

**A Theological Inquiry into the Nigerian Baptist  
Convention's Praxis of "Separation of Church and  
State" in the Quest for Fulfilling the Great Commission**

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**ABSTRACT**

The praxis of separation of Church and State is one major principle among the Baptists across the globe. This inquiry aims at examining the theology of this statement of faith and its relevance to the fulfillment of the Great Commission within the context of the Nigerian nation. The current socio-religiopolitical dynamics of the governments of the day with their attendant challenges of the culture of nepotism of governments, an unimaginable spate of killings of the Christians, and the impunity of the Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen Islamic sects make this investigation imperative. The writer employed diachronic approaches in this enquiry to investigate biblical accounts of God's redemptive work across the twelve fundamental chronological stages of the Bible. More so, the paper generally examined the principle of separation of Church and State with specific attention on the context of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The paper also considered the general overview of the Great Commission and its fulfillment in Nigeria with primary concentrations on its meaning, contents and inhibitions within the context of the study. In the end, the paper inquired God's missionary activities across the twelve stages to identify possible dichotomy in the divine agenda for the redemption of mankind. The writer, therefore, observed that Baptists' praxis of this type is extraneous to God's revelation to mankind and His missionary activity beginning

from the creation stage to the period of the epistles. It was also observed that if this dichotomy subsists, the Church would betray God's trust in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

**Keywords:** Theological Inquiry, Separation of Church and State, Nigerian Baptist Convention, and the Great Commission

## INTRODUCTION

The praxis of Separation of Church and State is one major standpoint that marks the Baptists across the globe. It is a pointer to a fundamental happening in the history of the Church - the unhealthy relationship between the Catholic Church and Roman government of the medieval Age headed by Papacy and Emperor respectively.<sup>465</sup> The union between these bodies suffered constant frictions as the pope involved in the affairs of the State and the emperor also waded into the matters of the Church. The untamed passion that frequently engulfed the two apex leaders in their search for political hegemony over the affairs of the empire was the bane of the problem. Needham N.R. named this situation: "The Catholic Church in Crisis."<sup>466</sup>

The early Church fared better in the pursuit of the Great Commission in the previous centuries, although it was always marked with trials and persecutions as many Christians suffered martyrdom. Justo L. Gonzalez presents persecutions as the most dramatic kind of witnessing of the early Christians.<sup>467</sup> However, the Church later became weak and corruption finally crept into her internal life. Given all this, the body of Christ became irrelevant in her God-given missions to the empire. The situation remained until the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. With this awareness, it is natural for Baptist to detest a repeat of history of this kind, especially in Nigeria.

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<sup>465</sup> Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (The Judson Press, 1950), 28.

<sup>466</sup> N.R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power*, Part Two: The Middle Ages (London: Grace Publications Trust, 2005), 373.

<sup>467</sup> Justo L Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, Volume 1 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 98-99.

Nonetheless, can the Church with separation of this kind survive the Jihadist movement in Nigeria which seeks to dominate the political space? Given the fact that Baptist is a major Christian denomination in the nation, what will become of the Christian faith and the fate of its adherents shortly with the attendant challenges to the long-term neglect of politics by the Church? This paper proposes that this Baptist principle is completely alien to the revelation of God's person and activity in human history. The statement of faith is thereby not theological and should be jettisoned for being biblically inadequate to the fulfillment of the divine commission in the Nigerian nation. This inquiry employs diachronic approaches that investigate the theology of blocks of canonical writings in their chronological order.<sup>468</sup>

### CONCEPT OF SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

The people called Baptists have their origin in England and Holland as far back as early 17<sup>th</sup> Century. They were shaped by the reform movements of the dissidents like the Puritans, Separatists, and Ana-Baptists. The Reformation Theology of the reformers like Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin and the English Bible had a great impact on them. A reflection of this reform is their adoption of Believers' baptism.<sup>469</sup>

Moreover, Baptists hold to the fundamentals of the Christian faith with a burning desire to hold to the teachings of the New Testament. Although they share many beliefs with other Christian denominations, they distinguish themselves with specific elements tagged "Baptist Distinctives."<sup>470</sup> Robert G. Torbet identifies six and regards them as vital parts of the identity of the people, namely, the sacred scriptures as the sole norm for faith and practice, the New Testament Church

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<sup>468</sup> S.O. Olagunju, *A Concise Introduction to New Testament Theology* (Iyana Ipaja: P & G Publishers, 2014), 14.

<sup>469</sup> Moses Olatunde Oladeji, *The People Called Baptists and their Distinctive Beliefs* (Mapo: Bounty Press Limited, 2010), 2.

<sup>470</sup> "Baptist Distinctives," <http://www.angelfire.com/la/jlush/baptist.html> <accessed on 24/01/20>

composed of baptized believers, the priesthood of believers and the autonomy of the local church, and the principle of religious liberty and the separation of church and state.<sup>471</sup> Torbet regards all these fundamentals as basic principles that mark the people. The historian also advances that Baptist Church is a religious organisation whose founding fathers were part of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century radical Protestant Movement.<sup>472</sup> Again, these distinctive elements are also presented with the use of the acronym BAPTISTS, namely, Biblical authority, Autonomy of the local church, Priesthood of all believers, Two ordinances, Individual soul liberty, Saved (regenerate) baptized membership, Two offices, and Separation of church and state.<sup>473</sup>

This section seeks to examine the last of these distinctive beliefs. Separation of Church and State implies that God put in place both the Church and the civil governments for different purposes. The Church is established to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) while the civil government is to ensure peace and tranquility in society (Romans 13:1-7). It is, therefore, expected of both entities to stay within their sphere of operations without any interference and alliance of any form.<sup>474</sup> This policy aims at discouraging a repeat of what happened in the Middle Ages which Oladeji tags: “Secularization of the Church.”<sup>475</sup> According to Torbet, Emperor Constantine the Great of the fourth century A.D., whose conversion to the Christian faith brought about the union, tagged religion as a section of the state and deeply involved in matters of theological and organizational disputes for political stability.<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Torbet, 16-34.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>473</sup> “Eight Baptist Distinctives,” <http://cornerstonebaptist-tyro.com/distinctive.aspx> <accessed on 24/01/20>

<sup>474</sup> “Eight Baptist Distinctives,” <http://cornerstonebaptist-tyro.com/distinctive.asp>.

<sup>475</sup> Oladeji, 110.

<sup>476</sup> Torbet, 28.

Similarly, separation of this kind, on the one hand, implies that the State has no right to interfere with the religious beliefs and faith and practices of any religious organization like the Baptists. The Church, on the other hand, should not expect any grants or supports of any kind from the State either. With this principle, Torbet justifies the acceptance of tax exemption on religious organizations from the government on the ground that religion renders a lot of benefits to the State. More so, church property is not profit-oriented and members of the church are already paying tax.<sup>477</sup> The meaning of this statement of faith is general to all Baptists without variation of any kind in any land, including the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

However, with an adequate understanding of the genesis of this statement of belief with its contents and the contextual socio-religiopolitical state of the Nigerian nation of this time, the weaknesses of this principle easily come to the fore. First, this writer identified that the principle is reactionary for it was a direct response to a crisis in Church history. In other words, its emergence was not informed by direct critical analysis of scriptures. Thus, it becomes imperative to subject it to God's self-disclosure of His redemptive activity in human history. Second, separation of Church and State is an existential problem that raises many questions with little or no answers. Are members of the Church not part of the State as citizens? If yes, why has God designed it this way if not to complement each other? If the existence of the Church is for the State, and vice-versa, why is a separation of this kind? Third, Jesus Christ, while praying for His disciples says, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it" (John 17:16, NIV). This scriptural text raises a semantic problem in the mind of an average Christian. However, is being not of the world tantamount to not being part of the world? The answer is no for the concept of the "world" in this context implies cultural practices of the evil people.

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<sup>477</sup> Ibid, 30.

The writer is not advocating for the use of the State fund to promote the Christian faith in any way or justifying the idea, although it is not out of place for the Church to accept such grants since the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof (Psalm 24:1). The Church should, however, go about financial gratifications of any type from the government legitimately if given. She should also expend the same appropriately to propagate God's Kingdom without bringing ridicule on Christ. The writer's concern at this juncture is how the Church in Nigeria will survive the Jihadists who are ill-bent to Islamize the nation along with other African nations at all cost in subjecting the continent to the rule of Sharia. This is contained in the Abuja Declaration of 1989, the communiqué issued after the Islamic conference held in Abuja between 24<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> November with representatives from all member nations in Africa.<sup>478</sup>

### **FULFILMENT OF THE GREAT COMMISSION IN NIGERIA**

The need to fulfill the Great Commission in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The resolution of the Muslims as contained in the Abuja Declaration and various activities of the Jihadists taking place by the day reflect this need. Part of the declaration says, "Muslims should support economic relations with Islamic areas worldwide. It noted that Muslims in Africa had been deprived of rights to be governed under sharia law and they should strengthen their struggle to reinstate it."<sup>479</sup> It is noteworthy to declare that politics is prime to religion in Islam; it is the heart of any nation.<sup>480</sup> How then can the Baptists whose primary concern is to salvage human lives from sin withstand this agenda without subjecting her policy statement to a necessary review?

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<sup>478</sup> "The Abuja Declaration And the Islamization of Nigeria," In Otedo News Update, Jan. 22, 2015, <https://ihuanedo.ning.com/m/group/discussion?id=<accessed on 27/01/2020>>

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Hamid Reza Nikookar and Seyed Hassan Jaafarian Sooteh, "Euthanasia: An Islamic Ethical Perspective," *European Scientific Journal* Vol. 2 (June 2014):180.

To say the least, Abuja declaration is a review of the aged-long Islamic evangelistic template of struggle with the sword in subjecting people to the rule of sharia. Various Jihadists' activities of bombings and killings in Nigeria are direct attempts to obtain political and economic power in reinstating the rule in the land. The question is what will become of the Great Commission of the Church in Nigeria if the policy of separation of church and state subsists?

The passion of God for the redemption of man is never in doubt in scripture for He is the Missionary per excellence. The entire world is His mission field. According to O.S. Oladejo-Babalola, God's redemptive agenda is global in focus. At a point in human history, God commissioned ancient Israel for the evangelization of the nations but the covenant people of Yahweh betrayed the trust. This necessitated the need for a "New Israel" as promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34, the promise that found fulfillment in the Church whose mandate is to fulfill the Great Commission.<sup>481</sup>

Scholars have investigated the Great Commission and have come up with findings relevant to the focus of this paper. According to S.A. Owoeye, the Great Commission, also known as evangelization, implies proclamation of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and intimating sinners with this redemptive work to reconcile them to God.<sup>482</sup> Also, Michael Adeleke Ogunewu noted two other elements. The need for converts to be made and added to the membership of a local church is one. In other words, the Great Commission is not fulfilled when the preaching of the message does not produce new converts. Efforts must also be made to bring the new Christians into the family of a local church.

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<sup>481</sup> Olafimihan Solomon Oladejo-Babalola, "Israel as "Servant of Yahweh" in Isaiah 42:18-25 as a Paradigm for Global Evangelization Today," In *Global Evangelization and the Challenges for Contemporary Church*, Michael Adeleke Ogunewu and Adedayo Oladele Odesola, eds. (Ogbomoso: Publishing Unit, The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, 2018), 220.

<sup>482</sup> S.A. Owoeye, "Evangelization and Electro-Media Technology among the Pentecostal Churches in Yorubaland," *JARS* Vol.16 (2002): 125.

Furthermore, Ogunewu identified two necessary dimensions to the Great Commission, namely, *kerygmatic* and *didactic* parts. The former dimension targets conversion of sinners to the Christian faith by the Gospel while the latter is the teaching aspect of the Great Commission to make the new Christians disciples of Christ.<sup>483</sup> These two sides are of equal importance and are fundamental to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. However, the ecumenical Church is deficient in the second dimension greatly and cannot afford to continue this way especially in Nigeria if the New Israel would not fail like ancient Israel.

Apart from the problems which Christians have been suffering from Boko Haram sect for years, the Islamist Fulani herdsmen also have essentially cultivated themselves a dangerous threat to the Christian faith in Nigeria. One contributory factor to this menace is the culture of nepotism of the government of the day whose major appointments have favored only one religion among the ranks of the service chiefs and ethnic people – Fulani in the north. A reflection of the effects of this situation is the impunity of the Jihadists whose activities receive no check from governments. This has greatly contributed to the tension in the land especially in the Christian dominated southern Nigeria. According to Caroness Cox Briefing Report published in February 2018, dozens of Christians were killed by the Nigerian Government airstrikes as helicopters and jets bombed houses, targeting civilians in villages already under the Islamist Fulani extremists' attacks.<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>483</sup> Michael Adeleke Ogunewu, "Media Ministry of Deeper Christian Life Ministry as Catalyst for World Evangelism," In *Global Evangelization and the Challenges for Contemporary Church*, Michael Adeleke Ogunewu and Adedayo Oladele Odesola, eds. (Ogbomoso: Publishing Unit, The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, 2018), 4.

<sup>484</sup> "Escalation of Attacks against Christians in Northern Nigeria," In Briefing Report, February 2018, *Baroness-Cox-Nigeria-Briefing-Report-Feb-2018.pdf*<accessed on 27/01/2020>.



To this writer, the bombing might be a mistake but why was it from the military whose main responsibility is to protect the territorial integrity of the Nigerian people? Aside from this, the context of the victims (Christian dominated villages) also constitutes another doubt. This scenario is just a reflection of the adverse effects of complete neglect of politics by the Church to the hand of Muslims for decades. Will not the situation be more devastating and volatile against the Church if Baptists' policy of separation of Church and State persists? The question is reserved for Baptist leadership in Nigeria to answer.

## **A THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY TO BAPTIST PRAXIS**

The focus of this section is to investigate whether or not the Baptists' praxis of separation of Church and State is theologically relevant to the self-disclosure of God' person and mission. To achieve this goal, the writer considers biblical accounts of God's revelation across the twelve fundamental chronological stages of the history of the Bible as identified by H.L. Willmington<sup>485</sup> using the diachronic approaches. In this way, the writer investigates the content and contextual scopes of God's missionary activity in the history of the Church. The investigator also considers any possible dichotomy from God's perfective.

### **The Creation Stage (Genesis 1-11)**

At creation, three men are vital to God's self-revelation of His person and missionary activities on earth. These are Adam, Enoch, and Noah. Similarly, four events are of equal importance to note, namely, the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel.<sup>486</sup> These stories cover the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Willmington posits that the

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<sup>485</sup> H.L. Willmington, *Willmington's Guide to the Bible* (Yaba: Tyndale House Publishers: Edysyl Bookshop Limited, 1984), ix-x.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

chapters are central to the understanding of the remaining part of the Bible.<sup>487</sup>

Events contained in this portion are regarded as etiological stories which explain the origin or cause of all things in the universe. Thomas Patrick Arnold advances that Genesis 1:1-2:4a presents God as the “Ultimate ‘Ancestor,’” the Source of all things, namely, the heavens and the earth, day and night, the ground, water, the man, and the offspring of the male and female humans, open atmosphere, sea and land, days, seasons, and years, plant and animal life on earth, and marriage.<sup>488</sup> More so, George Eldon Ladd pictures God as the seeking, inviting, and Fatherly God in His missionary activity through Christ Jesus.<sup>489</sup> He is equally presented as the judging God.<sup>490</sup> This section also contains the beginning of evil in the created world (chapter 3) and hostility between Cain (farmer) and Abel (herdsman) in chapter 4, among others.

The theology of the ancestral nature of God is not limited to a section of the created order but is global in scope. His search and invitation to sinners and Fatherly care for all are equally not limited. The same applies to His judgment which brings all to account at the end of the age. Event of the Fall and that of the flood similarly affect the created order in its entirety. Thus, the missionary activity of God was for the whole world at creation and dichotomy of any type was strange to the created order.

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

<sup>488</sup> Thomas Patrick Arnold, “A Theological Evaluation of Ten Major Creation Theories” (PhD Dissertation, Universiteit van die Vrystaat Bloemfontein, 2007), 26-27.

<sup>489</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Revised Edition, Donald A. Hagner, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 80-85

<sup>490</sup> Ibid, 85-88.

### **The Patriarchal Stage (Genesis 12-50; Job)**

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Job are the important men that appear at this stage. Abraham is regarded as the second of the seven greatest men ever lived on earth. These men are the following: Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul.<sup>491</sup> Everyone must understand that the twelve chronological stages of the Bible presented by Willmington is an integer, a complete whole. Thus, they are all developmental stages of God's mission. The patriarchal era was, therefore, God's missionary phase to create a new and peculiar nation for Himself such that would reach the nations with God's redemptive love. According to Tokunboh Adeyemo, Genesis is divided into two broad sections, namely, the general dealing of God with mankind (1:1-11:26) and His dealing with His special covenant people of Israel (11:27-50:26).<sup>492</sup>

The writer observed classification of the human race into two at this juncture: Israel and the nations (Gentiles). Is this God's perspective or that of the writer(s) or editor(s) of Genesis? To understand this, what exactly was the reason for this dichotomy? God employed the Israelites, whose history began with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (their human ancestors), to reach out to the nations. Therefore, the separation only existed in the mind of the Hebrews as represented by the writer(s) of Genesis. This separation cannot be from God whose emphasis is the unity of the created order.

### **The Exodus Stage (Exodus – Deuteronomy)**

This stage is the period of forming and preparing Israel for their God-given task - world evangelization of the nations. According to Willmington, the period covered the events of the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy within some 325 years.

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<sup>491</sup> Willmington, 36.

<sup>492</sup> Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., "Genesis," *Africa Bible Commentary (ABC Commentary); A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars* (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 9.

Notable men of this period are Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua. The following events are key to this developmental stage of the people: Israel's captivity and deliverance from Egypt by Moses (Ex.1-14), Israel's failure to enter the land of Canaan due to unbelief (Num. 13-14), Manna's appearance (Ex.16:14), Sabbath's institution (Ex.16:23-30), the giving of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:3-17), the Tabernacle's building (Ex. 40), Israel's aimless wilderness wandering (Num. 14:33-34), Moses' sin and death (Num.20:7-13; Deut. 34:5-8), and the emergence of Joshua as Moses' successor (Num.27:15-23; Deut. 34:9).<sup>493</sup> According to Gordon Wenham, Moses is not only traditionally believed to be the leading player in most of these books, but he is also the recipient of all the laws from Exodus to Numbers. Chapter 31:24 of Deuteronomy also attests to it that Moses is the preacher of the second law.<sup>494</sup>

The position of this writer on the preceding stage also holds for this. The separation of Israel was exclusively for service; Yahweh wanted to reach the nations through them. At this developmental stage, therefore, they were under God's preparation for the divine mandate in Egypt and wilderness as they anticipated the fulfillment of the promise of land – the Promised Land in Canaan. Thus, their settlement was Canaan while the rest of the nations were their mission field. Israel, therefore, had to relate with the nations, and vice-versa, in reaching them for God.

### **The Conquest Stage (Joshua)**

The conquest stage comprises of all of the events in the Book of Joshua covering 25 years. Notable among these events are Israel's invasion, conquest, and settlement of Canaan Land which Willmington called Palestine. Joshua is the counterpart to the book of Exodus as the latter describes how God led His people out of Egypt

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<sup>493</sup> Willmington, 64.

<sup>494</sup> Gordon Wenham, "Pentateuchal Studies Today," *Themelios: An International Journal for Students of Theological and Religious Studies* 22.1 (October 1996): 3.

under intense preparation while the former explains how He took them into the land rich with milk and honey,<sup>495</sup> a figurative expression of abundance of blessings. Israel started their missionary campaign in earnest with the salvation of Rahab (Jos. 6:25), a harlot woman from Jericho<sup>496</sup> who became part of the lineage of the Messiah in the New Testament (Matt. 1:5-16). Thus, the idea of the unity of mankind is also in view at this developmental stage.

### **The Judges Stage (Judges; Ruth, I Samuel 1-7)**

The history of ancient Israel is remarkable during the period of the Judges. Willmington named it the "Dark ages" of the nation of Israel for it was the most turbulent period in their national history.<sup>497</sup> Also, Elmer A. Martens advances that it was a period of religious infidelity when Israel abandoned Yahweh for the worship of Ba'al, the Canaanite god of fertility and rain.<sup>498</sup> The earliest appearance of the infidelity of this type took place at Shittim when the Israelites were en route to the Promised Land. They indulged in sexual immorality with the Moabites women who later lured them to worship Ba'al of Peor (Num. 25:3, 5). Peor is regarded as a phase of Ba'al whose worship was marked with awful licentiousness.<sup>499</sup> They sometimes went further to worship Ashtoreth (Judges 6:25-32), the lady of the Sea and partner of *El* as presented in the Ugaritic Cycle of Cosmogonic Myths.<sup>500</sup>

Moreover, Willmington identified seven notable individuals who played major roles in this developmental stage of the nation that

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<sup>495</sup> Willmington, 86.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>498</sup> Elmer B. Smick, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)*, eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), 327.

<sup>499</sup> "Baal," *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*, Bibleworks 7 Database, par. 1.

<sup>500</sup> H.L. Ginsberg, trans., "Ugaritic Myths, Epics, and Legends," <http://www.ericlevy.com/Revel/Intro2/ANET%20Ugarit%20Epics.PDF> <Accessed on 29/9/15>, 129.

covered a space of about 300 years; they are namely, Gideon, Samson, Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, Eli, and Samuel.<sup>501</sup> In addition to these was Deborah. According to Elmer, the primary role of the Judges at this time was to deliver the people from the tragic consequences of their infidelity with Ba'al which officially became a state religion of northern Israel during the period of Omrides (1 Kgs 16:31).<sup>502</sup>

Given all this, the children of Israel collapsed their artificial wall of separation which was extraneous to the perspective of Yahweh but for their religious pride. They abandoned Yahweh and continually lived a cycle of life of falling and rising. They lost their identity and made their mission mandate of no effect in their God-given field of action. Although Yahweh was a loving Father, His justice would not allow Him to spare the rod. He, therefore, employed the same neighbouring nations to execute His judgment on His covenant people whom Isaiah presents as "servants of Yahweh." According to Oladejo-Babalola, Israel is so named for they had what the scholar termed: "Universal mission mandate to the nations."<sup>503</sup> Thus, Christians cannot afford to be careless with their missions for there are dangers everywhere around. The Israelites lost sight with God and with their mandate and found themselves a prey to sin. Therefore, a life of commitment, Christian discipline and godly relationship are imperative for the contemporary Church.

**The United Kingdom Stage (I Samuel 8-31; 2 Samuel; I Kings 1-11; I Chronicles; 2 Chronicles 1-9; Psalms; Proverbs; Ecclesiastics; Song of Solomon)**

This stage presents the history of Israel on missions during the reigns of the first three kings for 120 years: Saul, David, and Solomon.<sup>504</sup> According to Eckhard J. Schnabel, the global dimension of the

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<sup>501</sup> Willmington, 86.

<sup>502</sup> Elmer, 327.

<sup>503</sup> Oladejo-Babalola, 224.

<sup>504</sup> Willmington, 104.

Israelites also reflects in the wisdom literature of Psalms. Their relationship to the nations was global as remarked in two ways. They challenged the nations to praise the LORD (Psa.47:2; 66:8; 96:7; 117:1) and to render service to Him (Psa. 11; 102:23). They also implored them to fear the LORD (Psa. 102:16). Schnabel also advances that the mission of Israel was to witness about God's great works and sovereignty among the nations ((Psa. 9:12; 96:3, 10; 105:1).<sup>505</sup>

Thus, the once existed wall of partition that collapsed during the period of the Judges was also conspicuously missing at this time. This is quite evident in the diplomatic relationships between Israel and the neighbouring nations especially during the reigns of David and Solomon. Examples of these nations are Tyre and Ophir (1 Kings 9:26-28), Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13), Arabia (1 Kings 10:15), and Egypt (1 Kings 10:28-29). Some of the conflicts and wars fought during the reign of Saul and David were direct execution of God's judgments by His people over the nations like the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:1-9) and the Philistines (1 Sam.17:1-58). David also executed Yahweh's judgment on the following nations among others: Philistines, Moab, Zobah, Syria, Ammon, Amalek, and Edom (2 Sam. 8:1-14). Israel also experienced similar treatments from the nations. The death of Saul by the Philistines (1 Sam.31:1-13) is an example. Yahweh's executing judgments against the nations was part of the mission mandate of God's people in the Old Testament to express Yahweh's sovereignty not only over Israel but the nations also. Therefore, this mission focus was global in content and context without any dichotomy of any kind.

### **The Chaotic Kingdom Stage**

This stage comprises of the following Books: 1 Kings 12-22; 2 Kings 1-17; 2 Chronicles 10-36; Obadiah; Joel; Jonah; Amos; Hosea;

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<sup>505</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Israel, the People of God, and the Nations," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Jets 45/1 (March 2002): 35.

Micah; Isaiah; Nahum; Zephaniah; Habakkuk; Jeremiah; and Lamentations. Willmington advances that the period lasted for about 325 years (930 B.C.-605 B.C.). It began with a civil war that broke the nation into two opposing kingdoms, namely, Israel in the north and Judah in the south with Jerusalem as its capital. More importantly, is their tragic ends through the invasion of Assyrian and Babylonian people.<sup>506</sup> Oladejo-Babalola regards these ugly situations in 722 B.C. and 586 B.C. respectively as direct consequences of the failure of God's people.<sup>507</sup> Yahweh scattered them amidst the nations to realise their errors, amend their ways, and reach out to the people in the midst of whom they were for missions. This is the wisdom of Yahweh and an expression of His justice and sovereignty over the then world.

Thus, separation of the world into church and state is strange to the divine agenda of God just like the artificial terminology of Israel and the nations. One danger with a mentality of this kind is a display of lip service to missions which seriously affected the Israelites for customizing Yahweh to themselves alone.

### **The Captivity Stage (Ezekiel; Daniel)**

The events of the captivity stage began with what Psalm 137 describes and ended with the content of Psalms 126. One major achievement of this stage is the purging of God's people of idolatry in exile, specifically in Babylon which Willmington termed "the city of idolatry."<sup>508</sup> The Jews failed to carry out their mission mandate in Zion until they lost their freedom to the nations whose cultural value was pagan, godless and sinful. God told them specifically to marry and give their sons and daughters in marriage for 70 years has been allotted for them in exile (Jer. 25:11; 29:10-11; Daniel 9:2; Zech. 1:12-17; 7:5-7). Initially, they trivialized the exile and made Jeremiah

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<sup>506</sup> Willmington, 140.

<sup>507</sup> Oladejo-Babalola, 220.

<sup>508</sup> Willmington, 210.



pay for his prophecies from Yahweh about their captivity (Jer.18:18). It took Ezekiel, whose ministry was among the exiles, for them to understand that going to exile was not for Yahweh's incapacitation but a punishment for their sins. The prophet established the sovereignty of Yahweh in their minds that Yahweh Himself sold them to their enemies.<sup>509</sup>

Thus, the temporary idea of separation of the Old Testament into Israel and the nations might be the basis of Israel's failure. Yahweh, therefore, made use of their experience in exile to finally cure them of this madness for better understanding of His missions in preparation for the fulfillment of the New Testament (Jer. 31:31-34) as necessitated by the failure of His OT people. After 70 years had expired and the exiles had been released, many of the Jews refused to return for they had become reputable in the affairs of their host empire. An example is the case of Daniel who served many kings like Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1-4), Belshazzar (Dan. 5, 7-8), and Darius of Persia (Dan. 6, 9, 11). Therefore, any attempts to continue with the separation of Church and State will bring the Church, especially the Baptists, to the error of the OT times.

### **The Return Stage (Ezra; Esther; Nehemiah; Zechariah; Malachi)**

This period presents the harassment of the returned Jews in the land of Palestine as recorded by Nehemiah. It also contains persecution of the remaining Jews in the Persian kingdom as analyzed in the Book of Esther. Two notable achievements of this period were the completion of the second Temple of the OT and final canonization of the OT Books. All this covered the space of 140 years.<sup>510</sup> In addition to all this was the Diaspora Judaism which had fully become part of the Jewish life by the end of this developmental stage. It paved the way for Christianity to thrive during the earthly ministry of Jesus and that

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<sup>509</sup>Sean A. Harrison et al, eds., "The Book of Ezekiel," *New Living Translation (NLT) Study Bible*. Second Ed, (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2008), 1313.

<sup>510</sup> Willmington, 244.

of the early Church through the establishment of synagogue worship.<sup>511</sup> Lawrence A. Hoffman presents more about worship in the synagogues.<sup>512</sup> Thus, the borderline between Israel and the nations was long gone for several non-Jews had gained the status of Jewish proselytes because of their passion for Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God of Israel. This development added value to the Christian faith when it emerged.<sup>513</sup>

### **The Gospel Stage (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)**

This stage succeeded in the return of the Jews from exile and began with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist to Zacharias in the Temple (Luke 1:11-20). It closed with the ascension of Jesus Christ the Son of the living God (Luke 24:51). Just as the OT started with man made in God's image (the first Adam) (Gen.1:26), the NT began with incarnated God in man's image (the last Adam - John 1:14).<sup>514</sup> All this covered a space of 35 years. The mission of Jesus was not limited to Palestine, the land of the Jews, but extended to the entire world as stated in John 3:16.

Sanders argues that Jesus intended to constitute a New Israel.<sup>515</sup> This is the NT Church birthed on the Pentecost Day (Acts 2). Although His primary target was the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10:5-6), supposedly using the old template of the Jews, it was a matter of semantics and approach. If she could attend to the Canaanite woman and grant her request to heal her daughter after the initial castigation of her as a gentile, the meaning of His "lost sheep of the house of Israel" cannot

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<sup>511</sup> Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1968), 32.

<sup>512</sup> Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Worship and Cultic Life," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Volume 15, Ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), 445

<sup>513</sup> Sanders, E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 73.

<sup>514</sup> Willmington, 263.

<sup>515</sup> Sanders, 58.

be literal (Matt. 15:22-28). Truth be told, the Good News had to start with Israel for better understanding. However, He also kept His pace with the non-Jews as evident in His divine template to His disciples that had to start in Jerusalem, then in all Judea, in Samaria and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). The Church followed this template after the ascension of Christ. The approval of Jesus' execution on the cross by the Roman government has established the fact that the Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has outgrown what the Baptists adopted in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **The Early Church Stage (Acts)**

The period began with the experience of Pentecost and closed with the martyrdom of Apostle Paul within a space of 38 years. R. Wagner & K. Warner opines that Pentecost is a Christian holiday to commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit that gave birth to the Church in the New Dispensation. The event took place on the 50th day after the resurrection of Christ Jesus. This symbolizes far more than a mere celebration of the Jewish Passover which commenced at the Exodus stage of the OT times.<sup>516</sup> A.T. Lincoln advances that Pentecost indicates the universality of the mission given to the Church.<sup>517</sup> This stage is also a period of Christian witness. Willmington advances two main crusades, namely, the "greater Jerusalem crusade" headed by Apostle Peter (Acts 1-12) and the "global crusade" headed by Paul (Acts 13-28).<sup>518</sup>

Jerusalem crusade witnessed growth and development after Peter's preaching on the Pentecost day. It also witnessed trials and persecutions from the Jewish authority, leading to the death of

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<sup>516</sup> R. Wagner & K.

Warner, *What is Pentecost?* <http://www.dummies.com/religion/christianity/what-is-pentecost> [Accessed on 3/9/2017].

<sup>517</sup> A.T. Lincoln, "Pentecost," *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Development*, Ralph P. Martin & Peter H. Davids, eds (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 906.

<sup>518</sup> Willmington, 366.

Stephen (Acts 7:60)<sup>519</sup> and the scattering of the Jerusalem Church. One of what the Church achieved at this period was a revival of the Christian missions within the Greco-Roman world. The missionary activities of Paul and Barnabas took the Christian faith to many other parts like Spain (Rom.15:24).<sup>520</sup> Thus, there was nothing like separation of Church and State all through the early Church in the mind of the people of God who had Gentile Christians on the majority and their Jewish fellows on the minority. Although they had no number to shake the empire, they did this by their responses to various persecutions from the governments.

### **The Epistle Stage (Galatians – Revelation)**

The prominence of Paul among NT Christian writers is never in doubt. Willmington posits that Paul alone has at least 13 of the epistles to his credit. The conservative scholars believe that the apostle's first writing was to the Galatians,<sup>521</sup> instead of 1 & 2 Thessalonians which has been the speculation of some other scholars. Paul's letters provide information about the man himself. The apostle wrote most of these letters to churches planted by him, except his letter to the Romans; responding to various issues of concern happening in his absence.

In view of this, J.R. Michaels describes Pauline letters as his "second-best substitutes."<sup>522</sup> Michaels categorized these letters as follows: Capital letters (Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and Romans), Captivity or prison letters (Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon),

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<sup>519</sup> M. Reasonet, "Persecution," *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Development*, Ralph P. Martin & Peter H. Davids, eds (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 907.

<sup>520</sup> W.P. Bowers, "Mission," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid, eds (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 609.

<sup>521</sup> Willmington, 396.

<sup>522</sup> J.R. Michaels, "Paul in Acts and Letters," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid, eds (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 609.

and Pastoral letters (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus). Most of them are called “occasional documents” for they are apostle’s responses to some local challenges. An example is Paul’s Letter to the Romans written to the Christian community in Rome to prepare them for his visit after delivering relief packages to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:23-32).<sup>523</sup> Michaels’ attempt is not to exhaust the list for 1 & 2 Thessalonians are not part of the categorization.

Although the idea of separation of Jews and Gentiles is prominent in some of these letters, especially in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, the emphasis is on the unity of the two parties for Christ is one. The oneness of Christ is highly emphasised in most of the letters (Rom.12:4-5; 1 Cor. 1:11-13; 12:4-6, 12-14; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14-22) and at no time were the believers told to draw a line between the state and the Church for many of the Gentiles were part of the affairs of the State long before coming to Christ. Thus, the mentality of separating the Baptist Church from the State has no scriptural basis as far as this stage is concerned just like the previous ones.

## CONCLUSION

The writer subjected the Baptists’ principle of separation of Church and State to a theological investigation. The state of the Nigerian nation at this time informed this enquiry with specific emphasis on the plight of the Church as many of her members are under intense persecutions of various degrees in different parts of the country. Many, like Leah Sharibu, are kidnapped while several others are murdered for their faith in Christ. The worst part of the situation is the carefree attitude of the governments to the clarion calls of the Church. Given all this, what does the future holds for the Christian faith in Nigeria and what is the fate of the Christians today?

The writer observed that Baptists’ separation between Church and State is extraneous to God’s revelation to mankind and His

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid, 680.

missionary activity in Church history beginning from the creation stage to the period of the epistles. It was also observed that if this dichotomy subsists, the Church would betray the trust of God in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The Church may, therefore, suffer more persecutions in the hand of the State as punishments for her failure. The Church needs to learn from the Jews whose deportation to Babylon was Yahweh's punitive measure for failing to evangelize the nations. The Nigerian Baptists should understand that as much as God is a loving Father, He is also a judging God.

Again, Baptist people should know that it is God's desire to use the Church for the State and the State for the Church. However, separation of this kind has been limiting the Church in her mission enterprise to the State. As a result, part of the on-going persecutions from the State has been the divine execution of God's judgment on the Church for her revival. Therefore, the earlier the Nigerian Baptist Convention wakes up from her slumber, the better it is for the body of Christ in Nigeria.

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