another. In Judaism, Proselytes or “Residents/Sojourners” are often referred to as “*Ger*”: ‘*Ger Tsedek*’ (righteous convert) or ‘*Ger Toshav*’ (a sojourner in a Jewish territory who observes the seven laws of Noah and has denounced relations with any idols). These present conversion to Judaism as a choice affair, never mind that, strategic measures are put in place in such environment to make the conversion inevitable. It should be noted that the God of Judaism, from the onset had shown itself as unwilling to accommodate worship of any other God (Ex 20:2, 3). Consequently, no other form of worship is admissible among the Jews, even when they sojourn in foreign lands. They technically ostracize themselves in foreign lands and tactically ostracize their host communities. To be Jewish is to be different human specie from the common humanity of the rest of humans. To have any relationship with them effectively, demands conversion to Judaism. On entrance to the Promised Land, Moses admonished them:

When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you must not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord; it is because of such abhorrent practices that the Lord your God is driving them out before you. You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God. Although these nations that you are

about to dispossess do give heed to soothsayers and diviners, as for you, the Lord your God does not permit you to do so.³⁰

In the first place, these prohibited actions are the religious practices of the people among whom or in whose territory they have found themselves. From an outsider's point of view the only way the Jews could settle and rest assured is by eliminating the population, having whatever remains to conform to Jewish ways and obliterate all vestiges of that race. In cleaning up the environment, Deut 21:10-14 further exhorts:

When you go to war against your enemies and the Lord your God delivers them into your hands and you take captives, ¹¹ if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. ¹² Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails ¹³ and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. ¹⁴ If you are not pleased with her, let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her.

These suggest that Judaism advocates for the forceful conversion at least for conquered people especially women (note that one becomes a Jew by maternity whereas tribal association is by paternity); this is an instance of Aggressive Coercive Proselytism.

Remarkably, Islam is the champion of Aggressive Coercive Proselytism. Jihad is the silent sixth pillar of Islam which has been very potent in the spread of the religion. Dar Al-Islam (House of

³⁰ Deut. 18:9-14. It should be noted that the practices referred to here are the traditional religious worship and practices of a people who neither knows Yahweh nor owe any obligation to him, those who by the standard of Judaism are rejected by him or not known to him.

Islam) and Dar Al-Harb (House of war) are the two broad divisions of the world by Islam. The religion allows for terror to be unleashed on the House of War for the purpose of either total annihilation or total conversion/submission. We often tout Islamic fundamentalists or extremists as the perpetrators of this form of proselytism as a way of asserting that moderate Muslims are innocent of that form of religious expression; however, as true as that may be, even the latter is still Islam at least by appeal. In other words, there is no evidence that the ideals of Islamic faith and morals contradict their (extremists/fundamentalists) measures or their understanding of Islam; even their extremism/fundamentalism is still well-grounded on Koranic content. The Koran admonishes:

They wish you would disbelieve as they disbelieved so you would be alike. So do not take from among them allies until they emigrate for the cause of Allah. But if they turn away, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them and take not from among them any ally or helper. Except for those who take refuge with a people between yourselves and whom is a treaty or those who come to you, their hearts strained at [the prospect of] fighting you or fighting their own people. And if Allah had willed, He could have given them power over you, and they would have fought you. So if they remove themselves from you and do not fight you and offer you peace, then Allah has not made for you a cause [for fighting] against them. You will find others who wish to obtain security from you and [to] obtain security from their people. Every time they are returned to [the influence of] disbelief, they fall back into it. So if they do not withdraw from you or offer you peace or restrain their hands, then seize them and kill them wherever you overtake them. And

those - We have made for you against them a clear authorization.³¹

According to Yoel Natan³², the Koran contains at least one hundred and sixty four pro-Jihad verses. In as much as Islam may have borrowed the idea of dividing the world between believers and non-believers from the two older religions of Judaism and Christianity, it became more ruthless in driving its religious convictions and agenda with violence and coercion. All national and international terrorist groups dedicated to the course of the caliphate and Islamic states belong to this brand of Islamic understanding, that by armed struggle, the whole world will be converted to Islam and this conversion is both inevitable and a religious duty.

In as much as Christianity does not teach Aggressive Coercive Proselytism, evidences of it abound in the activities of zealous Christian fundamentalists who understand conversion to Christianity as a do-or-die affair. Evangelical wave in Christianity has witnessed the destruction of shrines, sacred spaces and religious vestiges belonging to adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR), many times understanding them as partnering with the devil to bring about the many evils that bedevil society. For instance, Tony Edike had reported that on January 7, 2014, a Christian group burnt down shrines belonging to families in Umuaji Aguobuowa in Ezeagu Local Government Area of Enugu state in Nigeria. Regarding their reason of embarking on that dastardly act, he wrote: “The group reportedly claimed that the burnt shrines were responsible for the backwardness

³¹Sura 4:89-91

³²YoelNatan (n.d.), “164 Jihad verses in the Koran”, in Answering Islam, retrieved May 20, 2020, from https://answering-islam.org/Quran/Themes/jihad_passages.html

of the community and her indigenes....”³³Such fundamentalist approach is often derived from the Old Testament which at the same time is a copy of Jewish scripture, arising from misreading and misinterpreting them in the light of Christianity and Christian ideology. Meanwhile, each of these religions thrive in the conviction that no other religion truly worships God or sustains a method validated and legitimized by God.

Persuasive Proselytism

Persuasive proselytism is a more civil presentation of religious convictions to an outsider in order for him/her to reconsider their former position in favour of the new one which is often posed as superior or more promising. Christianity is the champion of persuasive proselytism and it is often deployed within Christianity by the various denominations there are, to woo others. Persuasive proselytism is fertilized, on the one hand, by different versions and varied interpretations of the Bible and, on the other hand, by doctrinal differences which form the basis for the emergence of denominations in the first place. Therefore, at the heart of this Persuasive Proselytism are two major contentions: the conviction that the other is error-bound in the interpretation and application of the Bible and the fear that the other by mere virtue of membership may not get the ultimate reward of afterlife. The further complication in persuasive proselytism is the element of coercion often found in it. Various Christian denominations engage in Persuasive Proselytism which they capture in varied words and phrases: search for souls, evangelism, outreach, faith drive and so on. Beyond these, Christians also use positions and

³³ Tony Edike (2014) “Police nab 6 over alleged burning of shrines in Enugu,” in *Vanguard*, retrieved November 13, 2020, from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/01/police-nab-6-alleged-burning-shrines-enugu/>

opportunities to compel conversion from one denomination to another. For instance, a brilliant student may gain sponsorship by merely agreeing to convert to the denomination of the benefactor, job opportunities or promotions may be tied to conversion too. Persuasive Proselytism can also be Mild or Aggressive, judging by the extent to which persuasion is foisted on the new convert.

All over the world, human beings of various races and cultures, at various times and places have fallen victims in the proselytizing schemes of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In the pretext of the promise of an afterlife, it is the domination of the religious ideology of any that is sought; each convinced that it has the map of the authentic and valid trajectory to the afterlife zone. Each of these religions has so much developed its body of teaching and schooled its disciples in it that what is left of the world is the area of battle for who exercises dominance. Judaism permeated the world in ancient times by its dogged appeal and adherence to its history and faith. It famed alongside Christianity in the era of Christian domination, though silently, even as Christianity smeared it with dirt for having killed its champion and decimated his followers.

Furthermore, Islam took off alongside Christianity and Judaism as a rival religion, offering its adherents reasons for and means of upturning and overtaking the former dominating religious establishments. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new wave of Islamic aggressive proselytism was launched with a historic outing by Al-Qaeda in the United States of America in four coordinated attacks on September 11, 2001. After then series of such phenomenon have rocked the peace of the world, ranging from the metastasis/resurgence and founding of countless terrorist organizations, through the uprisings of Arab spring and full blown civil wars to the establishment of Islamic Caliphates and decimation of whole villages all over the world. This new Islamic stranglehold of the world is, in part, informed and sustained by the mindset that the

Judeo-Christian civilization must be dethroned and the inverse Islamic version enthroned. Interestingly, it is these three religions which birthed, fostered and advanced the science and civilization of the world which has dominated the human race for more than two millennia.

The Middle East-North Africa and Global Religious Divide Religious Demography

According to the demographic review of Pew Research Centre (2011)³⁴ on The Future of the Global Muslim Population, 91.2% of the population of Middle East-North Africa are Muslims and that this demographic distribution will remain unchanged for the better part of half a century; majority of these Muslims being Sunni. In the same vein, Pew Research projections identify Islam as the fastest growing religion in the world going by youth population, high fertility rate and conversion. It is important to note that conversion is one of the strong variable factors upon which the population growth of Islam is predicated. Going by the categorizations of proselytism above, there will be a rise in global Islamic inspired terrorism.

If current demographic trends continue, however, Islam will nearly catch up by the middle of the 21st century. Between 2010 and 2050, the world's total population is expected to rise to 9.3 billion, a 35% increase. Over that same period, Muslims – a comparatively youthful population with high fertility rates – are projected to increase by 73%. The number of Christians also is projected to rise, but more slowly, at about the same rate (35%) as the global population overall. As a result, according to the Pew Research projections, by 2050 there will be near parity between

³⁴ “Religion: Middle East – North Africa”, in *Pew Research Centre: Religion & Public Life*, Retrieved October 9, 2018, from <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-regional-middle-east/>

Muslims (2.8 billion, or 30% of the population) and Christians (2.9 billion, or 31%), possibly for the first time in history.³⁵

Meanwhile all other folk religions, including Hinduism and Buddhism will be in a steady decline, confined to India and the Far East. The reason for this is not far-fetched, these religions do not engage in an active drive for membership. Remarkably, the three religious movements under our consideration all originated from the Middle East and the religious trends in the Middle East are the determinant factor of what happens in the rest of the world.

Ancient Religious Currents and the Birth of the One God

From the Neolithic period, through Sumerian civilization, up until the establishment of the Akkadian Empire, Babylonian Empire, Hittite Empire, Cushite Empire and the rise of western civilization, spanning more than eight millennia, the individual tribes and nations in the Middle East and North Africa practised the ancestral religion of their parochial societies and were faithful to their various traditions. Religious ideas and practices were not carried beyond the boundaries of individual nations, tribes or ethnicity.

However, there were demands for religious conformity of the vanquished of any conquered territory, the kind witnessed in Babylon.³⁶ This kind of conformity is demanded in that story was to reassure the sovereign of the loyalty of his subjects especially captives because of the likelihood of their revolting and in this particular instance, it could be a measure taken to intimidate this particular brand of captives (Jews) who pride their religion and history over above that of any other nation even when they are in

³⁵ “The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050”, in *Pew Research Center*, April 2, 2015, retrieved May 21, 2020, from <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/#fnref-22652-2>

³⁶Dan 3:1-7

exile with its concomitant servitude; not even the condition of servitude could cow their religious and ancestral pride. Such effrontery as was demonstrated by Shedrach, Meshach and Abednego was unprecedented in that epoch and civilization. Moreover, the demand of worshipping the gods of the conquering nations can only be effective in the territorial boundaries of the sovereign and in this case again, Jerusalem has been abandoned and the captives were living in the territorial boundaries of Babylon. This demand of the worship of the statue can only be enforced in Babylon. The Jewish perspective about this religious demand was that the intention was not to offer the Jews a guarantee of a better life as a result of the expected conformity, but to subject and subdue them under the authority of the Babylonian sovereignty. On the part of the Babylonians, the Jewish possible non-conformity may incur the wrath of their gods, so they will do anything possible to get that conformity. The fascinating aspect of the refusal to this demand by the three Jewish youths in the story is wrought with a clear consequential mortal danger of death and annihilation of a whole race. Survival instinct alone was enough to deter such courage, but for them death is preferable to conformity. Similar situations wherever or whenever it occurred in the territory under review did not cancel out the fact that religion was merely a national, racial or tribal affair; nationality was religion. Meanwhile in as much as it is arguable whether or not Moses was the inventor of monotheism, the history of monotheism cannot be complete without a mention of his stint. According to Chancellor Williams:

I advance further the theory that the nearly wandering Hebrews, so numerous in Africa, received many of their religious ideas in Africa, for there it was that Abraham sojourned, Moses was born, Joseph lived, and some of the early years of Jesus Christ were spent. There is no question that even centuries after mulattoes and Asians emerged as the only Egyptians, they still regarded

Black Africa as the chief source of the spiritual – “The Land of the Gods” or “The Land of the Spirits”³⁷

He noted that close to two millennia before Moses was born, Amenhotep IV, who famed as Pharaoh Ikhanaton, had done a robust religious reform of the worship of one God who is creator, as a restoration of an ancient religious consciousness which had suffered centuries of corruption by a self-serving priesthood, which lured by the quest for power and influence, developed numerous cult centres and shrines for selfish gains.³⁸ This One God was a force that penetrated the universe and things which are tangible and sensible evidences of his power and might. However, it was Moses who estranged the One God from his numerous manifestations, objectified him as a lone force and rendered his former emissaries his enemies. Thus was born a God that is isolated from his manifestations which were, in turn, promoted to “Other gods”. Once the Jews accomplished the encoding of this new characterization of God who had always existed, but known and worshipped through deities (understood as his manifestations), they claimed ownership of this God, declared themselves his sole preoccupation and priority and arrogated to themselves the duty and responsibility of both propagating his influence and getting other human beings into the bandwagon of allegiance to him even beyond the Jewish geographical boundaries.

Worthy of note is the fact that, in as much as Jews took their religion beyond their boundaries, they still kept the practice of the religion within the race leaving a very clear place for proselytes who by converting necessarily became Jews. Thus they became the only race which is defined by religion. This character earned them very

³⁷Chancellor Williams (1987), *The Destruction of Black Civilization*, Chicago: Third World Press, p. 35

³⁸Chancellor Williams (1987), *The Destruction of Black Civilization*, Chicago: Third World Press, p. 110

slim tolerance at various times and places especially in situations where they were expected to be applying themselves to foreign religions(of their conquerors) like other races. There were, however, very many cases of persecutions and intolerance especially at the nascence of Christianity. In other words, Judaism still maintained a national character like other religions, with a peculiarity for an opening to converts who being former non-Jews became Jews by conversion. In as much as Judaism could be identified as the precursor of proselytism, it was Christianity, especially the kind propagated by St. Paul, which by its very nature is not a national/racial religion; it is the religion of the converted irrespective of race and nationality. With time and the unfolding of events in its history, Christians arrogated to themselves the right from divine origin, to carry their religion into any territory and make converts there from. From the first to the seventh century CE, Judeo-Christianity became a singular religious force that both dominated and shaped human history; it was the possessor of science and philosophy, tradition and authority, human life and destiny. Whatever Christianity held as true assumed absolute nature and subsequently, all other religions were denigrated, devalued and demonized.

Born in 570CE, Mohammed's encounter with the Jews and Christians caused him to be disappointed in his tribe and history. Mohammed's religious experience began with the utter disillusion he felt in his tribe and ancestry, *Banu Hashim* sub-clan of the *Quraysh* tribe. He realized that unlike the Jews, they had no Law-giver, no prophet and no messages from Allah. There was also the worry that the thriving economy of the Arabian Peninsula created a volatile individualism that could destroy their community ethos. However, Mohammed did not set out from inception to be that prophet which he has identified as his tribal deficit. Ironically, in as much as Mohammed did not envisage that he will be that prophet needed for the social and spiritual revival of Arabs, his self-exile into the desert

was to undergo a spiritual transformation by which he became that prophet. Consequently, he founded a religion on the already established practices, symbols and places of the Arabian territory.³⁹ This religion which was judged as suited to their conditions, suffered a grievous rejection from Mohammed's own tribe, the *Quraysh*. He also suffered the taunt and mockery of Jews and Christians who ridiculed his new-found religion. As a portent response to this two-pronged predicament, Mohammed reconstructed Islam as a political reality and made proselytism an essential practice in its doctrines. Mohammed well knew that politics is a game of numbers and to gain that number, this religion has to be populated by conversion. Having accomplished that, Mohammed was set to overrun the Middle- East, North Africa and the world; campaigning for conversion to Islam. By 742CE, he had Mecca, the Middle-East and North Africa, subject the former traditional religions to Islam and began to make his way into Eastern Europe. Thus was born another proselytizing religion which was seeking relevance and dominance. We had branded this proselytism as Aggressive Coercive Proselytism also known as *Jihad*. Like Christianity before it, Islam also became a religion of converts ready to establish and admit of membership all over the world.

Nevertheless, the Middle East-North Africa, dominated by Islam, as this work is going on, is in complete disarray. *Ad intra*, there exists deadly struggle for domination among the sects, tribes and nationalities that make it up. Again *ad extra*, Israel constitutes a recurring decimal in the Middle East-North Africa equation of peace; Israel is a Jewish nation and the homestead of Judaism. For both Islam and Judaism, Jerusalem is the capital city of the Promised Land. The irony is that whereas it is the inheritance of Abraham, among the Middle Eastern dwellers, the struggle is between the descendants of Isaac and the descendants of Ishmael; who is the bonafide inheritor of

³⁹Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (1993), New York: Ballantine

the land of Abraham? Either theory of inheritance is based on a valid ancestral culture, history and tradition; either side of the divide is correct according to each side's narrative. Right in that location, it is the Palestinians who represent the Arab side of this divide; both Israel and Palestine vie for the occupation of Jerusalem while the rest of the world is preoccupied with the politics the so-called mirage of "two-state solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the same time, the rest of the world is divided along the lines of accession to either of the narratives and affiliation to either side determines the application of corresponding narrative to their world view and socio-political leanings. Therefore the consequent and concomitant drive towards the recovery of the Promised Land is harboured at the same level of intensity and passion by either side further complicated by the historical events that both drew the warring factions apart and further strengthened their claims. In as much as these claims are tied to religion and religious traditions, it is difficult to see the end of it; in as much as the two contending religions are proselytic, they keep gaining membership from other regions of the globe, widening the scope of their sympathizers and extending the pivotal centre of their division even to more distant frontiers.

The Paradox of the Fertile Crescent and Epicentre of Global Conflict

The Fertile Crescent has been described in varied ways depending on the orientation and objective of the writer. The concept derives from the quarter moon shape of the area as was popularized by the American Orientalist, James Henry Breasted.⁴⁰ It is considered the most arable part of the Middle East covering Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, parts of Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Cyprus. The

⁴⁰Adam Augustyn et al (2020), "Fertile Crescent", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, retrieved May 26, 2020, from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Fertile-Crescent>

area was formerly known as Mesopotamia because it was encumbered by the two great rivers of Tigris and Euphrates. It is known as the cradle of civilization and has bred many ancient cultures. Interestingly, the Fertile Crescent is the birthplace of the three proselytizing religions under review. The three religions are also called Abrahamic because they all recognized the fatherhood of Abraham by bloodline and faith affinity. Remarkably, the Abrahamic life journey is characterized by journey and sojourn through and in the various regions of the Fertile Crescent. The iconic personality of Abraham in the two different dominating traditions of the area had the best and holds the best promises of life extending into eternity. Throughout the area, the commonest greetings are “Shalom le ka” and “Salaam le ku” (peace be unto you). If peace is ordinarily afforded by the religious background of the people or is elusive by the same reason, it is proselytization which is at the core of it. That area, today known as the Middle East, is plagued by war, violence and terrorism without any hope for peace in the foreseeable future.

Dale Eickelman re-echoed the idea of the Islamic scholar, Sa’d a-din Ibrahim that “more damage and devastation has been inflicted on the Middle East by religious and ethnic conflict than by all of the Arab-Israeli wars combined”.⁴¹ Middle East – North Africa can be described as the epicentre of global conflict; one of its undisputed characters being that it is the breeding ground for all proselytizing religions. It is this area of the earth that has helped shape the fundamental understanding of early beginnings of the universe and the spread of the human species in which they give themselves pre-eminence and predominance. Sequel to that, they also developed these religions that make them see the world, its *raison d’etre* and

⁴¹ Dale Eickelman, “*Prospects for Religious and Ethnic Conflict in the Middle East*” (1997). Retrieved May 20, 2019, from <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/prospects-for-religious-and-ethnic-conflict-in-the-middle-east>.

destination thereof in terms of themselves. By a twist of fate, two mortally opposed religious narratives (Judaism and Islam) emerged from a single patriarchal origin and for whom the survival of each is determined by the extinction of the other and for each of which the world is made to serve. Such irredeemable rivalry has become the predicament of the world which has been polarized by affiliation to either of these religious components. Christianity ensued from Judaism and adopts the Jewish narrative, parts way with it only on the ground of accepting Jesus Christ as the “Son of God” and Messiah. However, for Islam, that difference is no difference at all in as much as the narrative which gives pre-eminence to the Jews is valid for both. Many times, the conflict in the Middle East is seen and approached as a political or sociological, often referred to ideology of civilization. This work represents rather a perspective of a more religious kind.

The Old Testament narrated the story of Isaac the son of Abraham. Isaac had twin sons (Esau and Jacob). The younger twin, Jacob, deviously appropriated the title of first son from his brother, Esau, over a plate of porridge (Gen. 25:34). Later he connived with his mother to craftily expropriate the first son’s rightful blessings from Isaac their father.⁴² The words of Isaac to Esau which served as his blessing and fate were remarkable: “Your dwelling will be away from the earth’s richness, away from the dew of heaven above. You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck”(Gen. 27: 39-40). This turn of events left a disgruntled Esau with anger and vengefulness that nothing but the death of Jacob could stay. Through the advice of their mother, Jacob fled the anger of his brother who vowed to avenge his fate by killing him (Gen. 27: 42-45). Jacob spent at least fourteen years with his uncle, Laban, served him and married

⁴² Gen. 27: 1-29

two of his daughters, which was partly motivated by the fear of his brother. Many years later, the hatred of the Edomites (descendants of Esau) was displayed in the direst situation of Israel's journey to occupy the Promised Land (Esau's forfeited inheritance) at the boundaries of which they lived. The Edomites declined all negotiations to grant the Israelites mere peaceful passage through their territory, threatening to decimate them if they dared. This turn of events caused Israel more years in the desert, more conflicts with enemies, more deaths and the serpent plague (Numbers 20: 14-21). The gap of enmity between these two great nations continually widened with the passage of time. Having lost the descendants of Esau who would have been by far their closest and greatest ally, Israel had more to contend with in an environment which also harboured their great patriarch's (Isaac) unearned rival – Ishmael. The Jewish scripture accounted for Sarah's Egyptian maid – Hagar – whom her husband got pregnant at the behest of his wife – Sarah.⁴³ Things turned sour when Hagar began to despise her mistress because she was carrying Abraham's baby; at least that was Sarah's feelings.⁴⁴ The situation so deteriorated that Sarah had to send her away after she had given birth to her son – Ismael. In this Jewish narrative, God collaborated with this action in order to make way for the son of promise - Isaac.⁴⁵ Meanwhile God has also promised to make of Ishmael a great nation and to prosper him. From the above narratives, the Jews have inadvertently created, in that narrative, two arch-rivals, the Edomites and the Ishmaelites. Consequently, it is a double jeopardy for the Jews to also include these in the group of gentiles in the manner of their traditional religious demographics. It will not be out of place to think that Islam is a direct reply to the provocations and exertions of Jewry on the rest of humankind, championed by the

⁴³ Gen. 16: 1-4

⁴⁴ Gen. 16: 5

⁴⁵ Gen. 21:8-14

descendant of Ishmael; it is a counter-narrative to the Jewish religious history which seeks the divine inheritance of Abraham as properly Ishmael's.⁴⁶ It is true that the position of Muhammad Al-Shari echoes the stand of many Islamic scholars, at the same time, the same Koran has been used to discredit the claims of Arabs to the Promised Land which such positions understood as properly belonging to Jews.⁴⁷ It is not difficult to see the strength of the religious culture upon which these rival ideologies were founded. The further complications are threefold: (1) the world as we know it have been balkanized along these rival paths, (2) Christianity bought wholesale into the Jewish narrative and incurred the wrath of Islam, (3) all of the three religious divides are faith-based and unyielding about their convictions and indictments of the rest outside of them.

Perspectives of Religious Proselytism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: A Critical Analysis

All over the world, human beings of various races and cultures, at various times and places have fallen victims in the proselytizing schemes of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In the pretext of the promise of an afterlife, it is the domination of the religious ideology of any that is sought; each convinced that it has the map of the authentic and valid trajectory to the afterlife zone. Each of these religions has so much developed its body of teaching and schooled its disciples in it that what is left of the world is the area of battle for who exercises dominance. Judaism permeated the world in ancient times

⁴⁶Muhammad Al-Ashari (2019), The Promised Land Belongs to Muslims, in Academia.edu, retrieved October 9, 2020, from https://www.academia.edu/38753800/The_Promised_Land_Belongs_to_Muslims

⁴⁷TovaDvorin (2014), "Even the Koran Claims Israel Belongs to the Jews", in *ArutzSheva*, retrieved October 9, 2020, from <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/177319>

by its dogged appeal and adherence to its history and faith. It fared alongside Christianity in the era of Christian domination, though silently, even as Christianity smeared it with dirt for having killed its champion and decimated his followers.

Furthermore, Islam took off alongside Christianity and Judaism as a rival religion, offering its adherents reasons for and means of upturning and overtaking the former dominating religious establishments. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new wave of Islamic aggressive proselytism was launched with a historic outing by Al-Qaeda in the United States of America in four coordinated attacks on September 11, 2001. After then series of such phenomenon have rocked the peace of the world, ranging from the metastasis/resurgence and founding of countless terrorist organizations, through the uprisings of Arab spring and full blown civil wars (as in Syria) to the establishment of Islamic Caliphates and decimation of whole villages all over the world. This new Islamic stranglehold of the world is, in part, informed and sustained by the mindset that the Judeo-Christian civilization must be dethroned and the inverse Islamic version enthroned. Interestingly, it is these three religions which birthed, fostered and advanced the science and civilization of the world which has dominated the human race for more than two millennia.

This work understands proselytism as any act by which another is influenced, directly or indirectly, to turn away from or jettison his/her former faith and embraces a new one. It is constructed upon the hypothesis that religion is naturally national, racial or cultural. In his study of Jurisprudence, Tseming Yang captured the intricate bond of religion and race, so much so that these two are the basic factor by which he identified one as a member of a community.⁴⁸ He used the

⁴⁸Tseming Yang “Race, Religion, and Cultural Identity: Reconciling the Jurisprudence of Race and Religion,” in *Indiana Law Journal*: Vol. 73: Iss. 1,

word 'Community' precisely because he was studying American culture of jurisprudence through the diversity and peculiarities of individual communities. However, that same sense of community could be extensively applied to nations and peoples in our context. Going by that racial, national and communitarian character of religion, therefore, it is propaganda and proselytism through which any religion can be populated outside its national, racial or cultural boundaries, the new converts, having previously identified as national, racial or cultural. On the other hand, the work agrees with the position of Ninian Smart as to the influence of gods and deities in ancient times which could also extend beyond national, racial and cultural boundaries. That is to say, the dominance of cities reverted to their gods. In other words, dominance of a city is the measure of the power of its god.⁴⁹ This thesis supports the earlier position of this work that the religions of Judaism and Islam allow for the forceful conversion of conquered people. Dominance by conquest reflects the power of the gods of the contending nations, races or cultures. The difference here is that the God of the Semitic religions had, evidently demanded this forceful conversion explicitly. Ninian Smart was referring to the (religious) spirit of the age, social behaviour and mentality of the time, in which conquered territories credit the very conquest by which they were subdued to the gods of their conquerors and where the god of the conquerors does not eliminate the former god of the conquered people but simply supplants or diminishes its influence.

Strangely, from the beginning, the God of Judaism had shown his unwillingness to co-exist with other gods.⁵⁰ To acknowledge the

Article 3, retrieved October 10, 2020, from <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ilj/vol73/iss1/3>.

⁴⁹Ninian Smart (1984), *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, p. 241

⁵⁰ Ex. 20:2

power of other gods or worship them became a grave sin among the Jews; and in the judgement of their religious leadership in different periods of their history, they suffered grievously countless times for renegeing on this fundamental demand of their religion. It was the firebrand prophet, Elijah, who birthed the new dawn of the absolute domination of the Jewish God. The event on Mount Camel in which Elijah demonstrated the overpowering power of Yahweh represented the classic of the final defeat of other gods by the Jewish all-powerful Yahweh.⁵¹ John Bowker underscores this triumph of Yahweh thus: “The Bible as a whole shows how Yahweh not only invaded the domain of El and of the other gods but took it over completely. Yahweh becomes all that the gods can be.”⁵² This character of Yahweh was unprecedented among the gods in the Ancient Near East. However, his unrivalled dominance and power informed the dogged confidence of the Jews, their rejection of other gods and resolve to convert others to express the same faith in Yahweh. In as much as the Jews never dominated the world by means of population, but they did for centuries through influence and achievement, but most of all through the inadvertent dissemination of their religious history by Christianity. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it will take only a few Jews to move the world. According to Gilad Atzmon:

The Balfour Declaration provides solid evidence that the dominance of Jewish political lobbies in world affairs is not really a ‘new development.’ In 1917, at the peak of WWI, it was up to a few Jewish financiers and lobbyists to decide the fate of countries, continents and the outcome of global conflicts.⁵³

⁵¹1King 18

⁵² John Bowker (2002), *God: A Brief History*, New York: DK Publishing, p. 183.

⁵³GiladAtzmon (2017), “The Balfour Declaration: A Century of Jewish Power,” in *Transcend Media Power*, May 19th, 2017, retrieved October 15, 2020, from

In line with the analysis of Ninian Smart whereby ancient gods and deities are influential to the extent to which their dedicated cities are dominant, domination is still at the centre of religious quests. For instance, Larry Jimenez believes in what he calls Christian Dominionism in which he insinuates that radical Christian fundamentalists are scheming to hijack the Republican Party, destroy democracy and institute biblical theocracy in America and that Christ will not come again until the whole world is converted to Christianity.⁵⁴ Even in the weirdness of such theory, it may appeal to a fundamentalist Christian mind as divine ordination. Even then, there is no doubt Christianity had dominated the world for more than two millennia and still quests after that domination not just in America, but throughout the world. This is founded on the basic idea that salvation can only come through Christ as was preached by his disciples from the beginning of the religion. It was to establish the authority by which the lame man at the Portico of Solomon regained the strength of his limbs, that Peter, the apostle of Jesus, hinted on the basic faith upon which Christianity will thrive - the necessity of Christ (by extension Christianity) for salvation.⁵⁵ By the end of the third century CE, St Cyprian of Carthage had propounded the axiomatic basis of the Christian conviction about salvation: “Extra Ecclesia nullasalus” (outside the Church there is no salvation).

Meanwhile, the quest of Islam to dominate the world is everywhere evident. Joel Richardson underscored this Islamic agenda:

In order to understand Islam properly, one must understand the way that Islam understands itself. Islam views itself as the only

<https://www.transcend.org/tms/2017/05/the-balfour-declaration-a-century-of-jewish-power/>

⁵⁴ [Larry Jimenez](https://www.transcend.org/tms/2017/05/the-balfour-declaration-a-century-of-jewish-power/) (2015), “Plan for Christian Domination,” in *The Church of Truth*, March 22, 2015, retrieved October 14, 2020, from

<https://thechurchoftruth.org/plan-for-christian-domination/>

⁵⁵ Acts 4:12

true religion - indeed the only religion worthy to be practiced. As such Islam has as one of its goals, total world domination. Islam's driving goal is to literally eradicate what it sees as the false and misplaced worship of all other religions. Until the day that everyone says, "none has the right to be worshipped other than Allah," Islam will continue its fight against unbelievers and unbelieving nations.⁵⁶

The religion of Islam was founded for the singular purpose of dominating other religions and the world and the Quran demands this domination from members with as much violent means as the beheading of unbelievers. Sheik Yer'Mami admonishes:

As Allah (swt) has said; this religion (i.e. Islam) is the only religion of truth; and the reason why he has sent us this deen is "*in order for it to be dominant over all other religions.*" Thus, Allah (swt) never sent us this deen as a mere spiritual belief. This deen has been sent to us by Almighty Allah (swt) in order for it to be implemented and for the whole of mankind to abide by it. The only one who would hate for Islam to dominate the world is the KaafirMushrik (non-Muslim), as Allah (swt) said, "*... even though the Mushrikoon (disbelievers) hate it.*" Consequently, any "Muslim" who dislikes for the Sharee'ah (Allah's law) to be implemented (out of being afraid to be labelled "extremist" for

⁵⁶Joel Richardson (2012), *Will Islam be Our Future? A Study of Biblical and Islamic Eschatology*, Published on myIslam.dk: October 4, 2012, retrieved October 14, 2020, from <https://myislam.dk/articles/en/richardson%20r15-islam-and-the-goal-of-world-domination.php>

example) has committed a negation of Eemaan, and thus left the fold of Islam for hating what Allah (swt) has revealed.⁵⁷

Mujahid Fi Sabeelillah extends the interior drive to dominate from Islam to the whole of Arab culture thus: “The Arab culture, whether it be the religious culture or whether it be the secular culture, has within it an ideal of Islam domination over the entire Middle East and over the entire world.”⁵⁸ Since the terrorist’s strike on September 11, 2001 in America, the struggle for Islamic domination of the world has taken a new and more violent dimension. This can be clearly seen in the proliferation of Islamic terrorist groups and the organic metastasis of the ones defeated in arms struggle.

There is no doubt that by nature, the God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are one and the same. It is its mode of operation and method of relating with him that set the three religions apart. Interestingly, within the territorial boundaries of any of the three, God maintains that character of *Aloneness* and *Exclusivity*. Consequently, it is not difficult to understand why Proselytism became a necessary tool for the three Semitic religions. Proselytism itself can only be justified within the context of a conflictual disbalance in which the validity of one religion, according to its adherents, outweighs the validity of another and others. Outside that conflict, proselytism loses its force especially that with which its practitioners are compelled uphold its cause.

⁵⁷Sheik Yer’Mami (no date), “[How Islam will Dominate the World](https://schnellmann.org/how-islam-will-dominate-the-world.html),” in Schnellmann, retrieved October 15, 2020, from <https://schnellmann.org/how-islam-will-dominate-the-world.html>

⁵⁸Mujahid Fi Sabeelillah (no date), “Islam Dominance,” in *Mideastconflict.org*, retrieved October 15, 2020, from http://mideastconflict.org/discussion/dominance/islam_domination.shtml

Conclusion

This work understands proselytism as any action which aims at or results in the abandonment of one faith affiliation for another. It gave two broad divisions of proselytism – *Coercive* and *Persuasive*, which accommodates any method or measure deployed by any religion to convert members to itself. The work opines that it is the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) which are the originators and users of proselytism as means of increasing membership and propagating religion. These three religions grew from the ancient cultures and traditions of the Fertile Crescent which explains the stunning similarity in their ideologies. However, this parody of religious ideas, ironically reflect a paradox of conflict in which any of the three religions can only thrive on the soilmanured by the ruins of others and the essence of religion is attack on and destruction of other religions. This work asserts that the nature of God in these three religions is fundamentally the same, except for the minor details of mode of revelation. Three of the defining characters of this God are the unwillingness to co-exist with other gods and spirits, ruthless and summary punishment for infidels and the denial of a peaceful afterlife for non-adherents. Global demographics show that these religions together constitute over 54% of the total world population and their members are drawn from different regions of the world. Due to the proselytizing activities of these regions, many nations and peoples of the world have lost their history, ancestry, tradition, culture and even language because to be integrated into them, sometimes require a whole abandonment of these advertently or inadvertently. Many African nations fall into the category of these losses. In Nigeria, the home country of this researcher, it is Christianity and Islam which defines the silver lining between the North and the South; this division is the fundamental cause of conflict and disunity in Nigeria. While this war rages, either of the regions keep losing more and more, it ancestry, history and culture which this

researcher believes would have been a better and possible ground for negotiating and fostering unity and peace. Wherever they are found living together, it is rivalry, conflict and chaos that underline their together-existence. The researcher does not see the possible end of the crisis in the world which he believes is sustained by the conflict among these religions and their hold on proselytism as an essential expression of faith.

The work agrees with the position of Jose Cassanova that religion is by nature nationalistic. It is impossible to find any immemorial culture without a religious character. Such religion is natural and environmental and people are naturally born into it. Proselytism takes any religion out of its national boundaries. In other words, to divest religion of a national character necessarily begs proselytism as a means of populating religion and would include undermining the religion of others and in turn the denigration of their humanity. Due to the quest for domination, each of these religions has participated in and fostered racism, slavery and caste systems together with the numerous inhuman practices associated with them. Each of the religions has evolved and perpetrated a constricted idea of God under the pretext that they have at their disposal all there is and can be known about God and religion. Udobata R. Onunwa decried this method of Christianity and Islam:

Christianity and Islam consistently failed to promote genuine peace and unity because of their inherent nature of trying to win adherents from even members of other religious group either by force or persuasion.⁵⁹

What they all have failed to acknowledge is the common humanity of the human species by which all humans are equal. The present researcher accepts the equality of all humans irrespective of race,

⁵⁹Udobata R. Onunwa (2005), *Studies in Igbo Traditional Religion*, Nigeria: Pacific

colour, language and religion, and that all peoples each in their natural disposition are the best of themselves and not ideal for others. Therefore the common ground for the interaction of different religion, people and culture is their humanity which constitutes the finest of religion. This is not an advocacy for the Religion of Humanity as proposed by August Comte which has developed in France and Brazil. It is a cautionary approach to the institutionalization of religion and arrogating absolute authority to it over the predicament and destiny of humankind. It is religious institutions as described above which weaponizes proselytism, demonizes other religions and in turn sustains unabated conflict in the world.

References

- Al-Shari, M. (2019), "The Promised Land Belongs to Muslims", in Academia.edu, retrieved October 9, 2020, from [https://www.academia.edu/38753800/The Promised Land Belongs to Muslims](https://www.academia.edu/38753800/The_Promised_Land_Belongs_to_Muslims)
- Armstrong, K.(1993). *A History of God* (1993), New York: Ballantine
- Atzmon, G. (2017), "The Balfour Declaration: A Century of Jewish Power," in *Transcend Media Power*, May 19th, 2017, retrieved October 15, 2020, from <https://www.transcend.org/tms/2017/05/the-balfour-declaration-a-century-of-jewish-power/>
- Ayandele E. et al. (1969). "Traditional Rulers and Missionaries in Pre-Colonial West Africa", *Tarikh*, III, 1.
- Bandarage,A.(2015). "Proselytism or a Global Ethic?" In *Huffpost*, retrieved October 18, 2018, from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/asoka-bandarage/proselytism-or-a-global-e_b_6779640.html
- Bowker, J. (2002), *God: A Brief History*, New York: DK Publishing
- Caldecott, T. (2016), "Forced Conversion to Islam?" In *The New York Review*, retrieved November 12, 2020, from

- <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/03/24/forced-conversion-to-islam/>
- Casanova, J. (2010). "For and Against Proselytism", in *The Immanent Frame*, retrieved October 19, 2018, from <https://tif.ssrc.org/2010/04/26/proselytism/>
- Cohen, S. I. (1998). "Legitimization Under Constantine," *Frontline*, retrieved January, 30, 2021, from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/why/legitimization.html>
- Edike.T. (2014) "Police nab 6 over alleged burning of shrines in Enugu," in *Vanguard*, retrieved November 13, 2020, from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/01/police-nab-6-alleged-burning-shrines-enugu/>
- Freitas, S. D. (2014). "Proselytism and the Right to Freedom from Improper Irreligious Influence: The Example of Public School Education," *Per*, 17(3), 868 - 887
- Jimenez, L (2015), "Plan for Christian Domination," in *The Church of Truth*, March 22, 2015, retrieved October 14, 2020, from <https://thechurchoftruth.org/plan-for-christian-domination/>
- TovaDvorin (2014), "Even the Koran Claims Israel Belongs to the Jews", in *ArutzSheva*, retrieved October 9, 2020, from <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/177319>
- Eickelman, D.(1997). "Prospects for Religious and Ethnic Conflict in the Middle East". In *The Washington Institute*, retrieved 20 May, 2019, from <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/prospects-for-religious-and-ethnic-conflict-in-the-middle-east>
- Kirsch, A. (2014). *Why did God choose the Jewish People to receive the Torah?* Retrieved October 8, 2018, from <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/170728/daf-yomi-79>.

- Mirus.J. (2008). "Understanding Proselytism". In Catholic Culture, retrieved October 18, 2018, from <https://www.catholicculture.org/commentary/articles.cfm?id=240>
- Okon, E. E, (2014). Christian Missions and Colonial Rule In Africa: Objective and Contemporary Analysis, European Scientific Journal, 10, 17, pp. 192-209
- Onunwa, U. R. (2005). *Studies in Igbo Traditional Religion*, Nigeria: Pacific Publishers
- Pelaia, A. (2020). "What Does It Mean For Jews to Be the Chosen People?" *Learn Religions*, Aug. 26, 2020, learnreligions.com/jews-as-the-chosen-people-2076776.
- Posner, M. (n. d.) "Moses: The Israelite Prophet and Lawgiver Known as Moshe in the Bible," Chabad.org https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/73398/jewish/Moses.htm#Moses
- Richardson, J. (2012), *Will Islam be Our Future? A Study of Biblical and Islamic Eschatology*, Published on myIslam.dk: October 4, 2012, retrieved October 14, 2020, from <https://myislam.dk/articles/en/richardson%20r15-islam-and-the-goal-of-world-domination.php>
- Rizvi, S. M. (2006), *How did Islam Spread? By Sword or By Conversion?* America: NAMSICO, <https://www.al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/38142>
- Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, London: L'ouverture.
- Sanneh, L. (1990). *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. Maryknoll, New York.
- Smart, N. (1984), *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Sorells, W. T. (no date). *Insurgency in Ancient Times: The Jewish Revolts Against the Seleucid and Roman Empires, 166 BC-73*

- AD. Retrieved October 8, 2018 from <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a436236.pdf>
- Snyder, T. (2012). "The Causes of the Holocaust," *Contemporary European History*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2012, pp. 149–168., doi:10.1017/S0960777312000094.
- Taer, J. (2020). "FBI Report: Jews were the targets of over 60% of religious-based hate crimes in 2019," *The Sara Carter Show*, retrieved January 28, 2021, from <https://saraacarter.com/fbi-report-jews-were-the-targets-of-over-60-of-religious-based-hate-crimes-in-2019/>
- Torrey, C. C. (1933). *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*. New York: Jewish Institute Of Religion Press . Bloch Publishing Co.
- Umar, M. (2011) *Islam Force Itself On Others?* Retrieved October 9, 2018, from <http://www.virtualmosque.com/islam-studies/hot-topics/does-islam-force-itself-on-others/>
- Weber, M. (1993). *The Sociology of Religion*, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.
- Williams, C. (1987), *The Destruction of Black Civilization*, Chicago: Third World Press.
- Yang, T. (1997) "Race, Religion, and Cultural Identity: Reconciling the Jurisprudence of Race and Religion," *Indiana Law Journal*: Vol. 73: Iss. 1, Article 3, retrieved October 10, 2020, from <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ilj/vol73/iss1/3>
- Yer'Mami, S (no date), "[How Islam will Dominate the World](https://schnellmann.org/how-islam-will-dominate-the-world.html)," in Schnellmann, retrieved October 15, 2020, from <https://schnellmann.org/how-islam-will-dominate-the-world.html>

Chika J.B. Gabriel Okpalike is a senior lecturer in Department of Religion and Human Relations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.