Matthew 28:16-20 and the Challenges of Christian Mission in North Eastern Nigeria

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The Christian mission in North East Nigeria has been crippled by persecution and circumscription to freedom of religion from the Islamic terrorist group known as Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen. As a result, thousands of Christians have lost their lives and homes. Churches have been destroyed and deserted in the region. In this context, the work employed the historical-critical method of exegesis in interpreting Mtt 28:16-20 in the context Christian mission in North East Nigeria. The findings of the work show that Mtt 28:16-20 presents Jesus’ teaching on mission with a promise of his ever-abiding presence for his disciples. The disciples, including Christians, are assured that as they go in the name of Jesus, that Jesus (God) will continue to be with them. In the context of the widespread persecution and attacks against Christians in the north east of Nigeria, this work challenged Christians in the region to persevere and continually take active steps in the spread of the gospel irrespective of these setbacks.

Keywords: Matthew 28:16-20, Christian mission, North East Nigeria, great commission

Introduction

Although Christianity is a strong religious movement in Nigeria, Christians have always been victims of persecution in the northern part of the country. In recent times, the rise of militant and fundamentalist Islam in Nigeria, particularly in the North Eastern Nigeria, has added impetus to the level of violence against Christians in the area. According to geopolitical zoning of Nigeria, North Eastern Nigeria includes Adamawa, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe states. Some of these states, have always been hotbeds of religious violence, particularly between radical Islam and Christianity which is the minority religion in the zone. The rise of the so-called Islamist sect Boko Haram, which being translated as western education is evil, and its quest to establish an Islamic state based on strict application of the Sharia in the north eastern part of the country is a reality that has confronted the Nigerian government since 2009. Literatures (Kukah, 2014; Agbiboa, 2013a; Agbiboa, 2013b; Shikalam, 2012) abound on this, hence no need repeating the problems and activities of the sect here. Based on its purported ideology, the sect also aimed at exterminating Christianity in the region as the sect singled Christianity out as an enemy connected with western education or westernization which the group fights against. Thus, Christianity and Christians in this region have always been targeted and “marked for death”
particularly in contemporary times. As Open Doors (2017) reports, the situation in North Eastern Nigeria has become extreme because the people are suffering from the onslaughts of both Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen. In the report, a state of emergency was declared in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa (states in North East Nigeria) in 2013 largely because of Boko Haram attacks. Yet, this did not deter the activities of the sect.

The systematic destruction of Christian Churches in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states in particular are all testaments to the problem this sect poses for Christianity in that region. As a report has shown (Mounstephen, 2019), Christianity and its churches are in danger in North Eastern Nigeria. Quite recently, the kidnapping and subsequent killing of the regional Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Lawan Andimi of Michika in Adamawa in the region by Boko Haram sparked rage among Christians in Nigeria on the precarious nature of practicing Christianity in the region now (Olatunji, Onyedika, & Daka, 2020). This shows how practicing Christianity in that region has become very precarious in recent times.

Backed up with the problem of Boko Haram, is that of the Fulani herdsmen who are also terrorizing Christians in the region. Fulani herdsmen are those who come from a tribe called the Fulani and because of their pastoral lifestyle, seek for greener pastures for their animals. It was the effort to reduce the attack by Fulani herdsmen that made the president Mohammed Buhari to introduce RUGA policy (rural grazing area). The policy resulted in a controversy which was totally kicked against many Nigerian citizens. Fulani herdsmen use the invasion tactics. They settle in a particular area to dominate the area. They do not only seek to dominate an area for grazing but also seek to wipe out Christianity from that area. Ochab (2016) stated that the Fulani herdsmen seek dominance over territories and ultimately aim to eliminate the presence of Christians in the area. In addition, T. G. Ngbea and T. J. Ngbea (2019) averred that herdsmen use terror tactics to conduct jihad, displacing local communities from their land to make room for their herds, to occupy those lands and to spread Islam. In North East Nigeria, their attack is more predominant in Taraba state.

In midst of these, what can be made out of the text of Matt 28:16-20 in the context of North Eastern Nigeria as it relates to evangelism and the survival of the gospel of Jesus in the area? Of course, this pericope deals with the mandate given to Christians to go on and preach the gospel to the ends of the earth with an assurance of Jesus’ abiding presence while this is being done (Reid, 2009, p. 9). It is a text, as Kapolyo (2006, p. 196) pointed out, with imperative on Christians who are instructed to go all out on evangelism and convert nations of the world. In this regard, the aim of this work is to interpret the text of Matt 28:16-20 and show its hermeneutical relevance for evangelism in North Eastern Nigeria being threatened by Boko Haram and the herdsmen activities. Hence, this work is mainly contextual. The methodology adopted in this work is the historical-critical method of biblical exegesis which will help us deal with pertinent issues surrounding the text of study.

Brief Historical Background and Authorship of the Book of Matthew

In traditional belief, the book Matthew was written by one of the disciples of Jesus known as Mathew the tax collector (Reid, 2009, p. 1; Kapolyo, 2006, p. 131). According to this belief, Matthew wrote out of experience with his close work with Jesus as his master and the information he gathered from the author of the gospel of Mark who wrote before him (Chinwokwu, 2015, p. 83). Equally, as Chiwokwu (2015) points out, Matthew had access to a body of traditions (oral or written) which made his gospel narrative unique in his own way. Most of this tradition deals with his stance on the Jewish law as seen in Mtt 5-7 and other particular pericopes not seen in both Mark and Luke. Of course, Streeter (1924) had called this source of Mathew, “L”. In
terms of date, Mathew is mostly believed to have written around 70 AD (Reid, 2009, p. 2), after the fall of Jerusalem (cf 21:41-42; 22:7). Contentions on the place the gospel was written actually exist, with most favouring Antioch in Syria (Streeter, 1924; Meier, 1979; Dah, 2009), which is the place adopted in this work as the place of composition of the gospel because of its large concentration of the Jews in the first-century AD.

Just like its setting, the makeup of Matthean community has been a debate among scholars. Because of its interests in the Jewish law, some scholars believe that Matthew wrote for a predominant Jewish community (Davies, 1964). However, most scholars now believe that the Matthean community was mixed, including both Jews and Gentiles. For the researchers, this is the best position to be taken on the subject although it is to be added that the community must have been urban and prosperous judging by the fact that the issue of silver and gold was mentioned in the gospel about 28 times. The purpose of Mathew is to firstly present to the Jews in particular and the entire universe in general that Jesus Christ by his life, death, resurrection and ascension in his earthly ministry has come to fulfill the Old Testament scriptures as the messiah of mankind. The undertone of the great commission therefore is to raise and commission Jesus’ kind of personality who will take the gospel mandate both for the Jews and the gentiles to the whole universe (Rainer, 2015).

During the canonization of New Testament scriptures, the gospel of Matthew was placed first not as the first gospel but because of its Jewish background. Some Old Testament narratives about the genealogy of Jesus were given. So many Old Testament scriptures linking Old Testament and the New Testament were copiously quoted. First of the four New Testament gospels and, with The Gospels According to Mark and Luke one of the three so-called synoptics (i.e., those presenting a common view).

**Exegesis of Matt 28:16-120**

| The text in its original Greek | Researchers’ Translation |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Vs 16 Oi` de. e[ndeka maqhtai. evporeu,qhsan evij th.n Galilai,an evij to. o;roj ou- evta,xato auvtoi/j o` VIhsou/j| But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. |
| Vs 17 kai. ivdo,ntej auvto.n proseku,nhsan( oi` de. evdi, stasanÅ| And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. |
| Vs 18 kai. proselqw.n o` VIhsou/j evla,lhsen auvtoij le,gwn 
moi pa/sa evxousi,a evn ouvranw/j | And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”. |
| Vs 19 poreuqe,ntej ou= n maqhteu,sate pa,nta ta. e;cnh( bapti,zontej auvtoj, eivj to. o;noma tou/ | “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”. |
| Vs 20 dida,skontej aqvtoj threi/n pa,nta o[s sa evneteila, mhn u` mi/n\ | Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. |

**The Setting of the Text: Matt 28:16-20**

Location: The meeting of Jesus and His disciples were at a certain mountain in Galilee. Jesus, after his resurrection, had some of His disciples who do not believe that he actually resurrected from the dead (Matthew 28:16-17). Gills (1980) makes two propositions that this certain mountain has been a point of spiritual discourse between Jesus and His disciples including the beatitude where Jesus gave a sermon on the mountain. Probably Jesus has called them out as usual to give them another secret of the kingdom and this time around not as a dying master but as Risen Lord. He wants to hand over the responsibility of advancing the kingdom of heaven to the disciples. The political implication of coming to the mountain was to avoid the interference of the Jewish leaders who crucified him and was championing a kind of peddling rumour that he never resurrected (28:16-17). His disciple came and stole him was a common language among the Jews at that time. The spiritual
dimension while the mountain was chosen is that only those who have been called by God can be qualified for
the herculean task of the great commission (Macdonald, 1995). Jesus on this note decided to give appointment
to his own (the disciples) who have had a close work with him during his earthly ministries.

Characters

The Disciples

In Matthew 28:16, the number of disciples that came to him on the mountain was 11. One of them Judas
had betrayed him and died headlong. The other remaining eleven were living in fear before now and all of them
had deserted their master during passion. Their belief was that Jesus as the expected Messiah has come to grant
them political kingdom. They could not imagine their Master who had power to raise the dead and perform all
kinds of miracle being held captive by Jews leaders and crucified. The eleven were now the innermost circle
whose confidence needed to be boosted more by Jesus through his resurrection and commission.

Jesus

He is now the risen lord and has completed His assignment on earth and He is about to return to the father.
He is no longer going to submit Himself again to the Jewish leader’s scrutiny during His earthly mission. He
purposely allowed Himself to be humiliated by the Jewish authority not because He had no power but for the
scriptures to be fulfilled as a design for the salvation of man. The redemption of humans was the central
purpose of His coming and He has to bear any kind of shame to fulfill scriptures.

Now He has gone through every process to save humans and for this reason, all power and authority on
earth and in heaven has been given to Him. Now He is going back to the father. He needs to empower His
disciples and commission them to continue from where He stopped and even perform greater miracles. This
will make the Jews to realize politically and socially that Jesus they crucified is still alive in his disciples. He is
not dead because He will be with His disciples to the end of the earth. This is a great assurance to allay the fears
that caught some of them during Jesus trials, death, burial and resurrection.

Structure of Matthew 28:16-20

According to our structure, the text of study is outlined thus:

Verse 16: On going to the appointed mountain
Verse 17: The Eleven worship Jesus
Verse 18-20: The great commission

Our structure of the text is based on the identifiable themes within the pericope. Beginning from Verse 16,
we can isolate the theme of the disciples going to the appointed mountain to meet up with Jesus. Verse 17 tells
us about the worship of Jesus by the disciples which stands on its own while from verse 18-20 deals with the
great commission. The need for this structure is to allow us have a firm control over the exegesis and discuss
these themes accordingly.

A Close Reading of the Text

Verse 16. On Going to the Appointed Mountain

Jesus has already scheduled an appointment with His disciple to meet them at a certain mountain in
Galilee. The mountain according to Brown (2014, p. 203) is symbolic to Matthew since it was the same mount
that speaks of Jesus’ revelation in Mt 5:1. The charge for the eleven disciples to meet Jesus at a mountain
evokes the image of Jesus as the new Moses of Israel (Reid, 2009, p. 9). Of course the mountain narrative in Mathew had long been argued by Davies (1964) of showing that based on the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew had the intention of proving Jesus to be the New Moses of Israel. Here in this verse, such echoes is also invoked one more. It also indicates that even at death, Jesus, the crucified lord, once more stands tall as the new Moses of Israel once again on the mountain top.

**Verse 17. The Eleven Worship Jesus**

This verse shows the disciples of Jesus worshiping Him when they saw Him. The Greek word ἴδοντει Ιησοῦν, verb participle aorist active nominative masculine singular from ἴδω which means come, go or approach shows that Jesus and His disciple did not come at the same time. On their arrival, they saw Jesus approaching where they were. The risen lord at this pointing time, no longer moves with His disciples as usual probably since He has limited time to be with them before His ascension or His current body transformation will not warrant Him to have longer communication with men but in any case, all the power in heaven and on earth has been given to Him.

Of course Jesus being God shares in the divine power of the trinity but as a human Jesus, He was empowered from heaven using the Greek word ἐξουσιάζω, a which is noun nominative feminine singular, which means right to act or a delegated authority which He now transferred and conferred on the disciples who were somehow afraid of Jesus personality and doubtful of His resurrection (Reid, 2009, p. 9). The manner of worship is also not the interest of Matthew. What concerns him most was that the eleven worshipped Jesus, although it may be doubted if all did so with their hesitant and doubtful attitude.

**Verse 19-20. The Great Commission**

After the worship, Jesus addressed the eleven. Jesus statement is to prove to them He is the lord and nothing can stop the salvation programmed of man which is the sole reason of His coming. Jesus made a declaration using the Greek word ἐλάλησεν, verb indicative aorist active 3rd person singular from λαλέω which means sound or given sound. So the translation could read Jesus with an active sound speech, spoke to His disciples that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. This echoes Dan 7:14 where it was prophesied that all power and dominion was to be given to the son of man. The declaration was made openly to the hearing of everybody and such should be a big encouragement to the disciples or any other Christian on evangelism. All powers belong to God and as now been given to Jesus as the resurrected lord also. According to Meier (1979, p. 212) Jesus speaks “as the son of man coming to his church in a proleptic parousia”.

The disciple has been given authority and mandate to make more disciples for the kingdom of God. This is the first task Jesus had given to them as a whole (Ellison, 1988, p. 1154). The Greek word εὐπορεύθησαν, verb participle aorist passive nominative masculine plural from εὐπορέω meaning proceed or go forth shows there is no going back in great commission that was given to the disciples. It is world-wide commission. They should no longer be afraid of the Pharisees and Jewish authority. However, the assignment given to them was clearly spelt out. They are to make disciples of all the nations. The great commission is a universal mandate. Hence it is very unlike the narrowly viewed mission of the disciples to the lost house of Israel alone as seen in Mtt 10:5-6. It is not going to be discriminatory. Every race of the world needs salvation. They are to make disciples and to raise followers of Jesus who will in turn reproduce other disciples. By implication, their evangelistic mission should not be counterproductive. It is a progressive mission and no threat from the
opponents of the gospel will stop their evangelistic campaign.

In order to strengthen the faith of the new converts, they are to be baptized by the name of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Henry, 2001). This command is certainly a baptismal formula placed on the lips of Jesus having probably been developed by the church by the time Matthew wrote (Brown, 2014, p. 203; Reid, 2009, p. 90). This is also akin to the baptismal formula seen in Acts 2:38; 8:16. The name of the Father represents God who made them and welcomes all the disciples into His kingdom as children. Baptism through the Son, points to the work of redemption. Christ the Son of God died for the salvation of mankind and reconciled man to God and closed the chasm between man and God (Jamieson, 2017). By the Holy Spirit signifies empowerment and sanctification. The disciples are empowered and made whole by the power of the Holy Spirit. Henry (2001) shares the same view that those being engrafted into the new kingdom of God are being purged from their old sinful nature and are now given the power to live a new life. Life that will no longer live in sin. The disciples of Jesus Christ are to baptize the new converts into a biblical doctrine of universal justification (Keil, 2006).

V. 20 depicts Jesus instructing the disciples not to stop at baptizing new converts alone, but the need to teach them balanced Christian doctrine. The Greek word dida,skontej (verb participle) present active nominative masculine plural from dida,sk[w which means teach, is an act of instructing the new converts to keep firm all that he has taught them. The teaching should be a complete theology on Christian ethics and dogmatism (Gaebelien, 1988). That is to say it must touch all area of their living in a Christian community where sometimes you have mix multitude. The part of the teaching of course will be to endure persecutions for the sake of the gospel. They should not raise disciples that will abandon the gospel as they deserted Jesus Christ during His trials and persecution. However, we think that in addition to what Gaebelien stated above, the contents of what to be instructed can also be located within the context of Matthews five great discourses or as Brown (2014, pp. 203) puts it, the contents refers to all Matthew had narrated as seen in Mtt 26:13.

The word threi/n verb infinitive present active from threi[w meaning to keep is not just to obey all the things that Jesus has commanded them but to keep obeying firmly. Let the virtue of obeying the commandment become part of their regular life styles as followers of Christ. It is even in doing so that the people of the world will know that they are His disciple. Though Jesus was about to leave and return back to heaven, He has promised to be with them to the completion of the age. The Greek word used is suentelei,aj (noun genitive feminine singular) common from suentelei,a meaning completion or consummation of all things on earth when all the design and programme of great commission on earth have been accomplished. The being depicts that God will be with them in the face of death or persecution. The being of Jesus Christ is both in life and in death.

In other to let the eleven know that they are not alone in this task of proclaiming the gospel, Jesus told them that he is with them till the end of the age. This assurance relates to the prophecy of Isaiah which Matthew presented at the very beginning of his gospel indicating that that Jesus is to be called Emmanuel which shows that God is with us. Here Jesus takes this name and personifies it by assuring the eleven that he is with them even to the end of the age. This assurance is very important to the task of the universal proclamation of the gospel of Jesus. They are to carry on the evangelizing of the world without fear hence Jesus needed to have this parting assurance with them. Of course, he knew that their task was to be a difficult one judging from the opposition He (Jesus) had in His earthly career. He also knew that the opposition to be faced by the disciples may even be greater since they are to transcend the borders of Palestine to other lands to proclaim the gospel. In doing this, opposition was bound to occur. Hence, they needed an assurance from Jesus of safety and success as they embark on this mission of proclaiming the gospel for the conversion of the whole nation (Stephen, 2019).
Concluding the Exegesis of the Text

The text of Mt 28:16-20 deals with the great commission, that is, the commissioning of the eleven after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This commissioning deals with the charge to proclaim the gospel of Jesus to the end of the world. This text therefore can be described as a text dealing with evangelism, that is, the charge on all Christians to spread the gospel to the whole inhabited earth.

Hermeneutical Implications of Matt 28:16-20 for the Christian Mission in the North Eastern Nigeria

The Situation of Christianity in North Eastern Nigeria

North Eastern Nigeria, as we have pointed out, is no stranger to religious violence particularly, those targeted against Christians. Beginning from the 1980s as occasioned by the Matatasine disturbances, the north eastern part of the country has been hotbed of religiously-motivated violence against Christians. While what may have been the causes of these disturbances is beyond the scope of this study, what is sure is that violent and radical Islam had been growing and finding foothold in the area for a long time now. But, it was not until 2009 that it organized persecution of Christians began in the North Eastern Nigeria with the rise of the Islamist sect, Boko Haram. By 2009, Mohammad Yusuf, founded a sect in Borno state which became pejoratively known as Boko Haram because of their rejection of anything westernization which they saw as evil, particularly, western system of education (Kukah, 2014). In addition, Boko Haram made known its hatred and rejection of anything that has to do with Christianity. Hence, by 2009, Boko Haram members began attacking and destroying churches in Borno and beyond. When the group successfully galvanized itself into a terrorist group around 2010, the stage became set for an organized persecution of Christians, their churches and their property in the North Eastern Nigeria. With its bid to Islamize the North Eastern Nigeria, at least, Christians became marked “humans” in the area. A study carried out by Christianpersecutionreview.org.uk (2019) showed that the activities of Boko Haram and other militant sects in the area has affected the Christian church in this area, including the herdsmen. Both groups, it can be said, have synonymous motive which is to wipe out Christianity in the Northern Nigeria, at least. It was reported that sometimes Boko Haram attackers disguises themselves as herdsmen to attack. Open Doors International (2017) recounted that Boko Haram attackers have been seen sometimes dressed like herdsmen with weapons. After their attack, they likely zoom off on motor bikes like the real Boko Haram attackers. The group has completely destroyed so many Christian villages like Kodomun in Adamawa and Gidan Doruwa in Taraba. In Adamawa alone, more than 3,000 people have been killed; over 400 churches have been looted and destroyed. Currently, UN reported that at least 1,000 churches have been destroyed so far.

In Borno, Boko Haram insurgents attacked Christian villages. According to ICC (2019) the Boko Haram insurgents launched attack on Nghurhlavu village in Lassa in Askira-Uba local council area of southern Borno state. Houses were burned down; most of the villagers were able to flee into the bush. One person was said to be killed and two abducted. The EYN church (church of the Brethren) was destroyed. According to Bakeni (2019), a priest in Maiduguri diocese, the attacks on Christians are growing aggressive. The ongoing conflicts with Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen have instilled a feeling of great fear and uncertainty in most Nigerian Christians in the north east.

Lowry (2019) reported an incident in a Christian community of Kuda near Madagali in Adamawa state in North Eastern Nigeria. In the report, Boko Haram fighters invaded and surrounded the Christian community.
They went door to door killing as many as 25 Christians. In a bid to bury the deceased, Boko Haram members attacked again, as a result of that, the bereaved Christians and those from neighboring community fled. Christian leaders in the area expressed their grievances and lamented to Open Doors (an organization serving persecuted Christians worldwide). Still on the report, Lowry (2019) stated the expressions of the persecuted church leaders. Thus according to him, they expressed “we are in danger, we have no one to fight for us to end this killing of our people.” In Yobe state, the story of attack on churches is still the same. Beginning from 2011 when Boko Haram extended their terrorists activities to Yobe state, Churches have been attacked constantly. In October 2011, for example, in the then governor’s town Geidam Local Government, Boko Haram literally obliterated Christianity in the area by bombing all the churches there. Similar story has been told of churches being attacked by Boko Haram in Yobe state all these years. Hence, the situation of Christians in the state is appalling. Christians are constantly persecuted, discriminated and marginalized. As a result of that, Open Doors (2018) reported that church attendance had gone down and number of church members had dropped. Many churches have been destroyed.

As we had pointed out, the attack from Fulani herdsmen in the area is also problematic, having adversely affected Christianity and missionary activities in the area. In Northeast Nigeria, the terror group operates more actively in Taraba state. Principally, they carry out attack against local farmers in Christian dominated communities. According to T. G. Ngbea and T. J. Ngbea (2019), Church leaders in Nigeria have come up to say that attacks on Christian’s communities by herdsmen constitute a war by Islam to eliminate Christianity in Nigeria. Thus, Ndubuisi (2018) stated that today the Fulani herdsmen, nomadic cattle grazers have been named one of the deadliest terror groups in the world. Ndubuisi (2018) further opined that the herdsmen conflict like other conflict in Nigeria has adversely affected activities in the church most especially vigil.

What we have shown is the grim situation of Christianity in North Eastern Nigeria. From the perspective of an insider, who had witnessed terror against the Christians, Bala told us that Christians in the area are very afraid to practice their religion. “The situation is very precarious”, Bala further told us. One of the researchers, having also visited this region during the height of Boko Haram attacks on Churches, dares say that Christianity is being seriously attacked in the region. Christians have become targets, so are their churches. The spread of Christianity in the area is also heavily affected since evangelism has been seriously halted. The gospel is “suffering violence in the area” and the Christians who are supposed to spread it have lost heart. The future of the Christian gospel in the region seems gloomy as constant attack against it is massive where it seems the governments, both at the federal, state and local levels, cannot protect Christians from these attacks.

**Lessons From Mt 28:16-20**

The exegesis presented Jesus’ sovereignty and his assurance of his ever-abiding presence to the disciples while they spread the gospel. This is an assurance that is real because Jesus resurrected and had all powers bestowed on him by God. In North East Nigeria, many Christians have lost hope on Jesus’ promise that He will be with them until the end of ages. Many Christians in the area have also become afraid to proclaim their faith publicly. In this regard, Matt 28:16-20 encourages these Christians to bear in mind that Jesus’ commission was a command. Christians have been given the power to overcome persecution. Proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ should be done without fear. Jesus’ promise that he will be with them until the end of age connotes his universality and eternity. Therefore, in the midst of persecution of Boko Haram and other Islamist sects in
the area, Christians in the north east are not to lose heart. Jesus is with them always as the go about practicing their faith and spreading the gospel.

Christians sleep and wake up in fear in the area. Many have been killed; many have fled and lost their loved ones. The gospel according to Mat 28:16-20 serves as a model to Christian missionaries in North East Nigeria. Christians should therefore not panic in this situation. The commission was not just for the disciples gathered at that particular time, it was also for Christians of today. Christian mission in North East Nigeria should not be carried out only by Christians in north east, all hands needs to be on deck. Hence, it is also a call to other Christians in Nigeria to extend their tentacle to the area in terms of mission and renewed evangelism. Christians in Nigeria are therefore to be united, just as their leaders ought to come together and tackle this issue as a united front. In this sense, the church in Nigeria needs to be united equally. Thus, Awotunde (2016) expressed that the church in Nigeria must be united for God to fight for them like he has done for the disciples. He made this expression as a result of the internal and intra persecutions in the church and among church members. Churches are persecuting one another in Nigeria. If the disciples of Jesus were not united, probably they would not have been able to effectively carry out the great commission issued to them.

Jesus’ command in Matt 28:16-20 is also inclusive. It involves all nations. It clearly stated that Christians should go out there and make disciples of all nations. But in North East Nigeria, the situation is problematic as we have shown. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program was instituted to bring Nigerian youths together to serve their father land. During this service, Christian corps members engage in missionary works through Christian bodies, like National Association of Catholic Corps Members (NACC) and Nigeria Christian Corpsers Fellowship (NCCF). As it stands today, in these states, the NYSC is partially operational. This therefore means that missionary activities carried out by Christian youth bodies of the scheme have been impeded because many Christian youth in Southern Nigeria are afraid to serve in the north east of Nigeria. The text of Matt 28:16-20 discourages this fear on the part of these Christian youths and task them to firmly reach for evangelism in the north east of Nigeria, knowing that Jesus is with them always.

Conclusions

It is quite obvious that the “voice of kerygma” in the North East Nigeria has waned. The Christian mission is not only suffering from the onslaughts of Boko Haram terror group, but also from that of Fulani herdsmen. Many churches have been completely destroyed and Christianity threatened. A great number of Christians have lost their lives and their loved ones. Therefore, this study has related hermeneutical relevance of Matt 28:16-20 for the Christian mission in the area. Matthew’s presentation of the great commission in Matthew 28:16-20 challenges Christian missionaries in North East Nigeria to courageously keep on carrying out the missionary work. The gospel according to Matthew 28:16-20 is a call to awake the faith and unity among Christian missionaries in North East Nigeria.

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