

DID CHRIST COME FOR THE JEWS ONLY?

HAD God Almighty purposed that the mission of Jesus Christ should be limited to the Jewish nation, Christianity, which he (Christ) founded, would not have attained with an immeasurable success its universal scope. For the salvation of mankind Jesus Christ was sent to the world. It is a denial of the divine grace of salvation, therefore, for any nation to repudiate Christianity or regard it as a foreign religion.

In those days, especially before Nigeria's independence, certain nationalists were fond of treating Christianity with disdain and branding it as a foreign religion. It was their opinion that Christianity was of no benefit to Africans and that it was meant for the Jews – and the Jews alone! All this they did in order to achieve their political ends.

Since after Independence, we have observed that a crop of people of that school of thought are still in the country but their activities have dwindled considerably. In an article captioned "Religious Independence", which was published in the *West African Pilot* of Tuesday, July 2, 1963, the writer described Christianity as "an imported religion" and went on to advocate the cause of what he called the "Godian Church of Africa". While he expressed hate for Christianity, he urged that the "Godian Church" needed the support, encouragement and sympathy of all true Nigerians, "so that it should be extended to all nooks and corners of this Federation, nay throughout the whole length and breadth of Africa and the GLOBE".

The pity of it is that some people for lack of spiritual wisdom or the sense of judgment give credit to such extreme opinions. Let us take it for granted that such a wishful thinking becomes a reality and "Godianism" spreads to all corners of the globe, would the "Godian Church", which is a religion of Nigeria (so to speak) not be an imported religion in other parts of the globe? On this consideration there will be no sense therefore in spreading "Godianism" to other parts of the world.

We know that those "nationalists" who make noise of the "Godian Church" have no genuine love or desire to worship God neither do they even understand the essence of a true and undefiled religion. And so they should not be taken seriously.

Muslims' View

Another point of view we will now consider is that of our Muslim neighbours who also hold the notion that Christianity is not for the whole world but that it is a religion of the Jews only. In support of their argument they often refer to the words of Jesus Christ to his apostles when he said: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," This text is at Matthew chapter 10, verses 5 and 6.

In defence of the Muslims' view, Alhaji Y. P. O. Shodeinde, Chief Imam of Lagos, made the following point: "Jesus Christ, after whose title the religion (Christianity) was called, claimed to be saviour only of the Israelites, and not of any other nation or race, 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel,' says he (Matthew 15: 24). When a neighbour Canaanite woman approached him begging for his ministration his reply was: 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs.' (Matthew 15: 26)" This was contained in Alhaji Shodeinde's article captioned "Are Christian beliefs tenable?" published in the *Daily Times*, January 24, 1958, page 5.

However, the Chief Imam lost sight of the significant fact that when the Canaanite woman showed a high degree of faith in her intelligent answer, Christ granted her request. As it is written: "Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour." (Matthew 15: 28.) This shows that Christ did not mean that non-Jews would not be blessed with his grace or that he was never for them.

We have no doubt in our minds that the argument of our Muslim friends is based on misconceptions. If they have a clear understanding of the Holy Scriptures as to put the mission of Jesus Christ, whom they believe to be a prophet of God, in its true perspective, they will not for any reason narrow the scope of Christianity to the boundaries of the Jewish nation.

All Nations

The Jews are the descendants of Abraham who was a faithful worshipper of Jehovah, the Almighty God. They were organised into a nation and God dealt with them as His chosen people in accordance with His covenant with Abraham. The Most High gave them laws to direct them in all their affairs. Moses exhorted them concerning the laws, and said: "Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." – Deuteronomy 4: 6.

Truly, in fulfillment of prophecies, Jesus Christ was born a Jew, from the tribe of Judah. It was the will of the Almighty God that he (Jesus) should begin his mission on earth at Jerusalem among his kith and kin – the Jews – before the work would in due course extend to other nations. Jesus Christ had the understanding of this purpose of his Father and he worked fully in keeping with it. He himself said: "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me." – John 6: 38.

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ he appeared to his apostles and opened their hearts to understand the Scriptures. He told them: "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until, ye be endued with power from on high." – Luke 24: 46-49.

The point that is pertinent to our argument is struck by verse 47 of the text which states that it was ordained "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his (Christ's) name among ALL NATIONS" (not only the Jewish nation) but "BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM". This parallels precisely with the saying of Sir Thomas Browne (1606-1682) that "charity begins at home".

So when Jesus Christ said that he was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and commanded his disciples not to go to the Gentiles but to the lost sheep of Israel, he knew that the time had not come for the work to cut across to the gentile nations. With God “there is a season to everything, and a time to every purpose”. – Ecclesiastes 3: 1.

Even though Jesus Christ had previously charged his disciples not to go to any city of the Samaritans, he, before his ascension, later indicated that when the apostles should have been endued with power from above, they would carry his message of salvation to Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Here is the Bible’s account: “When they (the apostles) therefore were come together, they asked of him (Christ) saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, AND UNTO THE UTTERMOST PART OF THE EARTH.” – Acts 1: 6-8.

What is more, Christ commanded the: apostles: “Go ye therefore, and teach ALL NAT IONS, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world. Amen.”- Matthew 28. 19, 20.

In the light of the foregoing, it is very wrong for anyone to say that Jesus Christ came for the Jews only.

Light of Gentiles

Long before the first advent of Christ, he had been referred to in prophecy as “a light of the Gentiles”. (Isaiah. 42: 6) And really when he was born and was later brought to the temple, Simeon who was a just and devout worshipper of God was moved by the Spirit of the Lord to say that Jesus Christ was “a light to lighten the Gentiles”. – Luke 2: 25-32.

The *Acts of the Apostles* is replete with fascinating accounts of how the apostles of Christ, after they had received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, worked hard among the Gentiles, many of whom were converted to the Christian faith. The missionary journeys of St. Paul took him to many Gentile countries where he expounded the gospel of Christ in earnest and with vigour. In fact, he stated that he was a teacher of the Gentiles. Said he: "Where unto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not:) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity." – 1 Timothy 2: 7; see also Romans 11: 13.

At Antioch, the Gentiles, in the days of St. Paul, showed greater enthusiasm and willingness to hear the gospel than the Jews. When the Jews saw that crowds gathered to hear Paul and Barnabas they were stirred by envy to argue against the truth of Christ's gospel. "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." – Acts 13: 46-48.

It is not stated that Jesus Christ is a light for the salvation of the Jews only but of the Gentiles as well. In fact, he himself said: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." – John 8: 12.

From the Scriptural facts lucidly explained in this *Sermon*, we can see that it is very wrong for certain Africans to renounce Christianity just because some foreign missionaries misused its name to gain political objectives. The faults of any person or group of persons who may identify themselves as a "church" cannot affect the TRUTH, the sanctity, the saving power or the universality of Christianity. Europe or America cannot for any reason claim Christ more than Africa. Even Palestine or Israel has no exclusive claim to him. It was Africa that gave Jesus Christ asylum or refuge when Herod wanted him killed. – Matthew 2: 1-15.

The divine truth is that God Almighty ordained Jesus Christ that he should be “for salvation unto the ends of the earth”. Therefore, any person in any part of the world, irrespective of colour or race, who believes in Jesus Christ and does the will of God, will be saved. And it is written: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the WORLD through him might be saved.” – John 3: 16. 17.