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**THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES IN THE
NIGERIA POLICE FORCE: THE STUDY OF SOUTH
EAST ZONE OF NIGERIA 2006-2020**

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ABSTRACT

Generally religious activities concern human beings, which continues to play various roles in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), particularly as it concerns the South East Zone of Nigeria. In the South East of Nigeria, Christianity continues to play important spiritual, social and economic roles in many Police formations in the region. Drawing information from primary and secondary sources, obtained from various Police commands in the region. The study argues that religion has contributed to the spiritual development of numerous police officers and families in many dimensions. The establishment of Chaplaincy Department in the Nigeria Police Force contributed in the shaping of the social and the spiritual life of police officers. The department in the formation contributed numerically, spiritually

and socially both to the families of police officers and civilians. The research recommends that the spirit of tolerance should not be downplayed, since other faiths are also working in the police formation in the zone. Federal government should also give attention to the Nigeria Police formation in the area of development and building of chapels where police officers and families usually worship God.

Keywords: Chaplaincy, Police, Protestant, South East, Church

Introduction

Christian activities constitute a vital part of numerous governmental and non-governmental organisations in many countries of the world. Christianity is a religion that is based on the teachings, beliefs and the practice of Jesus Christ. It was founded in the 1st century AD by Jesus Christ of Nazareth.¹ The word is used to identify people who associate with the cultural aspects of Christianity irrespective of the person's religious beliefs or practice. Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God, fully divine and fully human, and the Saviour of humanity whose coming was prophesied in the Old Testament. Consequently,

Christians refer to Jesus as Christ or the Messiah. The foundations of Christian theology is expressed in ecumenical creeds. These professions of faith notes that Jesus suffered, died, buried, and was resurrected from the dead just to grant eternal life to those who believe in him and trust in him for the remission of their sins. The creeds further maintain that Jesus bodily ascended into heaven, where he reigns with God the Father. Christian denominations teach that Jesus will return to judge everybody, living and the dead, and to grant eternal life to his followers. Christianity began as a Second Temple Judaic sect in the mid-1st century that quickly spread to Europe, Syria, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and Egypt.²

In 1960 when Nigeria attained political independence from Britain, Christian activities was not officially recognised by the Nigerian police. Though prayers were usually offered during major occasions or before normal police lectures and trainings. Prayers and the preaching of the word of God were not allowed in some police Divisions and Commands. Christian activities were officially recognised after the establishment of Chaplaincy

Department.³ The police chaplaincy started during the administration of IGP Mike Okiro (Rtd), in 2006 with the aim of impacting morality and fear of God to police officers and men.³ Before the advent of the department the body known as Christian Police Fellowship has been in existence. The body has branches in almost all the police commands in the country. They usually have weekly prayer and sometimes yearly conference. It is the body that brought the idea of having a chaplaincy section in the Nigeria police. The department comprises the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Muslim Chaplaincy. It is through the Roman Catholic and Protestant Chaplaincy that Christian activities started officially in the Nigeria Police formation.⁴

Conceptual Analysis

Religion: It generally refers to beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe. It is the belief and worship of a super human controlling power. **Religion** is a cultural system of behaviours and practices, world views, sacred texts, holy places, ethics, and societal organisation that relates humanity to what an

anthropologist called "an order of existence".⁵ Different religions may or may not contain various elements, ranging from the "divine", "sacred things" "faith" a "supernatural being or transcendence that will provide norms and power for the rest of life."⁶

Religious practices include rituals, sermons, commemoration or veneration, sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trances, initiations, funeral services, matrimonial services, meditation, prayer, music, art, dance, public service, or other aspects of human culture. Religions have sacred histories and narratives, which may be preserved in sacred scriptures, symbols and holy places, that aim mostly to give a meaning to life. Religions may contain symbolic stories, which are sometimes said by followers to be true, that have the side purpose of explaining the origin of life, the Universe, and other things. Traditionally, faith, in addition to reason, has been considered a source of religious beliefs.⁷ In the lexicon of religion, chaplaincy can be found. The word is used because the department of chaplaincy can also be addressed as religious department in the Nigeria police.

Police: Police force is a constituted body of persons empowered by the state to enforce the law, protect property, and limit civil disorder.⁸ Police however, legitimize the use of force. The term is most commonly associated with police services of a sovereign state that are authorized to exercise the police power of that state within a defined legal or territorial area of responsibility. Police forces are often defined as being separate from military or other organisations involved in the defense of the state against foreign aggressors.⁹ Policing has included an array of activities in different situations, but the predominant ones are concerned with the preservation of order.¹⁰ In some societies, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it was developed within the context of maintaining the class system and the protection of private property.¹¹

Short History of Southeast Zone of Nigeria

The Igbos remain the dominant people of the Southeast zone of Nigeria. The advice of late Alex Ekwueme led to the restructuring of the country into six geopolitical zones¹² in 1995 during the regime of President Sani Abacha.¹³ States that make up

the Southeast zone are Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo and Abia states. Also it is one of the densely populated zones among the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria in terms of persons per square kilometer.¹⁴ Economically, the region despite being one of the most attractive in agricultural potentials with rich soil for cash and food crops, as well as year-round cultivation activities, contends with unemployment rate of almost 20%, which far exceeds the national average of 13% (NBS, 2016).¹⁵ The zone has witnessed several political changes in the history of Nigeria.

Brief Origin of Christian Activities in Nigeria Police Force

Generally, religious activities in the Nigeria Police started when the Chaplaincy Department was created in 2006.¹⁶ It was during the administration of **IGP Sunday Ehindero Rtd, 2005-2007**.¹⁷ The Department is made up of the Muslim, Roman Catholic and Protestant Chaplaincy.¹⁸ IGP **Sunday Ehindero** Rtd, saw the need of recognising the place of God in policing. He was of the view that effective policing can only result when police officers have the fear of God.

The Protestant Chaplaincy was responsible for most of the religious activities in many police formations, particularly the Christian Police Fellowship that piloted numerous religious activities before the establishment of the Chaplaincy department of the Nigeria Police Force.¹⁹ The formation set up a Committee for the establishment of Chaplaincy Department at the Force Headquarters in Abuja. It was recommended that adequate provision of structures, manpower and equipment should be made for the three structures. In arriving at the above position, the Committee took a cursory look at the practice in the Christian religion and came to the conclusion to build a single structure for Catholic, Protestant and Muslim.²⁰

The Protestant Chaplaincy Section according to the Committee on the establishment of the Chaplaincy will incorporate all the Protestant Churches that include all the Pentecostal and the Main Line Churches.²¹ This development and step helped the formation to incorporate all the denominations in Nigeria in one umbrella called Chaplaincy. In a related development another source on the issue of Nigeria Police Chaplaincy notes;

the Police Christian Fellowship of Nigeria

leader, like AIG Michael Okiro who was the founder while in Enugu as Area Commander in 1989 then an Assistant Commissioner of Police and other leaders wrote letters seeking for the establishment of the Chaplaincy Department in the Nigerian Police. The All Denominational Church Executives planned a courtesy visit to the then Inspector General of Police Mr. Tafa Balogun, but no audience was granted to them. Later they decided to write another application seeking for the approval of a Chaplaincy Department in the Nigerian Police. It was later explained to them that chaplaincy will not be approved for Christians only. Rather the Muslim counterpart should be included.²²

It was after this development that the Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo and the then Inspector General of Police, Sunday Ehindero on the 1st of April 2006 inaugurated the Nigeria Police Force Chaplaincy.²³

Christian Activities in the Nigeria Police Force in South East Zone 2006-2020

After the official inauguration of religious activities in the formation, Christian activities officially started in many police formations in the region. The Police Chaplaincy in the Southeast

zone started religious activities in 2009 when chaplains were sent to the region to carry out their primary assignment in police formations.²⁴ The commencement of the department gave birth to Christian activities in the region.

In Anambra state Christian activities took place at Mobile Police Force base in Awka, where police officers and families met for different Christian services. More police chaplains went to other Police Divisions for monthly and weekly prayers with police officers while major activities took place at Mobile Police Force Headquarters. The preacher Envongwa noted that other Police formations in the state were yet to witness the presence and the impact of the Protestant Chaplaincy Department. This resulted because of shortage of manpower in the department, not only in Anambra state but also in the entire federation.²⁵ In Mobile Police Force Headquarters that is situated in Awka, police officers and their children met on Sunday and other days for worship.

Enugu state, witnessed numerous Christian activities at Police Training College Chapel in Oji River, State Police Headquarters, and Police mobile Base in Enugu. Apart from these places, the

police clergies in the formation visited some police formations in the state during police lecture with the aim of praying for them.²⁶ The Police Detective College in Enugu, was also involved in Christian activities. Police officers met for prayer in the course of police lectures. According to Philemon Sidi, preaching the word of God to Police officers is one of the primary assignments of the police chaplain in Enugu Mobile Police base.²⁷ Relatedly, in the State Police Headquarters, Police officers gathered on Tuesday and Wednesday for prayers. The pastor in charge of state Police Headquarters, prayed and preached the word of God to Police officers in many occasions.

In Abia state there are churches in Mobile Base Number 55 Aba, State Police Headquarters in Umuahia and Central Police Station Aba. Apart from these formations the chaplains visited other Police Stations once in a month with the aim of preaching the word of God to Police officers. The churches in Abia State met on Sunday and other days, where Police officers and their families went to worship and praise God. This is because the churches were built primarily for police officers and families. Notwithstanding

those who were not police officers also worshipped in these churches.

More so, in Ebonyi State, there is a church at State Police Headquarters where police officers and their families worshipped on Sunday and other days.²⁸ There are other police divisions that the chaplain went for religious activities.

Furthermore, in Imo State, Christian activities took place at Police Training School, Nekede, Shell Camp Police barracks and Mobile Police Base number 18 barracks Irete in Owerri. Besides, the state Police headquarters and New Owerri Police Station, had a chapel where Police officers met on Tuesday and other days for prayers. This chapel is still existing till date.

Protestant Chaplaincy had churches in almost all the states in the Southeast Zone of Nigeria. All Saint Protestant Church, Nigeria Police Protestant Chaplaincy was the name of the Church that fell under the Department. Communicants worshipped on Sunday and other days. In the course of these services sermon of repentance and freedom were preached by chaplains to worshippers. Despite the fact that the Church was meant for Police

officers and families, some civilians staying outside police barracks also worshipped with police officers and families during service days.

The Protestant Chaplaincy in Southeast had four categories of chaplains namely; The Nigerian Police Protestant Force chaplain; the Nigerian Police Protestant Zonal chaplain; the Nigerian Police Protestant Command Chaplain and the Nigerian Police Protestant Assembly Chaplain.

The Nigerian Police Protestant Command Chaplains: These categories of Protestant chaplains reside in the State Police Headquarters. They control and direct the affairs of the churches and fellowships that are under their domain. They are directly involved in the administration of Police Area Commands of the state.

The Nigerian Police Protestant Assembly Chaplains: The primary assignment of these categories of chaplains is to pastor Police churches across the federation.²⁹ They reside in Commands and Mobile Police Force Headquarters in the Southeast zone. But in other states outside the Southeast zone, their residence is in

Police Zonal headquarters, Police Academy, Police Training Colleges and other Police formations. This is because Police churches are many. Some are located in the Police zones or commands. The work of Police Assembly chaplains are enormous. This is because they are manning Police churches. They relate directly to communicants and non-communicant members of police churches. They officiate during the service of the Holy Communion, marriage solemnization and burial of Police officers or families.³⁰

These chaplains most times are responsible to Zonal or Command Chaplain or the police boss operating in that area. They usually present the needs of the church to the Zonal or Command Chaplains. For instance if the church needs land for building, it is the duty of the Police Assembly Chaplain to present the request before the Zonal or Command Chaplain.³¹

Conclusion

Christian activities in the Nigeria Police in South East Region has contributed to the spiritual development in the life of police officers and men in many dimensions over the years. Since the

Christian activities has existed over the years various clergies authorized by the Nigeria Police to operate in the Southeast zone should be wise in handling spiritual matters just to avoid religious fracas in the force, because there are other religious clerics that are working in the region. Without an iota of doubt, one can conclude from the available evidence, that Christian activities in the region of study has made a significant impact in the lives of police officers and their families. As a result of this development, such activities should be regarded as an agency for shaping the morals of officers and men of the police force in every police zone in the country.

Recommendations

The issue of religious tolerance is very important in many societies across the nations of the world. Since there are other faiths authorized by the Nigeria Police formation to operate in the zone, it therefore become important for both to work in harmony and unity.

The various clergies operating in the zone should partner with religious bodies like Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Christian Council of

Nigeria in the Southeast zone of Nigeria. This will improve the performance of the religious body in the chaplaincy department in the zone.

High premium should be placed on the message against bribery, corruption, extortion and ill-treatment of civilians by some police officers. This will checkmate some of the police officers practicing such anti-social behaviour.

Besides, the Federal government should provide all that are needed materially and financially to Christian organisations operating in the formation. They can be assisted in the area of building of chapels and other facilities regarding the organisation.

The police formation in South East zone has numerous police divisions and commands where there are no resident police chaplains. Regarding this the Police Authority should employ more clergies to enable them cover some of these areas where there are vacuums.

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