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RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS IN NIGERIA AND *DA' WAH*: THE CASE OF NASFAT, ILORIN BRANCH**ABDULWAHAB DANLADI SHITTU, Ph.D**

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Abstract

Nasrullahi-l-Fatih Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) is one of the contemporary Muslim organisations with national identity and grass root influence. The twenty year old organisation that has its head quarter in Lagos, Nigeria, has not only gained international recognition but also has equally made positive impacts on the economic, social, political, educational and spiritual life of many Muslims. The organisation, in its bid to reach the grass root, inaugurates branches and prayer units at strategic locations throughout the federation and even beyond. Its central coordination helps in preserving its unique feature of taking aggressive approach in solving some of the contemporary challenges that are militating against the growth of Islam in the world over. This paper examined some da'wah activities of the Ilorin branch of the organization with a view to identifying the role played by the organisation in propagating Islam within and outside the Ilorin emirate using a historical research method. Data of the work were collected majorly from printed materials and oral interview with major stake holders. Findings of the work revealed that notwithstanding the numerous in-house da'wah activities of the branch, its impact is rarely felt in the surrounding towns and villages of the city of Ilorin and if the propagation activity is not taken out to these villages, the objective of the organisation would only be partially achieved.

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-religious nation with numerous adherents and prominents among these religions are Islam and Christianity. Even though, Islam penetrated the nation before Christianity, the arrival of Christianity with western education, at a time when the teaching of Arabic and Islamic studies by the Muslims was informal, subjects Muslims to the threat of evangelism by the Christian missionaries whose objective of educating citizens of the country then was majorly that of evangelism.¹ Subject to this threat, Muslims felt the need to get a more unifying platform where issues affecting them would be discussed and problems confronting them would be solved. The urgent need for a workable solution to the problems informed the formation of Islamic organizations among which are: *Ansaru-d-Deen Society of Nigeria, Jama'atu Nasrul Islam, Anwarul Islam* movement of Nigeria and *Ansarul Islam Society of Nigeria*²

The rise of Christian Pentecostalism in Nigeria towards the end of the 20th century posted a serious challenge to the Muslim faith in Nigeria with its liberation appeal, anchored largely on the capitalism ideology and its dominant message of prosperity and miracle, which is in turn backed by aggressive conversion of Muslims,

especially the youths. The need to respond to this social vacuum was felt for a repeated time and this informed the emergence of modern Islamic organizations. These organizations which brought innovations into the conduct of prayers and other religious activities include the *Nasrullahi-l-Fatih* Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) and *Fathul Qareeb*.³ The traditional and the modern Islamic organizations both met at the point of aiming to take the religion of Islam to the door step of Muslims in particular and the entire mankind in general using multiple devices such as public lectures, lectures on media houses, building schools and colleges, visiting inmates and people in the hospitals among other things

Da'wah in Islam: A Conceptual Analysis

Da'wah is an Arabic word which means to call or summon someone to something.⁴ This term is often used to describe when Muslims share their faith with others, in order to teach them more about Islam or to explain to them those issues that are of high importance.⁵ This act is a religious obligation that should be taken up by every Muslim using all available legal avenues. The concern of an advocate of Islam is however, to get his message convincingly disseminated. He is not disturbed when he could not win a soul even though such an achievement is rewarded additionally. Allah says

فَإِنْ أَعْرَضُوا فَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِظًا إِنْ عَلَيْكَ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ

But if they turn aside, We have not sent you as a watcher over them; on you is only to deliver (the message) (Q42:48)

In a similar verse, the Qur'an confirms thus:

إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

It is true you will not be able to guide everyone whom you love; but Allah guides those whom He will and He knows best those who receive guidance (Q28:56)

Notwithstanding the above verses of lenience, the responsibility is considered obligatory in the following verse:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بَالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

Invite to the way of your lord (Islam) with wisdom and fear preaching and argue with them in a way that is

better, truly, your Lord knows best who has gone astray from His path, and He is the best aware of those who are guided. (Q16:125).

In the above verse, Allah enjoins the Prophet (s.a.w) , (and by extension, the entire believers) to take up the responsibility, strictly abiding by the ethics of the obligation. Commenting on this verse, Sayyid Qutb observed that:

إن الدعوة دعوة إلى سبيل الله. لا لشخص الداعي ولا لقومه. فليس للداعي من دعوته إلا أنه يؤدي واجبه لله. لا فضل له يتحدث به، لا على الدعوة ولا على من يهتدون به، وأجره بعد ذلك على الله.

والدعوة بالحكمة، والنظر في أحوال المخاطبين وظروفهم، والقدر الذي يبينه لهم في كل مرة حتى لا يتقل عليهم ولا يشق بالكثايف قبل استعداد النفوس لها. والطريقة التي يخاطبهم بها، والتنوع في هذه الطريقة حسب مقتضياتها. فلا تستبد به الحماسة والاندفاع والغيرة فيتجاوز الحكمة في هذا كله وفي سواه. وبالوعظة الحسنة التي تدخل إلى القلوب برفق، وتتعمق المشاعر بلطف. لا بالزجر والتأنيب في غير موجب...

وبالجدل بالتي هي أحسن. بلا تحامل على المخالف ولا ترذيل له وتقبيح. حتى يطمئن إلى الداعي ويشعر أن ليس هدفه هو الغلبة في الجدل، ولكن الإقناع والوصول إلى الحق

The advocate must make it clear that he simply calls on people to follow the path outlined by God. He is not calling for any personal or national cause. He is simply discharging his duty towards his Lord. He claims no credit for himself, nor does he has a favour to curry with the message itself or with those who respond to his call and follow divine guidance. He receives his reward from God alone.

Advocacy must be undertaken with wisdom. The advocate of the divine message must take into consideration the situation and circumstances of the people whom he addresses in order to

determine what he tells them on each occasion. He must not make things appear difficult to them, nor should he burden them with a long list of duties before they are so prepared. He must also consider how he should address them, and how to diversify his method of address in accordance with different circumstances. He must not let his enthusiasm carry the day so as to overlook the prerequisites of wisdom in the advocacy. Together with wisdom goes goodly exhortation which addresses hearts gently, seeking to kindle good feeling and response. No unnecessary reproach or remonstrance should be thrown at them...

The third element in this proper approach to Islamic advocacy is to argue 'in the most kindly manner'. This means that there should be no personal criticism or humiliation of an opponent. It is important in such an argument to make the other party realize that, as advocates of the cause of faith, we have no vain desire to win an argument or to boast about having an irrefutable case. Our aim must always be clear, namely, to arrive at the truth...⁶

Emphasizing on the need for application of wisdom in calling to the path of Allah, Shacrāwiy added:

ولكن لماذا تحتاج الدعوة إلى الله حكمة؟

لأنك لا تدعو إلى منهج الله إلا من انحرف عن هذا المنهج، ومن انحرف عن منهج الله تجده ألف المعصية وتعود عليها، فلا بد لك أن تفرق به لتخرجه عما ألف وتقيمه على المنهج الصحيح، فالشدّة والعنف في دعوة مثل هذا تنفره.

But why is the advocacy to the way of Allah in need of wisdom? Because you only invite to the way of Allah such that have deviated from the path and any body who deviate from the path of Allah will be found being friendly and accustomed with wrongdoing you need to deal with him gently to be able to bring him out of what he is accustomed to and place him on the straight path. Harshness in an advocacy of this type will further drive him away.⁷

In a similar verse, inviting to the way of Allah is considered an act of worship. Allah says:

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ قَوْلًا مِّمَّنْ دَعَا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا وَقَالَ إِنِّي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

And who is better in speech than he who calls (men) to Allah, works righteousness and says; I am of those who burn in Islam (Q41:33)

The word that reaches the highest mark of human speech as contained in the above verse is evidenced in three facts;

1. The invitation must be to the truth of Allah and free of self desire
2. There should be no conflict between his preaching and his conduct. When he preaches righteousness, he must himself be righteous.
3. His submission to Allah must be absolute

Even when the invitation to the way of Allah could be viewed as being restricted to selective people as mentioned in the Qur'an thus

وَلَتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong; they are the one to attain felicity. (Q3:104).

The fact still remains that an individual, whether he feels exempted from the obligation or not, must not remain mute when seeing perpetration of atrocities in the society. This is the more reason why Allah threatens those who shy away from the responsibility thus;

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنزَلْنَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالْهُدَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا بَيَّنَّاهُ لِلنَّاسِ فِي الْكِتَابِ أُولَئِكَ يَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّاعِنُونَ

Those who conceal the clear (sign) we have sent down and the guidance, after we have made it clear for the people in the book. On them shall be Allah's curse and the curse of those entitled to curse (Q2:159)

The verse eulogises those who invite to the way of Allah, act righteously and are proud to be Muslims,⁸ and establishes that anybody who wishes to be qualified for the praise must be steadfast, knowledgeable and patient.⁹ In lending credence to this,

Uthaimin posited that a person who wishes to invite to the way of Allah must be wise and accommodating.¹⁰ While understanding the need for propagation of the religion of Islam especially when the situation on ground necessitates it, NASFAT at both the international, national and local level work towards filling the social vacuum.

A Brief History of Ilorin Branch of NASFAT

Nasrullahi-l-Fatih Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) is an Islamic organisation with international recognition. The society, which was founded on the basis of the understanding of Qur'an 3: 104 which enjoins people to invite to the way of Allah, had its inaugural prayer session at the residence of its pioneer President, Alhaji Abdul-Lateef Wale Olasupo in Lagos on the 5th of March, 1995 before it later moved to its present assalatu prayer ground at Alawusa Central Mosque in Lagos.¹¹ In view of the fast increase in the number of its members and the provision of the constitution that: "it shall be lawful for the society to establish branches in any part of Nigeria or other countries".¹² Offa Branch of the association emerged a pioneer branch¹³ and other branches followed among which is the Ilorin Branch.

The idea of introducing NASFAT to Ilorin was first mooted by some few Muslim brothers on 30th December, 2001. The brothers, because of their contact with some members of NASFAT at Lagos especially, those who are indigenes of Ilorin such as the pioneer National Secretary of the association, Alhaji Yinka Yahya, were fascinated into the establishment of the society in Ilorin.¹⁴ The idea was not actualized until when, in the month of February, 2002, the group commenced its prayer session in a central mosque opposite the Kwara state stadium in Ilorin. With the fast growth of the society, the central mosque of the Kwara state college of education, Ilorin was chosen as the next assalatu venue. The society was formerly inaugurated on the 12th of October, 2002, barely ten months after the society commenced its assalatu on its permanent site at kilometer 4, Ilorin-Ogbomoso express way.¹⁵ The objective of the formation of the association agrees with the general objectives of the association which include:

- 5.1 To bridge the gap, both educational and spiritual, between the elites and the Islamic scholars (*ULAMA 'A*) through the creation of a well lubricated channel of communication to serve as a basis for effective interaction and exchange of ideas
- 5.2 To create a conducive atmosphere for the unity of members irrespective of status, race, gender or color and to strengthen in them the true Islamic spirit of brotherhood and absolute faith in Allah.

- 5.3 To facilitate access to sound Islamic and western education by establishing libraries and educational institutions and also promoting scholarship and academic research by and for Muslims
- 5.4 To promote and propagate the cause of Islam and make conscious Muslims by building mosques, teaching and educating members and the society at large on Islamic ethics and values
- 5.5 To promote and enhance the health, economic well being and welfare of members by building hospitals and establishing and promoting business based on Islamic principle
- 5.6 To assist the less privileged in the society irrespective of their religious beliefs, colour, gender and race within the limits of the resources of the society
- 5.7 To promote policies and programmes that will encourage beneficial relationships amongst members of the society in particular, other Islamic organizations and humanities in general
- 5.8 To undertake the production of the holy Qur'an and other Islamic materials and literature in print and multimedia forms
- 5.9 To support all meaningful and legally accepted activities for the advancement of Islam in Nigeria and worldwide
- 5.10 To undertake other activities which are beneficial to mankind¹⁶

Da'wah Activities of NASFAT, Ilorin Branch

Pursuant to the stated national *da'wah* activities of NASFAT which are:

- Prayer/lecture session every Sunday morning from 8.30 a.m to 12.30 p.m
- Observance of *Tahajjud* (midnight remembrance of Allah and prayers) on the first and third Friday of every month from 10.00p.m till the observance of *subh* prayer
- Arabic and Islamic classes for children and adults to learn the holy Qur'an and to inculcate Islamic values
- Commemoration of major Islamic festivals such as Ramadan, *Eid-il-Kabir*, *Eid-il-Fitr*, etc.

- Publication of monthly bulletin 'NASFAT BULLETIN' and a quarterly magazine 'THE VICTORY' for the education and enlightenment of members and the general public.
- Weekly *usrah* session
- Economic empowerment and skills building for members and *Da'wah* on Television, Radio and Print Media
- Scholarship awards to students in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions
- Welfare visitation to the less privileged homes¹⁷

In fulfillment of the provision of Qur'an 3:104, the Ilorin branch of NASFAT constituted a *da'wah* committee to oversee the *da'wah* activities of the society. *Al-Hilal* Committee was equally constituted to monitor all those that revert into Islam through the society. This committee on converts works in conjunction with the Guidance and Counseling Committee to make sure that the welfare of the new converts is adequately taken care of. Below are the outstanding *da'wah* activities of the branch.

The Sunday Prayer/lecture Session (8.30 am to 12.00 pm)

Like other branches of the society worldwide, the Ilorin branch of NASFAT conducts prayer/lecture session every Sundays of the week. In the recent period, the branch introduced a new dimension by interchanging the weekly lecture with (special) prayer in view of the fact that members have more interest in supplication than lecture and whenever a lecturer commences lecture, some of them are seen leaving the prayer ground before the departure time. The lateness of members to the prayer ground in the morning equally informed the introduction of a supererogatory prayer (*salatut tashih*) between 8.00am and 8.30 am.¹⁸ With this strategy, the association is able to retain its members for a period of three hours and thirty minutes.

Observance of Tahajjud (midnight remembrance of Allah and prayers)

The observation of the mid-night supererogatory prayer in congregation is one of the *da'wah* activities of NASFAT. This activity, unlike any other *da'wah* activity of the association, received condemnation from scholars majorly because of the involvement of women at an hour when they should be in-door with their husbands. The branch of the society still retains the activity despite this condemnation in view of the fact that it is considered a better way of elevating the members spiritually. More so, it is considered a better alternative for some of the Muslim women who sneak out of their husband's houses to attend the Christians night vigil. However, women are warned not to attend the programme without the consent of their husbands and as against the national standard of twice in a month, the *tahajjud* is reduced to once in a month¹⁹

The Sundays Arabic and Islamic Classes

The branch has attained a number of successes in the education of its members. Three batches of graduates of the recitation of the Qur'an have been celebrated with married women outnumbering men. Graduates of the Qur'an schools still proceed to study the meaning of the Qur'an, traditions of the Prophet (s.a.w) and some elementary aspects of the Arabic grammar. Currently, the Qur'anic school has a population of up to twenty students and all of them are women.²⁰ A separate class is organized for children. Children in this class are in hundreds and they are divided into two classes for the purpose of convenience in managing them. Majority of the children in this class are those who attend the prayer with their parents but are not mature enough to stay with the elders. The teachers keep them busy with some Islamic rhymes and teachings throughout the *asalat* period²¹

Economic Empowerment and Skills Building for Members

One of the latest innovation in the branch association is its empowerment scheme which takes different dimensions among which is the free training of interested members on the production of materials such as perfume, soap and air fresheners. Others with small scale businesses are given short term interest-free loans to enable them expand their businesses while some are trained in catering services. Even though, majority of the beneficiaries are women, the society has succeeded in wiping the tears of poverty from the face of some Muslims through this programme.²²

Da'wah on Television, Radio and Print Media

Eventhough, invitation to the way of Allah through preaching is considered the ultimate *da'wah*, the commitment of NASFAT, Ilorin branch to this aspect is quite insignificant. Unlike when the association started in Ilorin with *da'wah* activities on television and radio especially during the months of Ramadan, the branch of the society no longer sponsors lectures on television and radio. The excuse given is that there are a number of public lectures all over the town during Ramadan hence, resources to be used for such lectures should be diverted to the feeding of the destitute during the evening hours of the month.²³ When inquired whether the association participates in the public lecture during the month or any other time, it was confirmed that the association neither organizes public lectures in the town nor visit villages for *da'wah*. The *da'wah* chairman confirmed that he passed a One-Year-*Da'wah*-Activity proposal to the executive of the association in November, 2014 and the proposal centers on open lectures in villages and other activities for the whole year of 2015 but up till the month of May 2015, the proposal is denied consideration²⁴

Welfare Visitation to the Less Privileged Homes

Among the laudable *da'wah* activities of the association is the visitation to the less privilege homes. The Ilorin branch of the society has a programme of visitation to the inmates in the prisons, the motherless homes and the hospitals. This programme, as laudable as it is, is limited to the month of Ramadan and it is the Ramadan committee of a year that designs the modality for the visitation and what shall be given to the less privileged.²⁵

An Examination of the *Da'wah* Activities of the Branch Association

A study of the *da'wah* activities of the association reveals that the association sets out to unfold the beauty of Islam by inviting people to Islam using divergent strategies such as:

1. Educating members of the association both western and Islamic Education
2. Bringing Muslims under the same umbrella of understanding
3. Putting the welfare of the Muslims in the fore front.

With the adoption of the divergent strategies, the association is already working towards achieving its aim of developing an enlightened Muslim society nurtured by a true understanding of Islam for the spiritual upliftment and welfare of mankind and it equally agrees with part of the provision of Qur'an 16:125 that enjoins that invitation to the way of Allah should be with wisdom but unfortunately, justice is not done to the second part which enjoins fear preaching. The Sundays lectures at the prayer ground can definitely not fill this vacuum because:

- 1- Information reveals that the Sunday lectures is lacking consistency in the present day. It is now mostly replaced with supplication in congregation which is led by a member of the mission board
- 2- Most of those at the prayer ground are convinced Muslims. Muslims in surrounding villages are already being taken away by the Christian missionaries because no Muslim missionary goes to them to explain the religion of Islam to them.
- 3- More than one hundred non Muslims have being baptized at the prayer ground and less that ten percent still remain with the society or with Islam because they embraced Islam not on conviction by words of Allah but because of their desire to associate with a flourishing organization.²⁶
- 4- The provision of Qur'an 41:33 is that, no any other means of propagating the religion of Allah could supersede preaching the word of Allah. Even when Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) was raised as a messenger, his first assignment was to preach the word of Allah as contained in Qur'an 74:2.

Conclusion

This paper has established that NASFAT is one of the non governmental faith based organizations (FBO) with capacity strength of millions of members scattered all over the world. The society emerged as a solution to the problem of Muslims mass conversion to Christianity. Having recognised the vital role this great association is playing in giving a remedy to some socio-religious problems and its areas of weakness. This paper hereby recommends that:

- 1- The activities of the organization should be extended to remote areas of the country
- 2- Public lecture should be given priority
- 3- Radio and television programmes should be extended beyond Ramadan period
- 4- The branch should encourage publication of Islamic literatures for the education of the masses
- 5- Members of the society should be made to know that observation of a supererogatory prayer is better observed individually at home than in congregation at the outskirts of the town
- 6- *Tahajjud* in Islam is not expected to take over the whole night, all verses on it and traditions of the Prophet confirm that one should deny himself the night rest for just a fractional part of the night. This fact should be explained to members.

It is of the paper's view that if the association should adopt the above recommendation, it would be a better ambassador of Islam among the Muslims and non Muslims

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- ²⁰ An oral interview with Alhaj Ismail Burhanuddin Isa, a member of the mission board deployed to the teaching of the students in the NASFAT class. Aged 35years. Interviewed on 10th May, 2015.
- ²¹ An interview with Alhaji Jamiu AbdulRaheem, the assistant education secretary of the association. Aged 56 years
- ²² A submission made by Alhaji Daud Gbolagade, the coordinator for Ali group, NASFAT, Ilorin branch
- ²³ The Dawah chairman of the association, Alhaj AbdulWahab Shittu made this submission when interviewed on 3rd May, 2015
- ²⁴ An oral interview with the Da'wah chairman, Alhaj AbdulWahab Shittu on 3rd May, 2015. Aged 43
- ²⁵ An oral interview with the Da'wah chairman...
- ²⁶ This is the position of Hajia Khadijah, the Chairperson of Hilal committee when interviewed on 10th April, 2015